

12-9-2014

Tales that Tell All: A Political Analysis of Folktales of Iran

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Yass Alizadeh, PhD

University of Connecticut 2014

Abstract

This research presents an analytical study of the rewritten folktales of Iran in 20th century, and investigates the ideological omissions and revisions of oral tales as textual productions in modern Iran. Focusing on the problematic role of folktales as tales about the unreal and the fantastic serving a political purpose, this study traces the creative exercises of Iranian storytellers who apply ideological codes and meanings to popular folk language. The works of Mirzadeh Eshqi (1893-1924), Sadegh Hedayat (1903-1951), Samad Behrangi (1939-1968) and Bijan Mofid (1935-1984) are examples of a larger collection of creative writing in Iran that through the agency of folklore shape the political imagination of Iranian readers. While Eshqi's revolutionary ideas are artistically imbedded in oral culture of the Constitution era, Hedayat's fiction follows with an intricate fusion of folklore and tradition. Later in the 20th Century, Behrangi introduces politically charged children's tales to an invested audience, and Mofid dramatizes the joys and sorrow of Iranian culture through a familiar fable. Revisiting the past and reframing the present, these writers invite the readers to participate in a political discourse the consequences of which extend beyond their era to encompass the lives of other generations of Iranians.

Tales that Tell All:
A Political Analysis of Folktales of Iran

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the

University of Connecticut

2014

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2014

APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

Tales that Tell All: A Political Analysis of Folktales of Iran

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Acknowledgement

My sincerest gratitude to Professor Patrick Hogan for guiding me with patience and encouragement through the winding paths of this research. It was with his earnest supervision and scholarly commitment that I was able to move from page to page and chapter to chapter. My wholehearted thanks to Professor Lucy McNeece. She is the embodiment of the intellectual outlook that Cultural Studies presents, and it was with her example that I dared to take this journey. I am grateful to Professor Manuela Wagner and Professor Jacqueline Loss for their invaluable feedback and input. My sincere appreciation to Professor Rosa Chinchilla for her kind leadership and support. I would not be able to initiate this quest and contest its many challenges without my hero my husband. I dedicate this dissertation to my parents who have patiently waited to see it done, to my husband who has lovingly endured a student-wife for life, and to my two children Yavar and Ava who are my life.

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Introduction

Dressing Folktales in Becoming Outfits

بالا رفتیم ماست بود قصه ما راست بود

Bala rafteem maast bood Ghesseh maa raast bood

We went up there was yogurt Our story was the truth

This research is an introductory step towards a better understanding of the dynamics of Iranian political literature that continues to safeguard *the truth* between the lines of reframed popular tales. Rewriting and reframing old tales is hardly a novel endeavor in the history of Iranian storytelling, and despite the emergence of the subject as an independent field of study in 1930s, Iranian folklorists have continuously avoided a political analysis of the country's popular tales. Fedowsi's epic *Shahnameh*, for example, written in 11th century, is arguably a pioneering project in the field of written folktales within the history of Iranian written art, critiquing the poet's tumultuous times in layers of mythical, historical, and folkloric imagery. The epic, however, has hardly been critiqued as a political discourse where the legendary personae and popular motifs of Iranian cumulative mythology are resurrected and refurbished by the poet on a quest to engage his readers in a discourse on consent. The popular notion that Ferdowsi spent a life time researching, collecting and creating Iranian stories for Mahmood Ghaznavi's court only to be demeaned by the Sultan's lack of interest and reward is often where the introductory statements begin and end. The significance of the epic to today's reader is even

more obscure as the introduction to most versions hardly exceeds a couple of cliché paragraphs. Omissions and revisions of this massive text too are barely questioned and usually blamed on the variety in the available yet hard to reach original texts. One example of the widespread censoring of the lines of *Shahnameh* appears in the discrepancy between the two-volume published in Iran in 2002 by the Ministry of Education and Islamic Culture, and Zabiollah Safa's version with more lines and different wordings than the endorsed copy¹ (*Shahnameh* 1864, Safa 128). In effect, *Shahnameh*, the unrivaled miniature depicting the intricacies of the dynamic cultures of the Iranian plateau, continues to be handled with partiality and prejudice. On the one hand, censored as a xenophobic manuscript, and on the other, worshipped as a hyper-nationalist document, the epic is continuously stripped of its historical significance and is treated, instead, as a collection of antiquated yet irrelevant myths. While one group cuts and revises the text in accordance with the state ideology, another severs the text from the context and presents it as an apolitical collection of tragic tales about grandiose heroism and fateful misunderstandings. Unlike *Shahnameh*, however, Iranian folktales have hardly been critically approached. In fact, the analysis of the country's vast pool of folktales has seldom surpassed a static reflection on the ancient peoples' bewilderment over the unbeatable forces of nature. This approach to folklore, a scientific endeavor towards understanding the agrarian behaviors of early Iranians, made a valuable introduction to folklore studies in early 20th century Iran; however, it ceased to keep up with the ever-evolving critical studies of literature and culture. By their scientific methodology of documenting oral tales, idioms and customs, Sadegh Hedayat (1903-1951) pioneered Iranian folkloristics, and followed by Abolghasem Enjavi Shirazi (1921-1993) and, later, Ahmad Shamloo (1925-2000) helped to introduce a methodological approach to cultural norms and tales of Iranian people. Nevertheless, their research did not instigate a continuation or expansion of the

¹ The omission of the line "نگهدار او را بروز و به شب" or "protect him day and night as long" که تا چون بود کار من با عرب

field within the field of Humanities in Iran. As poets, speakers and storytellers, these three can be compared to Persian bards with a significant impact on giving a voice to otherwise dismissed folk narratives. Similarly to bards, their art too was scrutinized by the state. Shalmloo's *Koocheh* and Hedayat's *Neirangestan* may be their most significant contribution to a historical study of Iranian folklore, but their retelling of Iranian folklore is a critical contribution a political analysis of Iranian culture.

Samak Ayyar is considered to be the oldest recorded Persian folktale that was transcribed in the 12th century during the reign of the Saljuqs and at the height of Iran's cultural development (Mahjoob 593). Nevertheless, it is not clear when story telling shifted from being an act of leisure to a profession. Although little research has been done on oral storytelling as a form of public entertainment before the reign of the Safavids (1501-1736), Jafar Mahjoob contends that oral tellers became popular and well-known during the Safavid dynasty attracting both ordinary people and the nobility to coffee shops that concurrently grew in number and scope (1094-5). Because of the popularity of the tellers in the society, and the possibility of influencing their audience through their selected narratives, a state-sponsored agency called "Selseleh-ye Ajam"² was created to supervise the affairs of the tellers in coffee shops and other public places. The head of the agency or "Nagheeb"³ strictly monitored bards and oral tellers who not only narrated but also performed sections of *Shahnameh* and other popular folktales and myths for the Iranian populace. During the reign of the Qajars and the early years of the Pahlavis, "*naghalli*"⁴ continued to be popular and prevalent. Gradually however, *naghalli*, with

² Of Persian Genealogy: *Ajam* is the pejorative term for non-Arabic speaking Iranians

³ Chief

⁴ نقالی or *naghalli* (telling and transferring) is oral story-telling by a professional bard.

the tragedy of “Rostam and Sohrab”⁵ at its core, lost its bearing and was replaced by feverish religious performances of “*Tazieh va Shabeeh khanni*”⁶ symbolizing the Shiite fervor and the victimization of the members of by Hussein’s family by the dominant Sunni caliphs. The advent of literacy during the later years of the Qajar dynasty did not result in a more substantial interest in or the acknowledgement of *Shahnameh* nor did it curtail the popularity of Shiite passion plays. Later, the Pahlavis publicized Ferdowsi’s epic as an olden text best suited for a nostalgic celebration of Iran. The idea of bygone bards who sang the praises of ancient kings went well with the overall trend of the monarchy to present itself as the legitimate holder of an ancient empire where sacred Iranian kings had fought the invading forces of evil for thousands of years. This dominant trajectory resulted in a disconnect between the poem’s political structure and the popular sections of chivalry and romance that, to this day, are highlighted to be the essence of *Shahnameh*. As the epic continues to be both censored and dismissed as irrelevant and antiquated, and is hardly presented in an oral form on TV, radio or other public venues, *Tazieh khani*, an elaborate form of Shiite storytelling, continues to have a government-sanctioned stronghold.

In 1934, following the post war zeal for asserting distinct national identities of nation states around the globe, the Iranian government too initiated the founding of an institute of anthropology and folklore to explore the “national treasures” of Iranian peoples. The institute, although central to the development of a native exploration of Iranian narrative traditions, was soon dismissed by the literati who distrusted all state-sponsored actions. The sponsored self-study did not arise in a vacuum as there was already a colonialist context in place. Prior to the

⁵ The tale of the son, Sohrab, searching for his father, Rostam, and the tragic ending of the story as the father unknowingly kills his son. According to Bahar, the tale symbolizes the end of the matriarchal society of ancient Sakas and the birth of the patriarchal society (273).

⁶ تعذیه و شبیه خوانی: performance of Shiite passion plays during the holy month of Ashura.

authorized motion, the majority of collectors had been European diplomats and correspondents who in their fantastic travelogues had not only substituted the exotic charm of Iran's folktales and fairytales for the mundane but also produced an amalgam of stories about the Middle East that blended particles of every *exotic* culture they had encountered or imagined into a polished mirror of the Arab world. One such entertaining yet fantastical narrative was Edward Lane's (1801-1876) *1001 Nights*, first published in England in 1834, in thirty-two consecutive sections. The collection, as Lane explained, presented an accurate view of the Arab society and norms, and was not to be regarded as a series of farfetched or magical tales because the adventures were either witnessed by the author himself or relayed to him by informants who asserted the verity of the content:

I endeavor to shew, by extracts from esteemed Arabic histories and scientific and other writings . . . as well as by assertions and anecdotes that I have heard, and conduct that I have witnessed, during my intercourse with Arabs, that the most extravagant relations in this work are not in general regarded, even by the educated classes of that people, as of an incredible nature. This is a point which I deem of much importance to set the work in its proper light before my countrymen. (1: xiii-xiv).

Lane's affirmation of the tales as real phenomena was a successful component of the colonialist ventures of Britain whose rational stance against Arabs' irrational mindset would not only justify the West's preeminence but also ease their minds of the possible dangers of the Arabs' resistance to Western dominance. Moreover, the Indo-Iranian root of the stories, the Persian names and

Iranian setting of the tales, and the non-Arabic structure of most sentences within the Arabic collection as Mahjoob contends, were either ignored or purposefully veiled by Lane (369-70). About two decades before Lane, James Morier (1780-1849) the British author of *The Adventures of Haji Baba of Isfahan* had engaged in a similar *Orientalist* move when, in December 1823, he introduced the ways of the Persians to his countrymen as, most probably, a surprise Christmas present:

I will not say that all my dreams were realized; for, perhaps, no country in the world less comes up to one's expectation than Persia, whether in the beauties of nature, or the dress and magnificence of its inhabitants . . . A distinct line must ever be drawn between 'the nations who wear the hat and those who wear the beard'; and they must ever hold each other's stories as improbable, until a more general intercourse of common life takes place between them. What is moral and virtuous with the one, is wickedness with the other, that which the Christian reviles as abominable, is by the Mohammedan held sacred. Although the contrast between their respective manners may be very amusing, still it is most certain that the former will ever feel devoutly grateful that he is neither subject to Mohammedan rule, nor educated in Mohammedan principles; whilst the latter, in his turn, looking upon the rest of mankind as unclean infidels, will continue to hold fast to his bigoted persuasion, until some powerful interposition of Providence shall dispel the moral and intellectual darkness which, at present, overhangs so large a portion of the Asiatic world. (www.gutenberg.org)

Later in the tale, as if his long account of the adventures of the young Haji may unintentionally show the author to be partial to the Persians, Morier praises the sincerity of the English through the voice of Haji the protagonist and the narrator. In the majority of the adventures, Haji faces treacherous situations where he has to trick his countrymen in order to survive, hence the tale pictures the typical Iranian as barbaric, ignorant and deceitful. On the contrary, the sincerity of the British and their charitable personality is so full-heartedly praised by the Persian narrator that it makes his stance farcical:

One of the most remarkable features in the character of our English guests was their extreme desire to do us good against our inclination. Rather than not attempt it, they put themselves to infinite trouble, and even did not refrain from expense to secure their ends. They felt a great deal more for us than we did for ourselves; and what they could discover in us worthy of their love, we, who did not cease to revile them as unclean infidels, and as creatures doomed to eternal fires, we were quite at a loss to discover. (www.gutenberg.org)

It was more or less the urgency of an official response by the newly formed nation-state to such picturesque Orientalism that triggered the government to introduce a more glorified version of a purely Iranian folklore befitting a grand dynasty on the verge of modernization. Nevertheless, the *musée imaginaire* of Iranian folk culture did not sit well with Iran's European educated elite such as Sadegh Hedayat (1903-1951) who considered most government-sponsored motions as sham and accused the state of forging a research material that was of little cultural or ethnic authenticity:

این جنبش در ایران پس از چاپ کتاب "نیرنگستان" 1312 آغاز شد، و معلوم نیست بچه علت کتاب نامبرده توقیف گردید ولی زمامداران وقت متوجه شدند که از این راه میتوانند وسیله نمایش فراهم بیاورند. اسم بکر "مردم شناسی" اختراع شد، موزه ای به این نام گشایش یافت که بر اشخاص بی سابقه پیدا نیست مقصود موزه Ethnographie یا Sociologie یا Anthropologie و یا اداره جاسوسی است. متأسفانه این تقلید هم مانند همه تقلیدهای بی اساسی که انجام گرفت بصورت کاریکاتور وازده ای از آب در آمد. یعنی مقداری البسه و اشیاء فراهم شد و بدون رعایت اصول Museographie مرتب گردید.

In Iran this movement started after the publication of *Neirangestan*⁷ in 1312 (1933), and it is not clear for what reason the mentioned book was seized, but the statesmen at the time realized that they could in this way make a show. The impeccable name of "مردم شناسی"⁸ (*mardom shenassi*) was invented. A museum with the same name was opened and it is not clear even to the lay folks if it is meant to be the Museum of Ethnography or Sociology or Anthropology or a bureau of espionage. Unfortunately this imitation like all other superficial imitations that took place came out as a failed caricature. In other words, a bunch of clothes and objects were provided and arranged without following the rules of museography. ("Folklore or the Culture of the Masses" 451-2)

⁷ *Neirangestan* is Hedayat's critical collection of Iranian folklore including superstitions, rituals, songs and ceremonies. As Hedayat mentions in the introduction of the book, he picked the name from a Pahlavi book of prayers (15). The two-word name *Neirangestan* means "Land of Trickery."

⁸ مردم شناسی is a two-word noun that stands for "The Science of Learning about People" or Anthropology; however, in this context, it is refer to or Folkloristics.

One can detect an early triad of Iranian folklore study as Orientalist, Official Nationalist and Resistant Nationalist. Later, however, Leftist and Islamist appropriations of folklore dominate the spectra and hijack the field. As this indicates, folklore has always had a contested status in Iran's literary history, and diversity of opinion regarding its interpretation and categorization has continuously subtended its politicized status and ambivalent reception through various regimes and reigns. The post-revolutionary theocracy that continues to dismiss the relevance of most folktales by heavily controlling their publication and reception follows five decades of secular monarchical rule that appropriated oral tales as emblems of Iran's resistance to religious and foreign oppression. While Iran's ruling Islamists continue to question the racial consciousness of ethnic tales dismissing them as byproducts of divisive imperialism and rewriting them within an all-Islamic framework, many in the diaspora persist in coining them as allegorical tales of an ancient nation guarding a sacred yet static identity hence disregarding the cultural religiosity and ethnic diversity that many of the tales contain. Between such ideological extremes, however, there is a fine threshold where the simple language of Iran's oral tales invites readers into a critical dialogue with tradition, where texts can be symbolic manifestations of history, and tales can become the discursive illustrations of culture. In this transient space, Iranian folktale is hardly an autonomous free-floating object, but a creative force in a fierce negotiation with other socio-political forces in order to create meaning. With this contention, I study ideological rewritings of Iran's folktales to trace the political conditions of their production, alteration and consumption, and to examine the extent of their resistance to appropriation by dominant religious, nationalist, and colonial discourses.

My reading of Iranian folktales finds popular Iranian tales to be a module in Iran's political discourse hence the theoretical premise of this research builds upon the ideas of

contemporary political theorists such as Fredric Jameson and Aijaz Ahmad, and historical analysts of oral literature including Vladimir Propp and Claude Lévi-Strauss. This might look like a polemic approach; however, the synergy of the political standings of these four disparate critics of culture results in an unbinding reading of Iranian literature that releases the tales from the pitiful patriarchy of post-colonialism which continues to dismiss any agency other than the enslavement of the literature of the *Third World* by the political doctrinaires of the *Free World*. Following Propp, I argue that folktales are urgent responses to reality and relevant only if they are part of the discourse about man's ethical problems. I continue with Lévi-Strauss' depiction of the written word as an ideological phenomenon, as a means of exploitation rather than enlightenment, and as an agency of domination augmenting the power of the central authority so that no citizen is exempt from following the rules: as long as there is no written word, there is no logical debate, hesitation, scrutiny and so forth (Lévi-Strauss 1423-1424). I thus contend that the oral structure of folktales assigns an oppositional standing to this genre in any political system. As the most immediate form of transferring imaginative literature, folktales are grassroots agencies of socio-political change through which the narrators prosecute the kings and the queens of their tales and humiliate them with infertility, unruly children, incestuous desires, beastly son-in-laws, indestructible ogres and magical fairies that outsmart the authorities and expose their flaws. This approach brings me closer to Jameson and his association of culture with politics; as an extension of politics, political representation with the medium of literature is hence a political phenomenon. If folktales are not always fair or logical in their functions and conclusions, and if they penalize the antagonist with an oppressive force that may parallel or exceed the malice of the authority, they, I conclude spread the seeds of a revolution that may or may not happen. Concurrently creating and challenging power structures, folktales have an

intertextual formation that keeps them relevant to their immediate surroundings by condemning and reversing the established norm and proposing alternative rubrics that may ironically be as extreme. This extremity, I contend, postulates revolutionary ideology and welcomes folktales into the discourse of political inquiry. Ahmad, questioning the homogeneity that Jameson ascribes to the *Third World* rebuts the prevalent assumption the *Others* suffer from a systematic recycling of history with cultural and political extensions that have hardly been evolved or extended beyond an anti-colonialist nationalist aspiration (104, 107). This dissertation too focuses on the complexity of Iran's literary alterations and creations that have far too long been (dis)regarded as redundant fixities. Undoubtedly, there are tropes that bind the modern literature of Iran together making it both modern and Iranian. Nevertheless, these tropes do not echo fixed anxieties, because, similarly to the *Western* world, and even more so, the anxieties of Iranians shift, and so do the topoi of their narratives.

In Chapter I, I explore the motivations of two quintessential representatives of their tumultuous times Mirzadeh Eshqi (1893-1924) and Sadegh Hedayat (1903-1951) whose informal styles and taboo themes marked them as radical, revolutionary and even anarchical. Eshqi was the prototypical poet of the short-lived freedom delivered by the Constitution Revolution of 1906, and Hedayat was the iconic voice of the modernity that followed. In a colloquial voice and far from the lofty linguistic style common to the era and the hundreds of years preceding it, both authors condemned the lingering traditions of tyranny and repression in the newly recognized nation-state that boasted a revolutionary modernity. The zeal of the two literary figures to include folklore _the language of the bazaar, ethnic and urban songs, riddles and jokes and oral tales_ in their political writing was inseparable from their ideological fervor. Theirs was neither a purely Iranian movement irrespective of the foreign gaze nor a fully

developed practice devoid of scientific pitfalls. What foreign collectors such as Henri Masse, Bessie Allen Donaldson and James Morier had produced was believed to be a solid foundation for further research, and questions of authority and intent hardly interfered with this generation's folkloric ventures. On the other hand, the modern Iranian author was in search of new perspectives to share with Iranians and others hence the birth of Eshqi's political drama, satirical poetry and radical papers, followed by Hedayat's multifaceted work in which love of oral culture combined with the inherent disillusionment of his generation was symbolically presented. This would lead to a revolutionary style that future authors too would appropriate as they would insert their socio-political grievances in symbolic tales about failings and flaws.

Beginning in 1930s, Iran was settling in modernity with a relatively civil rule of law, the advent of public education and the unprecedented unveiling of women. In a race against religious fanaticism and other byproducts of a lengthy despotic traditionalism, proponents of modernization and secularization, initiated an interest in collecting vernacular literature and folklore as well as ethnic fables and customs. Leaping away from the static identity that the Qajar dynasty had coined, they found a new fascination with the constants of their culture and the popular literature that it entailed. Although their move was greatly influenced by German nationalists and British Romanticists, it was different from the German spirit whose insistence on collecting and creating folktales was a unified mission to give their country an identity of its own; it was also different from the spiritual zeal of British Romanticism that searched for the tranquility of the times past in meadows and pastures and away from the newly industrialized metropolitan life. Theirs was a sense of ambivalence shared with other developing Middle Eastern countries such as Turkey and Egypt. As the new constitutional monarchy insisted on creating a cohesive nation through breaking with old traditions and severing the nation of its

rough ethnic edges, there loomed an urgency to prove to the world and itself that there was an astute and solid Iranian culture that needed to be conserved. Like many intellectuals of the 1930s, Hedayat's ideas clashed with the monarchy's autocratic push for civilizing the predominantly rural nation through forceful displacement and suppression of nomadic peoples and tribes by what was famously known as "building the nation from the outside" or a superficial transformation of the country from a predominantly agricultural society to industrial metropolises:

The educated Iranian may know more about European way of life than that of his own country; as such, how can he express nationalism . . . Because of poverty and hunger, exodus and eradication of ethnic tribes, modern transportation and rapid transformations in the society, many of the traditions and customs of remote villages and tribe are forgotten, and if they are not properly collected today, we will lose many of our national treasures before long.

("Folklore or the Culture of the Masses" 451, 457)

Moreover, Hedayat's generation cocooned itself in a passionate secularism that verged on the dismissal of the deep-rooted religiosity of the populace by portraying it as a failing cause. Hedayat's nostalgic longing for a pre-Islamic Iran reveals in the multitude of historical writings such as *Parvin the Daughter of Sassan* and *Maziyar* in which he blatantly criticizes Islam as an oppressive doctrine that dominated Iran long enough to adversely affect the habits of the populace. *Alavieh Khanoom* which will be fully discussed in Chapter I is a clear example of this approach. In effect, Hedayat's description of the characters in the opening lines of *Parvin the*

Daughter of Sassan reveals his prejudiced partiality to his Iranian Protagonists under attack by the Arab Antagonists:

چهره پرداز __ چهل و پنج سال، بزرگ منش، اندام خمیده، موهای
خاکستری پر پشت روی دوش های او ریخته، جامه ابریشمی خاکستری با نقش و نگار بهمان
رنگ، کمربندی پهن گره خورده . . . کفش بندی نوک باریک بدون پاشنه، با وقار، مرموز و با
ایما و اشاره.

پروین __ دختر چهره پرداز، بیست ساله، بلند بالا، رنگ مهتابی، گیسوی
خرمایی بلند تابدار شانه کرده، جامه بلند ابریشمی نازک تا روی مچ پایش افتاده. . . سینه باز،
گوشواره، گردن بند مروارید، النگو، نوار ابریشمی برنگ لباس روی پیشانی او بسته شده. . .
ساده، صدای رسا، لوس و یکی یکدانه پدرش.

. . .

چهار نفر عرب __ عباهای پاره بخود پیچیده روی آن نخ بکمرشان بسته اند.
صورت ها سیاه، ریش و سبیل سیاه زمخت، سر و گردن را با پارچه سفید و زرد چرک پیچیده
اند، پاها برهنه، غبار آلود، شمشیرها مختلف _ درنده، ترسناک، داد و فریاد می کنند.

Artist⁹ __ 45, magnanimous, slouched physique, his thick gray hair
falls on his shoulders, gray silk garment with patterns of the same color, a thick
belt tied . . . pointed shoes with no heels, poised, mysterious, and with hints and
gestures.

⁹ چهره پرداز (chehreh pardaz) is an artist specialized in human portraiture, a forbidden art in Islam. Hedayat has most likely chosen this profession for Parvin's father to enhance the contrast between the two sides.

Parvin __ the artist's daughter, twenty years old, tall stature, soft glow¹⁰, curly brunette locks brushed, long silk light robe down to her ankles . . . wide open neck, earrings, pearl neckless, bangle, a silk band the same color as the robe wrapped around her forehead . . . simple, strong voice, pampered and her father's one and only.

...

Four Arab individuals __ wrapped themselves in torn *abayas*¹¹ tied with a string around their waist, black faces, thick frizzy beard and mustache, covered their head and neck with a dirty yellowish white cloth, bare feet, dusty, dissimilar swords, vicious, terrifying, and they scream. (9-10)

Here, the elevated status of Hedayat's Iranians in contrast to the punitive associations of the Arab aggressors is too noticeable to dismiss. Throughout the play, he footnotes the historicity of the time, the place and the events, and brings historical documents to assert if not the accuracy but the authenticity of similar episodes portraying the resistance of everyday Iranians to the Arab conquest. Eshqi too, in his opera and the first of such a genre in Iran, *Rastakheez-e Shahriaran-e Iran* or *The Resurrection of the Kings of Iran*, mourns the loss of a grand civilization as one by one the Persian royalties of ancient Iran, Khosro-dokht¹², Darius¹³, Cyrus¹⁴, Anoshe-ravan¹⁵ (Kasra) and finally the Zoroastrian Prophet Zarathustra rise from their graves to lament the

¹⁰ مهتابی: moonlit, pale, fair.

¹¹ Traditional Arab cloak.

¹² "Khosro's Daughter"

¹³ 550-486 BC

¹⁴ 559-530 BC

¹⁵ 409-579 AD

calamities befalling their nation beginning with the Arab conquest. Eshqi introduces the opera as such:

This speaker in the year 1334¹⁶ of *Migration* (lunar calendar) while traveling from Baghdad to Mosul, visited the ruins of the great city of Madaen (Ctesiphon). Watching the ruins of the cradle of world civilization overwhelmed me. This Opera of Resurrection attests to the tear drops that I have shed on the paper mourning the ruins of our miserable ancestors. (231)

Here Eshqi does not just blame ancient history for the loss of the Persian Empire; as one by one the mythical kings and queens mourn the death of their splendor, the spirit of Zarathustra appears and warns about the colonial aspirations of the West and how it can easily overcome a nation with no morals and morale:

دست بر شمشیر نابرده در آیندی ز پای	حیف نبود زادگان خسرو کشور گشای
این همی گوید که ایران از من، ان گوید ز ماست	خیرگی بنگر که در مغرب زمین غوغا بپاست
بر سر مشرق زمین شد جنگ در مغرب زمین	ای گروه پاک مشرق، هند و ایران ترک و چین
هریک اندر خوردنش چنگالها برداشتند	در اروپا، آسیا را لقمه ای پنداشتند

Isn't this a pity for (you) the offspring of the conqueror *Khosro*¹⁷

To fall to your feet without having touched your sword

¹⁶ 1915 AD

¹⁷ Khosro (496-579) also known as Anoosh-e Ravan the just was the most popular Sassanid king.

Look at the bravado of the Western world where there is mayhem
As this one says Iran is mine and that one says it's his

Oh the pure people of the East, India and Iran, Turk and China
Over the Eastern world there is a war in the Western world

In Europe, they have taken Asia for a morsel
Everyone has picked up a fork to eat it (239-40)

The new social order in the late 50's, after the CIA coup against Mosaddeq and the return of Mohammad Reza Shah to power, creates a new historical praxis with new faces and younger authors who, unlike Hedayat or Eshqi, are at peace with the traditions, the rituals and the religiosity of Iranian polity, and are instead anxious about the fast growing social injustices that sort people into classes and the majority of the people into the lower class. Although Hedayat and his contemporaries had set the stage for the new literary figures to emerge, the new generation pondered a different problematic and their route differed dramatically from their predecessors. In Chapter II, I analyze the shift in the focus of political literature from the accountability of religion and tradition to poverty and Western Imperialism. The developing country, rich in oil and a growing middle-class that consumed the latest European commodities, was concealing its flaws under the flawless Persian rugs that it proudly presented to the world as the sophisticated tapestry of Iranian aptitude. Witnessing all this, little seemed to give the 60s and 70s generations the optimism they needed to better Iran. Drastic change was what they had in mind and the pledge for total cleansing of the establishment was reflected in the pessimism

that consumed the literature of the era. Folktales rewritten in poetry, drama and prose, found a heavy ideological undertone that fed into what Fakhreddin Azimi calls “a culture of confrontation” (*The Quest for Democracy in Iran* 307). With the fast growing educated population, the urban middle class had a political awareness that was in conflict with its very bourgeois status. Leftist ideas were widespread and the regime’s suppressive behavior inflamed the reading public to embrace such ideas as the only way out. Iranian authors, in turn, wrote about the miseries of the underclass and scorned the middle class lifestyle to be shallow and superficial.

Following Jameson’s socio-political reading of literature, I trace the “path of the subject” in 60s and 70s Iran when the rewritten oral tales produced in a variety of genres enter the political discourse and twice-told tales of follow ideology. I propose that oral tales with a short dialogic syntax and a democratic façade on the one hand, and predictable functions and stock characters on the other, make this genre the medium of choice for authors to engage their audiences in a political discourse that would lead to momentous socio-historical consequences for both the author and the reader. With SAVAK (State Security and Intelligence Organization) in full swing, the young novelists, poets, and playwrights of Iran lacked their predecessors’ high social status and governmental connections and faced severe inquisitions, persecutions and harassments. It was during this period that revolutionary authors like Samad Behrangi produce collections of folktales and presented them in both the popular original form and reframed versions that not only invite the readers to an allegorical reading of familiar children’s stories, but also influence the readers by adding a political overtone to the old phonology. Investigating the significance of pop-culture as an urban form of folklore that effectively engages the youth in ethical inquiries is also part of the focus in this chapter.

Of course, the risky business of spreading communist slogans did not escape authorities. In addition, prohibition and banning of radical discourses made them the most popular trend in a variety of artistic productions and the most anticipated theme for an audience who found all oppositional tunes pleasing so much so that the very old and popular folktales and personae were now viewed with one eye on a radical political interpretation. Hence Behrangi and many of his peers rewrote Iran's popular tales to engage their readers politically, they found Persian folktales to be inherently politically charged, and a revolutionary generation was being encouraged to look at literature politically and to take action accordingly. In Chapter III, I continue with Behrangi's tales that represent the three stages of historical selection, omission and reproduction of folktales within a new narrative form, or in other words, his art of reframing old tales. Stage productions, partly because of the immediacy and the impact of the genre, have been subject to a stricter scrutiny, and have been delayed for various cultural and political reasons, hence lagging behind other forms of literary representation in Iran. The musical play *City of Tales* by Bijan Mofid, as one of the most influential satires in the history of Iranian theater that continues to be banned long past its 1968 production, will conclude this chapter. The play is based on a rhythmic short children's tale about a tiny cockroach *Khaleh Sooskeh* leaving his parents' home to find a loving husband. *Khaleh Sooskeh* or Auntie Cockroach is the folktale heroine whose "feminist" tale addresses the status of women in a patriarchy that has endured far too long. Ironically, the story is so graphic that despite its endearing voice, one can hardly mold it to suit, let's say, the expectations of my American born children, hence I have done without: The roach's ultimate test for a good husband is his method of beating her in case of a disagreement, and most of the tale is a rhythmic discourse between the roach and the suitors about the latter's means of abuse! On the other hand, *Khaleh Sooskeh* has had an essential role in

raising the daughters of Iran. Hers was a tiny step that dared *Oldooz* and *Talkhoon* to take a giant leap.

In a synopsis, chapter I is an analysis of early treatments of folklore by resistant nationalists specifically Eshqi and Hedayat, whereas Chapter II and III focus on the shift in the treatment of folklore in the latter half of the twentieth century and the political spin of authors like Behrangi and Mofid on popular folktales of Iran. While Chapter II treats folklore directly, Chapter III analyzes political adaptations of Iran's popular tales. In exploring these two periods of post-Orientalist folklore study, we may conclude with the following key point: folklore in Iran is an active component in political discourse and a variable in the gradual or sudden shifts of the political equation. The topic of post-revolutionary treatments of folklore requires a separate study. However, in the conclusion of this dissertation, I sketch out some characteristics of the period including the arbitrary edifice of a new set of popular tales that put a timely spin on classical Shiite terminology. In addition, I conclude that social radicalism of the early Pahlavi generation of Iranian authors and radical socialism of the late Pahlavi intellectuals lead to a post-revolutionary discourse that shuns both. All translations are mine unless I have specified in parenthesis.

Chapter I

Eshqi, Hedayat and the Birth of Modernity

A Theoretical Perspective

Concession, licensing and subjugation mark the triangular problematic of most noteworthy Iranian literature of early twentieth century, and the authors whose texts continue to be read and reviewed a century later, are the few who question the authority of tradition and culture as fiercely as the tradition and culture of the authority. The writers and poets of the Constitution era until mid-Twentieth century Iran hardly expect their art to change the politics of the time; neither do they create art that is openly influenced by politics. They judge their time through their art, reflect on it, and express it in the coded language of metaphors. Although their time is the main context _the only context- in which their art grows, proposing a linear connection between the literature of the constitutional era and the politics of the time would be a disservice to understanding both the ingenuity of the arts and the complexity of the times. Nevertheless, the socio-political questions that led the country towards a revolution are the same questions that authors like Eshqi and Hedayat asked through their art. Neither author is the “voice of the people;” on the contrary, they are stern critics of culture and tradition. They mock politics as fervently as they follow it, and consider themselves the outcasts fitting only a future time and

a differing place. In effect, the most prominent authors of early twentieth century Iran are untimely avant-gardes and the validity of their alienation can be observed in how they live and die. Whereas the way they live will be analyzed in this chapter through an analysis of their work as well as brief historical commentaries voiced by their contemporaries, the way they die can be briefed in a simple utterance: Eshqi was assassinated at 30, and Hedayat committed suicide at 48. Although Hedayat picks up where Eshqi leaves, the two belong to the same modernizing force that struggles with the basic dialectic of “the modern” versus “the regressive.” Enveloping the country in a vicious cycle albeit a spiral of construction and destruction, their writing simultaneously builds and destroys “values” manifesting a comic catharsis of sorts built upon the tragedy of loss. Eshqi pictures this tragi-comedy in his sharp satirizing voice when he mocks the leaders who seek to replace the tyrannical past with a mishmash of a republic in the post-revolution era, and Hedayat follows his footsteps with similar ethical questions hidden in a vast collection of short novels about the debilitating forces of a culture that has yet to be cultured and the inevitability of failure in such a closed space. The new social order in late 50’s after the CIA coup against Mossadeq, and the return of Mohammad Reza Shah to power, creates a new historical praxis with new faces and younger authors who unlike Hedayat and Eshqi are at peace with themselves, with the beliefs of the common man, and the religiosity, superstitions and traditions of Iranian culture, and are instead, anxious about the fast growing social injustices that sort people into classes and the majority of the people into the lower class. While to the future generation of Iranian writers socialism is the pathway to happiness, nationalism with its vast association of significations is the burning question for Eshqi: how would a modernized Iran stay clear of the colonizing West if modernity is but a Western force? This assimilation of anti-colonial nationalism with progress is the problematic that Eshqi struggles with sometimes

successfully and other times with an existential nihilism that converges with a dogged vanity. Mocking the past simultaneously as he denies the probability of progress in a country that is too heavily invested in sedentary historicity, Eshqi questions the possibility of a democratic republic for Iran as aggressively as he rejects the tyrannical statehood of either the upcoming Pahlavis or the ousted Qajars.

There is a common way of telling the story of politics in Iran. It divides the world into two categories, prominently nationalist vs. socialist. To many critics of culture, modern literature of Iran worthy of an academic study fall into such predestined categories as anti-colonial nationalism or pro-Soviet socialism, hence the predictable typecasting of authors like Eshqi and Hedayat as reactionary nationalists or alienated idealists. This study challenges such binary barriers by focusing on the hybridity of the democratic aspirations of the authors and the verisimilitude of their democratic objectives, and the integral part they played in the political discourse of their time as illustrated through their poetry and prose; the time of a great shift in the socio-political power in Iran that not only reflected history in making, but also paved the way for history to be made. The suppression of democracy in Iran and the revolutionary quest for modernity resonates in the works of Mirzadeh Eshqi and Sadegh Hedayat two authors who masterfully echoed the contradictions of their time in the voice of the everyday people on the streets. Giving their political work an oral textuality that echoes the dreamy phonetics of Iranian folktales, the tell-all-tales of these two authors demonstrate that the literature of modern Iran not only engages in the political discourses of its time but also at times strives to substitute politics for ethics, and ethics for politics. This phenomenological shift challenges both the ideological and the ethical values of the audience questioning the validity of the independence of either discipline as well as the impartiality of the language of arts at times of flux. Although the authors

and poets of early 20th century did not directly sway the political destiny of Iran, they were as much in control of the context in which politics was being authored as the politics that was being authored in context.

A Historical Perspective: Late Qajars and Early Pahlavis

The Qajars began their reign with the fearless rebellion of Mohamad Khan that led to the coup of the Zand dynasty and delivered a new genealogy of rulers to Iran. When they took hold of the kingdom in 1786, Iran had suffered through one of its darkest times, a century of wars, carnages and massacres that Zarrin Koob famously names the “Century of Terror” (728). Ruling the country for about 130 years, the Qajars brought relative geopolitical stability to a people that had experienced centuries of volatility, but in order to survive in the new revolutionary world of enlightenment, industrialism and colonialism, the state needed more than a safeguarded capital that owed its autonomy to powerful chieftains and a minute number of underpaid brigades. Hardly qualified to lead, the kings had little to rely on but concessions and allowances to the two superpowers that consistently augmented their geopolitical manoeuvres. Ahmad Kasravi traces the birth of the Constitutional Revolution to the spring of 1905 when two leading clergymen, Mohammad Tabatabaiee, and Sayed Abdollah Behbahani who promoted constitutionalism among the masses _an important revolutionary step towards the modernization of Iran (60). Because of the widespread religiosity and illiteracy of the Iranian majority, the leadership of such progressive religious leaders was an urgent component of the revolution that

could have easily become dormant (60-1) According to Mansoureh Ettehadieh, the 1907 Anglo-Russian agreement was a crucial event affecting the course of the Constitutional Revolution. The agreement would divide Iran into three controlled territories: the north stretched all the way to the center and the west would be under the control of the Russians, the south stretching all the way to the east and the west would be in British control, and a small middle barrier of neutral land would separate the two occupied zones (48). The First World War (1914-1918) coincided with Iran's first constitutional monarchy and the rule of the last Qajar king, Ahmad Shah, who sat on the throne at the age of twelve. The final four years of the Qajar saw disarray in the still evolving parliament, bankruptcy of the central government, and official occupation of the country by the British and the Russians. As allies in the World War, the two countries disregarded Iran's declaration of neutrality, and as old geopolitical rivals, they continued their aggressions adamant to cripple Iran's economic and democratic aspirations. With multiple ethnicities and tribes whose cultures, languages and religions hardly kept them as one populace belonging to the same nation, Russia and Britain competed in geopolitical aggressions while the Qajars failed as either capable dictators or fearsome tyrants. Leaning on the clergy for popular cogency, ignoring the unruly independence of tribal lords, and giving incessant concessions to Britain and Russia to support their legitimacy, left only a puny idea of kingdom and statehood in the land.

The collapse of the Tsarist Empire in 1917 revived a dormant hope for immunity from Russia that had far too long interfered with the stability and the independence of Iran. Simultaneously, influential periodicals published inside and outside the country encouraged the populace to embrace change. *Kaveh* published in Germany by a group of exiled intellectuals led by Sayed Hassan Taghizadeh (1878-1970) an established yet exiled politician who urged the

Iranian people to follow the route of Europe where religion and politics took separate paths. The conservative yet leftist *Jangali* militia in the north famously known in the West as Persian Robin Hoods and established by Mirza Koochek Khan (1880-1921) published *Jangal*, and in Azarbaijan, Sheikh Mohammad Khiabani (1880-1920) a leading revolutionary cleric published the paper *Tajadod*. In June 1920, the socialist delegates from different political parties gathered in Anzali in a congress under the name of “The Communist Party of Iran” concluded at the end of the session that the goal would be for the country to be “The Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran” (Abrahamian 110-117). In effect, the Constitutional Revolution had given the Iranians the courage to pursue freedom the way they saw fit: with little hesitation, restraint or self-doubt. In the course of two decades, the country saw nineteen prime ministers, thirty four cabinets, innumerable political publications and fervent advocates of secularism, democracy and civic responsibility. However, their joyful political proclamations did not last for long as in the expected post-revolutionary havoc of the democracy in bloom, the geopolitical status of the country was changing and the borders with Russia were gradually dissipating. Reza Khan, a 42 year old high-ranking Cossack army officer, rose to the occasion of saving the kingdom from pressing disarray by tactically keeping both the Bolsheviks and the British happy while saving the country from losing its fragile and uncertain unity (Abrahamian 117). By 1921, the hopeless struggles of the constitutional monarchy seemed to weigh heavily on the populace who saw chaos as the major gift of the new era of governance. In October 1923, Reza Khan the war minister of Ahmad Shah Qajar, was appointed prime minister; hence a military regime was created that would soon lead to a new authoritarian rule, that of the Pahlavis. Those who had fought for a constitutional government were now quietly watching their political destiny slip away from their grip, and the unquiet few, such as Eshqi and Hedayat, voiced their anger mostly

in metaphors. The unfortunate turn of events caused by the combined pressure of the same three forces tyranny, colonialism and religion would continue their crippling effect for decades to come, but so would the unrelenting quest of the Iranians to sanction civic nationalism as an indispensable agency. Despite its ethical shortcomings, nationalism was the urgent response to the geopolitical claims of Britain and Russian, the traditionalism of the clerics, and the tyranny of the state. As Azimi explains, the deferring of revolutionary movements against Reza Shah's tyranny was a byproduct of tyranny itself. The incapability of the Qajars had left so much disarray that at such a crucial moment in history, and after so much hope for the country's inclusion in the evolutionary momentum of the twentieth century, Iran's democratic aspirations were halted yet again:

In Iran, demands for the creation of democratic accountability had coincided with the necessity of creating a centralized state strong enough to maintain order and security, resist outside pressure, and effect socioeconomic reform. Adherence to constitutional principles and procedures came increasingly to be regarded as subservient to action aimed at addressing the practical and urgent need for political order, administrative effectiveness, and socioeconomic modernization. (*The Quest* 67)

Among the few who continued expressing their opposition were Mirzadeh Eshqi and Sadegh Hedayat, two revolutionary authors whose distinctively oral textuality brought the voices on the streets to the forefronts of political literature. Substituting the affected language of the Qajar with the everyday language of the bazar, Eshqi broke the rules of literary etiquette to

voice his radical if not anarchic messages. Hedayat, Eshqi's junior by a few years, followed his footsteps in a more calculated manner but devoid of the mannerism that was expected from an author of his stature.

Mirzadeh Eshqi (1893-1924)

دییو مهیب خودسری چون ز غضب گرفت دم امنیت از محیط ما رخت بیست و گشت گم
حربه وحشت و ترورکشت چه میرزاده را سال شهادتش بخوان "عشقی قرن بیستم."

When a frightening obstinate demon caught its tale out of rage

Security left our surroundings and went missing

How the weapon of horror and terror did kill Mirzadeh

Call¹⁸ the year of his martyrdom "Eshqi¹⁹ of *Twentieth Century*."

Farrokhi Yazdi (1887-1939)

قرن بیستم را به شما و شما را به خدا میسپارم.

I leave *Twentieth Century*²⁰ to you and you to God.

Eshqi to Habib Qadiri

¹⁸ "بخوان" is used as a double entendre, meaning both "read" and "call" referring to both Eshqi's assassination in the Twentieth century and the title of his famous newspaper *Twentieth Century*.

¹⁹ A personal name, "عشقی" is a derivative of the root "عشق" or love.

²⁰ *Qarn-e Bistom*, the name of Eshqi's newspaper. The poet plays a pun on the phrase *Eshqi-ye Qarn-e Bistom* or Eshqi (the writer and the man) of Twentieth Century" as he bids his friend farewell. In Abjad calculations, his death occurred in 1303.

For students of Iranian history, World War I and its aftermath in Iran are fascinating for many reasons. The demise of the Qajar dynasty and the rise of a constitutional government witnessed the palpitating heart of democracy in infancy, but perhaps, the most exceptional feature of the times was the construction of the stepping stones of free speech. Such liberty unprecedented in the history of Iranian literature launched a political discourse that vehemently defied the three main forms of power that despite their separate contentions had the shared potential for suppression of free speech: religious authority, government control, and colonialist hegemony. Among the vocal critics of this collective control was a young journalist, playwright and poet Mohammad Reza Mirzadeh Eshqi whose assassination on July 3rd 1924, a year short of his 30th birthday, led to a widespread discourse on the role of poets in politics, and prompted the editors of the free press specifically those supporting the minority fraction²¹ of the legislature to take sanctuary in the parliament demanding the government to guarantee the safety of all writers, poets and editors. In an open letter addressed to *Majlis*, the angry writers and editors including Sayed Asadollah Rasa the editor in chief of *Qanoon*, Abbas Eskanadari of *Siasat*, Rahim Zadeh Safavi of *Asia-ye Vosta*, and Fakhroddin Shahab of *Shahab* signed a petition demanding government protection of the citizens' individual safety and social rights, adhering to the freedom of speech and the freedom of the press as declared in the constitution (Moshir Salimi 9):

نظر بوضعیات غیر عادی و سو قصدی که اخیراً به یکی از نویسندگان و

طرفداران حزب اقلیت بوقوع پیوسته و نظر به انواع تهدیدات دیگری که نسبت به مدیران

²¹ The two major political parties in the second session of the parliament were Democrats and Moderates. The majority or the Moderates were conservative and were supported by tribal leaders and landowner. The minority or Democrats had more progressive views and advocated for a secular socialist republic (Ettahadieh 32-3).

جرايد طرفدار اقلیت بعمل میاید امضا کنندگان ذیل از نقطه نظر عدم امنیت جانی در مجلس شورای ملی تحصن اختیار می نمایند و ضمناً" خاطر محترم را متذکر میشوند که تحصن مزبور فقط برای احتراز از وقوع در معرض سوقصدهای محتمله نبوده زیرا در آنصورت وسایل دیگری که عبارت از نگفتن و ننوشتن حقایق باشد در دست بوده لیکن این تحصن از برای اینست که در عین احتراز از وقوع در معرض خطر حتمی بتوانیم قضیه سو قصد به رفیق بیگناه خود را تعقیب کرده و موفق شویم دولت را با نظارت مجلس ملی که حقا" در هر موردی میتواند در اعمال دولت نظارت و تفتیش داشته باشد وادار به کشف جنایات و بدست آوردن محرکین اصلی آن بنماییم.

In lieu of the unnatural circumstances and the recent assassination of one of the writers and supporters of the minority group, and in lieu of all other sorts of intimidations against the managing editors of the minority backing periodicals, because their life is in danger, the following signatories take sanctuary in the National Assembly and also, they respectfully remind his honors that such refuge is not just to escape being the target of possible assassinations because in that case one could use other methods such as not telling and not writing the truth; however, taking sanctuary is because we want, in addition to caution against real danger, to be able to investigate the event of our innocent comrade and succeed in making the administration, under the supervision of the National Assembly, which can fully supervise and interrogate the administration, investigate the crime and arrest the actual ringleaders behind it.

(Moshir Salimi 10)

In 1909, at the time of the elections for the Second Majlis, four political parties were represented in the Majlis: the Democrats (*Ejtema-iyoon-e Aamiyoon*), the Moderate Socialists (*Ejtema-iyoon-Etedaliyoon*), the Liberals (*Azadikhahan*) and the Union and Progress (*Ettefaq va Tarraghi*). The Democrats, led by Hasan Taghizadeh, were generally in support of progressive ideas such as the separation of religion and politics, and the distribution of agricultural lands among peasants. The Moderate Socialists, more conservative in their agendas than the Democrats, were mostly landowners and constitutionalist clerics and worked under the joint leadership of Ali Mohammad Dolatabadi and Mirza Mohammad Sadegh Tabatabayee. The other two parties the Liberals and the Union and Progress were much smaller in their membership (*Ettehadiyeh* 38-9). In the subsequent sessions of the parliament, other parties and fractions appeared including the party of the conservative *Olama* (*Hey-at-e Elmiyeh*) led by the influential cleric Sayed Hasan Modarress, as well as a large group of Independents. During the Third Majlis, The Democrats and a fraction of the Moderate Socialists joined, and with the help of the Independents, made the majority opposition to the *Olama* party (Bahar 43)).

Ironically, Eshqi was barely a supporter of either party in the parliament and criticized the inadequacies of the Democrats as vigorously as the shortcomings of the Moderates. In a poem "نامه منظوم" or "Letter in Verse," he satirizes his friend Hossein Koohi Kermani the chief editor of the weekly periodical *Naseem Saba* for endorsing the members of the minority group. Comparing Koohi's meager economic status to that of Ali Dashti the chief editor of *Shafaq Sorkh*, and an upcoming parliamentarian, who had just returned to Iran from Iraq where he had lived for the majority of his life, the poet puts a pun on the two names, comparing the mountain-like uprightness of Koohi ("from the mountains") to the lowly behavior of Dashti ("from the plains"). Eshqi playfully praises the rectitude of Koohi as he mocks away the

degeneracy of Dashti, and advises the latter to go back to Karbala and to mind his own business instead of meddling in the affairs of the Iranian state. By questioning the legitimacy of a government that acts irresponsibly towards its constituents and succumbs yet again to corruption and nepotism, and by questioning the role of the savants who represent the government, Eshqi points to the looming danger of concession, licensing and subjugation in both the literature of Iranian politics and the politics of Iranian literature:

لشخوران گفتند: پولت میدهم	سر خط رد و قبولت میدهم
دشمن خود هستی ای خانه خراب!	از چه رو دادی به آنها این جواب؟
جان من کم غصه بهر ما بخور	شیخنا رو کربلا خرما بخور!
گر که میدادند آنها بر تو پول	داشتی گر عقل میکردی قبول
پس به لشخورها تو مهمان میشدی	هم وکیل شهر کرمان میشدی
...	
هی ز آقای "مدرس" مدح کن	هی ز آقای "ستاره" قدح کن
از اقلیت بکن توصیف ها	از وطن خواهان بکن تعریف ها
...	
از سفاهت تکیه بر ملت بکن	خویشتن را مایه ذلت بکن
پول و سور و عیش و نوش از دیگران	تو برای خوش الرحمان بخوان
روز و شب له له بزن از تشنگی	کنج غربت جان بده از گشنگی!

The vultures said: We'll give you money

We'll give you the green light to pass or fail

You are your own enemy, thou the housebroken!

Why did you give them this answer?

My soul, don't suffer for us so

Our Sheik, go to Karbala and eat date!

If they would give you money

If you had some wisdom, you would accept

And so you would be the guest of the vultures

And would become the deputy of Kerman

...

(Why) say the praises of Mr. "Modarress"

(Why) pay tributes to Mr. "Setareh"

(Why) give the compliments to the Minority

(Why) write the commendations of the Nationalists

...

From foolishness lean on the people

Thus make yourself humiliated

Money and feast and wining and dining is for others

You sing (the prayer for the deceased) *Alrahman*²² for yourself

Day and Night pant from thirst

In obscurity, die of hunger! (Moshir Salimi 398)

Eshqi the Ever-Rejectionist of the “Phony Republic!”

Like many of his peers, Eshqi was born into an upper-class family to whom education in its bilingual Persian/French mattered for social status as well as a respectable career. At the early age of 20 he joined a large group of emigrants and left the capital for Constantinople, a city where he dwelled on an off earning a living as a Poet Laureate who praised the Ottomans and as well as the young Qajar prince in exile. However, he soon gained the reputation of a rebel who was never satisfied with the politics of his times mocking the politicians of his time, the republican slogans of the new constitutional government as well as the mistakes of times past. Prosecuted and imprisoned for his blistering political pieces, Eshqi was esteemed so highly as a political figure that during the brief premiership of Hassan Pirnia he was offered to be the mayor of Isfahan, a position that he expectedly rejected (Moshir Salimi 8).

As a vocal satirist of Iran’s political chaos, and an ever present poet of the Constitution era, Eshqi was the quintessential Lyortardian story teller of Iranian politics. He criticized the agendas of the nationalist intelligentsia that seemed to entrap the country in Sisyphean redundancy as fiercely as all the facets of institutional politics and cultural norms.

²² Moslem prayer for the deceased.

Striving to introduce an alternative discourse on liberation, he mocked the mythical narratives of Iran's autocratic past simultaneously as the republican idealisms of his contemporaries. In effect, Eshqi was the earliest voice of the postmodern *petit-recite* relentlessly challenging the stability of accredited knowledge and calling his audience to the open-endedness of meanings. A fierce critic of a Westernized rushed modernity, Eshqi questioned the superficial changes that the country was experiencing as fervently as the political experimentations of the new government that seemed to be bogus maneuvers too perilous for a fragile democracy in infancy. In his famous article "Phony Republic," he accuses the supporters of the new government of the deliberate dismissal of the truth, and mocks the oblivious enthusiasm of both the public and the statesmen in fooling themselves with the "fake" and "underage" government that they call a republic. This hurried celebration is as absurd as the cylinder hat that Eshqi's barefoot butler spends all his money on just to look cultured. Just as the top hat would soon become a "dusty, filthy, beat-up, wrinkled thing" that shouldn't have been worn by the shepherd or the butler to begin with, a democracy run by a politically immature populace would soon lose its liberating essence:

What really sounds hilarious is that the shepherds of Saghez are now republican supporters, and this very speaker with this hefty load of bow tie is anti-republic. . . first change people's heads then their hats . . . what will we say besides laughing and thinking a foreigner probably passed by this place and wanted to have a good laugh and without even giving (the shepherd) one of his

own outfits, he has taken the hat off the shepherd and duped him²³! And has put his formal and ceremonial party hat on his head and ridiculed him?

(Moshir Salimi 141, 142, 143)

In Persian, the phrases “taking someone’s hat” and “putting a hat on someone’s head” connote deceiving a person, and Eshqi plays beautifully with both metaphors to develop his criticism. Beyond the new order and the country’s apparent infatuation with Western style clothing, Eshqi’s imagery encompasses the impaired judgment of the public in backing the new government as an immature political gesture and an illegible copy of the constituents in Western democracies. Most importantly, in the poet’s view, despite Reza Khan’s ostentatious call for a republic, it continued to be a tyrannical puppet of colonial Britain:

The policies of the Great Britain want our foreign policy to be murky with the Ottomans and the Russians. That is why they have found ways to cut our negotiations with Russia, causing over six million bags of rice to rot in Rasht. One cannot even find a dinar in Tehran bazaars. Despite all this, the present government has permitted the Imperial Bank to exit currency hence cut the relationship and the bond between Iran and the Turks. (Moshir Salimi 165)

The infatuation of the upper-class with Western-style clothes in the poverty-stricken Iran was to Eshqi a vivid indication of the superficial transformation that had tangled the country in havoc. In the final issue of *Twentieth Century*, Eshqi forcefully condemns the policies of the

²³ “کلاه سر کی گذاشتن یا کلاه کسی را برداشتن” meaning “putting a hat on someone’s head” or “taking someone’s hat” are both metaphors that mean deceiving someone.

government with Reza Khan as its new premier questioning both the validity of Reza Khan's republican aspirations and the public understanding of the basic rubrics of a democratic government:

A republic! In a country where the majority of its people have not yet understood the meaning of law and constitution!

In a country where even one out of a hundred cannot yet do basic reading and writing!

In a country all over which is ignorance and superstition!

In a country that needs everything but a republic!

Republicanism in this country is exactly like the marriage of a five year old girl with a seven year old boy . . . (Moshir Salimi 143,145, 148, 149).

Eshqi's mockery of the trendy talks of republicanism left few friends on the side of the young poet who in one of his inflammatory letters provoked Qavam the prime minister preceding Reza Khan to send his terrorist militia to murder him before the prime-minister himself would be forced to pay for his obvious and well-known crimes:

We are not afraid.

We count death to be worthless.

We wish to be killed in the course of duty, be martyred.

This would be the ultimate dream for us and our friends.

We won't die: Our endurance is recorded on the pages of the universe.

Eshqi's revolutionary poetics calls for the annulment of all ties with the past. To him, even the forerunners of the constitutional revolution are no longer eligible to run the country. In effect, there is a radical avant-gardism in Eshqi's ideology that verges on obsessive rejectionism, and nowhere does this negation show more forcefully than in his rhythmical satire of the newspapers of the time. Giving animal names to each paper, Eshqi's "مظهر جمهوری" or "The Emblem of the Republic" appeared in the one of the final copies of the paper with the picture of an angry fat man "John Bull" as the symbol of the British empire who with a rifle in one hand a silver coin in the other covered by the shadow of a devilish spirit symbolized the British ties of the new republic. A cobra, an owl, a mouse, a dog, a donkey and a cat each represents a republican newspaper. It is important to mention that the animals are completely devoid of the positive qualities that they might have in other Persian or European allegories, and as one by one the animals introduce themselves and their sub-human animalistic characteristics, devoid of the symbolic tropes of strength, wisdom or faithfulness that are classically associated with them in fables:

مظهر جمهوری فرماید:

من مظهر جمهورم الدم و بولدرم از صدق و صفا دورم الدم و بولدرم

من قلدر پر زورم الدم و بولدرم مامورم و معذورم الدم و بولدرم

من قاعد جمهورم الدم و بولدرم

افعی گوید:

من افعی بیجانم صدقنا زهر است به دندانم آمنه صدقنا

من دشمن ایرانم - آمل - صدقنا من فاقد ایمانم - آمل - صدقنا
من بوجار لنجانم - آمل - صدقنا

The Emblem of the Republic declares:

I am the emblem of the republic _ *Oldoram o Boldoram*²⁴

I am far from honesty and truth _ *Oldoram o Boldoram*

I am the belligerent bully – *Oldoram o Boldoram*

I am the apologetic agent – *Oldoram o Boldoram*

I am the foundation of the Republic _ *Oldoram o Boldoram*

The cobra says:

I am the lifeless cobra – *Amanna – Saddaghna*²⁵

I have poison in my teeth – *Amanna – Saddaghna*

I am the enemy of Iran – *Amanna – Saddaghna*

I am without faith – *Amanna – Saddaghna*

I am the weeping winnower – *Amanna – Saddaghna*

As one after another, the periodicals introduce their animalistic characteristics with a pathetic plea, *Twentieth Century*, Eshqi's radical newspaper that condemns all political leniencies, concludes the discourse by criticizing the Republic and advising him to take a leave of absence and let the populace alone:

قرن بیستم گوید:

²⁴ The onomatopoeic words might reference the bullish power of the republic.

²⁵ Koranic words that end most prayers.

ای مظهر جمہوری۔ ہی ہی جبلی قم قم
 جمہوری مجبوری۔ ہی ہی جبلی قم قم
 مسلک نشود زوری۔ ہی ہی جبلی قم قم
 تا کی پی مزدوری۔ ہی ہی جبلی قم قم
 یکچند نما دوری۔ ہی ہی جبلی قم قم
 من مرد مسلمانم۔ آما صدقنا

Twentieth Century says:

Oh the emblem of the republic - *hey hey joboli²⁶ ghom ghom*
 The imposed republic – *hey hey joboli ghom ghom*
 Doctrine cannot be done by force – *hey hey joboli ghom ghom*
 How long to continue with being a lackey – *hey hey joboli ghom ghom*
 For a while keep your distance – *hey hey joboli ghom ghom*
 I am a Moslem man – *Amanna – Sadghanna (281-2)*

Eshqi's poem is not just an attack on his peers, Britain, the government or even Reza Khan alone. Eshqi mocks religion, the confluence of religion with dirty politics, and the permissive whitewashing of treachery and deceit for statesmen whose religious affiliations make them indispensable to the devout public majority. Eshqi's bold criticism of Reza Shah may have been the main motive behind his assassination. However, Reza Khan was not the only enemy Eshqi had as he continuously criticized many aspects of the culture and was not only vocal in his

²⁶ Most probably a pun on the character "John Bull," the symbolic caricature of Great Britain that was transliterated in vernacular Persian at the time to جمبول or *jombool*.

criticism of the corruption of Iranian rulers, but also condemned the dogmas of the populace who obeyed the decrees of the powerful clergy. Eshqi's "tragic flaw" was his excessive audacity and radicalism targeting the esteemed public figures as fiercely as the established traditions in the core of the Iranian society. In his valediction on Eshqi, Malek O-Shorah-ye Bahar expresses the glum views of Eshqi about Iran, and the poet's conviction that he would soon be assassinated for his views. As Bahar contends, although Eshqi frequently spoke about the likelihood of being murdered and bade martyrdom in his texts and poems, he was shocked to be a target, and his desperate plea to live, gave his friends a mournful recognition of the failures of an audience that was not yet ready for Eshqi's message. His death was an ironic tragedy for a political poet who condemned the government for pushing a "phony republic" on an uninformed populace the majority of whom lived in rural villages and were decades behind the citizens of most developed countries. In Bahar's words:

Eshqi died and left the land that his delicate soul was never content with. . . .

Times could not tolerate to see a sensitive young man with a firm belief and solid patriotic politics, and as the result of its tyranny, it crushed him, and fluttered him and dispensed him like the petals of a young bloom. (Moshir Salimi 16-18)

The typical sarcasm and modern cynicism of commentaries like the following made Eshqi a well-known target for many government officials and private individuals:

جمهوری اسم جانور است؟ جمهوری اسم گیاه است؟ اگر جانور است چه شکل جانوری است؟
اگر گیاه است چه شکل گیاهی است. . . خدا برکت دهد به ایرانی "این طفل یکشنبه ره یکساله

میرود. "جمهوری که سی سال مقدمه لازم دارد و حتما باید با دست دو هزار دیپلمه دارالفنون دیده اجرا شود ملت ایران با دست چند نفر بین النهرینی و ... در عرض سه ماه آنرا ساخت. . .

Is Republic the name of an animal? Is Republic the name of a plant? If it is an animal, what type of an animal is it? If it is a plant, what type of a plant is it . . . God blesses the Iranian: "This child accomplishes a year in one night." A Republic that takes thirty years of preparations, and needs the hand of at least two thousand graduates of *Darolfonoon* to be developed, the people of Iran built it with the hand of only a few Mesopotamians and . . . in three months. . . (141)

Finally assassinated in his house on a warm summer morning in July 1924, Eshqi the poet became Eshqi the martyr²⁷. The feverish voice of revolutionary idealism, Eshqi's cocky brilliance marks him as a reference for the country's multiple democratic uprisings. In effect, Eshqi is among the few preachers who follow the same path that they encourage others to take. In "The Necessity of Revolution," he summons the youth of the country to revolt, give their "blood" to the "tree of freedom," and die for a cause that lives forever:

لزوم انقلاب

این ملک یک انقلاب میخواد و بس	خونریزی بیحساب میخواد و بس
امروز دگر درخت آزادی ما	از خون من و تو آب میخواد و بس

²⁷ Eshqi died in the hospital and according to Bahar, was fully alert until the very end cursing the assassins and giving a detailed account of the assassination in his usual sarcastic tone. The assassins had showed up at his door the night before, when Eshqi had company and had told the maid not to let in random visitors. The assassins showed up again the next morning and shot him inside his house (Moshir Salimi 13-18).

Necessity of Revolution

This land needs a revolution and done

Needs massive bloodshed and done

Today then the tree of our freedom

Needs watering by the blood of me and you and done.

(Moshir Salimi⁴¹²)

Eshqi's Revolutionary Discourse in Drama

Eshqi's poetic infatuation with social causes does not expunge his antipathy toward an ignorant public that he is desperate to educate. Nothing hurts Eshqi more than the conformism of a culture that clings to obsolete traditions in semantics, politics and social behaviors. His revolutionary era calls for an urgent syntax and new semantics. In his introduction to "Norooz Letter" a collection of poems in praise of the beauty of Istanbul and the proximity of the cultures and the hearts of Iranians and the Turks, Eshqi declares his plan of modernizing Persian language while staying true to its authenticity. Although he does not go into details and brushes on the topic with simple rhyming changes that he has practiced, fear of scrutiny by the heavyweights of his time reveals through his calm tone and hefty word choice:

Is it not that according to the advice of all the world's philosophers at any moment all of the atoms of the universe even the solids change? As far as I have excavated, I have found no reason to consider Persian literature even more unchangeable than solids . . . Undoubtedly a group of conservative (*conservatoires*) meaning the followers of policing archaic rules will not take to liking my new idea and style and my simple method of wording and will regret why we should not continue with the hyperbolic style of the predecessors. (260-1)

Revolutionizing Persian semantics was only a small part of Eshqi's modernizing agenda. The paradox of embracing a modernity that was already coined as Western, British or French, thus colonialist, was hardly a dilemma for him or other intellectuals at the time. In fact, the urgency of moving forward was so all-encompassing that native traditions seemed to be but a dispensable hurdle. Modernism stood in sharp contrast to traditionalism, and there was little about the latter that was worth a deliberation. Autocracy, illiteracy, inequality of genders and classes, and so on, were not just problems but traditions that Eshqi obsessively condemned. In effect, to Eshqi, socio-political traditions of Iranians did not overlap their sense of a national identity; on the contrary, nationalism meant progressive patriotism verged with modernity.

In *Understanding Nationalism*, Patrick Hogan identifies the general categories by which humans identify themselves. Belonging to a nation, being born within an acknowledged set of borders, and speaking the official language of communication categorically give an individual a sense of national identity, pride and bias no matter how arbitrary the rules of belonging to that "nation" are. Being an Iranian was Eshqi's "categorical identity" as Hogan's cognitive reading of nationalism may suggest. Objecting to the traditions that ruled Iran would,

on the other hand, would give him the “practical identity” of a nationalist; a learned and fluid form of identity that ironically alienated him from many others who also identified themselves as nationalists (36-9). For example, in his eulogy “Marg-e Eshqi” or “Eshqi’s Death,” Malek O Sho-ara-e Bahar (1884-1951)²⁸, an esteemed poet and a Democratic politician of the Constitution era, regretfully explains how he conciliated with the poet only a few months prior to Eshqi’s murder (Moshir Salimi 17). The majority of the writers and poets who took refuge in the parliament upon Eshqi’s death were also frequently criticized by Eshqi despite their general accord with Eshqi’s practical identity as a nationalist (Moshir Salimi 9-10).

One of Eshqi’s greatest contributions to the trajectory of Iranian literature is his poetic drama. As a forerunner of the dramatic genre in Iranian literature, the simplicity of his language and the transgressive themes of his texts were undoubtedly the gateway for authors like Hedayat to embark on writing about taboo subjects in the vernacular language of the folk. The idea of drama itself was quite new for a long literary tradition that considered poetry to be the most admired form of artistic expression. Adding socio-political themes to the form was an even larger deviation. In his introduction to the poetic drama *Ideal or Eshqi’s Three Tableaus*, he explains the symbolism of a young village girl being seduced by a treacherous city man. Commending himself on creating an unprecedented style of literary expression in Persian language, Eshqi proudly states in the introduction that his play is the “best example of this century’s poetic revolution” not only because the modernity of the language of the three-act poetic play but also because of the theme. The play, he contends, is a response to the invitation of Farajollah Bahrami²⁹ (1878-1951) who, as a high-ranking official in the Ministry of War,

²⁸ Mohammad Taghi Bahar was a Poet Laureate with the title of “Malek O’ Sho ‘ara” or the *King of Poets*.

²⁹ Reza Kahn’s secretary, a parliamentarian, and a high-ranking official in the Ministry of War as introduced in Encyclopedia Iranica: www.iranicaonline.org.

invited the country's intellectuals to envision their ideal state and to publish their account in *Shafagh-e Sorkh*, a prominent newspaper at the time. Eshqi responds to the affected invitation by turning the tables on the plea that demanded a promotional support for the state. *Ideal or Eshqi's Three Tablaue* is the poet's political satire about Reza Khan's usurpation of power, telling the story of a young village girl who kills herself after being raped by an aristocratic outsider. The young girl's desperate suicide echoes the abrupt ending to the country's young revolution, and her mourning old father's anguished tears mirror the continuous desperation of the old country facing yet another tyrant. In the short introduction to the poem, and in his familiar sarcastic tone, Eshqi explains how the poem is a direct attack at Bahrami's proposal:

As it appeared, some people guessed that the intention of Mr. Secretary was for the majority of the authors to express their ideal to be a powerful central government held by *Sardar Sepah*³⁰, and then , articles with similar points could be seen. They asked this subject³¹ too, and this subject created the following three ideal portraits that you will graciously study, and of course, you will agree that the components of my ideal are in disagreement with their intention. All the authors wrote in prose: only this speaker said in in verse, and it was published in *Shafagh-e Sorkh* year three. (Moshir Salimi 172)

In the third scene, Eshqi creates a dramatic dialogue between the narrative voice and the mourning father who curses the gentry, the aristocracy and the officials for imposing themselves on the country only to diminish its revolutionary aspirations. Concluding the poem with a direct

³⁰ Head of the battalion and the famous military title of Reza Khan.

³¹ بنده self or subject; referring to oneself with humility.

speech at Farajollah Baharami, he promises a vengeance for the farmer and a bloody revolution for all. Written in the month of *Farvardin*, the first month in Iranian Solar calendar, and the time of New Year's celebrations, Eshqi plays a pun on the word *عید* or *eid*, and warns the statesman about bloody revolution to come:

ز من هم گر بپرسی تو، ایدآل آنست همین مقدمه انقلاب ایران است
...
عجب مدار اگر شاعری جنون دارد بدل همیشه تقاضای عید خون دارد

If you ask me too, this is the Ideal

This too is the preface to Iran's Revolution

Don't be alarmed if a poet (poetry) has mania

Has forever in his heart the call for the "celebration of bloodshed"

(191-3)

Namayeshameh-ye Jamshid-e Nakaam or *The Play of Ill-fated Jamshid*, a reflection on the suicide of the author's young brother who, like many of his upper-class peers, was sent to Europe to attend college and return with a specialized degree is another example of his endeavor in modernizing Persian literature. The play is the satirical story of a contentious Iranian student in Europe who is witness to the futility of purpose and the unethical principles of wealthy Iranian students such as two of his friends, ironically named "*Velengar Khan*"³² or Sir

³² ولنگار or *velengar* means idle and irresponsible, and خان or *Khan* a term that is originally used to for a tribal chief or a feudal lord has gradually become a respectful suffix for (aristocratic) men.

Idle, and “*Meghraz Mirza*³³” or Mr. Debt, two characters who fit well into the corrupt Iranian system of governance that supports their perpetual deceit. Although it was customary for the young men of aristocratic families to go abroad for higher education, many spent their days idle and homesick, finding it impossible to adjust to the demands of European educational system and cultural norms simultaneously carrying the burden of responding to the high expectations of the homeland. Alcoholism and even suicide were common among such students as the expectations of their high social leverage along with the urgency of the monetary support of the government that would cut them off unless they produced documents of continuous enrolment in a certain field were many times too much to endure. In addition, before their scheduled return to Iran, their family would usually announce the date of their arrival in the town newspaper, expecting to seal them a high social status and as well as a municipal job. In Eshqi’s play, we see *Velengar Khan* carelessly spending time in his friends’ expensive hotel room. Cheering himself on his latest theft of a diamond ring intended for his French mistress who, as we soon learn, sleeps with other Iranian students too, *Meghraz* receives a letter from his father advising him on essential strategies before his return to the homeland. The good looking Jamshid³⁴ who most likely represents the Eshqi’s brother, fed up with such behavior and is here to advice *Meghraz* to return to Iran before further ruining the reputation of Iranians, is asked to read him the letter. In addition to the satirical exchanges between the characters mocking the idiocy of the behaviors and traditions of the upper-classes, Eshqi trespasses a taboo by not only broadcasting the sacrilegious cause of his brother’s death in the foreword to the play, but also turning the subject of his death into a comedy. The short play, however, does not directly address suicide, but seems to portray the background story of his brother’s death to be the life story of many

³³ مقراض or *Meghraz* means scissors, but is also a pun on the root of the word: قرض or debt.

³⁴ Jamshid is the name of the mythical king of Persia who rules over three hundred years in peace and prosperity for all creatures.

young Iranian men living abroad. In the letter to *Meghraz*, his father *Saffak O'Doleh*³⁵ (Lord Satan) advises him to not only write a couple of political articles for a variety of newspapers before leaving, but also send home a telegram in a hefty archaic prose to publish in a daily paper:

عزیزم! دو مقاله یکی بفرانسه تحت عنوان: (ایکاش من ایرانی نبودم و یکنفر فرانسوی بودم) دیگری تحت عنوان: (ایرانی یک ارباب خارجی میخواهد) مبنی بر اینکه: او نمیتواند خود را اداره کند و چقدر خوب بود یک نفر انگلیسی ایران را اداره میکرد! دیگر اینکه دو مقاله هم بتهران بفرست که بدهم بروزنامه های بزرگ چاپ کنند، یکی: (ایران باید بدست ایرانی اداره شود) و یکی، ("ای ایران ای مادر عزیز! (اولادهای) تو، در اقصی بلاد عالم برای اداره کردن تو مشغول تحصیل و زحمت کشیدن هستند توجهی بفرزندان خلف بنما، شاید موفق شوند بچون تو مادر عزیزی در آتیه خدمت کنند. . . نور چشم: وقتی به ایران میایی تلگرافی بمضمون ضیل بزن که آنرا بدهم به روزنامه ها درج کنند: "مقام منیع مقدس بندگان حضرت اقدس والا شاهزاده سفاک الدوله! پس از تحصیلات وافیه، کسب معلومات کافیه، ملاقات با فلاسفه و دیپلماتهای بزرگ دنیا و مباحثه با رجال و رؤسای علوم و گرفتن تصدیقات از مدارس عالییه و دارالفنون پاریس، عازم تهران میباشم.

My dear! Two articles one in French under the title: "I wish I were not an Iranian and were a Frenchman; and the other: "An Iranian needs a foreign master" with the following: He cannot take care of himself and it would be really nice if an Englishman took care of Iran! Also send two articles to Tehran so that I give them to big newspapers to publish. One: "Iran must be run by Iranians" and the other: "Oh Iran O Dear Mother! Your children in the farthest lands of the

³⁵ cruel, and owner of; a pseudonym that connotes a Qajar princely rank.

world are educating themselves and working hard to take care of you. Kindly pay attention to your rightful children so that in the future they can serve a dear mother like you” . . . The light of my eye: As you are coming to Iran, send a telegraph for me as detailed below to send to newspapers to be published: “His saintly highness for the worshippers of his holiness, noble prince *Saffak O’ Doleh!* After finishing high education, gaining sufficient knowledge, meeting with philosophers and major diplomats of the world, debating with the heads and leaders of sciences, attaining licenses from higher-education schools and the *Darolfonoons*³⁶ (Polytechnic Institute) of Paris, I am departing for Tehran” (198-9).

The one act play of only seven pages not only addresses the superfluous life of wealthy Iranian abroad, but also targets the dysfunctional politics of a country that is run by the same reckless aristocrats. Jamshid the only untainted character in the play and a tribute to Eshqi’s brother who is expected to die “*nakam*³⁷” as clear from in the title of play *Namayeshnameh-ye Jamshid-e Nakam* concludes the play with a short monologue:

Jamshid Khan __ (faces the audiences and says: “Oh God! These aristocrats come to the western world with such lavish wealth and instead of studying; they do such filthy things that cause disgrace for Iran and Iranians.” (200)

³⁶ The name of the first Iranian institution of higher education. The satirical tone of the poet makes the reader doubt if Lord Tyrant differentiates between the Proper Persian name and its English equivalent.

³⁷ An adjective that connotes unexpected death of a young person.

Hardly known for eloquence or decorum, Eshqi's uncensored language that invited the profanity, cursing and foul language on the streets into the in the category of high arts had become his signature style. Like the upcoming Hedayat, he immensely enjoyed the lingos of the lower class and the verbal outpours of the workers in the bazaar and questioned the affected rhetoric of Persian texts and dismissed them as archaic and irrelevant. The only way to break free from cultural restraint was through the dismissal of all *forms* passed on by the old hence even more so than to Hedayat, profanity was to Eshqi the only logical signifier to express a collective disgust of the tradition of submission to tradition. In his short poem "A Life of Groan and Moan" about the colonial aggression of Britain and the indifference of Iranians in defending their country, Eshqi poignantly breaks the boundaries of textual etiquette to deliver his offensive message. Comparing his countrymen to passive victims of rape, he shrugs with disgust at the submissiveness of Iranians who do not defend their motherland against British colonialism:

یک عمر آه و ناله

مرا چکار که یک عمر آه و ناله کنم؟	که فکر مملکت شش هزار ساله کنم!
وطن پرستی مقبول نیست در ایران	قلم بیار من این مملکت را قباله کنم
من التزام ندادم که گر در این ملت	نبود حس وطن دوستی اماله کنم!
بگو به ... خر آماده باش و حاضر کار	بمادر وطنت زین پس حواله کنم!
سزای مادر این ملک انگلیس دهد!	چرا ز ... خر آنقدر استماله کنم؟

A Life of Groan and Moan

What is it to me to live a life of groan and moan?

To worry about this six thousand year old nation!

Patriotism is not presentable in Iran

Bring a pen so that I write off the deed of this land

I didn't give an oath that, if there were in this people

No feeling of love for homeland, to do an enema!

Tell to the (dick) of the donkey to be ready and set to work

To the mother land, from now on, I will give it!

The punishment for the mother of this land, England will give!

Why should I rub the (dick) of the donkey so³⁸? (440)

A poet of contradictions, Eshqi could be solemn and sardonic, articulate and profane in a single breath. An avant-guard in politics and a transgressor in philology, Eshqi was neither a devotee of the imported Western modernity nor a disciple of a glorious ancient Iran. A quintessential intellectual, he voiced the ambiguities of the early 20th century Iran in controversial poems that juxtaposed the heated arguments of his political commentaries. The intransigence that debilitates most readings of the constitutional era fall short of recognizing Eshqi as the poet of the future and an avant-garde who charged at the weighty tradition of Iran's written language as fiercely as the hollow affectation of western style clothing. Eshqi mocked the

³⁸ No need to prepare the donkey to rape the mother (land) as England is quite ready for a similar offence.

counterfeit republic that kept the ceremonial system of governance intact, and questioned the old narratives that held on to hierarchies. Eshqi' is a witness to Hogan's observation that storytelling is but the most encompassing form of recording human experience (*Empire and Poetic Voice* 2, 32). One can add to Hogan's argument that literature is the only cultural discourse that in its intertextuality connects the diverse branches of knowledge without yielding to the supremacy of any; Eshqi, in his poetic creations, analyses history, produces knowledge and presents the truth which history, politic or sociology singlehandedly lack. His contribution to cultural discourse, like the rest of the authors in this study, is more than reflecting on or responding to a 'produced' knowledge; Eshqi proposes knowledge and conjures action, just as Hedayat does a few years later, only with more precision and grace.

Sadegh Hedayat (1903-1951)

Hedayat and Selfless *Selfies*

Sadegh Hedayat (1903-1951) is perhaps the most read, researched and revered Iranian writer whose vast collection of fiction and nonfiction continues to lure and captivate Iranian readers whose parents, grandparents and great grandparents were as much at awe with his work as the future generation of Iranians will most likely be. This incessant

fascination with Hedayat's voice seems to grow out of the perplexity of the epistemological questions that he frequently asks but never answers. Despite the dramatic shift in the societal institutions of Iran in the past century, what could arguably be called the Iranian "culture" seems to have hardly altered. What makes Hedayat relevant to today's readers, is his mastery of defamiliarizing a familiar culture with much more quantitative than qualitative modification in a value system with static essentials that continue to be problematic. If effect, the reason why Hedayat remains a "mystery" writer of books that are mysteriously familiar, is his unabashed mirroring of a modern Iranian who tells stories about Iran. The difference between Hedayat and his people is that he was well-read and, and read his people well. Partly because of his vast interest in all things modern and traditional, and partly because of his talent and education, Hedayat was the outsider who was like Behrangi's Talkhoon both one of them and not. Similarly to Behrangi too, he became larger than life partly because of his writing and mostly because of his early death which is, perhaps, a dominant factor in including him in this research: if Hedayat had lived an old age, he would have undermined his larger than life stature by the simple fact of living. If Behrangi is a "social" martyr whose death colored his writings into how-to notes on fighting societal institutions, Hedayat is a "cultural" martyr whose death imposed a revisiting of Iranian superstructures. Culture in this research is closer in its application to mainstream domination of a superstructure or hegemony of patriarchic religiosity that despite its many contradictions, aspirations and practices, pertains to a unity that suppresses any unpredicted resistance or deviation. Such approach, in the postmodern world of political relativism and cultural nationalism is hardly a problematic deserving of time or research. To most contemporary critics of culture, the complexities of the "indigenous" cultures of the Middle East, in which category Iran is a queer member, are translatable only in a threesome of minimally elucidated

types opposing the Imperialists' aspirations and transgressions. "Theirs" is epistemologically an "eastern" ideology that falls outside the category of a problematic unless it is 1. An unfortunate reactionary ideology to western imperialism. 2. An implosive exclusionary nationalism that is as harmful as any foreign dominance. 3. A westernized rushed modernity that never "fits" the cultures of the third world. To many critics of modern Iranian culture, most fictional narratives of Iran, worthy of an academic study, fall into similar predestined categories, hence the predictable stereotyping of an author like Hedayat as either a reactionary nationalist or an alienated elitist hater of all things Iranian or both. In fact, there is hardly a Hedayat critic who is unapologetic about Hedayat's moral standing. In his study of women in Hedayat's fiction, Mahmood Kianoosh describes him as a member of a generation of young Iranian intellectuals who had just gotten familiar with centuries of western philosophy and would expect to absorb and follow them without due introduction and understanding of their intricacies:

And that is why a young intellectual author like "Sadegh Hedayat" would be simultaneously influenced by "Corneille" and "Racine" and "Moliere," and "Hugo" and "Lamartine" and "Balzac" and "Guy De Maupassant" and . . . that is why he was influenced by both "Voltaire" and "Rousseau" as well as "Hegel" and "Marx" and "Darwin," by "Kierkegaard" and "Jean Paul Sartre," as well as "Freud" and "Jung." In other words, he wanted to take a few centuries old journey of numerous dissimilar and diverse generations in the short span of one generation; and this is why, unfortunately, on his path to self-discovery and self-building, he would reach self-alienation; and that is why in his mind, socialism

was mixed with fundamentalist nationalism, and Darwinism with racism and Arian infatuation. (207-8)

In this section, I strive to challenge such reductionist depictions by sketching the conditions under which a canonical author like Hedayat developed his vast collection of work that continues to be simultaneously celebrated and condemned in Iran, and to debunk the popular yet frivolous notion that Hedayat's interest in folklore was the hegemonic production of a nationalist bourgeois superstructure that contained him as an upper-class foreign educated 30's Iranian male. Through an analytical study of a selection of Hedayat's work, I trace the trajectory of Hedayat's "cultural" productions within the "Iranian" society in the country's early stages of historical "modernity" towards an understanding of his uprooted discourse that seems to have come not from a synthetic imitation of foreign texts, but organically and rationally. Hedayat saw little for celebration around him, and expressed his disappointment in the most bizarre stories. As an avant-garde, he was a pioneer in searching for the times passed and was distressed about the gradual loss of Iran's many dialects, oral tales and folklore. Ironically, however, as shown in his fiction, he was simultaneously disillusioned with the culture that he was so passionately studying. He was neither a pluralist nor a populist, and the duality of his life as recorded by his friends, admirers, critics and observers versus his art as we have it today, is perhaps the main reason he continues to be the most researched Iranian author the ethics of whose life and work is in constant renegotiation. In order to understand Hedayat, I contend, we must begin with what made him one of us _in a general sense of the word, having a gender role, belonging to a class, following a religion, having a nationality, ethnicity and so on_ and in this regard, I do not differentiate him by a post-colonial third-worldist signifier simply because of his "third world"

nationality, and furthering on to what made him one of us_ in the specific sense of the word_ *a consumer and producer of texts*, a signifier that crosses borders and cultures and does not need justifying anyhow. However, one might ask if Hedayat's experience of foreign languages _specifically French, and foreign people, texts, places and cultures would be the same as that of a French author's experience in his or her homeland. I would argue that Hedayat's experience of "the foreign" was not an expectedly-essentialized reaction by an Iranian young man in the west as he was as much at awe with modern culture of the west as the traditional culture of his own country. The common tradition of approaching his texts from either a purely anti-colonial, purely nationalist or purely psychological standpoint or even a combination of the three is hence contested in this research. Hedayat's writings opened the door to a national recognition of the bewildering complexities of Iranian culture the inadequacies of which he criticized through the language of fiction partly because the culture he criticized was not open to direct criticism and partly because he himself was a production of the same culture of indirect indignations; metaphors that for centuries have become tokens of the truth and incomparable signifiers.

"Zنده Beh Goor:" A Generation that was "Buried Alive"

Studying the contributory relationship between fiction and reality, and analyzing mimed discourses that hide factual revolutionary topics in layers of imagery and structure, I consider Hedayat a radical writer whose stories occupied a political vacancy in the cultural discourses of his time and beyond. Hedayat's writing was not only a part of the 1979

revolutionary discourse in Iran but also a component of its primer. The result, however, was the lovechild of the very two vices that Hedayat condemned to be the roots of Iran's backwardness. The revolution, I contend, despite its many political and economic rationalizations, was the partial product of a widespread cynicism that became the theme of the fiction and poetry of Iran's esteemed writers who simultaneously condemned both inherited traditions and expectant transformations. In this section, I focus on the two contradictory aspects of Hedayat's work. On the one hand, he is innovative and creative, breaking ties with tradition and pleading to an audience that is not yet born; on the other hand, he denounces growth and rejects the enforced progress of modernity. Undoubtedly, without Hedayat's groundbreaking texts, Iranian literature would have a much harder time finding the winding path to post-modernism. In his comprehensive analysis of Hedayat's life and work, Mostafa Farzaneh points to a commanding characteristic of Hedayat's writing that continues to be a challenge for most Iranian authors. As he contends, what distinguishes Hedayat from most other Iranian authors is the active voice of his narrators. The "I" in Hedayat's texts lives and breathes and loves and sins; he is neither an omniscient entity surrendering to the force of logos nor an impartial bystander reporting to the audience ; Hedayat's narrator does not just deliver God's words, but has his own version of the story and words it out in his own concrete language. As Farzaneh argues, Iranian literary culture before Hedayat and arguably until now, finds no usage for words outside the limited territory of rhetoric. It is important to note, however, that Farzaneh does not distinguish between written and oral language, because, historically and until early Twentieth century, literature in Iran was celebrated mostly through poetic verse; the primary medium of imaginary literature that begs to be read aloud. In this context, where reading is primarily a public practice, private matters lack

space, words are used for communicating to others about others, and the self _under the constant advisory of religion_ is simply lost in translation:

The eastern world narrator _especially the Iranian narrator _ considers the open and frank word to be indecorous. To him, the word is the beauty; the word is superior to intellect. The word is music, a phenomenon that is mysterious and abstract. So much so that one can say contradictory things, and never be criticized. The only rule of speech is the beauty of the word. For our audience, to whom the reason for the existence of the world is discovered, learning about the mind is a futile pursuit. . . The individual, individual needs and individual desires are nothing and scrutinizing one's condition, speaking of the self is futile and vain... All speech is about "Him." "He" is all that is everywhere and we are all in "Him." Hence there is no place for "I." Man is not the "Subject" hence his condition is not worth recounting. (355)

In other words, what makes Hedayat a ground breaker in the history of Iranian literature, is his insistence on brining the self to the center. The absent "I" of the Iranian tradition of writing is not a simple coincidence, but as Farzaneh argues, the "I" is absent because there is no place for the self or the body in the Islamic tradition of Iranian writing. The cultural connotation of using the pronoun من breaks the selfless rules of conduct that is expected in the culture. Culturally, the first-person pronoun is missing from most polite conversations out of respect, as an invitation to a communal inclusion, as well as a profession of humility. If there is a need for using the

pronoun “I,” the plural form ما or “we” is uttered instead. It is by the credit of this simple transgression half a century ago that Hedayat breaks other cultural taboos as well.

I begin my analysis of Hedayat’s use of folklore by a marginal case in “*Zنده Beh Goor*” or “Buried Alive” with the narrator’s fond memory of a female story teller *Geleen Baji*. I will then move on to Hedayat’s other stories where folklore plays a central part. “Buried Alive” is a short story in which the first-person narrator, Hedayat’s “I,” contemplates his continuously failed attempts at suicide. Not only does the author turn a taboo subject into a hilarious short story, but he also write about the futility of existence for an upper-class young Iranian male who, instead of enjoying the privileges of studying abroad, enjoying uncensored relationships with women, kissing in public, having coffee with friends, and clearly, not having to work for a living, spends his time in an obsessive planning of a *chic* death. The narrator, however, neither disregards the absurdity of his immediate behavior nor is oblivious to the existential problem of being. Daring enough to break ties with life and the living, he is the quintessential Sartrean existentialist who finds life a burden that he simply does not care to oblige:

یکهفته بود که خودم را آماده مرگ میکردم. هر چه نوشته و کاغذ داشتم همه را نابود کردم. رختهای چرکم را دور انداختم تا بعد از من که چیزهایم را واری می کنند چیز چرک نیابند. رخت زیر نو که خریده بودم پوشیدم ، تا وقتی که مرا از رختخواب بیرون می کشند و دکتر می آید معاینه بکند شیک بوده باشم . . . عکس خویشان خودم را درآوردم نگاه کردم . . . آنها را دوست داشتم و دوست نداشتم ، میخواستم ببینم و نمیخواستم . . . عکسها را پاره کردم، دلبستگی نداشتم. خودم را قضاوت کردم دیدم، یک آدم مهربانی نیوده ام.

For a week now, I had been preparing myself for death. I destroyed all of my papers and writings. I threw out my dirty laundry so that after my death, when they would be going through my stuff, they would not find dirty clothes. I wore my newly bought underwear so that when they would pull me out of the bed and the doctor would come to examine, I would be chic. . . I took out the picture of my family and looked at it. . . I loved them and I didn't love them. I wanted to see them and I didn't . . . I tore the pictures, I was not attached. I judged myself and I saw that I had not been a kind person. (*"Zنده Beh Goor"* 23).

In a flowing phonological rhythm, the narrator of "Buried Alive" recounts the past, documents the present and predicts the future through a sinuous trance of opium overdose. Although the reader anticipates his death, _ not necessarily because he truly intends to die but because sooner or later the drugs may kill him_ the absurdity of his self-destructive behavior lulls the reader and denies him or her any anticipation of a rescue, so that when his death is announced in the last line of the story, there is hardly a space left for empathy or sorrow. Instead, his death builds a familiar estrangement between the target audience and the alienated narrator who like many others in his generation _including the author and two of my uncles_ committed suicide. Periodically in and out of conscious, he contemplates on his childhood desperately searching for a good memory only to shatter the readers' prototypical anticipation of a carefree past. His only sweet memory is that of his old nanny telling him bedtime stories:

چه هوسهایی به سرم میزند! همینطور که خوابیده بودم دلم میخواست بچه
کوچک بودم، همان گلین باجی که برایم قصه میگفت و آب دهن خودش را فرو میداد اینجا بالای

سرم نشسته بود، همانجور خسته من در رختخواب افتاده بودم، او با آب و تاب برایم قصه میگفت و آهسته چشمهایم بهم میرفت. . . آیا آنوقت خوشبخت بودم؟ نه، چه اشتباه بزرگی! همه گمان میکنند بچه خوشبخت است. نه خوب یادم هست. آن وقت بیشتر حساس بودم، آن وقت هم مقلد و آب زیر کاه بودم. شاید ظاهراً میخندیدم یا بازی میکردم، ولی در باطن کمترین زخم زبان یا کوچکترین پیش آمد ناگوار و بیهوده ساعتی دراز فکر مرا بخود مشغول میداشت و خودم خودم را میخوردم.

What longings run through my head! Just as I was sleeping I wanted to be a small child, with that same *Geleen Baji* who told me stories and swallowed her saliva sitting here by my head. I was so tired laid out in bed; keenly and meticulously she would tell me stories and my eyes would slowly close . . . Was I happy back then? No, what a big misunderstanding! Everybody supposes that children are happy! No, I do remember well. Back then I was more sensitive, back then I was also a follower and a sly. May be it looked like I laughed or played, but deep inside, the slightest sharp tongue or the smallest sad and frivolous incident preoccupied my mind for hours on end and I myself would eat me up. (“*Zendeh Beh Goor*” 11-12)

The narrator does not reveal much about his childhood nor does he dwell on reminiscing the happy occasions _the nightly sessions of his Turkish nanny’s storytelling. Unlike the fleeting nostalgia of his childhood, the narrator’s premonition about the procedural outcomes of his death is given in full detail: from the handling of his corpse by “bastard Arabs” in charge of Moslem burials in Paris to a subsequent funeral in Iran where his family would mourn his death by

wailing; some saying his praises and others denouncing his habitual bitterness; and everyone faithfully observing the funeral rituals, or in the narrator's words, "the filthy stuff that is routine" (25).

Despite the author's pioneering methodology in exploring Iran's folktales, one can hardly anticipate a positive recollection by the narrator of "Buried Alive" if asked about *Geleen Baji's* oral tales. In effect, unlike Hedayat's theoretical texts and folklore collections where the country's folklore is presented if not with admiration, but with attachment, Hedayat not only dichotomizes Iranian stories to find their pure and original form free from the influence of the Greeks, the Jews and the Arabs, but also flips folktales and strips them of the motifs of magical quests and happy-endings. In "*Ghesseh Kharkan*" or "The Tale of the Thorn Picker," the author surprises the reader by a minimalistic portrayal of the simple life of this popular persona turning his magical adventures into a realistic account of plain poverty and pure misery. The thorn picker is usually a childless old man whose perseverance is rewarded by the birth of a son who has magical powers, becomes king, etc. While faithfully following the familiar mnemonic devices of Iranian oral tales, Hedayat defamiliarizes the functions and the personae of his story in a blunt shift shocks the enthusiastic reader with a new cognition of a seemingly old subject. The opening lines could well echo *Geleen Baji's* words when she began her bedtime stories:

جونم واستون بگويد آقام که شما باشيد، در ايام قديم يک خارکنی بود که بيرون
شهر بود. چه ميشود کرد؟ اين خارکن خار ميکند؛ اينهم کارش بود. ديگر چه ميشود کرد؟ يکی
از روزها اين خارکن هي خار کند و خار کند، تا نزديک غروب کولبارہ خارش را کول گرفت
و رفت در دکان نانوايي که خارهايش را بفروشد، جونم واستون بگويد آقام که شما باشيد، خارها
را به نونواهه فروخت يکدونه نون سنگگ گرفت و رفتش بطرف خونشون.

حالا خارکن را اینجا داشته باشیم برویم سر خونه خارکن. فکر بکنید مثلن خونه خارکن چه

افتضاحی باید باشد!

My soul is telling you this tale you my master. In the old days there was a thorn picker who was out of town. What can be done? This thorn picker picked thorns; this was his job. What else can be done? One day this thorn picker picked and picked thorns, until close to sunset when he lifted all the thorns on his back and went to a bread maker's shop to sell his thorns. My soul is telling you this tale you my master, he sold the thorns to the bread maker, got a *sangak*³⁹ bread and went to his house.

Now let's keep the thorn picker here and go to the thorn picker's house.

Imagine for example what a disaster a thorn picker's house would be!

Right after the familiar greeting that warms up the listener with a familiar anticipation of a happy ending for a hardworking husband and father who makes a living by cutting fire-starter prickly bushes, Hedayat flips the folktale into a realistic account of a deprived citizen whose miserable wife and sickly child are expecting his return in the dead of a winter night hoping only to see him go back to work in the desert the next day. Early next morning, however, when the unpleasant wife wakes her breadwinner by kicking and scolding him to go outside in search of dried bushes, the family is going to spend another day of misery and hunger as the snow has covered everything and the man refuses to leave the shack. Denying the awaited magical warranty to overcome life's wretchedness, Hedayat concludes his sarcastically short account of the thorn picker by the popular lines "just as they reached their dreams, you will too," and finishes it all up

³⁹ One of the most popular Iranian breads baked on a bed of hot pebbles.

with the familiar mnemonic ending that reinforces the wondrous elements of a tale that everyone has heard since childhood; except, this time around, the cozy ending covers a cold truth:

بالا رفتیم ماست بود پایین آمدیم ماست بود

قصه ما راست بود

بالا رفتیم دوغ بود پایین آمدیم دوغ بود

قصه ما دروغ بود!

قصه ما بسر رسید کلاغه بخونش نرسید!

We went up there was yogurt We went down there was yogurt

Our story was true

We went up there was kefir We went down there was kefir

Our story was a lie!

Our story got to the end The crow didn't reach home yet! (19)

“Aab-e Zendegi” and the Politics of Oral Tales

Just as the as the author’s playful dismantling of the anticipated transitional formula jolts the reader into reconsidering and relearning, in a familiar folktale such as “*Aab-e Zendegi*” or “The Water of Life” the Tehrani dialect of the teller/narrator and his iconic wording give the tale an allegorical edge that directs at the political issues of Hedayat’s time. The story

begins with an ailing father demanding his three sons to leave home in a quest to find their destiny. As expected from similar tale types, the two older sons soon plan to get rid of the father's favorite third son Ahmadak. They leave him in a cave, and send a dispatcher home with his torn shirt smudged in a pigeon's blood to prove to their father that a wolf had killed the boy. Being a nice boy, however, he finds his way out of the cave with the help of a hermit. Each going his way, the two older brothers manipulate their ways to the top. One becomes the king of Gold Spread or the Country of Blind, and the other becomes the king of Shining Moon or the Country of the Deaf. The youngest innocently searches for the water of life until a phoenix flies him over the tallest mountains and lands him in a magical land where he meets a beautiful village girl:

احمدک به یک نگاه یکدل نه صد دل عاشق دختر چوپان شد و ازو پرسید:

"__ اینجا کجاست؟"

دختر جواب داد: "اینجا کشور همیشه باهاره."

"__ من به سراغ آب زندگی آمده ام، چشمه اش کجاست؟"

دختر خندید و جواب داد: "__ همیه آبها آب زندگیس، این آب چشمه مخصوصی نداره . . . فقط

در کشور کرها و کورها این لقبو به آب اینجا دادن، اما اگه برادران حس آزادی ندارن، بیخود

وخت خودتو تلف نکن، چون آب زندگی بدردتون نمیخوره."

Ahmadak⁴⁰ in one glance, not with one heart but with a hundred hearts, fell in love with the shepherdess and asked:

"__ Where is this place?"

⁴⁰ Little Ahmad; the prefix *ak* connotes a favorable smallness, youth and dependency.

The girl answered: "This is the Country of Ever-Spring."

"__ I have come to search for the water of life; where is its spring?"

The girl laughed and said: "__All waters are the water of life, this water does not have a special spring . . . only in the Countries of the Deaf and the Blind they have given the water here such a title, but if your brothers do not have a sense of freedom, don't waste your time, because the water of life won't do them any good. (119-20)

Unlike Ever-Spring where everyone works for a decent wage, where people go to school and become educated, where everyone is happy and free, the blind live in shackles, hopelessly digging for gold spending their leisure time smoking opium while the ever-present flogging by the police looms over their heads. The gold from their barren lands and streams is traded by the rich for opium and other luxuries. As Ahmadak tries to release the workers of their blindness by washing their eyes, he is captured and sold to a merchant and traveling with him, he is witness to similar misery in the Country of the Deaf:

سر راه احمدک میدید که بارهای شتر مملو از بغلی عرق و لوله های تریاک و زنجیرهای طلا بود
که از کشور ماه تابان به زرافشان میرفت و از آنطرف هم خاک طلا بکشور ماه تابان می بردند تا اینکه
بالاخره وارد کشور ماه تابان شدند. به اولین شهری که رسیدند احمدک دید اهالی آنجا هم بدبخت و فقیر
بودند و شهر سوت و کور بود و همه مردم بدرد کری و لالی گرفتار بودند زجر میکشیدند و یک دسته
کر و کور و احمق پولدار و ارباب دسترنج آنها را میخوردند.

On the road Ahmadak would see camels with loads of pocket bottles of vodka and opium tubes and gold chains going from Shining Moon to Gold Spread, and from there gold dust would be exported to Shining Moon until they finally entered the country of Shining Moon. As they reached the first town, Ahmadak saw how here too all the inhabitants were miserable and poor and the town was dead silent and all the people were struggling with the disease of deafness and muteness; they suffered and a group of stupid wealthy deaf and mute lords lived off of their labor. All around were opium fields, and smoke would come out night and day from the chimneys of vodka manufacturing factories. There were no books, no newspapers and no musical instruments and no freedom. Birds had abandoned this country and a bunch of deaf and mutes squirmed and drudged under the flog and the boots of their own executioners. (126)

Certainly, this tale could not be a bedtime story to put the suicidal narrator of “*Zنده Beh Goor*” to bed. Geleen Baji’s version could be as long and as complicated, but there is a raw escapism present in most *original* Iranian oral tales that is transformed in the hands of critics of culture like Hedayat and his successors like Behrangi, Mofid and Shamloo. Hedayat’s allegorical revisiting of a familiar tale type with the *constant* of three dispatched brothers who struggle their way out of recurring troubles in a magical quest that proves only the youngest to be the true hero and the other two are hence excluded or killed, brings the *variables* close to the home of his past, present and future Iranians. For an old plebeian nanny like *Geleen Baji* who like *Alavieh* struggles with life’s basic necessitates and complications, folktales with their cruel

vengeances and eventual retributions are immediate escapes that offer a cathartic renewal every time she engages in their give and take. Hedayat, however, is the aristocrat who writes history, and wishes he could rewrite it, and as such, he hardly finds solace in the old tales that define the cultural identity of Iran. In his introduction to *Neyrangestan*⁴¹ or *Land of Tricks*, a pioneering theoretical compilation of Iran's collective folklore, Hedayat offers a puzzling analysis of Iranian cultural inheritance, differentiating between the quality beliefs and customs of ancient Iran and the superstitions that were the exports of neighboring or infringing countries. Affirming the Zoroastrian condemnation of superstitions, Hedayat claims that superstitious behaviors and illogical rituals were foreign to Iranians who started to follow such ideas only under the effect of other peoples such as Greeks, Jews and Romans:

On the other hand, neighbors Chaldea and Assyria who could be called the mother of superstition and sorcery, along with their scary gods, sacrifices, holy and unholy days and hours, the impact of stars on human destiny, and so forth _although Iranians were less prone than their neighbors to follow superstitions_, but altogether, their ideas were hardly without an influence in Iran. Putting them aside, the attack of the Greeks with their oracles, gods and semi-gods, and then neighboring the Romans with their foretellers, soothsayers and astrologers, and on the other hand, the immigration of the Jews and the superstitions they brought with them as souvenirs from Egypt and the deserts of Arabia, and finally, the invasions of the Arabs strengthened the footing of these superstitions. (*Neyrangestan* 17)

⁴¹ *Neyrangestan* is also the name of a *Pahlavi* book of prayers.

As mentioned in the introduction, Hedayat's blunt condemnation of almost all ancient civilizations other than Iran is one of the reasons why many consider him an overzealous nationalist _if not a racist_ whose idealistic image of a forgone nation that lived in peace and harmony, respected others peoples, valued women as equals, and cherished animals and plants as sacred appears in many of his writings. However, there is a cynicism in Hedayat's fiction about his contemporary society that, on the one hand, may clear him from the bigotry that afflicts the lay perception of nationalism, and on the other, brings about the question of national identity and the author's puzzling perception of himself as a Moslem Iranian who lovingly criticized the particularity that signified him as, well, an Iranian Moslem.

In a cognitive approach to the normative powers of nationalism, Hogan defines nationalism as a sustained set of common principles that underline a historical particularity and cultural similarity leading to an in-group/out-group differentiation: a categorical identity that despite individual differences acquired through life _practical identity_ connects a group of individuals together with an "emotional" sense of inclusive and tolerant understanding (*Understanding Nationalism* 36). However, language, Hedayat's primary capital, is a part of his practical identity; hence Hedayat's ease and independence in delivering the dialect of the lower classes is a result of his disinterested familiarity rather than an emotional attachment to their speech patterns. Moreover, when writing about the habits of the lower classes, Hedayat arguably alienates them as an out-group to whom he or his group –the upper-class society to which he belongs_ is superior. Interestingly, as Hogan contends, no specific action is needed to make one feel that he or she belongs to a category other than a simple confirmation in words that one belongs to the group, resulting in an arbitrary but consequential reaction of favoring one group

and alienating others (30). Being born in Iran makes some people Iranian⁴², a categorical identification that leads to partiality towards Iran and Iranians and bias against others; this in-group differentiation that denies others many of the rights that Iranian citizens have such as attending public universities, receiving inheritance, taking public office, and voting. Being a Shiite too gives a legal advantage to Iranian Moslems hence an endorsed distancing of other citizens such as Sunnis; needless to say, the categorical identity of Iranianness causes ethnic and other religious minorities to have minimal legal rights. This categorical identity is what Hedayat categorically denies because of his practical identity as an evolving intellectual, and paradoxically embraces, as he evidently rationalizes why Iran has gradually become so unappealing: attack of the Arabs, immigration of Jews, openness to neighboring cultures, colonialism, imperialism, and most importantly, the fallout of the Constitutional Revolution. Hedayat's nationalism is partly a passionate patriotism that through an idealistic sense of the past, denies a historical and cultural progress for the country, and partly an apologetic justification of a nation gone awry. The recurring suicidal finales in Hedayat's tales profess to the impossibility of such growth; nevertheless, as I will discuss in the story "*Abjee Khanoom*," suicide can also be the most decisive violation of the most revered yet rejected commodity in Iranian culture: the self.

⁴² If the father of a child is not Iranian, the child will not be an Iranian citizen; in addition, Iran does not grant citizenship to foreigners, and children born of refugee parents do not get Iranian citizenship. This law has caused tremendous problems for Iranian women married to foreigners as well as millions of Afghans who for decades have lived in the country as refugees.

“Abjee Khanoom” the All-Iranian Bachelorette

Many of Hedayat's characters are compulsive individuals who seldom act with premeditation. In “*Abji Khanoom*,” or “Lady Sister” where an allegedly ugly older sister drowns herself in the *aabanbar*⁴³ at the night of her younger sister's wedding, Hedayat pins down the cultural deficits of Iran in layers of disinterested imagery that hardly lures the reader to sympathize with the older sister who is ugly, has a temper, becomes a fanatic Moslem, and ends up dying a hateful spinster. Scorned by a mother who is tired of sheltering and worrying about her, ignored by a father who is embarrassed because he is sure she will never have a suitor, intimidating to her younger, whiter, shorter, chubbier sister who is now marrying the butler of the house where she has been working since she was fifteen, even if Hedayat had not ended her livelihood as such, the Iranian reader, familiar with the restraining life of many such *abjis*⁴⁴, might propose a similar impressive yet untimely death for her:

نصف شب بود، همه بیاد شب عروسی خودشان خوابیده بودند و خواب های
خوش میدیدند. ناگهان مثل اینکه کسی در آب دست و پا میزد صدای شلپ شلپ همه اهل خانه
را سراسیمه از خواب بیدار کرد. . . ننه حسن دید کفش دم پای آ بجی خانم نزدیک دریچه آب
انبار افتاده. . . نعش آ بجی خانم آمده بود روی آب، موهای بافته سیاه او مانند مار بدور گردنش
پیچیده شده بود، رخت زنگاری او به تنش چسبیده بود، صورت او یک حالت با شکوه و نورانی
داشت. مانند این بود که او رفته بود به یک جایی که نه زشتی و نه خوشگلی، نه عروسی و نه
عزا، نه خنده و گریه، نه شادی و اندوه در آنجا وجود نداشت. او رفته بود به بهشت!

⁴³ آبناار a traditional water reservoir in the basement of Iranian homes; water cistern

⁴⁴ Abjee is the endearing and respectful nickname for the oldest sister in a family.

It was midnight; all were asleep nostalgic about their own wedding night and having sweet dreams. Suddenly as if someone was drowning in the water the splish-splash awakened the household in frenzy. . . *Nana Hassan* saw *Abji Khanoom*'s slipper down by the opening of the cistern . . . The corpse of *Abji Khanoom* had risen to the surface of the water, her braided black hair curled around her neck like a snake, her turquoise dress was stuck to her body, her face had a majestic and luminous aura as if she had gone to a place where no ugliness and no loveliness, no wedding and no funeral, no laughter and no tears, no happiness and no sadness did not exist there. She had gone to Heaven! (82-3)

The reader can predict the sweeping sorrow that the woman's death brings to the family, but more importantly, her suicide brings a lifelong shame as burdensome as her unmarried presence. With the habitual bleeding of the public into the private, *Abjee* has always been an oddity; never an individual. In fact, she is only individuated when she ends her life, but the way her life ends is an oddity. To *Hedayat*, individualization is an oddity, just as the woman's most selfish act is paradoxically a rejection of her *self*.

Alavieh vs. Parvin: Islam vs. Iran

In Hedayat's unrelenting critique of Iranian culture, individuals' failures in following the societal anticipations and expectations, lead to constant horrid consequences. In effect, cultural references in his fiction are never a reason for national pride. Hedayat presents culture as a banal futility of the 'typical' Iranian. In *Alavieh Khanoom* where a group of Shiite pilgrims set on a journey to the Shrine of the eighth Imam in Mashhad, the home of the ever-popular Imam Reza and the only Imam buried in Iran, the narrator does not give any chance of redemption to the pilgrims who are as crude as the purpose of their journey. In an essential dialect of the lower class Tehran, Hedayat presents a grim picture of folk culture. Sexual exploits, starvation, polygamy, addiction, deceit and profanity are the constants that the author reproduces with exhaustive imagery and dialogue. Hedayat does not look for the causes of his characters' repulsive existence; nor does he suggest a cathartic resolution. They are neither trapped nor saved, and Hedayat is content with portraying their forsaken lives with little empathy:

شامی را با تخم مرغ و کاسه آبگوشتی که آقا موچول آورده بود قائق نانشان کردند. پشتش هم نفری دو تا پیاله چایی خوردند. ننه حبیب از گوشه چارقش دو حب تریاک در آورد به علویه داد: " بدین بچه ها بخورن." فتیله چراغ را پایین کشیدند و حاضر خواب شدند. . . بوی گند و عرق انسانی و مواد تجذیه شده نامعلوم در هوا موج میزد. . . در طی راه علویه گاهی عصمت صادات را عروس خودش معرفی میکرد و گاهی از دهنش درمیرفت و میگفت: "میخواهم دخترم رو ببرم مشهد شوور بدم." همچنین آقا موچول را گاهی پسر گاهی داماد، و گاهی برادر اوگه ای خودش معرفی کرده بود. بچه های کوچک

را هم گاهی میگفت سر راهی برای ثواب برداشته. گاهی میگفت نوه و گاهی هم میگفت
بچه خودش هستند. معلوم نبود بچه ها مال خودش، یا مال دخترش یا مال یک نفر
سورچی بودند.

They ate their bread with the lentil kebabs, the eggs and the bowl of lamb stew that Mr. Moochool had brought. Each followed it up with two cups of tea. Nana Habib took two cubes of opium tied in the corner of her scarf and handed them to Alavieh: "Give these to the children." They lowered the wick of the kerosene lamp ready to sleep. . . . A foul smell of human sweat and unknown decomposed particles filled the air. Along the way, Alavieh had sometimes introduced Esmat as her daughter-in-law and sometimes it would skip her mouth and she would say: "I'm taking my daughter to Mashhad to get her a husband." Also, she had now and then introduced Mr. Moochool as her son, her son-in-law, and a half-brother. About the little children she would say she had adopted them as a charitable act. Sometimes she would say grandchild and sometimes she would say her own children. It was not clear if the children were hers, her daughter's or a carriage-driver's. (*Alavieh Khanoom* 35-6).

Unlike "*Abjee Khanoom*" where the plot and the finale play an important part in understanding the story, in *Alavieh Khanoom*, plot is of little significance. We never learn who Alavieh really is, where she comes from and if the children following her are hers, abducted, or may ever be sold without remorse. Hedayat leaves the reader filling in the blanks with the everyday experiences of the everyday Iranian who, with a casual stroll in the Shrine of Imam Reza, can

witness the overwhelming destitute of pilgrims. Despite the underlying misery in the story, lingos in the characters' relentless dialogues make it impossible to go through the pages without a hearty laugh at every familiar yet exclusive verbal give and take. In effect, the dramatic structure of *Alavieh Khanoom* makes it a story that is best appreciated when read aloud or acted on a stage. Profoundly anti-philistine in imagery and dialogue, the author finds no solace in the mundane affairs of the everyday folk who, ironically, may well be the beloved cooks, maids and nannies like *Mahrokh* _the younger sister in "*Abjee Khanoom*" or *Geleen Baji* the beloved nanny in "*Zنده Beh Goor*." These despicable personae are the same people who work in aristocratic households, take care of the children of the rich and nurture them with their bizarre life stories and realistic fairytales. In "*Zنده Beh Goor*" the narrator's only sweet memory from childhood is that of his old nanny *Geleen Baji* telling him bedtime stories. As noted, a woman like *Geleen Baji* would be socially, economically and culturally akin to the pilgrims in *Alavieh Khanoom*. Hedayat's quasi- feudal society with absolute class differences where every rich household has underpaid maids, nannies and drivers solely dependent on their wealthy patrons for sustenance, leaves a limited alternative for the servants: a life similar to *Alavieh Khanoom*'s, cruel, poor, and painful. *Baji* the title of the narrator's nanny in "*Zنده Beh Goor*" indicates her initiation to Mecca the expensive and challenging *haj*. Essentially, the title is also a respectful reference to any older woman asserting her financial ability for such an esteemed journey, even if she hasn't yet and never will. The same beloved nanny could be the subject of Hedayat's most sardonic writing when she leaves her workplace and heads home:

در اینوقت زن سیل داری که سی و پنج یا چهل ساله بود مثل مادر و هب،

چادر نماز پشت گلی بسرش و دستش را به کمرش زده، با صورت خشمناک، از اتاق مجاور

درآمد. فریاد میکشید: "___ آهای علویه، قباغت داره. خجالت نمیکشی، خجالتو خوردی
 آبرو روقی کردی؟ دیشب تو گاری مراد علی چه کار داشتی، همین الان میبایس روبرو
 کنم. ___ کلیه سحر هم پاشده، کاسه گدایی دسش گرفته مردم رو زاورا میکنه. خودت
 هفت سر و گردن کلفت بس نیست، مرد منم میخوای از چنگم در بییاری؟ مسلمونی از دست
 رفته، دین از دست رفته، آهای مردوم شاهد باشین، ببینین این زنیکه بی چشم و رو چی به روز
 من آورده. تو میخوای بری زیارت؟ حضرت کمرتو بزنه."

At that time, a mustached woman about thirty five or forty years old, like *Vahab's* mother, a flowery *chador*⁴⁵ on her head and hands on her hips, with an angry face, came out of the adjacent room screaming:
 "___ Hey Alavieh, it's a disgrace, aren't you ashamed, did you eat the shame and vomit the honor? What did you want in Morad Ali's wagon? I should make you face it right now. ___ and at the break of dawn she wakes up holding the beggar's bowl and fooling people. Seven thick-necked ones are not enough for you, you want to snatch my man from me too? Moslemhood is lost, religion is lost, Oh, you people, witness, see what this shameless woman has done to me. You are going on a pilgrimage? His holiness hits you on your back! (40)

To Hedayat imported Islam is an imposed legacy that violently shifts the Zoroastrian ideal of the purity of mind, word and deed to a lamentable pastiche. In *Alavieh Khanoom*, using the name Alavieh⁴⁶ for the dubious main character is Hedayat's introduction to a lampooning of the religious convictions of Iranians. A feminine derivative of the word Ali,

⁴⁵ A wide piece of fabric that covers a woman's figure when in public.

⁴⁶ Vahab was a Shiite martyr in the famous Karbala war of October of 680 AD led by Hussein, Prophet Mohammad's grandson and the leader of the Shiite revolutionaries, versus Yazeed the Caliph at the time.

Shiite's first Imam, *Alavieh* is the feminine form of *Alavi*, the noun that signifies the Shiite division of Islam. Giving the desperately detestable central female character such an eloquent name is one way Hedayat unapologetically mocks the pilgrims' religiosity. Like Ms. Alavieh, other travelers combine pious fervor with self-serving viciousness, and sadly, they are oblivious to the accustomed bearing.

Hedayat's sardonic pen does not forgive the flaws of the folk; neither does it hide his disgust under emotional maxims that his successors will soon use when voicing the miseries of the underclass. Religion is to Hedayat more than a set of innocent rituals that distract the underclass while giving conviction to the upper class. In his other writings including the plays *Parvin the Daughter of the Sassan*, and *Maziyar* he blatantly criticizes Islam as a false establishment that has dominated Iran long enough to adversely affect the habits of Iranians. In a sense, Hedayat's Islam does not remain an alien force struggling to dominate the Iranian spirit; instead, the religion defines Iranians and the people mold well into it. To Hedayat, there is hardly a difference between the old Arab enemy and the new Moslem Iranian, and the 7th century enemy in *Parvin the Daughter of Sassan* is as inhuman as the 20th century characters in *Alavieh Khanoom*.

Parvin the Daughter of Sassan is the story of a beautiful Iranian girl who, snatched by the Arab invaders, commits suicide in captivity to avoid a forced nuptial with the leader of the Arab army. With an overload of anti-Arab slogans and nationalistic mantras, the play is at times dogmatic, fanatical, and even racist while it passionately portrays a vanished Iran where Aryan women, elegantly free, enjoyed equal rights as men who were both brave and refined, where music and painting were regular hobbies for the Iranian household, and where dogs, which in the Moslem culture are avoided and abhorred, were the loved and valued pets in

the household. The dialogues between Parvin and her Arab suitor is one of the many examples in the play where the uniqueness of Iranian civilization is articulately explained to the Arab invader as well as the Iranian audience through the voice of Parvin whose eloquence is juxtaposed to the repressed women in post-Islam habituating disgrace in a culturally regressed Iran. The tall, graceful and commanding Parvin is a Zoroastrian woman who is soon replaced by the fully covered Moslem women who instead of facing the world _much less a stranger, are advised to change their voice when speaking to a stranger by putting their pointer finger in their mouths in case a male stranger hears their feminine voice, recognizes it and is aroused by it. Parvin, on the other hand, takes control of her surroundings and the stranger who clearly hears her voice:

We have fought to keep our freedom. We have never fought others in the name of religion and faith, nor have we belittled others' cultures and traditions, we left them free . . . you call yourselves wise but have no knowledge of the Divinity. You are newcomers with hungry eyes and mouths; how dare you talk to us about our faith? Our faith is as ancient and as old as the universe; you the people of lately want to become our prophet? Look at yourselves, you think you are on the right, and you behave like beasts and monsters. The god that you worship is the Satan, the god of war, the god of massacre, the vengeful god, the vicious god who wants blood. The substance of your doings, your method and manner is based on torture and dirt. You are thirsty for human blood, all you do soils the earth and degrades human race. (45-6)

The result of the Arab conquest, as we see it through Hedayat's imagery, is a land of suppressed, superstitious, and conniving women and men who appear in the author's other writings either as egoistical aristocrats or a failed underclass. The futility of living among such people leaves only one option for Hedayat's protagonists: death. Parvin and the unnamed student in "Buried Alive" commit suicide just like the author himself. *The Blind Owl* too, arguably Hedayat's masterpiece, is hallucinatory tale of a distraught young man who views a symbolic representation of Iranian history through the small window of his modern apartment. The man mutilates his wife and while digging the ground to bury her in a nearby cemetery, he finds an antique urn painted beautifully with the picture of his slaughtered wife. Hedayat's blunt attack on the Moslem Iran is also evident in "*Haji Morad*" the short story about a troubled marriage of an older man with a younger woman and their ultimate divorce after the man's suspicion about the woman's infidelity leads him to mistake another fully covered woman strolling nonchalantly on the streets of Tehran for his wife, and slapping the wrong woman for leaving the house without his permission. Ultimately, as the Haji is publicly humiliated and charged for assault, he divorces his wife to keep up appearances and to justify his actions.

Despite the gloom in Hedayat's voice, he is also very witty, but with a twist. His comic portrayal of the mistaken identity of Iranian women who covered with *chador* justifiably look the same, are never fully trusted, and are easily divorced, is an addition to his long list of sarcastic imagery about the consequences of an Islamized Iran. Hedayat is neither a rigid doctrinaire nor a pedantic nationalist. To Hedayat, Iran might once have been an esteemed empire, but there is neither the propensity to return to a grandiose past nor the anticipation of a bright future to replace the disappointing current. Throughout his fiction, he attacks the Arabs as fervently as his contemporary Iranians. In effect, there is a discernible disconnect between the

historical personae like *Parvin* and *Parviz*, and the author's modern-day characters like *Alavieh*, *Haji Morad*, or the unnamed *Zنده Beh Goor*. The transcendence of Hedayat's ancient personae gives way to a decadence that is represented, on the one hand, by Hedayat's forsaken underclass who is generally crude and unforgiving, and on the other, by a lost generation of selfish aristocrats whose futility echoes in their affected behavior and language.

The "I" in *Zنده Beh Goor* lives only to tell his story; in effect, without his constant attempts at killing himself, he would hardly have a story to tell, or at least, that is what he seems to project. On the other hand, his death is a public occasion. He can talk about it simply because soon others will know more about his death than he does. He can talk about death and he does; the more intimate ideas, however, have to die with him:

اینها را که نوشتم کمی آسوده شدم، از من دلجویی کرد، مثل اینست که بار سنگینی را از روی دوشم برداشتند. چه خوب بود اگر همه چیز را میشد نوشت. اگر میتوانستم افکار خودم را بدیگری بفهمانم، میتوانستم بگویم. نه، یک احساساتی هست، یک چیزهایی هست که نمیشود به دیگری فهماند. نمیشود گفت، آدم را مسخره میکنند، هر کسی مطابق افکار خودش دیگری را قضاوت میکند. زبان آدمیزاد مثل خود او ناقص و ناتوان است.

Writing these calmed me down a bit, it conciliated me, as if a heavy weight was lifted off my shoulders. It would be nice to be able to write everything. If I could make others understand my thoughts, I would tell them. No, there are emotions, there are things that cannot be communicated to the other, cannot be told, they would mock you; everyone judges the other based on one's own ideas. Human language is just as deficient and powerless as man is. (27)

Existentialist pessimism is what most readers know Hedayat by; a hysterical Kafkaesque gloom that summons readers to painstakingly laugh at the misfortunes of fate simply because there is no way out; one might as well make the best of life by ending it the way one wants because being born into life and living it are out of human control. The fatalism that defines most of Hedayat's work is to many of his critics the message of Hedayat. This fatalism, however true, encompasses more than a disoriented individual's inability to cope with the war-weary world _ what many critics of the European literature of early twentieth century may define as bourgeois alienation. Hedayat is a bourgeois for sure, but his bewilderment in facing the world _both the east and the west_ is hardly because of the change in his surroundings. Hedayat lampoons the traditional Iranian culture as fervently _even more fervently_ as the modernity that the country strives for. Most importantly, he seems to be more at home in Paris than in Tehran, not just because of the life style that Paris offers him _and it would be a mistake to disregard that, but because in Paris, he is alone; hence he is himself. In effect, the weight on his shoulders is the weight of an unfortunate culture that needs relief. If there were no need to save Iran, there would hardly be a need to kill oneself. Would Hedayat commit suicide if there were not a distressed homeland to anticipate his return? The narrator of "*Zendeh Beh Goor*" is Hedayat's voice for a generation of anxious young men carrying the heavy burden of Iranian culture, history and politics; a generation that represents the glory of an old empire halted in a whirlwind of theological shift and is deemed responsible to bring the glory back to the land. The existentialist edicts of the narrator and his formulaic self-questioning behavior signal Hedayat's infatuation with Dostoevsky, Kafka and Sartre, but undoubtedly the burden of Iranianness adds much salt to his wound:

من خودپسند، ناشی و بیچاره بدنیا آمده بودم. حال دیگر غیر ممکن است که برگردم و راه دیگری در پیش بگیرم. دیگر نمیتوانم دنبال این سایه های بیهوده بروم، با زندگی گاویز بشوم، کشتی بگیرم. شماهایی که گمان میکنید در حقیقت زندگی میکنید، کدام دلیل و منطق محکمی در دست دارید؟ من دیگر نمیخواهم نه ببخشم و نه بخشیده بشوم، نه به چپ بروم و نه راست، میخواهم چشمهایم را بآینده ببندم و گذشته را فراموش بکنم.

I was born selfish, inept and desperate. Now it is impossible to turn back and start on another path. I can no more follow these pointless shadows, grapple with life, tackle. Those of you who suppose you live the truth, which solid reason and logic do you have? I don't want no more to forgive or be forgiven, don't want to go to the left or to the right, I want to close my eyes on the future and forget the past.
(*"Zندهh Beh Goor"* 36-7)

Hedayat's characters give up, but their compromise is not appealing. There is hardly a story that ends with a glimpse of hope for the main character, but there is hardly a story that does not make the reader question their so called fate, if not their *choice*. Hedayat's stories hardly shock the reader by their tragic ending because his reader is all too familiar with the alternatives. Although death is a constant, fatalism is not. Hedayat invites his readers to look closely at the collective life they live rather than a Western style alienation that singles out individuals one by one. In effect, his Iranians have too many urgent social responsibilities to contemplate the luxury of individuation. The problem is not with the alienated city life that comes with industrialization; there is no romance in Hedayat's villages either; the-return-to-

nature that defines romanticism, the fatalism that defines realism, and the alienation that defines modernism hardly define Hedayat's style. If in "*Zani keh Mardash ra Gom Kard*" or "The Woman who Lost her Man" the passionate love between the two young villagers who are expected to consummate their love only as a married couple fast forwards to the physical abuse of the wife by the husband, and the woman's consequential abandonment of her child, all in an calm and collected language that defines a familiar culture of expected suffering, the author does not raise eyebrows with the story as Iranians are all too familiar with the "doomed marriage" that is collectively expected to conclude a real-life "love story." Leaving the reader to ponder the taboo, Hedayat brings the culturally evaded "body" into the center, questions the familiar forbidding of "sex" and wonders if the socially ostracized young love has to end only in the matrimony! In "*Aroosak-e Posht-e Pardeh*" or "The Doll behind the Curtain," Hedayat plays again to the tune of a culture that prohibits love, taboos sex, and praises a marriage of convenience. The foreign educated Mehrdad engaged to his young cousin before leaving for France, falls in love with a delicate French porcelain statuette and spends his married life daydreaming about the doll until the fatal night he shoots his wife to death. Dressed like the statuette out of desperation to make her husband happy, the young wife dies because of her unexpected transgression. Hedayat's portrayal of Mehrdad mirrors the features of a typical studious young Iranian male:

Mehrdad was one of those eyes-and-ears-closed boys who in Iran had become a point of reference for his family, and to this day, if he heard the word woman he would blush from his forehead to his earlobes. French students made fun of him, and when they talked about women, dancing, fun, sports and

their lovemaking, Mehrdad would agree with their words out of respect, without being able to add anything to their stories of love, because he was raised a mama's boy, fearful, unhappy and depressed, had never spoken to a *na-mahram*⁴⁷ woman, and his parents, as far as they possibly could, had filled his brain with advices and ideas of a thousand years ago. And then, in order to keep their son on the right track, they had engaged him to his cousin Derakhshandeh and had shared ceremonial sweets ___ and this they knew to be an utmost sacrifice and a big debt on their son's shoulders, and in their own words, they had raised an innocent son with pure eyes and ears, and a statue of morality who was good only for a thousand years ago. Mehrdad was twenty four years old but did not have as much confidence, experience, culture, smarts, and courage as a fourteen year old foreigner. (81-2)

Hedayat's tales are about a struggle for cultural transformation by a people stuck between opposing forces of history: the push of secular modernism, on the one hand, and the pull of religious traditionalism, on the other. Although many of his leading characters let go, fatalism is not the memo he leave behind. Hedayat's puzzling protagonists usually perish in utter self-abandonment, but their death is an unfortunate necessity if the moral of the story is "to start anew!" In effect, his characters are accidental martyrs in an ongoing war of "ethics," as he sums up in the concluding words of "The Message of Kafka:"

⁴⁷ People who do not belong to a person's household. *Mahram* women for a man include mothers, sisters, mother-in-laws, grandmothers, aunts, great aunts and wet-nurses. Cousins are not *mahram* hence they can marry each other.

Kafka believes that this world of lies and deceit and stupidity must be ruined and on top of its ruins we must be build a better world. If the world of Kafka is struggling with nihilism, it does not mean we should embrace it with open arms, because it is ominous. One feels that Kafka has an answer, but the answer is not given. In his unfinished work, the heart of the matter is untold. (75)

Hedayat's stories continue to have a political space in the cultural discourse of Iran, but he leaves "the heart of the matter . . . untold" for those who follow to fill in the blank.

Chapter II

Behrangi and Others: Children's Tales and Political Pop 1960s -1970s)

For the truth, Oldooz dear, freedom is a good thing.

“Oldooz and the Crows”

Some Theoretical Considerations

This chapter seeks to analyze the intertextual and discursive folktale elements embodied in different mediums of imaginative literature in Iran within the two decades leading to the 1979 Revolution. Iranian narratives in 60s and 70s Iran, I contend, do not simply tell an imagined story; neither do they retell a version of history in fictional language. The imaginative literature of these two decades plays an integral role in portraying the dictatorial social order as disorder, and the inevitable disorder as the ideal order. Although the goal of most of such fictional writings is to discredit the state-sponsored social order, they mirror the state by pushing towards an imagined stability, a presumed center, and a hegemonic discourse that, however radical, fixes meanings to static and standard. Samad Behrangi (1939-1968), one of the most controversial authors at the time, and a great example of a revolutionary author who influenced the Iranian society by covertly contesting to Shah's assertion of political and cultural monopoly, is the focus of this chapter. Behrangi does not write in alienation, however, and the rushed

political spirit of the era does not belong to erudite and aloof authors alone. The new metropolitan society with the easily accessible medium of radio and TV hosts many new voices who literally sing to the country's political tunes. Before turning to Behrangi, I introduce the new pop-loving culture of the youth and how it opened a welcoming space for authors like Behrangi. In addition, I introduce the theoretical premises upon which my approach to Behrangi stands, beginning with an understanding of the theories of the Russian folklorist Vladimir Propp and his historical analysis of Russian wondertales, as well as Fredric Jameson in his political reading of western narratives. I will take advantage of Propp's formalist methodology as well as his Marxist reading of Russian folktales in a political analyses of Behrangi's popular children's stories specifically the tales of Oldooz, "Mah Pishani" or "Moon Forehead," and "Kachal-e Kaftar Baz" or "The Dove-Flying Bald" where the author, I contend, develops popular folktales into enigmatic children's stories that read twice, leave little hesitation about his ideological provisions for young readers. Behrangi's popular narratives, I propose, made a significant imprint on the procession of revolutionary ideas in Iran towards the nationwide uprising of 1979, a revolution with a consequential national and global impact. Nevertheless, I am neither proposing a linear projection of political historicity in the Iranian literature of the time nor assuming that mid-century Iranian prose and poetry answered all the ethical questions posed by the Iranian populace frustrated with the regime. Instead, due to the systematic authoritarianism of the monarchy, representational and ideological texts that might directly address the socio-political concerns of Iranian readers were banned and inadvertently substituted by a succession of coded narratives with a discursive philology that exaggerated the many vices of the monarchic history, as well as the virtues of the other two grand narratives: those pledged by the doctrinaires of Islam and the ideologues of Marxism.

The kinship between the many facets of Iranian “life” and “literature” makes isolating one piece from another debilitating to any critical analysis. In Iran, imaginative texts are hardly self-contained units untied from the world outside, and the trajectories of the triangle of ethics, politics and culture in the pre-revolution era of Iranian literature calls for a theoretical approach that is cognizant of this entanglement. Hence, I find the ideas of Erich Auerbach, Walter Benjamin and Benedict Anderson to be a fitting framework for my research. Auerbach’s philological understanding of literature through the historical configuration of the everyday and the peripheral voices of the era introduces the notion of looking at history from within but away from the center. Benjamin’s critique of the relationship between the arts and the social order that contextualizes the arts, and the historical circumstances that lead to, and are addressed by works of art, help with my analysis as well. Finally, Anderson’s continuation and elaboration of the critical perspectives of Auerbach and Benjamin by redirecting of the interpretive model from the “representative body” to “personal life” adds invaluable insight to my reading (Anderson 32). Finally, as most fictional texts of the time are in subtle negotiation with socio-political influences over meaning and validity, figurative language in most Iranian narratives becomes a “cultural” code and breaking it is possible through an understanding of the history and politics that surround it. Accordingly, the contemporary research of cognitive models of emotional reception of texts introduced by cognitive narratologists such as Patrick Hogan are essential to my study of the popular reception of Iran’s ideologized narratives and their role in the co-construction of the collective actions that followed.

The Socio-historical Scene of 1960-1978

The intricate cacophony that echoes in the literature of the time can be explained only through an appreciation of the revolutionary culture of 60s and 70s in its triad of public and private, literary and political, social and personal trajectories. What interweaves into the synchronic fabric of Iranian literature in the two decades proceeding to the 1979 revolution is the embedding historical scene with its ambivalently endearing and momentous effect as industrial prosperity, cultural growth and social ease are true reflections of it at a first glance. On a second look, however, widespread dissatisfaction with a dictatorial government that appears detached from the populace by disregarding the widespread poverty, illiteracy and visible inequality in all aspects of social welfare breeds a political dissatisfaction that is disinterested in the clear metamorphosis the country has experienced throughout the fifty years of Pahlavi's monarchy.

In Chapter I, I discussed the nationalistic ideals of Iran's early modern authors, the anxieties of the 30's generation with sovereignty, literacy and authenticity, and replications of the frustrations and hopes of the elite in writing either a feel-good national story that celebrated a well-embraced Western modernity or a bitter personal account of a cultural frustration with the religious rituals and the miserable life-style of the underclass. Targeting the few educated readers who generally belonged to the same elite class as the authors themselves, these writers were different from the upcoming 60s and 70s authors who were neither optimistic about the future nor concerned with the idea of nationhood as they had endured enough systematic exaggerations of *Aryanness* and *Persianness* throughout the multi-cultural, multi-lingual, multi-ethnic country. In addition, as an orderly nation state with a strong military and a firm geo-political standing in the Middle East, the pre-occupation of the earlier authors with

nationhood was rather obsolete. Reza Shah's despotic rigidity that was generally excused as urgent because of the possibility of the usurpation of the country by the Soviets from the North and the British through the South was neither a preoccupation of the new elite nor a logical stance for the new king. Under severe scrutiny by both the authorities and the reading public whose numbers had substantially grown in the course of 50 years of Pahlavi monarchy, this generation of authors grappled with the dilemma that anything the authorities tolerated, the public despised, and no level of complaisance simultaneously pleased both. Most importantly, Iran's visible shift from a patriarchal order to a civic metropolis was a fertile ground for dissatisfaction among the majority who lagged too far behind, both economically and culturally, to benefit from the quasi-secular modernity that the government was adamant to introduce. The majority of the young authors who belonged to the new rising educated class were, unlike their predecessors, graduates of Iranian universities, and when they wrote about the miseries of the lower classes of the society, their experiences were first hand and personal.

Pop Culture and Political Hip

The discursive elements that prompted the literature of the time to be "political," and the silent agreement between the audience and the artists to assert the pessimistic facets of the selective modernity that the Shah was proud to host, did not spare the fast growing pop culture in depicting the daily struggles of the subaltern and the mounting economic and

social inequality in Iran. Lack of sufficient educational opportunities and learning tools for the lower classes of the society both in the cities and the villages, and the disengagement of the poverty stricken populace that had little hope to break the class shield were now the central problematic of most noteworthy literature. The significant influence of ideological literature in shaping the convictions of Iran's youth was not only imbedded in Ahmad Shamlou's poems, Bijan Mofid's plays, and Samad Behrangi's stories, but also disguised in the lyrical poems of famous lyricists such as Iraj Jenati Atta'i and performed by the country's endearing pop singers like Dariush Eghbali. Moreover, the popularity of authors like Samad Behrangi in the intellectual circles of the time was hardly because of pioneering story writing for children; instead, it was because of his bold criticism of a failing class system and an educational system that catered to a selected few. Revered by established authors such as Jalal Al Ahmad and Gholam Hossein Saeedi, and later appropriated by the country's leading Marxist group *Fadaiyan* and their insistence upon his being a "true communist" and a martyr, the growing suspicion over the cause of his death was also largely effective in making him popular (Dehghani, 10). I will discuss Behrangi's nonfictional writing and his status as a leftist educational critic in Chapter III.

Iranian pop culture lamenting the social disillusionment of the youth is poignantly portrayed in Dariush Eghbali's iconic song "Ali Konkoori" written by Iraj Jenati Atta'i, a popular Iranian poet and producer. With less than ten percent chance of admission to the university system in 1973 and continuing, the hundreds of thousands of eighteen and nineteen year olds who were expected to pass the dreaded test and "become somebody" as regularly expressed in Iran, found *Konkoor*, the national entrance contest to enter the university system, an unsurpassable hurdle to their initiation into the civic society (Dabashi 137). In Atta'i's words:

با چشای بی فروغ

میون راست و دروغ
خودمو گم می کنم
توی این شهر شلوغ

بیچ بیچ آدمکا
بس که تو هم می دوه
دیگه فریاد منو
سایه مم نمی شنوه

صدای زنجیر تو گوشم می خونه
تو داری از قافله دور می مونی
سرتو خم کن که درا وا می شن
تا بگی نه پشت کنکور می مونی

من می خوام مثل همه
ساده زندگی کنم
چادر موندنمو
هر جا خواستم بزنم

تو این دریا نمی خوام
نهنگ کوری باشم
پشت این درهای قفل
علی کنکوری باشم

صدای زنجیر تو گوشم می خونه
تو داری از قافله دور می مونی
سرتو خم کن که درا وا می شن
تا بگی نه پشت کنکور می مونی

With eyes of no sparkle
Between True and False
I lose myself
In this crowded city

The whispering of puppets
Running into each other so
Does not even hear me cry
My own shadow

The sound of the chain sings in my ears

You are falling far behind the caravan
Bend your head and the doors will open
As you say “no” you’ll stay behind *konkoor*

I want like everybody else
To live simply
My staying tent
To put up anywhere I want

In this sea I don’t want
To be a blind whale
Behind these locked doors
To be *Ali Konkoori*

The sound of the chain sings in my ears
You are falling far behind the caravan
Bend your head and the doors will open
As you say “no” you’ll stay behind *konkoor*.
(<http://www.iransong.com/song/13220.htm>)

“*Posht-e- konkoor moondan*” is, to the Iranian audience, more than simply failing an exam. The metaphorical structure of “being left behind something” or “staying behind something” poignantly connotes a Sisyphean futility and a Kafkaesque condemnation that the audience is accustomed to. As the national exam is held once a year, students adamant to win the competition may spend years caught up in the vicious cycle of taking the test and failing it. *Konkoor* from the French word “Concours” has a gloomy undertone for Iranian families whose children can hardly make a middle-class living if they fail the test and enter work force instead. In Iran, high school graduation is hardly a cause for celebration as college degrees play a central

role in giving adults the social status and economic security that they would otherwise lack. The symbolism of the word “*zanjeer*” (shackles) that the poet juxtaposes with the Persian proverb of “falling behind the caravan” develops the theme of conforming to the normative rules of the Iranian society that demand people to follow the country’s collective unwavering expectations. Far from being motivated, Ali, with an endearing and popular name of a typical Iranian protagonist yearns for a normalcy that does not require joining the *Konkoo*-taking crowd of crowd pleasers.

Ali is supposed to have the courage and the leadership characteristics of Imam Ali, Mohammad’s son-in-law and the Shiite’s first Imam. The poet’s usage of the metaphor “caravan” and how the young man will be left behind if he does not follow the rules, is an ironic twist of the Shiite version of Ali’s historical narrative: Rreturning from an annual pilgrimage, Prophet Mohammad stops the caravan of the pilgrims to announce that Ali is his legitimate successor and the leader of the Moslem populace in the future. The controversial appointment of a younger tribe member as the future leader of Moslems causes so much turmoil after the prophet’s death in 632 AD that it divides the Moslems into the two sects of “Sunnis” who follow “Sunat” (tradition) and the “Shiites” (factionists) who accept Ali as their first Imam and leader (Munson 17). Needless to say, Iran is home to the largest number of Shiites in the Islamic world priding itself on its revolutionary, non-traditional and, most importantly, political approach to Islam. Dr. Ali Shariati⁴⁸ (1933-1977) an Iranian university professor with numerous writings and speeches on political Islam is considered to be greatly influential in leading the college-educated youth towards the 1979 revolution. The radical character of Ali, Mohammad’s son-in-law and

⁴⁸ Shariati’s untimely death in England, just like the drowning of Samad Behrangi was largely believed to be Savak’s doing.

the Shiites' first Imam, was a significant topic for Shariati and arguably the Iranians who found Ayatollah Khomeini to be the Ali-like leader that Shariati introduced (Munson 19).

The song "Ali Konkoori" also became the soundtrack for the movie *Ali Konkoori* (1973), a black comedy by Masoud Asadollahi about a young man's journey through repeated attempts at taking the exam and failing it much to the chagrin of his family, relatives, neighbors, neighborhood vendors, and a crowd of people who show up at his doorstep with kisses and Korans to wish him well on his way to the test center only to come back with a broken morale as he is confident that he has failed the test yet again. The movie presents the constant heartbreak of Ali as a collective disillusionment experienced by all who show up at his doorstep, and their futile attempt moving up the social hierarchy⁴⁹.

In his biographical account of Iran's history, Hamid Dabashi states the poignancy of *konkoor* and the embedding educational discrepancy to be one of the causes of the collective discontent among Iranians:

The reduction in the infant mortality rate, which had not been accompanied by a corresponding rise in life expectancy, had resulted in a noticeably young population, with 60 percent under the age of twenty-five. In 1970, when I participated in the national entrance examination to attend college in Iran, some one hundred thousand high school graduates did the same. The entire capacity of the Iranian university system that year was only 10,000 seats, about 10 percent of all the applicants. . . . Only 10 percent of high school graduates were admitted to college, and a corresponding 10 percent of the population lived in Tehran __ but

⁴⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vp7nD5EvR9Y>.

both these percentages . . . were disproportionately important in the rise of the revolutionary momentum between 1977 and 1979. (136)

At the time, there were two alternatives to entering college for the Iranian high school graduates. One was the dreaded national draft, and the other was “Sepah-e Danesh” or the Literacy Corps that developed in 1963 as a constituent in the Shah’s White Revolution. Literacy Corps was an alternative to the two year army service, aimed partly at eradicating the widespread illiteracy among Iranian villagers, and partly for the employment of the young urban male with a high school diploma (<http://www.iranicaonline.org/articles/literacy-corps-1>). Behrangi’s critical observation on Literacy Corps will be studied in detail in Chapter III, but his words on the essential link between failure in *konkoor* and the choice to be a teacher are appropriate here:

Remember the thousands of young (high school graduates) with the diploma who stay behind university doors and each year their numbers grow. . . . A group (of them) becomes teachers because it is better than staying behind the university doors and even if it is nothing, at least it gives one pocket money. And any time they pass konkoor, there they go. (*Digging and Searching in Iran’s Educational Problems* 40-41)

As Savak gradually became the frighteningly immoral face of the regime, the habitual inclination of the audience to read between the lines encouraged the country’s popular authors to add an undertone of political commentary even to the simplest texts. Ironically, the same political suppression that barred the literati from voicing their anti-monarchist ideas did

little to discourage the stacks of work limited in their trajectory to melancholic accounts of the underclass, the plight of the prostitutes, drug addicts' heart wrenching ordeals and the systematic disfranchisement of the country's have-nots. The problems were passionately portrayed in the country's widely popular and affordable weekly magazines such as "Javanan," "Zan-e Rooz" and "Banovan." Prostitution and addiction were also popular tropes for the fast growing movie industry where the plight of the disfranchised and the displacement of the disillusioned made poverty-ridden back alleys and run-down rental rooms a constant setting in movies. In *Gavazn-ha (The Deer)* a 1974 production of Masoud Kimyae , the charismatic actor Behrooz Vosooghi plays the role of a helpless and endearing drug addict who shelters a fugitive bank robber played by Faramarz Gharibyan. With a bookish look of thick glasses, a Marxist mustache and disheveled hair, the terrified robber leaves no doubt in the minds of the audience to be a political fugitive escaping from the authorities. The movie was showcased after a series of anti-government militia activities and armed struggles by the leftist group Fadaiyan- Khalgh or People's Devotees with well-known insurgencies that concluded with the imprisonment and execution of some of its young members who were mostly middle and lower class college students and young graduates under the leadership of self-proclaimed Marxist-Leninists Ashraf and Behrooz Dehghani, Samad Behrangi's old friends (Ashraf Dehghani 50).

The sound track of *The Deer* was the endearing folksong "Gonjeshkak-e Ashi Mashi" ("Itsy Bitsy Sparrow") about a little sparrow who is warned by the persona about the grim outcomes of the bird's landing on the poet's roof. Sung by Pari Zanganeh (b. 1939)a prominent female folk singer, the lyrics had been first collected and categorized by Sadegh Hedayat under the title of "Children's Songs:"

گنجشکک اشی مشی

لب بوم ما نشی

بارون میاد و تر میشی

برف میاد گندله میشی

میفتی تو حوض نقاشی

کی در میاره؟ فراشباشی

کی میکشه؟ قصاب باشی

کی میپزه؟ آشپزباشی

کی میخوره؟ ملا باشی.

Itsy bitsy little sparrow

Don't sit by our roof

It rains and you'll be wet

It snows and you'll turn into a ball

You'll fall into the paint pool

Who will catch you? The butler

Who will kill you? The butcher

Who will cook you? The chef

Who will eat you? The mullah.

A cautionary tale about a naive little sparrow who to the modern Iranian audience symbolizes the young martyrs whose loss of life is hardly an esteemed choice, the song performed by Farhad Mehrad (1944-2000) a well-educated pop singer whose music carried a strong socio-political note, became an anthem in both the 1979 revolution and the 2009 Green Movement⁵⁰. With the little sparrow in constant danger by both the forces of nature _rain and snow, and the power of man _the butler, the butcher, the chef and the mullah_ who join their forces together to benefit the highest ranking member in the hierarchical system of the traditional Iranian education, the mullah, the song pinpoints the power of the clergy and the collective servitude of the working class in awe of his standing. Although the word “mullah” is slang for a self-proclaimed educated person or a know-it-all, it denotes a male who is educated in the traditional religious schools.⁵¹ In most folktales, as in the traditional perception of the mullah in Iranian society, he is miserly, of a poor background and prone to avenge by being a strict and abusive teacher despised by children while fully trusted by adults. A word that continues to bear a heavy load of metaphorical meaning, in most Iranian fables, the mullah’s deceitful persona is portrayed by the fox, as in Bijan Mofid’s *Shahr-e Ghesseh* or *City of Tales*, which will be discussed in Chapter III.

Another pivotal component in the history of the Iranian was the 1973 live broadcast of the military trial of Khosro Golsorkhi, a young member of the leftist militia Fadaiyan-e Khalgh charged with the conspiracy to kidnap the queen and topple the monarchy.

⁵⁰ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ERuDbE-4ql8>

⁵¹ (<http://aryanpour.com>).

Found guilty of treason and condemned to death though a parody of a trial that stunned the audience as he refused the right to a defense attorney and responded to most of the questions with long soliloquies about his sacrificial love for “his people,” Golsorkhi was later executed to the shock of the nation who fell in love with his poetic stance as a young father and a self-proclaimed “Marxist Leninist who found social justice in the Ideology of Islam” and was not afraid to die for the freedom of the Iranian people.⁵² Golsorkhi’s oratorical argument during in juxtaposition to the disaffected members of the military court was a radical spark for the invested audience who was dared to challenge the regime just as Golsorkhi did, and they did!

In addition to lay Marxist ideas that immersed the young in an idealistic view of an achievable utopia, another visible trend was “Political Islam” introduced by Ali Shariati and more restrictive Shiite public disobedience commanded by Iran’s future supreme leader Roohollah Khomeini (1902-1989). With vigorously growing mosques and *Hosseinyehs* that attracted the urban poor and the migrant city workers who found religiosity to be a common solace to the secular modernity that gave them little space or interest, Islamism was growing even faster than the radical Marxism that was, on the one hand, crushed and pushed even further underground by the Shah who had executed and imprisoned many of its advocates, and on the other, still distrusted by the majority of Iranians to whom Islam was a cultural identity that did not accord with Marxism. Most importantly, as the Shah had already dismantled the National Front and the lingering remainders of non-radical democratic ideologies as discussed in Chapter I, the major anti-government rivalry over public support was between radical Marxism and Islamism. Finally, the Shah’s anti-democratic policies helped the rising Islamists fill an

⁵²<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=buTIBLGdUfo>

invitingly vacant political space and establish themselves as the victors of the 1979 revolution.

As Azimi observes:

The nonexistence of conventional political vehicles for venting discontent and articulating political wants had facilitated the task of the mosques and other religious institutions in filling the oppositional organizational vacuum. Seemingly nonpolitical religious associations of various kinds had largely supplanted the banned secular associations. In the absence of viable rivals, modes of solidarity rooted in religious sensibilities and concerns or couched in religious terms had overshadowed or saturated civic life. No one could deny that by eliminating or paralyzing the secular democratic opposition, the Shah had paved the way for the ascendancy of uncompromising opponents of the regime, whether secular or Islamist. He had particularly facilitated the rise of a religiously inspired and led opposition whose political genesis, configuration, feasibility, and prospect of success had eluded him and his supporters. (330)

In the post Mossadeq era, fast increase in the number of Iranian authors, many first generation college graduates rising from the lower strata of the society, along with the availability and affordability of books, stemmed from the state's mission *_however faulty in its route_* to alter the country's socioeconomic status, and to bring Iran to the forefronts of the twentieth-century modernity. Shah's White Revolution in 1963 was the embodiment of the monarch's symbolic initiation into such a vision for a civic Iran. The irony in the name of the reform that was also known as "The Revolution of the Shah and the People" was bold enough to

make the public notice that not only the authoritative status quo was considered doomed by the state but also some sort of a “revolution” was called upon to make the necessary shift in the country’s evolution. In addition, Shah’s populist gestures followed the 60s global guerilla mentality that had already initiated a havoc around the world. Fighting for an open space in the post-colonial world, the monarch was desperately trying to have the upper hand in the inevitable “revolution” towards a “better” Iran, but his was a looser interpretation of change and a total disregard for the Iranian constitution that had followed a bloody revolution in 1906. Although none of the items in the nine sections of the monarch’s plan was but a positive proposal *_on paper_* for a fundamental change in the civic system, the elephant in the room was Shah’s total disregard of much needed space for political debates, democratic elections, and the legitimization of political parties. Land reform was perhaps the most revolutionary item on the list as it ruled for the mandatory selling of the land by the feudal ‘lords’ to peasants and share-croppers below the market price. Profit sharing for factory workers, women’s right to vote, formation of literacy corps with the intention of educating the rural poor as well as free and compulsory education were other measures that were put forth haphazardly and without proper measures or introductions.

In the Iran of 1960’s, every step that the government took towards the modernization of the populous seemed to work against it. In fact, if it were not for the White Revolution, the Islamic Revolution would arguably not happen a decade later. Many of the country’s young leftist writers including Samad Behrangi hired by the government’s literacy corps to teach in the country’s vast rural areas were frustrated over the profound poverty they witnessed in the villages, lack of resources to make any visible change, and a feeling of

abandonment by that the government that had little concern over the under-paid young teachers with a low morale:

We who send our young and inexperienced teachers to the villages with empty hands, empty pockets and empty brains, have we ever thought how they spend their leisure? Is it possible that they may come out as professional gamblers? What means do we have to prevent this? Is it possible that, in a remote village, in order to satisfy their sexual urges, they approach themselves, or worse their students, or even worse each other? Why wouldn't they? Have you ever thought of the destiny of a young instructor involved with a pink and rosy student could end with the filthiest things, vengeance and retaliations ... This great pain, one of the thousand educational pains of Iran, could become the subject of a very effective research that, unfortunately, I don't see the courage and creativity it takes in any of our instructors and psychologists and those who hit their chests with the stone of being the authority in educational problems.

(Behrangi D&S 24-25)

Leaving the corps with anger and disillusionment, many young teachers joined the angry voices that found the promised reform a hollow proposal that was not expected to be followed through. The visible loss of power of the country's elite land owners whose well-seated aristocratic ownership of land and the watering system had always given them little reason to budge to the monarch, made new enemies for the state. In addition, the rise of a new working class made of the small farmers who sold back their land to the previous owner, flooding the

cities in search of an easier lifestyle led to unmeasured problems for the country's fragile economy. In effect, a country that had a long standing in agriculture was now rushing towards an industrial economy that disregarded the farmland and the villagers who made the majority of Iranian populace. Most importantly, the king's call for a "referendum" over his proposed reform bill was yet another demonstration of authoritarian dismissal of the Iranian constitution that was established after the bloody revolution of 1906. While the majority of the intellectuals quietly mocked the superficiality of the proposal as another symptom of the king's lack of legitimacy, the only oppositional voice loudly and self-righteously heard was from the religious right and the future leader of the 1979 revolution Roohollah Khomeini who unfalteringly objected to the bill. Khomeini's 1963 speech led to his arrest and expulsion from the country, but most importantly, the havoc led by the regime over this sermon led to a collective amnesia about the rigidity of Khomeini's religious beliefs and his unabashed enmity with modernity:

[I]f, gentlemen, you take a look at the Bahai's almanac of two or three years ago, you will read: "Abdul Baha [11] advocates equal rights for men and women"; and this is the line that has been adopted by them. Then the ignorant Mr. Shah also steps forward and talks of equal rights for men and women! You poor wretch, they have purposely set you up so that they can say that you are a Baha'i, and so that I in turn denounce you as an unbeliever and you are finally got rid of. Don't continue in this way, you fool; don't do it.

Conscription for women is what 'Abdul Baha advocates. The almanac in question is available, so why not read it. Has the Shah not seen this?! If not then those who have seen it and have set this poor wretch up to say these

things are to be rebuked Both our country and our religion are in jeopardy.

You repeatedly tell the ‘ulama not to mention that our religion is endangered; but if we don't say this does that mean that our religion is in fact not in danger? If we do not mention what the Shah is like, does that mean he is really not like that?

Indeed, you must do something to change this situation. You are being blamed for everything. You helpless creature, you don't realize that on the day when a true outburst occurs, not one of these so-called friends of yours will want to know you. They are all friends of the dollars. They hold no belief or moral principles and they have no sense of loyalty. (Translation not mine.)

<http://english.irib.ir/radioislam/articles/item/154741-historic-speech-of-imam-khomeini-in-196>

Khomeini's opposition to the state's extension of suffrage to women, and raising a girl's legal age of marriage from nine to fifteen, would have been enough to dismantle his growing status as a legitimate oppositional voice had not the regime thrown an untimely havoc over his timely sermon that concluded with his well-publicized expulsion from the country.

As Dabashi contends, with over half of the population illiterate and the majority living below poverty, the disconnect between the state and the populace went far beyond a disagreements over political space (145). The paradox of expecting an industrialized society run by well-educated technocrats to conform to the authoritative rules set by a few self-serving elites was only one side of the story of the country's path towards a mass uprising. Authors like Samad Behrangi and Bijan Mofid continued their predecessors' tendency to tell stories about the periphery and the disadvantaged, but the bitterness Hedayat's generation expressed towards

religion and illiteracy of Iranian people, was now replaced by fury against the regime.

Witnessing all this, little seemed to give the 60s and 70s generations the optimism they needed to better Iran. Drastic change was what they had in mind and the pledge for total cleansing of the establishment was reflected in the pessimism that consumed the literature of the era. Folktales rewritten in poetry, drama and prose, found a heavy ideological undertone that fed into what Azimi explains “a culture of confrontation” (*The Quest* 307). With the fast growing educated young, the urban middle class had a political awareness that was in conflict with its very bourgeois status. Leftist ideas were popular and the regime’s suppressive behavior inflamed the reading public to embrace such ideas as the only way out. Iranian authors, in turn, wrote about the miseries of the underclass and scorned the middleclass lifestyle as shallow and superficial. In effect, because the problems of the country were blamed on the arbitrary state of the fifty year old monarchic system, the only envisioned solution recognized by the majority was full elimination of the regime. Another example of the popular political literature that addressed the regime’s anti-democratic status is Shahyar Ghanbari’s “Booy-e Gandome” or “The Scent of Wheat” sung by Dariush was banned at the time, and circled underground in a cassette form. The political undertone of the song was hence magnified by its taboo status. The mysterious absences of political individuals such as Shahram Mohamadian, a young medical student who had joined the underground *Peyka*⁵³, a militia branch of the leftist Fadaiyan-e Khalgh, and executed in the Islamic Republic on July 15, 1985, was an enticing cause for his young cousins including the nine-year old me to sit close to the cassette player with its volume set on low and listen to Dariush singing about the inequalities of life at a time when “Capitalist” America with its “Imperialist” arrogance was believed be the backbone of the country’s detested monarch :

⁵³ Battle

بوی گندم مال من هر چی که دارم مال تو
یه وجب خاک مال من هرچی میکارم مال تو
اهل طاعونی این قبیله مشرقیم
تویی این مسافر شیشه ای شهر فرنگ
پوستم از جنس شبه پوست تو از مخمل سرخ
رختم از تاوله تنپوش تو از پوست پلنگ
بوی گندم مال من هر چی که دارم مال تو
یه وجب خاک مال من هرچی میکارم مال تو
توبه فکر جنگل آهن و آسمون خراش
من به فکر یه اتاق اندازه تو

...

بوی گندم مال من هر چی که دارم مال تو
یه وجب خاک مال من هرچی میکارم مال تو

...

شهر تو شهر فرنگ آدماش ترمه قبا
شهر من شهر دعا همه گنبدش طلا

...

میزنم بوی گندم مال من هر چی که دارم مال من
یه وجب خاک مال من هرچی میکارم مال من

The smell of wheat be mine

Everything I have be yours

A foot of earth be mine

Everything I plant be yours

I am a plagued member of this Eastern tribe

You are this glass traveler of the Western city

My skin is the quality of night

Your skin is the red velvet

My cloth is blisters

Your cloth is the tiger's skin

...

You are thinking about iron and skyscrapers

I am thinking about a room your size

Your town the Foreign Town, its people in silk shawls

My town the Prayer Town, all its domes of gold

...

The smell of wheat be mine, everything I have be mine

A foot of earth be mine, everything I plant be mine.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PsnapU3D-G8>

With a zealous self-righteousness and partiality, this generation of writers led the public in a political discourse that although deeply embarrassed about the country's poor social and cultural status, put the blame on "the others." The result was a flood of indoctrinating stories with cramped themes, motifs and morals that for the most part construed the reality, snubbed the sanguine and barred most constructive and optimistic messages as self-deceiving playthings of the petit-bourgeois. In turn, the Iranian readers of the pre-revolutionary era hardly approached a text as *a thing in itself*; instead, they appropriated prose and poetry as social commentaries on their country's autocratic political habits. The Iranian authors' role in this continuous encoding and decoding was to introduce cultural productions that however realistic in tone and style, unabashedly dismantled the real, and rewrote history. The literature that was collectively embraced in the two decades preceding the revolution fed of and into the covert political discourse hardly giving a chance to the optimist to thrive. In fact, few narratives at the time fell outside the widespread leftist discourse that conjectured most stories as covert ideological manifestoes. As the educated public showed little interest in apolitical interpretations of narratives and was instead eager for stories that could be interpreted as allegories of the country's cultural and political struggles, popular authors constructed, on the one hand, realistic stories that were contained by the ideological discourse, and a possible utopia that was close by and eminent. The reality at hand demanded urgent ablution and a purgative initiation to into the inevitable ideal. Meaning was thus fixed and the effort to fix meanings was a mutual exertion between the writer and the reader. In effect, the more obtrusive pressure the government put on publications, the more hegemonic the underground political discourse grew so much so that most readers responded only to radical propagandist writings. It was in such a politically charged setting that Samad Behrangi grew to be the most popular children's author.

Samad Behrangi (1939 - 1968)

In the introduction to his Oldooz collection of children's tales, Samad Behrangi, the controversial Azarbaijani teacher, author, educational theoretician, and social activist, blatantly bans wealthy Iranian kids from reading his stories! Through the voice of a ten year old girl "Oldooz" or "Star" in Azarbaijani Turkish, Behrangi hammers his young readers with a candidly communist voice:

One day I told him my adventures. Mr. "Behrang" liked it and said: "If you allow me, I will turn the adventures of you and the crows into a story and will write it in a book." I agreed with a few conditions: First that he writes my story only for kids, because big people are so absent minded that they don't understand my story and won't enjoy it. Secondly that he writes my story for those children who are either poor or not too spoiled. So, these children have no right to read my tales: 1. Children who come to school with a butler. 2. Children who come to school in luxury cars. Mr. "Behrang" said that in big cities wealthy children do this and are too proud of themselves. ("Oldooz and the Crows" 9)

In effect, as expressed posthumously by Ashraf Dehghani, one of the early members of Fadiyan-e Khalgh, the Marxist Leninist militia group that was officially established by Behrangi's longtime friends Behrooz Dehghani _Ashraf's brother, Bijan Jazani and Amir Parviz Pooyan in 1971, four years after the author's death, Behrangi was a "true communist" who "throughout his life fought against injustice and exploitation and ignorance and obliviousness" (Dehghani 10). In *The Mystery of Samad's Death . . . !? How Retrogression Has Abused Samad's Mysterious Death as a Ploy to Attack His Comrades*, an biographical account of Behrangi's life and death, Ashraf Dehghani refers to Behrangi's writings as a major reason behind the "revolutionary training" of Iran's youth, and to Behrangi and Dehghani's relationship as a mirror image of the relationship between Marx and Engels:

For me, Samad and Behrooz who were able to answer all my questions would look exactly like Marx and Engels. I would imagine that Marx and Engels were like Behrooz and Samad Was it not that Marx and Engels too were two close friends with common words and hearts? Very educated people who fought against power mongers and oppressors and on behalf of the empty handed and the proletariat? (11, 38)

Although not alone in his ideological rewriting of folk literature, Behrangi was the only children's author _ among the very few Iranian writers of children's stories at the time- whose political views, knitted into the tapestry of popular folktales, had a significant impact on the young readers of the of the pre-revolutionary Iran. Within the decade leading to the 1979 revolution, Behrangi's collection of children's stories attracted more attention from his readers

for the politically charged themes and revolutionary characters than his recording of Turkish oral tales and classical anecdotes in their original Azari language, or his numerous translations and commentaries most of which were signed with a pseudonym. His mutual effort with Behrooz Dehghani to record popular Turkish folktales in their original language, as well as his collection of essays on the methodology of teaching Farsi to Azari students, soon made him famous among the elite in the field of teaching and education and led to his scrutiny by Savak. As the monarchic culture insisted upon the unity of the “Persian speaking” nation whose multi-lingual population was denied the right to use their native tongues as an official language and was expected to accept Farsi as the only route to literacy and education, Behrangi was interrogated by the authorities, and for a time, forced to go on leave without pay (Bajan 79).

Behrangi’s disillusionment over the social and cultural welfare of the disenfranchised people of Azarbaijan reveals in the simple dedication heading that presents the author’s longing for a better life for the future generation of Iranians. Kazem Sa-adati and Roohangeez Dehghani the married couple to whom Behrangi dedicates the book were his old friends and two of the main leaders of the Fadaiyan-e Khalgh⁵⁴ Living most of their adult lives in hiding or in jail, Kazem committed suicide in 1971 while in a house arrest by the Pahlavi regime, and Roohangeez was executed by the Islamic Republic 10 years:

برای

کاظم دوست بچه ها

و

⁵⁴ www.fadaian.org

روح انگیز

که بچه های خوبی برای ما تربیت کنند

با این امید که در بزرگی زندگیشان بهتر از ما باشد.

For

Kazem _children's friend-

and

Roohangeez,

to raise good children for us

with the hope that in adulthood their life be better than ours. (7)

Behrangi the Teacher

As a teacher in rural villages of Azarbaijan, Behrangi was the self-proclaimed voice of a generation of young teachers who were predominantly from the working class, and were hired by the government after the 1963 White Revolution reform to bring literacy to the largely illiterate population of the country's rural villages. However, to Behrangi, *the learning tools* and *the expected outcomes* were a laughing matter. The futility of the teachers'

mission is the undertone of most of Behrangi's essays on education and literacy where he fumes at the absurdity of using the standard educational textbooks for Turkish speaking students who are, on the one hand, deprived of the basic necessities of life, and on the other, need an alternative teaching method _Farsi as a second language_ to succeed or survive schooling. In "The Problem with Textbooks" he says:

Here I bring examples of the First Grade Book of the past one or two years which was written by two or three apparently much educated individuals . . . In that book there was a picture that showed Azar, Dara and Papa and their dear Mama eating dinner: a table in the middle with a table cloth on it, chairs around it, a big room with decorations just like a beautiful bride, knives and forks, china plates, crystal jars and glasses, and etcetera and etcetera. And then when I would ask my students "what are these children doing?" They would all stare at me. Even if I told them without an introduction that they are having dinner, they would one hundred percent take me to be a liar. (71)

With the same humorous tone, Behrangi continues exposing the cultural and economic lacks of the village and the contradictions that standard textbooks targeted for wealthy metropolitan kids would cause for village students. A culture that looks down on young boys combing their hair⁵⁵ or wearing shorts or girls exposing their hair would not, as Behrangi argues, lead to literacy. More importantly, the educational standards of teaching Persian in Persian weigh heavily on both the teachers who have to spend most of their time explaining the farfetched curriculum, and on the students who learn that their language,

⁵⁵ Behrangi mentions how the village clergy denounce men's combing their hair as sacrilegious, and how the state too orders all school boys to have shaved heads.

culture and life are simply irrelevant (72-74). One of the reasons Behrangi was allegedly under scrutiny by Savak was his writing a contextualized Persian textbook for Azari school children. In effect, it was this daringly oppositional stance to mainstream educational standards that made him famous in intellectual circles of Jalal Al Ahamd, Gholam Hossein Sa-eddi and others (Bajan 21, 80).

In many of his theoretical texts, Behrangi insists on writing in Turkish about Azari folklore, culture and language. Like many other members of Iran's ethnic groups, marginalization is a collective experience that he witnesses both throughout his service in rural villages of Azerbaijan, and his personal life within the Persian-dominating dogma of the state. Writing in Turkish for the Turkish speaking population validates the linguistic capabilities of Turkish as a formal language rather than a dialect, and introducing the wealth of the culture to the rest of the country is a radical move at his time and continuing.

In *Afsaneh-haye Azerbaijan*, co-authored with his friend Behrouz Dehghani, the authors include “بيزوم” or “*Beezo-om*” a short Turkish folktale introduced as such: “The beauty of this tale is in reading it in Turkish. This is why we decided to refrain from translating it.” The tale has a strong similarity to “Gonjeshkak-e Ashi Mashi” which, as discussed earlier, points at the injustice in the hierarchical order of command. In this poem, and in a simple dialogue between a young shepherd and the constants of his daily routine, the shepherd is challenged by the power play that leaves the spoiled cat on top. Despite their integral role in the cause and effect equation, all but the cat are cognizant of their flaws and the power of another: The hard ice which causes the chain of events, is not strong at all because the heat of the sun can melt it away. Despite the melting power of the sun, the cloud can easily stand against it and overcome its strength. If the rain eliminates the cloud, and grass can drink it away, and if the

grass seems to be the winner, the sheep can finish it with one chew. The cat, however, is even stronger than its human owner, the lady of the house who spoils it with food from her lap. At the end, the one who is not necessarily the most deserving wins the game. Truly, the short rhyming dialogues are best enjoyed when read aloud in Turkish⁵⁶:

بیر بیزووم وار ایدی.

پیه ده یّری وار ایدی.

آپاردیم سووار ماغا

آیاغی بوزدان زوودو.

دیّدیم: بوز، سن نندن گوژلی سن!

دیّدی: من گوژلی اولسایدیم، گون منی ارتیمزدی.

دیّدیم: گون، سن نندن گوژلی سن!

دیّدی: من گوژلی اولسایدیم، بولود اوستومی آلمازیدی.

دیّدیم: بولود، ین نندن گوژلی سن!

دیّدی: من گوژلی اولسایدیم یاغیش منندن یاغمازیدی.

دیّدیم: بولود، سن نندن گوژلی سن!

دیّدی: من گوژلی اولسایدیم اوت منندن گوگر مزیدی.

دیّدیم: اوت، سن نندن گوژلی سن!

دیّدی: من گوژلی اولسایدیم قویون منی ییّمزدی!

⁵⁶The text is in Azari Turkish and Leily Mohseni, Forugh Rooz and Mehrzad Ardahali are the dear friends who helped me in understanding its Turkish nuances.

دیدی: قویون، سن ندن گوڙلی سن!

دیدی: من گوڙلی اولسایدیم قورد منی بیر تمازدی.

دیدی: قورد، سن ندن گوڙلی سن!

دیدی: من گوڙلی اولسایدیم، ایت منی قاومازدی.

دیدی: ایت، سن ندن گوڙلی سن!

دیدی: من گوڙلی اولسایدیم قری منی اورمازدی.

دیدی: قری سن ندن گوڙلی سن!

دیدی: من گوڙلی اولسایدیم سیچان بوغدامی آپارمازدی.

دیدی: سیچان، سن ندن گوڙلی سن!

دیدی: من گوڙلی اولسایدیم پیشیک منی توتمازدی.

دیدی: پیشیک، سن ندن گوڙلی سن!

دیدی: گوڙلی یم ها، گوڙلی یم!

دمیرداراق دیشلی یم!

کورسی آلتی قیشلاغیم دی،

کورسی اوستو لیاغیم دی.

خانم نمنه پیشیرسه،

او دامنیم قویماغیم دی.

Once there was a goat

It had a place in a barn.

I took it for a swim

It slipped on the ice.

I said: Ice, are you the best!

It said: If I were the best, the sun would not melt me.

I said: Sun, are you the best!

It said: If I were the best, the cloud would not cover me.

I said: Cloud, are you the best!

It said: If I were the best, rain would not fall from me.

I said: Rain, are you the best!

It said: If I were the best, grass would not (have to) grow.

I said: Grass, are you the best!

It said: If I were the best, the sheep could not eat me.

I said: Sheep are you the best!

It said: If I were the best, the wolf would not eat me.

I said: Wolf, are you the best!

It said: If I were the best, the dog would not catch me.

I said: Dog, are you the best!

It said: If I were the best, nana⁵⁷ would not hit me.

I said: Nana, are you the best!

She said: If I were the best, the mouse would not take my wheat.

I said: Mouse, are you the best!

It said: If I were the best, the cat would not catch me.

I said: kitty cat, are you the best!

It said: I am the best, I am the best!

A hard iron-comb my teeth

Under the *Korsi*⁵⁸ my winter retreat,

Over the *Korsi* my summer cottage.

The lady of the house cooks,

And feeds me buttercream on her apron. (123-125)

Behrangi's fascination with Azari folklore is evident in his decision to exclude a Persian translation of the tale. At the heat of the Cold War, following the Western trend of antagonism to USSR, and the regime's constant fear of the Soviet intrusion in the affairs of the state specifically because of the proximity of the language and culture of the Turkish people of Azarbaijan to that of the Soviet territory of Azarbaijan in the North-West of the country, the author's insistence upon both voicing Turkish stories, and giving them a written voice was a

⁵⁷ ننه *nanah* or *naneh* is an old endearing term for mother, grandmother, nannies or other older women.

⁵⁸ A low square table covered with a heavy quilt and warmed by a heater during winter months in Iran.

clear display of dissent. The folklore of Azarbijan, as the author contends in an article by the same name, is in effect, the folklore of the “masses” and what authors write, are first and foremost, for the masses:

We can never disregard the great service of the masses⁵⁹ to the spiritual development of humankind. Maxim Gorki the famous author writes:

“The masses of the people are not only the power that creates material values, but also is the positive and unending source of spiritual values.”

The masses of the people are the earliest poets and philosophers and worshippers of beauty and life. . . Many of the greatest scientists and writers and artists and other important figures of humanity rise from the people. For example, Lomonosov who was simply the son of a fisherman, and Newton who was the child of an unknown farmer.

The masses of the people are creators of vast epics and fantastic legends and beautiful songs and dreamy dances. Great artists have always created their most beautiful art based on the culture of masses (folklore), poetry, music, stories and dance have always fed on folklore and forever will. (133).

Children’s Tales in Adult Language

⁵⁹ The term that he uses is "توده مردم" a famously Communist term to refer to the common man, and a derivative from the word "توده" the name of one of the oldest Communist groups in Iran.

Behrangi's fiction vividly portrays the economic and cultural poverty of the Iranian majority. In effect, there is hardly a story or a folktale in Behrangi's vast collection of fictional writings that disregards class discrepancies and social injustices. In the introduction to "Kachal-e Kaftar Baz" or "The Dove-Flying Bald," one of his most popular folktales that he intentionally leaves unfinished, he gives a detailed account of social responsibility and justice encouraging his young readers to reject the status-quo, read about social problems, and learn that "the society is not a pledge to hold untouched:"

We know that in order to treat a disease, one must first find its causes . . . To eliminate social diseases as well, one must do the same thing. We know there is never a disease in a healthy body. In a healthy society too, there should be no trace of a disease. Bankruptcy, tyranny, lies, theft and war are diseases that are seen only in an unhealthy society. . . . Always ask yourself: Why did they send my classmate to a carpet-making factory? Why do some people steal . . . When do war, poverty and hunger end? . . . Books that only entertain and deceive us, are good for shredding and burning. Story reading is not for entertainment. That is why I do not like smart kids to read my stories for entertainment only. (129-131)

Behrangi's words to children echo a simplified version of Marx's preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*. In fact, few authors could enlighten children _if not the Iranian adults_ about historical materialism and the essential correspondence between material modes of production and intellectual life better than Behrangi as he encourages Iranian children to shift the "inherited" order and push it toward socialism (131). His introduction to "The Dove-Flying Bald" reads like a simplified paraphrase of Marx's words:

In the social production of their life, men enter into definite relations that are indispensable and independent of their will, relations of production which correspond to a definite stage of development of their material productive forces. . . . The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. . . . With the change of the economic foundation, the entire immense superstructure is more or less rapidly transformed. (775)

"The Dove-Flying Bald"⁶⁰ starts as a typical rag-to-riches folktale where a princess falls in love with the unlikeliest of all suitors, a poor, bald, young trickster whose spends his pastime teaching his beloved doves the art of flying in unison __a traditional hobby in Iran that was for a long time reviled and even illegal (Mahjoob 1131). Behrangi's vernacular tone when

⁶⁰ Mahjoob has an exhaustive chapter on the art of flying doves in Iran with cultural and historical documentation (1131-1161).

addressing his readers gives a purposeful urgency to the theme of the story that would otherwise be absent. After the initial oneself of the feverish love of the princess for the young man, the narrator frames his story as such:

All story tellers would say in such occasions: “The king’s daughter did not expose the secret in her heart to anyone.” From fear or from shame or decency. But I say that the kings’ daughter told the secret of her heart to the king. When the king heard his daughter is in love with the dove-flying bald, he got angry and screamed: “if one more time, the name of this filth comes out of your tongue⁶¹, I will banish you from the town. Was there a scarcity in humanity that you fell in love with this filth? I will give you to the minister’s son. *Va’salam*. (114)

In effect, despite Behrangi’s purposeful shift in the classical structure of the folktale by encouraging the princess and her readers to address their grievances and speak up to the authority, nothing really comes out of the sincere dialogue between the princess and the king. Argument and logic are not helpful tools in dealing with the authority, and if Behrangi’s readers want to change things, they need to break the traditional order of power, and become, well, vigilantes like the Bald and his future princess-wife.

With a serious touch of magic and lots of goat dung, the Bald wins the princess’s hand without the King’s blessing, and the two live in Kachal’s slightly renovated shack happily

⁶¹ comes out of your mouth

ever after. Kachal's job is to rob the rich to give to the poor, and that too is considered commendable as the internal Socratic dialogue within Kachal reveals:

Kachal was walking and saying to himself: Dear Kachal, calculate and see if Haji Ali's wealth is lawfully⁶² yours or not? Where does Haji Ali get all the money? From his factories. Does he himself work? No. He does not touch black or white. He only takes the profit of the factories and has a good time. Then who works and gives the profit, dear Kachal? Use your brain well. I'll ask you a question, answer correctly. Let me see, if people don't work, what happens to the factory? Answer: they will close. Question: and then would the factory as much profit? Answer: of course not. Conclusion: Then dear Kachal, from this question-and-answer we conclude that workers work but Haji takes all the profit and gives only a little back to them. So, now that Haji Ali's wealth is not really his own, it is *halal* to me. (116-17)

And hence Behrangi brings an old Azari tale to the forefronts of socialism, ties Marxist ideology to Moslem Sharia, and skillfully trains his young reads to extract revolutionary messages from simple oral tales that make them laugh. Behrangi ends the tale with an anticipation of change: "All story tellers say 'our story has reached its ending,' but I am certain that our story has not yet ended; on day, of course, we will continue this story" (*Story Collection 2*, 155).

⁶² حلال or halal.

“Oldooz and the Crows” and How to Raise a Militant

Just like “The Dove-Flying Bald,” Behrangi’s “Oldooz and the Crows” is an open-ended tale overflowing with ethical questions that target the young readers of 60s and 70s Iran. The opening of the story in the form of a letter by Oldooz the 10 year old narrator gives the tale immediacy and presence, intended by Behrangi, perhaps, to urge his readers to consider the tale as a true account of a the life of a little girl in a small town in Azerbaijan. Through the voice of his 10 year old narrator *Oldooz* _Star in Turkish, he unabashedly separates his target audience from the wealthy minority that ironically mark the majority of his readers:

آقای "بهرنگ" يك وقتي معلم ده ما بود. در خانه ی ما منزل داشت. روزی من سرگذشتم را برايش گفتم. آقای "بهرنگ" خوشش آمد و گفت: اگر اجازه بدهی، سرگذشت تو و کلاغها را قصه می کنم و تو کتاب می نویسم. من قبول کردم به چند شرط: اولش اینکه قصه مرا فقط براي بچه ها بنویسد، چون آدمهای بزرگ حواسشان آنقدر پرت است که قصه مرا نمی فهمند و لذت نمی برند. دومش این که قصه مرا براي بچه هایی بنویسد که یا فقیر باشند و یا خیلی هم نازپرورده نباشند. پس، این بچه ها حق ندارند قصه های مرا بخوانند: 1-بچه هایی که همراه نوکر به مدرسه می آیند. 2 بچه هایی که با ماشین سواری گرانقیمت به مدرسه می آیند. آقای "بهرنگ" می گفت که در شهرهای بزرگ بچه های ثروتمند این جوری می کنند و خیلی هم به خودشان می نازند.

Mr. “Behrang” was once the teacher in our village. He lived with us. One day I told him my life story. Mr. “Behrang” liked it and said, “If you

allow me, I will turn the adventures of you and the crows into a story and will write it in a book.” I agreed upon a few conditions. First is that he writes me story only for children, because grown people are so absent minded that they do not understand and enjoy my story. Second is that he writes my story for children who are either poor or not too pampered. So, these children have no right to read my story: 1. Children who come to school with a butler. 2. Children who come to school in expensive cars. Mr. “Behrang” would say that in big cities wealthy children do such things and they are very proud of it too. (*Story Collection* 1: 9)

Oldooz’s introductory note clearly sets the stage for the readers’ ideological cultivation. With an indoctrinating tone, the readers get a clear image of their positioning in Iran’s class based society. Considering the legitimacy of this positioning and reconsidering their role in enduring the status quo, the tale addresses them with a symbolic call to action. Oldooz’s permission to “Mr. Behrang” excludes two groups of readers from her target audience: adults and wealthy children. The grownups are excluded because they are simply too distracted to understand and enjoy her story, and wealthy children who come to school with a butler or in expensive cars are just too self-absorbed to be included in her circle of readers. Behrangi’s direct address to his audience through the words of his heroine brings his tales one step closer to the orality that he attempts to produce. Not only does he position his characters in the present, but by shifting between fiction and reality, he gives his story a fluidity that adds layers to an otherwise ideologically constrained propagandist story. Moreover, he lure adult readers to pick up the book and be confronted with a subtle yet forthright story telling that leaves little to imagination when it comes to the moral of the story. He also challenges the children who, in a

country that is run by a king with an obvious barrage of wealth, maybe oblivious to the inequalities in their surroundings.

Locked once again by the stepmother who has left for the public bath, Oldooz makes friends with a crow who weeps quietly as she listens to the story of Oldooz's loneliness, her sadness over the lost speaking doll that her divorced mother had made before returning to her own village. The crow promises to give Oldooz one of her newborn chicks to keep her company, and the friendship brings some brief moments of joy in the predominantly gloomy tale. When the story ends, the young reader has seen the mother crow hanged, her little chick starved to death, and Oldooz and Yashar flown away to the Land of the Crows by an army of black birds. Leaving the misery of their everyday on a net patiently handmade made by the two, and from the threads that the crows would steal and bring, Oldooz and Yashar never return.

In "Oldooz and the Crows," Behrangi draws a surreal account of a small town in Azerbaijan, where two poor children's commitment to the disadvantaged crows, the black ominous birds in most folk cultures, and symbols of deception and pry in Iranian tradition, takes precedence over all else. The story mirrors the commitment of Behrangi's generation, many of whom were the future members of the Marxist Fadaian- e Khalgh⁶³, who were devoted to a 'short' life of armed struggle for the betterment of people, even if the route was bloody, immoral or unjust.

Despite the restrictive discourse that mandated a measured signification for the tales and the society where the tales were produced, Behrangi celebrated the poignant cultural motifs that had survived through generations of readers and writers, and the cultural symbols that Iranians had held for centuries. On the other hand, as an avid researcher of folklore, Behrangi

⁶³ <http://www.fadaian.org/file/manch.uk.html>

knew enough about Iranian culture to skillfully question the readers' expectations with regards to tropes such as the animals that took the central role, the functions that moved the plot forward, and the transgressions that the personae made to fulfill a quest. By adding elements of magic to a modern children's story _Oldooz speaking to crows, having a speaking doll, flying on a net held by crows, etc._ and by shifting the principles of fairytales _crows as the animal helpers, contemporary Azarbaijan as the setting, the fathers as unemployed factory workers, and Oldooz's mother not dead but divorced, etc._ Behrangi employs familiar elements that result from a modern "form of production." He effectively both defamiliarizes his story line by shifting the familiar elements of classical folktales, and questions the expectations instituted by the "superstructure." In the introduction to "Domrol- Divaneh Sar" or "Crazy Head Domrol," he explains the difference between the world of classical folktales and the modern world:

[Our] ancestors like us had long and far dreams . . . and because in real life they could not fulfill their wishes, they would make fairytales and in the world of magic would reach their dreams. . . I repeat again that none of the old fairytales have scientific value and one should not take the beliefs of the personae in these fairytales as the truth. Thoughts, discourses and attitudes of the heroes of these fairytales cannot be our model. We should take the thoughts, discourses and attitudes of our time and place. We should search for the heroes of our time and not limit ourselves to one time and one place. The twentieth century is our time and the whole the world is our place. (Stories 2: 9, 13)

Behrangi's critique of folktales as an ideological phenomenon that is only as vast as the mode of production allows, is quite similar to Propp's historical analysis of folktales as a phenomenon of the superstructure:

[A] general law for studying all historical phenomena: "The mode of production of material life conditions the social, political, and intellectual life process in general" (Marx 1962, 363). It follows that we must find in history the mode of production that gave rise to the wondertale . . . We should discover the social-economic formation, the stage in the development of this or that formation within whose framework the plot arose because it *had* to arise. Consequently, in order to grasp any literary phenomenon (and wondertale is a case in point), we should turn to material culture, economy, and the social phenomena connected with them . . . Elements of the wondertale must be compared with elements of production, with the social life, rites, rituals, and beliefs of the people among which the wondertale is current, and of the peoples which stand at the same level of economic and cultural development. (103, 125-30)

Similarly to Propp, Behrangi contends that stories and specifically folktales are gravely conditioned by political and economic interests. Although to this day many folklorists insist on the formalist comparativism that unites oral tales in the universal category of Aarne-Thompson tale types as the only relevant method, and consider the Marxist approach of Propp's to Russian wondertales as an involuntary gesture under Soviet ideological pressure, Propp's ground breaking analysis of the interrelatedness of imaginative literature in its "crudest" and

most sincere form that is oral tales, with a people's circumstances of existence or "social class" continues to be a fertile approach to oral tales. According to Anatoly Liberman, Propp might have been under pressure to produce a dialectic for the production and interpretation of folktales after the triumph of the Bolshevik revolution (xii). As the longings of the oppressed reflected in historical folktales were no longer relevant to the socialist system installed, and as there was no more a class struggle to justify a continuous production or reception of folktales, historical materialism seemed to be a safe and productive tool for folktale analysis. Nevertheless, the result was surprisingly beneficial to students of folklore. As Propp contends:

Historical study should show what happens to old folklore under new historical conditions, and trace the appearance of new formations . . . the inherited folklore comes into conflict with the old system that created it and denies this system. It does not deny the system directly but rather the images created by it, transforming them into their opposites or giving them a reverse, disparaging, negative coloring. The once sacred is transformed into the hostile, the great into the harmful, evil, or monstrous . . . Folklore formations arise not as a direct reflection of life . . . but out of the clash of two ages or of two systems and their ideologies. (11)

In 60s and 70s Iran there were enough reasons to *reproduce* folktales and that was exactly what authors like Samad Behrangi did: they rewrote inherited folklore that came into conflict with the old feudal system that had created the original. These new tales negated both the old system and the motifs created by it, and transformed the motifs into their opposites by

giving the tales a socialist hue. On the one hand, “Oldooz and the Crows” has the fatalist realism typical of the literature of the era: A seven year old from a poor working class family in a small town in Azarbaijan suffering in the hands of a cruel stepmother and a impassive father, Oldooz spends daydreaming about a beloved doll that the stepmother has gotten rid of. Social disillusionment, cultural dogma and superstitious religiosity are at the core of the story, while the pessimism that signifies the realism of the time is absent from Behrangi’s tale. Partly because of the magical elements that add a layer of hopefulness to the story, and partly because, written for children by an educator, the author was quite cognizant of the language that he used when addressing children. Mocking sacred rituals , poking at the street wisdom of the ordinary man _the otherwise idealized masses_, cursing destiny and the unjust life that it delivers, attacking nature with its harsh winters and unfriendly dogs, and most importantly, judging the country that quietly accepts misery are the themes that Behrangi creates. Despite its touching simplicity, “Oldooz and the Crows,” as an example of pre-revolutionary children’s tales, gives the mature reader an anxious awareness of direct ideological drilling by the narrator. This duality, I contend, deeply affected the young Iranian readers of the decisive years preceding the 1979 revolution. Far from fixing the multi-faceted meaning of the uprising, reading such a historic phenomenon through a small children’s story, pinpoints the relationship between the symbolic and the real, the reader and the writer, and the ironic formation of hegemony that popular writers consciously or unconsciously imposed on the social order/disorder of 60s and 70s Iran. Banned soon after the victory of the 1979 revolution, the question of what elements of the tale caused the Islamic government to dismiss the tale as sacrilegious and a deviation of the enforced new social order will be discussed in later chapters.

The tale also reads as a children's fairytale and a Cinderella variant where little Olddooz living with her sincere but disengaged father and a mean and nosy step mother is constantly locked up or doing chores. Olddooz finds solace in the company of crows despised for –among other things- stealing the soap that is customarily left on the edge of the *hoze* – the small deep washbasin and the centerpiece in most traditional Iranian courtyards. Speaking the language of animals, being clever enough to escape from her daily confinement, joining forces with another young person, and soaring through air like a bird are motifs that recur in other similar tale types. In fact, without the magical elements, Olddooz's story would be too gloomy of a read, a stylistic feature of the realism that Behrangi's other writers at the time produced sometimes successfully, and many times unsuccessfully. The magical elements, however, neither cover up the violence that is established throughout the tale nor lead to the happily ever after that concludes most Cinderella variants. In one Iranian variant of the Cinderella tale, Mah Pishani the beautiful "Moon Forehead" initiates her trespassing by pickling her mother in a jar of vinegar as soon as she starts her education at a religious school run by a deceiving headmistress who is prying upon Mah Pishani's father (Khazayee, Vol 6: 135-143). Convinced by the teacher to kill her mother, she drowns her mother in a barrel of vinegar only to realize her mistake as the teacher becomes the stepmother from hell. Her transgression of submerging her mother in vinegar, a popular preservative in Iranian cooking, leads to the mother's continuous presence as she keeps looking after Mah Pishani throughout her quest. As a combination of Aarne-Thompson 480 "The Kind and the Unkind Girls," and 510 "Cinderella," "Mah Pishani" has many violent motifs or minimal narrative units, and formulaic functions that move the plot forward with culturally familiar constants and variables. Violence, for example, as a familiar feature in many Iranian oral tales, opens "Mah

Pishani” with the heroine throwing her own mother in a barrel of vinegar. The horrifying act of matricide may be justified as the vinegar is a traditional Iranian preservative hence the cleverness of Mah Pishani who tries to “preserve” and keep her mother intact despite being beguiled by her tutor to kill her. In fact, the day after the mother is drowned, a golden cow comes out of the jar letting Mah Pishani know that the animal is the incarnated mother protecting her from the cruelties of the stepmother. Depending on the local culture where the story is told, there are a few variants of Mah Pishani, but the transgressive actions of a young girl who becomes enchanted with the role of the stepmother as a teacher, and the girl’s docile submission to her authority play an integral part in this version pointing to the widespread distrust of widows, belief in feminine treachery, condemnation of the female pursuit of literacy, and the poignancy of power relations in the culture. Nevertheless, these negative connotations have economic justifications and materialistic reasonings in both Iranian and universal traditions. Absence of social welfare for the majority, specifically women, who as daughters inherit only half as much as their brothers, and as widows inherit only one-eighth of a husband’s movable assets, are perhaps cultural specificities, but collective distrust of womanhood, fear of the power that comes with literacy, and most importantly, the possible independence achieved through literacy from the domestic role of a daughter, a wife and a mother, are the universal themes in most folktales, or as Propp argues, the art-form of the lower strata of most class-based societies:

Folklore is, first and foremost, the art of oppressed classes, both peasants and workers,” and we could add women to the category as well . . . identical forms of production in material culture give rise to identical or similar social institutions, to

similar tools, and, in ideology, to the similarity of forms and categories of thought, religion, rituals, languages, and folklore. (5, 7)

Following the cross-cultural pattern of a motherless girl suffering in the hands of a step mother and leaving a wretched life behind by marrying a prince who recognizes her by the magical power of a gold shoe that fits, in one Persian variant, studied by Margaret Mills, while the picture of the moon beautifully shines on Mah Pishani's forehead, the stepsister grows a donkey's penis on her forehead. A donkey's penis, in addition to being used as a curse word all over Iran with its load of sexual overtone, symbolizes the carnal character of the abhorred step sister in contrast to the innocent and ethereal Mah Pishani. In 1978, Margaret Mills studied the story through the lenses of a ritualistic ceremony of collective stew making by women in the village of Dizbad in the south-east of Khorasan. During the ceremony, the tale of Mah Pishani is performed by chanting, and the stepsister's grotesqueness is mocked and scorned. Mill's points about the socio-cultural reasons behind the general loathing of the stepmother and daughter by the female reader/audience are noteworthy. Because the teacher has found herself a new husband by treachery against another female member of the society, Mah Pishani's mother, she is loathed and punished by the phallic symbol that grows on her daughter's forehead. In addition, the veil, which, as Mills contends, is a vehicle of disguise hence mobility and power for the female members of the society, cannot cover the protruding male genitalia. Symbolizing masculinity, the penis disfigures the stepdaughter by turning her into a man thus unwanted among women, pointing to the significance of female solidarity in a patriarchal society, or as Alan Dundes observes, "female role anxieties in a society that is famous, or infamous, for its male chauvinism" (181). Unlike Mah Pishani, the stepsister proves herself to be deceitful and

untrustworthy by stealing jewels from the old woman living at the bottom of the well, by refusing to clean the woman's room in the well, and by offending her as she refuses to brush the woman's filthy hair (Khazaii, 135-43). In effect, although Mah Pishani has committed the ultimate crime of female betrayal through matricide, she has redeemed herself by dutifully following all the orders of the old woman in the well and not touching the jewels that she could easily take.

"Oldooz and the Speaking Doll," the second story in Behrangi's collection, and the background story to Oldooz's adventures with the crows, is perhaps intentionally positioned late to raise the readers' empathy even more. In this tale, the Cinderella functions are reproduced in a more profound way. Not only does Oldooz speak to the family cow, but soon after the stepmother becomes suspicious of the magical powers of the cow, she orders her husband to kill it. Cooking the meat as a medicinal stew for her pregnancy cravings, the stepmother cannot eat the meat, whereas, Oldooz fully enjoys it. Poignantly, however, Behrangi reverses this function by letting Oldooz eat the cow's meat whereas in the folk version of the tale, Mah Pishani is advised not to touch the meat that everybody else seems to enjoy, and to instead bury the cow's bones in the courtyard. On the day when Mah Pishani is ordered to stay home while everyone else is leaving for a wedding, the bones work their magic so that she can attend the party wearing a regal dress and gold shoes, riding a splendid white horse while backyard chickens finish her chores. Later in the tale, when the prince comes to find the owner of the lost gold shoe, the same chickens let the prince know where she is hidden by singing a song about the whereabouts of Mah Pishani. Although in both the classical and modern versions of the story, birds play a significant role in helping the heroine, Behrangi makes sure to defamiliarize his story even more by replacing homely chickens with outcast crows. In effect, his modern variant of the famous

Aarne-Thompson Cinderella tale type has little left of the playfulness that characterizes this classic. Despite the archetypal casting of characters and the universality of their magical quests, most of his tales are so ideologically charged that they assume an active role in raising a generation of skeptic radicals.

Behrangi's readers embrace his magical accounts of a necessary uprising that will soon overturn the political destiny of their country only to yields an ideological state in discord with the paradigm that their childhood reads assumed. If the endings of "The Dove-Flying Bald" and "Oldooz and the Crows" are vague and undecided, could it be that a happy ending was to Behrangi, even more far-fetched than reproducing a magical folktale? Before the 1979 revolution, most of Behrangi's tales had an ambivalent reception by the authorities. Strangely enough, the state published his tales, and even produced a couple of them for the children's radio programs. The state's simultaneous celebration and condemnation of Iranian writers was a paradoxical routine with a most frightening effect. After the revolution, however, the ban on fairytales that by definition hinted at sacrilegious themes included the "socialist writings" of prominent writers and poets like Eshqi, Hedayat, Mofid and Behrangi.

Propp's *Morphology of the Folktale* breaks down the plot of folktales into thirty one units of action or "functions" that are a constant in most folktales. Although not all the functions are necessarily present in all folktales, they do follow a linear pattern and presuppose one another. Oldooz's story is not a "pure" folktale as the orality that presupposes folktales is absent in this narrative, but it follows the stylistic features of the other popular "oral" tales that folkloristics, in its Proppian formalism, distinguishes as the scientific law of folktale structure. The formulaic functions of Oldooz's adventures is a disguise that hides the sophisticated symbolism of her tale behind the familiar rhythm of a children's story:

1. Absentation: A family member who is the usually enemy goes away: Olddooz's stepmother goes to the public bath.
2. Interdiction: The hero is banned: Olddooz is locked in a room.
3. Violation: The hero breaks the rules: Olddooz speaks to the crows, feeds them and most importantly, leaves the confinement.
4. Reconnaissance: The villain snoops into the hero's escapades: The stepmother is suspicious of Olddooz's carefree behavior.
5. Delivery: The villain gets information about the hero: The stepmother guesses that Olddooz is transgressing and is up to mischief.
6. Trickery: the villain attempts to make the hero fail: The stepmother brings in the dog to watch Olddooz, but Yashar helps her kill the dog.
7. Complicity: The hero unwittingly helps the villain: Olddooz inadvertently causes the death of both Mr. Crow and his mother by making the stepmother so angry that she orders her husband, Olddooz's dad, to kill the crows.
8. Villainy: The villain brings harm to the hero and others: the stepmother causes harm to Olddooz and the crows.
9. Mediation: The hero begins the ultimate quest to fulfill the desire: Olddooz's adventures to free herself from boundaries.
10. Departure: The hero leaves home: Olddooz and Yashar go to the land of crows to live happily ever after.

With an absent mother and out of touch father, Olddooz is stuck with a typical motif of a folktale stepmother who would do anything to have her gone. As Olddooz finds solace in the company of an unlikely bird, a crow, with whom she can communicate in its language, the bird's wellbeing becomes her number one priority. Soon, Olddooz's magical adventures become complicated as the harsh realities of Olddooz's life interfere with her quest. The parallel lives of Olddooz and the crows lead to a true friendship that concludes with a vengeful episode led by the crows and a fantastic voyage for Olddooz and her young companion Yashar. Although Behrangi leaves the story unfinished and the reader wondering about the conclusion of the adventures of Olddooz and Yashar, he includes the background story in the second chapter of the collection, "Olddooz and the Speaking Doll" where parallelism, repetition, simplicity of structure and the vernacular language of narration as the four major stylistic components of oral tales mark the story as a modern folktale. Just like the adventures of Olddooz and the crows, the second story is filled with poignant socialist metaphors and sharp political poetics. With an even more elaborate description of the poverty that dominates the lives of Olddooz and Yashar, Behrangi leaves little to imagination as he includes glimpses at the daily routine of child laborers who spend their days weaving carpets:

يك روز ياشار همچنان كه پشت دار قالی نشسته بود دفه می زد فکری به
خاطرش رسید. او فکر کرده بود كه عروسك همقد اولدوز است و بنابراین می شود از
لباسهای اولدوز تن عروسك هم کرد. از این فکر چنان خوشحال شد كه شروع کرد به آواز
خواندن. از شعرهای قالیبافان می خواند. بعد دفه را زمین گذاشت و كارد را برداشت. همراه
ضربه های كارد آواز می خواند و خوشحالی می كرد. چند لحظه بعد بچه های دیگر هم با او دم
گرفتند و فضای نیمه تاریك و گرد گرفته كارخانه پر شد از آواز بچه های قالیباف:

رفتم نبات بخرم
تو استکان بندازم
در جیبم دهشاهی هم نداشتم
پس شروع به ادا و اطوار کردم

دکاندار سنگ یک چارکی را برش داشت
و زد سرم را شکافت
خون سرم بند نمی آمد
پس برادرم را صدا زدم

One day while sitting at the carpet mount and knitting, Yashar came up with an idea. He thought that as the doll was as big as Oldooz, she could be dressed up in Oldooz's clothes. He became so excited about the solution that he started singing. He sang the carpet makers' songs. He put the needle on the floor and picked up the knife. He was singing to the knock of the knife and cheering up. A few moments later the other kids joined him and soon the dim and dusty space of the factory was filled with the song of carpet weaving children:

I went to buy rock candy
To throw into my (tea) cup
I didn't even have a penny in my pocket

So I started mimicking and gesturing

The shopkeeper picked up the quarter stone

And hit and cracked my head

The bleeding of my head would not stop

So I called my brother (104-105)

In his cognitive reading of nationalist narratives, Hogan points to three universal prototypes of heroic, sacrificial and romantic metaphors that arouse acknowledgment and empathy in not only the target audience but the general audience as well. The heroic structure in narratives that can be read as allegories of nationalism, involves the courageous acts of one or more individuals in a group to store or restore power. The sacrificial prototype in nationalist narratives presents the necessity of bloodshed for the community that has some how sinned. In order to restore normalcy and to find redemption, an important member of the group is killed and becomes a symbolic martyr. Finally, the romantic narrative prototype involves a love story in which lovers struggle to unite (192-194). In Behrangi' tale, not only does the romantic prototype of love for the nation present itself in the love between Oldooz and Yashar, but also the sacrificial and heroic prototypes of martyrdom are celebrated through the bloody death of the leader of the crows, Nanny Crow, and Oldooz's daring actions all through the tale. story. As a reminder to the reader to be vigilant about the "cause," the narrator candidly states his expectations from his young readers through the bold heading that reads like a direct call to

action. The readers, young enough to still be on pacifiers⁶⁴, are old enough to rebel against the adults who continue to appease them with the calming lure of binkies:

پستانکها را دور بیندازید!

به یاد دوستان شهید و ناکام⁶⁵

Throw away the Pacifiers!

In the Memory of the Martyred and Friends (59).

The symbolic meaning of the pacifier to Behrangi's generation is obvious to the readers. In fact, as discussed earlier, the two types of anomalies within the Iranian society were frequently portrayed with the same poetic language and elevated to a parallel romantic status. Just like most other failings of Shah's autocratic regime, joining an underground armed militia and becoming a drug addict were believed to be directly caused by his undemocratic policies. In the aftermath of sacrificial act of killing the dog and flying away to the land of the crows, the leader of the group, Old Nanny Crow tosses the pacifier that once belonged to Oldooz and makes a declaration:

ننه بزرگ دنبال حرفش را گرفت: اما این "پستانک" را دور می اندازیم. برای اینکه آن را زن بابا برای اولدوز خریده بود که همیشه آنرا بمکد و مجال نداشته باشد که حرف بزند و درد دلش را به کسی بگوید. اولدوز پستانک خود را شناخت. همان که داده بود به "ننه کلاغه". ننه

⁶⁴ The saying !هنوز پستونک میخوره! or "he is still on a pacifier," is a sarcastic response to a young person who pretends to be an adult.

⁶⁵ The clause is missing from some published versions during the Pahlavi era,

بزرگ پستانك را انداخت پایین. کلاغها هلهله کردند. ننه بزرگ گفت: زن بابا "ننه کلاغه" را کشت ، "آقا کلاغه" را ناکام کرد، اما یاشار و اولدوز آنها را فراموش نکردند. پس، زنده باد بچه هایی که هرگز دوستان ناکام و شهید خود را فراموش نمی کنند !کلاغها بلند بلند قارقار کردند. اولدوز و یاشار دست زدند و هورا کشیدند.

We throw away this “pacifier” because Dad’s wife had bought it for Oldooz so that she would always suck on it and not have time to speak and tell others about the pains in her heart. . . Dad’s wife killed “Nanny Crow,” slayed “Mr. Crow,” but Yashar and Oldooz did not forget them. Thus long live children who never forget their slayed and martyred friends! (59-60)

Earlier in the story, Mr. Crow recounts his “executed” mother’s statement that could very well echo the maxim of leftist groups:

ای زن بابای نفهم تو خیال می کنی که کلاغها از دزدی خوششان می آید؟ اگر من خورد و خوراک داشته باشم که بتوانم شکم خودم و بچه هایم را سیر کنم مگر مرض دارم باز هم دزدی کنم؟ . . شکم خودتان را سیر می کنید خیال می کنید همه مثل شما هستند؟

Oh, unintelligent stepmom, do you suppose that crows like stealing? If I have food and provisions to be able to fill up my and my children’s

stomachs, am I sick to steal again? . . . You fill up your stomachs, and you think everyone is like you! (27)

Finally, introducing a parallel universe in which the reality on the ground has the power to fly, Oldooz and Yashar fly to the City of Crows, where, we are told, millions of crows live in full harmony:

کلاغها هلهله می کردند و می رفتند.

می رفتند به شهر کلاغها.

می رفتند به جایی که بهتر از خانه "بابا" بود.

می رفتند به آنجا که زن بابا نداشت.

The crows were yowling and going.

Going to the City of Crows.

Going to the place that was better than "dad's" house.

Going to the place that had no "dad's wife." (59)

In order to reassert the "truth" of the story, Behrangi includes a letter signed by twenty eight Azari school children who had read the story before its publication and "did not want to keep quiet" about the ordeal of Oldooz and Yashar (61). The letter is addressed to

“friends” of Olddooz and Yashar and bursts with an innocent affirmation of solidarity with the two young heroes. The letter, we are told, is written by a group of 6th graders whose native Azeri Turkish shows through the simple and short sentence structures that urgently petition for their heroes’ triumph and declare their solidarity with the two lost friends:

به دوستان الدوز سلام داریم. هر که از الدوز خبری برای ما بیاورد مژده می دهیم.
ما نگران کلاغها یاشار و الدوز هستیم. . . ما میخواهیم ننه ها مثل ننه کلاغه باشند.
ننه کلاغه مادر بود. ما مادر را دوست داریم. ننه کلاغه با شوهرش دوست بود. می
خواهیم ننه ما با بابایمان دوست باشد. ما خیال می کنیم آقا کلاغه و الدوز و یاشار رفته
اند به دعوا. دعوا کنند. با باباها. زن باباها. ما به یاشار تیر و کمان درست خواهیم
کرد. . . ما به الدوز کفش و لباس خواهیم داد. ماهیها را خواهیم دزدید. عنکبوت ها
را جمع خواهیم کرد. آقا کلاغه مژده خواهد آورد. در جنگ پیروز خواهد شد. یاشار
دست الدوز را خواهد گرفت. خواهند آمد. الدوز مادری خوب خواهد شد و یاشار بابای
خوب. ما در عروسی آنها خواهیم رقصید. ما نگران هستیم. نگران همه شان. می
خواهیم برویم کمک آنها. می خواهیم آنها از شهر کلاغها زود برگردند.

Greetings to friends of Olddooz. Whoever brings us news from
Olddooz will have a reward. We are worried about the crows,
Yashar and Olddooz . . . We want mams to be like Nanny Crow.
Nanny Crow was a mother. We love the mother. Nanny Crow
was friends with her husband. We want our mams to be friends with
our dad. We think Mr. Crow, Olddooz and Yashar have gone to a fight.
To fight. With dads, dads’ wives. We will make Yashar a bow and arrow.

. . . We will give Oldooz shoes and clothes. Will steal the fish.
Will collect spiders. Mr. Crow will bring good news. Will win in
the war. Yashar will take Oldooz's hand. They will come. Oldooz
will be a good mother and Yashar a good dad. We will dance in their
wedding. We are worried. Worried about all of them. We want to go to
their help. We want them to come back soon from the City of Crows. (61)

The risky business of spreading communist slogans did not escape authorities as the prohibition and prosecution of such radical discourses made them a popular trend in a variety of artistic productions, and the most anticipated theme for an audience who found all oppositional tunes pleasing. In fact, the old popular folktales and personae were now viewed with anticipation of a radical political message. How could the readers of Behrangi interpret his tales otherwise? Authors like Behrangi rewrote Iran's popular tales to engage their readers politically, that they believed most folktales to be already politically charged, and that a revolutionary generation was being encouraged to look at literature politically and to take action accordingly (<http://www.siahkal.com/publication/Samad/A.%20Behrang.pdf>).

The unexpected drowning of Behrangi at the age of 29 in Aras River had a profound impact upon a distrusting generation of readers to take the political undertone of his stories as the words of the scripture. Many Iranian intellectuals reinforced the incident as a political murder by SAVAK, but the sudden death of a leftist author, would nevertheless raise him to the revered status of martyrdom without hesitation at such a tumultuous time in the political history of Iran. Just like my cousin the son of two Fadayi leaders whose father was

executed by Shah and whose mother spent most of her adult life in jail, many other new born babies were also named “Samad.”

Behrangi appropriated the metaphors and metonyms of Iranians literature and culture and gave them a historical specificity that put both the tale and its readers in contingency. If thirty years after his death, his martyr stature is still a debatable idea that people write about, even if he drowned in Aras because he simply lost to the extreme force of nature on a sunny day in Azerbaijan, to the Iran of the 60s, martyrdom was more urgent than the daily bread and Behrangi himself was an important co-author of this ideology. In effect, the motifs of revolution and martyrdom in “Oldooz and the Crows” leave no hesitation about the author’s stance as a Marxist revolutionary. Most importantly, the ever increasing pressure of Savak on college students, incarceration and execution of many members of leftist groups, and the ever tightening grip of the regime on all varieties of publications, made the frustrated public cherish the few stories that bypassed censorship, symbolized their disillusionment, and had a therapeutic effect on their anemic social condition. Just like a fairytale, the change that followed the collective wish of the Iranian people was nothing short of magic. Many historians have tried to describe the spell-bound whirlwind that defined the enchanted revolution, but few have expressed it as frankly as Dabashi:

The last years of the Pahlavi regime, between the Arab oil embargo of 1973 and the gathering of revolutionary momentum in 1977, were the longest years of our century ___ for the shah seemed stubbornly intractable, invincible, even (like Jamshid) immortal. He was not. We were all wrong ___ in more ways than one: we were not careful what we were wishing for,

for it came true. (136)

Behrangi's tales represent three stages of historical selection, omission and reproduction of folktales and are prime examples of ideological appropriation of literature in pre-revolutionary Iran. When reproduced in a new narrative form, "ideology" appropriates the fictional, alters it, and inserts a hegemonic message in the old text directed at an audience who is already familiar with the old format and the new discourse, and is eager to participate in the dialogue.

Chapter III

Mofid and Behrangi: Reshaping Motifs to Meet Modernity

اصولاً فولکلور نشاندهنده و منعکس کننده احوال و افکار و آرزوهای طبقات محروم و پایین اجتماع است و گاهی که از بالاترها و اشراف صحبت می شود هنگامی است که طبقات محروم به ناچار ضمن امرار معاش و تحصیل روزی با آن برخورد می کنند.

Basically folklore presents and reflects the feelings and thoughts and dreams of the disfranchised and the lower classes of the society, and when it occasionally speaks of the uppers and the aristocrats, it is when the disfranchised unwillingly have to deal with them for making a living and earning sustenance.

(Behrangi “Characteristics of Heroes in Fairytales of Azerbaijan”)

A Historical Context

The symbolic opposition of folk and gentry in midcentury Iran takes a unique shape as the adjusting Shah leaps onto modernity by challenging the quasi-feudal system of Iranian society through reform acts that eventually lead to his unexpected downfall. In early 60s, Shah introduces the nine sections of The White Revolution as a modernizing force to eradicate

the country's economic, social and cultural ailments. Challenging traditional laws of land ownership in the predominantly agricultural economy of the country long held by the old aristocracy, sending literacy corps to desolate villages, and introducing women's right to vote, are, on the one hand, long overdue, and on the other, a social challenge for a country that seems ill at ease with all the trajectories of its underdeveloped status. The traditional fabric of the society is not the only opponent to Shah's proposals as the elite as well as the majority of the populace mock the monarch's revolutionary ideas. Shah's proposal seem to echo the imposed modernizing rhythm of the first Pahlavi who, in the name of statehood, subjected the nation to two decades of despotism, followed by decisive imperialist maneuvers that brought his son to power, and altered the course of history for Iran. If lack of peace and quiet in Iran's immediate history halted the soul searching that would call tradition and culture to the stand, the warranted procrastination, as Azimi observes, went as far back as the Constitutional Revolution and its promise of the birth of a civil society when vivacious political debates and dialogues ended with an autocratic militarism:

Iran, demands for the creation of democratic accountability had coincided with the necessity of creating a centralized state strong enough to maintain order and security, resist outside pressures, and effect socioeconomic reform. Adherence to constitutional principles and procedures came increasingly to be regarded as subservient to action aimed at addressing the practical and urgent need for political order, administrative effectiveness, and socioeconomic

modernization, which in Iran, in contrast to Turkey or Egypt, had been seriously delayed. (*The Quest* 67)

In the introduction to *The White Revolution* a collection of different reform ideas first published as a collection in December 1966, Shah gives an informed albeit egocentric account of his proposal and its promising trimmings. Although many historians find the source of the demand for reform in the American anxiety over the cold war and the fear of the Soviet-backed socialism that seemed to find a welcoming void within the undemocratic underdeveloped Iran, Shah claims the reform to be an organic albeit interrupted by foreign powers, and an overdue progress for a nation with unique historical characteristics. In effect, despite the hefty self-aggrandizing lingo of the monarch, one can hardly debate the positive topics of the text. Nevertheless, the Shah's words were deemed irrelevant as the country was supposedly run by a constitutional government. In effect, the monarch's insistence upon a revolution to be launched led and steered by him sounded more like the revival of an expired regime than a leap forward:

I thank God because right when the historical condition and the international climate have made it possible for me to design and execute such a program, he has trusted me with ruling this country and the people that I respect and love from the bottom of my heart. Today I and my people have an unbreakable bond of hearts and souls that one cannot possibly find it anywhere else in the world. The base of such a bond is not

just my strong intention to sacrifice myself fully for the development and elevation of my country, and not just the trust that through 26 years of tests and turbulences the pure and dutiful people of Iran feel towards their king, but primarily (this bond) is based on the esteem and the spiritual rank of monarchy and the person of the king in Iran which is founded on a very ancient tradition. (4)

In the plan, Shah regularly brushes upon political freedom, democracy and the importance of public involvement in the government, but the judiciousness of his solutions are simultaneously undermined by a patronizing self-promotion, and the civility of his ideas become problematic as he refuses to include any public figure other than himself to be responsible for developing the plan or to mention the demands of the people as an instigator for a reform. More importantly, he dismisses the urgency of political freedom by insisting on the priority of reforming the country's weak economic standing claiming that a country that suffers from economic exploitation is incapable of contemplating politics:

One of the necessities and important characteristics of such a revolution is fulfilling the rule of democratic economy. Basically, a political democracy cannot become a reality unless it is completed with economic democracy. In this economic democracy no exploitive agent should interfere,

whether this exploitation is backed by a person, the government or a group in favor of a minority or a social class. (22)

Restricting the interpretation of democracy and freedom to economic independence and development, Shah ignited a fire that grew in the next two decades and did not yield until 1978 when it burned the country along with its economy, culture and politics in the oxygen of pure ideology. Despite the various interpretations of the monarch's proposals, most historians point to Shah's fatal mistake of dismissing the dignity of Iranians as capable and independent citizens who could choose their political system and well could do without the monarch to be the autocratic leader that he was. In effect, with his insistence on the corruption of the land owning aristocracy whom he accused of plotting against the state as lackeys of foreign powers, one wonders if prioritizing such a historic act as the land reform law was permeated by a fear of the unbending tribal lords and the wealthy land owners than a genuine plan for the betterment of the country's desperate villagers. In fact, soon after the government began buying large portions of land and redistributing them among farmers, the farmers sold their allotted acreages and migrated to the cities in unprecedented numbers gradually building run-down houses on the fringes _the famous "tin houses" that in due time would symbolize the corruption of the Pahlavi regime.

The historic reform law as the most significant and least successful of the monarch's attempts at reforming the country was the muse of many new tales for young writers who built upon the hybridity of classical folktales by reinterpreting them in a new discursive frame that encoded the familiar tales in an unprecedented social context where *the folk* was no

more a typical hardworking villager but an urban underclass ready for a magical quest in the peripheries of a fast developing metropolis.

The White Revolution and the Village

We were wondering, at the time of dividing the acreages in this village, how would they deal with those who do not own a handful of dirt on God's earth and what did they do to the residents of similar villages? Even if they give them land, where do they get the money to buy seed, and forget the tractor, how do they afford a cow to run after from morning to dusk to plow their land? ("Visiting the Villages" 216)

Behrangi took the historically familiar path of a revolutionary writer who benefited from the liberties provided by the authoritarian regime and used them, albeit cautiously, against the regime itself. His gloomy accounts of the poverty stricken rural Iran and the anger that sprung in most of his nonfiction were the learning outcomes of Behrangi the student-teacher-writer. Without the government-sponsored Literacy Corps, public education initiatives, and insistence upon cultural growth, the three categories that Shah had identified as the essential elements of his educational proposal, Behrangi would hardly have the opportunity to be as influential as he was. In fact, the monarch's grievances as expressed in *The White*

Revolution have an eerily similarity to what Behrangi, the voice of many leftist teachers and writers of his generation, identifies as the core problem of the Iranian society. In Shah's words:

If we notice that despite all the efforts made during my father's reign towards developing schools and educating the country's children and youth, and despite continuing and enhancing these efforts during my own kingship, still at the time of the Revolution of Bahman 6th (February 4th Revolution) over eighty percent of our people were illiterate, then we can feel that exactly when developed countries of the world have based their work on more widespread learning and public education, and at the age when everyday more elementary schools and high schools and universities are built in those countries, incompetence and corruption of Iran's governing institutions, along with the ominous influence of reactionary and foreign politics and other violating agents, have degraded our society to such level of ignorance and obliviousness. (*WR* 125)

Juxtaposing the monarch's words in 1963 with Behrangi's criticism of the developmental policies of the Ministry of Education in the same year, illuminates the ironic disconnect between the polar opposites who, in effect, shared comparable grievances against the same public policies:

The same superintendents who have diminished the culture of each district to filth, you see them once gathered in a place with extra compensations and free meals in the name of a conference to discuss why our culture does not improve. The same superintendents whom we discussed earlier. The same one, who is incompetent here and cannot fulfill his duties, will have an even more profound job in the center and will order around his previous boss and, let's say, directs him and issues memos. (*Digging and Delving* 66)

Pointing at the corruption and failure of the governing body in public educations gives the Shah and Behrangi a common ground. Nevertheless, the starting point is where the similarities between the two critics of education end. While the monarch promises a widespread reform, Behrangi is a pessimistic witness to the repeated failures caused by the constant divide between the rulers and the ruled, the upper class and the lower class, and city dwellers and the villagers. The Shah's optimistic policies on improving living conditions in rural communities are in sharp contrast to Behrangi's desolate depiction of the village life as he reports in "Village and the Villager:" To Behrangi, Iran's villagers suffer from a rigid traditionalism enforced by their harsh environment. Not only do they suffer in the hands of vicious lords who have for centuries diminished the farmhands' dignity, but in turn, they have also copied and habituated that cruelty. Behrangi is not afraid to compare peasants to farm animals who only live to serve a purpose; neither is he oblivious to the misogyny and child abuse that make the farmers' lifestyle:

I summarize it in two words: All those delightful and sweet words about strange and unusual lovemaking of the villager at moonlit nights by flowing streams are no more than poetic imagination. The relationship between the village male and female is based on the likelihood of female infidelity, stupidity, belittlement and servitude to men. We know that about seventy five percent of Iranian people are villagers, and from the remaining, city dwelling of many is pressured by poverty, and they have brought the setting of the village to the peripheries of cities and have become sort of citizens. With the same relations and head coverings and dung and galoshes of the village.

Behrangi's criticism of peasant culture parallels his anger at the obliviousness of the government in its irresponsiveness to the grievances of the farmers who, despite being the largest class of the population, are left to fend for themselves ("Visiting the Villages" 222, 243). At a time when agriculture is the country's major mode of production, the harshness of long winters and rainless seasons mock The White Revolution's major initiative of land division and profit sharing. Literacy Corps fail to change the glum routine of village children to whom the mud house called the school is a mile away from their everyday job as a farm labor. Lack of health resources from soap and drinking water to doctors and health centers are a few of the visible inadequacies of the monarchy's implementation of his bravado reform that ends with the villagers' unprecedented exodus to the capital creating a new underclass of migrant workers living in tin houses on the fringes of the country's fast developing urban settings (Behrangi "Digging and Delving 23, Azimi *The Quest* 326). Such problems inspire new motifs, personas

and plots that target inequality. The everyday quests of these alienated heroes and heroines shift to the new and the unfamiliar urban setting, and their once magical fights are now against the political imbalance down spiral stairs, behind locked doors, in the darkest chambers, in the farthest lands, in the farthest times, and right next door in a blind alley in Tehran. Behrangi's "Talkhoon" and Mofid's *City of Tales* are two such urban folktales. Neither tale allows a romantic wistfulness for lost pastoral times or a prophetic vision of a brighter future. Instead, through a satirical interpretation of the shift in the social order of modern Iran, they make a mockery of their traditional society that is home to modern day heroes who save the day amidst arbitrary circumstances that, ironically, do not seem out of place, partly because of the familiar mnemonic devices that create continuity and recognition by framing the new themes.

The White Revolution and the City

We would say to ourselves: If these folks happen to go to Tehran and see the north side with its marble buildings and perfumed half-naked women, what will happen? Would it still not stir the waters? At least, for a while, wouldn't Tehran's enticement make them so dizzy that they think they are dreaming and that there is no place better than this village? Maybe. (Behrangi "Visiting the Villages" 218)

The implementation of the land reform bill led to a substantial shift in the traditional style of land ownership across Iran; however, it did not result in a noticeable agricultural development or socio-economic growth in rural areas. The poverty stricken sharecroppers continued to suffer as new owners of farmland that was in a majority of cases too small to provide for the basic subsistence of a rural family, the farmers did not have access to water wells or they relied on dry farming and hence mere luck for sustenance, and with the speedy industrial change that was the monarch's ultimate strategy, rural life was simply too harsh to keep the farmers from migrating to the cities as day laborers, bazaar hands and factory workers. Most importantly, as Azimi contends, the clergy who for centuries had supported the old aristocracy, relied on the lords for its livelihood, and even owned large acres of land through donations and charities, felt threatened by the monarch's unprecedented moves and continued to stir anger against the regime (*The Quest* 172-3). Through the religious provocation of the clergy, many farmers gave the acquired land back to the lords believing the trading to be a sacrilegious offence. Jumping on any secularist move by the government to call it a threat to Islam, the clerics constantly stirred anger and provoked the religious fervor of the populace.

In the following sections, I analyze Behrangi's "Talkhoon" as a quintessential folktale of the 60s socialist ideology, and Mofid's monumental play *City of Tales* tells the dramatic fabula of an encompassing confusion voiced by wild and domestic animals in a traditional urban setting that is as much out of place as the characters themselves. The play mocks the busy tapestry of autocracy, religion, socialism and democracy each represented by an influential segment of the society; the state, the clergy, the young revolutionary authors and the educated technocrats. Behrangi's "Talkhoon" is a displaced folktale that fast-forwards the

traditional quest of an Iranian heroine, trapped in interlocking chambers of old Iran, to modern anxieties of 1960's.

“Talkhoon” and the Socialist Quest of the Seventh Daughter

As long as there are gentry, there is the folk, and there are folktales that tell the story of a hero's quest who overcomes the injustice in the core of the story. If the tale is that of a princess, she has to endure displacement, alienation, labor, hunger, slavery, immobility and even death. A prince, on the other hand, has to overcome even more obstacles in order to be granted legitimacy to the throne. In most folktales, the reaffirmation of the nobility to their high power is hardly overruled. The folks seldom contemplate dethroning a ruler, and are instead content with imposing a quest on a noble offspring who is destined to lead them to a better future. In other words, most folktales recycle kings and queens hoping the products are more folk friendly. They also take revenge by leaving royal parents blind, depressed, and even dead. In fact, an offspring's trials and turbulences leave their parents with enough torture to provide the folk a life time of tales: folktales.

First published in 1963, under the pseudonym of *Saad Gharanghoosh* in Ahmad Shamlou's literary journal *Ketab-e Haftah (Book of the Week)*, “Talkhoon” is a *kunstmarchen* or an elaborated fairytale adapted from an Azari oral tale “The Tale of *Ahh*,”⁶⁶ and collected by Behrangi and Dehghani. The tale was later published in 1968 in *Talkhoon and a Few Other*

⁶⁶ آه or *Aah* is more or less the equivalent of “sigh or alas” in English. However, the word is used in everyday conversations to indicate a variety of feelings: sadness, longing and even jealousy.

Tales posthumously to Behrangi's death. A typical AT 425 of Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson's "The Search for the Lost Husband," that can be categorized as a primary tale type with variants ranging from the husband being a monster by night and a man by day to a bewitched prince who is condemned to be an animal, the functions in Behrangi's version diligently follow the universal tale-type of AT425:

1. The monster as husband: A daughter asks her father for a gift from a trip, she is captured or seized by a man, and she realizes that she is the bride of a supernatural husband. In "Talkhoon," the youngest daughter of a kind merchant called Talkhoon asks her for a souvenir; *Aah* gives him the gift in exchange for the girl.

2. Loss of the husband: The bride loses her husband because of a careless act such as sharing her secret with others or looking at him or a physical mishap. Talkhoon unintentionally kills the young man by pulling a feather on his side.

3. Search for Husband: The girl begins a quest of unhappy journeys, helps and deceives others. Talkhoon starts her journey of grief and helps others along the way.

5. Recovery of husband: She returns to her husband's estate, disenchanting him or revives him with something that she gained from her adventures. *Aah* brings Talkhoon back to her dead husband; she brings him back to life.

As far as the trajectory of this study is concerned, Behrangi has four main interconnected topics in "Talkhoon:" the ethical bearing of a hero, the sacrificial symbolism of a hero, gender and its role in building a hero, and heroism as a duty of all Iranians. I will consider them in turn, but first a synopsis of the story:

The heroine Talkhoon the seventh daughter of a merchant, his youngest and his favorite, is at odds with her older sisters who spend their days in fulfilling their carnal desires. As

the merchant sets off on a business trip he asks his asks his daughters for a list of what they want as a souvenir, hoping that for once, Talkhoon would ask for a palpable physical present. Of course, other than Talkhoon, everyone asks for an expensive souvenir: the oldest daughter expects gold and silver bath tub, the second daughter asks for gold and silver shoes, the third asks for slaves, the fourth wants jewels, the fifth asks for silk pantyhose, and the sixth desires a combination of the first five gifts. When the merchant starts on his journey, he is confident that Talkhoon's expectedly unusual demand for "*del o' jegar*" a heart and a liver, won't take long to find, but as the older sisters' list takes too long to fulfill, the merchant's' last minute search for "a heart and a liver" in the town's butcher shops leads nowhere. *They all sell mirrors now!* Suddenly, as the merchant takes a deep breath and sighs, a strange spirit appears and gives him a heart and liver only to take Talkhoon. The merchant takes the souvenir and forgets about the unusual promise for the trade. Excited to get the heart and the liver, Talkhoon cuts her chest open and adds the bloody organs to her bleeding chest; just then, a young man appears, announcing that he is sent by Sigh to take Talkhoon away. Pleased with her handsome suitor, she jumps on the white stallion that takes the two lovers to a world apart. If for most other fairytales, the adventures sum up with the youngest daughter finding a princely suitor, for Behrangi's heroin, the journey has just begun.

As a young and wealthy virgin fleeing the mediocrity of her bourgeois upbringing on a quest to fight villainy and restore virtue, Talkhoon is Behrangi's most memorable folk hero, and arguably, the quintessential revolutionary persona that he expects the Iranian children to copy: a young girl who leaves her family behind and sacrifices not only her comfortable lifestyle but her father's love in order to learn about, live in, and save the "real" world that is on the outside. Talkhoon is the defiant child that the author expects his young readers to copy; the

antihero of most other children's stories. In his critique of the cultural message of Iran's popular children's literature by famous authors like Abbas Yamini Sharif (1919-1989) whose celebrated poems about manners and social conduct appeared in most textbooks at the time, Behrangi explains the necessities for shifting the discourse from training sheltered children who follow the superficial etiquettes and decorous rules of the society to children who question the inequalities around them. As he argues, ethics, and not manners, must be the message of children's literature, and poverty must be exposed as the real cause of *bad* behavior:

The time is already over to limit children's literature to propaganda and indoctrination, to dry and restrictive advice, washing the body and hands and feet, obeying fathers and mothers, listening to grownups, being quiet in front of guests, "wake up at dawn to succeed," "smile so that the world smiles at you," helping the poor in the style and method of charity institutions, and similar things- that the overall and ultimate result of all this is children's remaining ignorant about important and urgent and vital problems of their living environment. . .

Why do we say it is bad to lie? Why do we say it is bad to steal? Why do we say it is preferable to obey fathers and mothers? Why don't we explain to the children the roots and causes of lying and stealing . . . Why do we advertise helping the poor and we never say how that one became "poor" and this one "rich" to blow out his chest and give an insignificant share of his wealth to that poor guy patronizing him like yes, I am an benevolent and charitable man and I always

look after poor and miserable people like you; and by the way, all this is only to please God because you yourself are not worth it.

(“Children’s Literature” 117-119)

The vigilance that Behrangi expects from his readers culminates in *Talkhoon*. An edible herb that grows wildly by rivers and ponds, Talkhoon has a distinct smell and a bitter taste that justifies the name. The word can be syllabically and semantically divided into two words *talkh* (bitter) and *khoon* (blood) On the other hand, *talkh*, in some Persian dialects, means “pool” or “pond,” and *oon* is a preposition that defines attribution and ownership, probably referring to the herb’s habituation by a body of water. The name Talkhoon is an unusual name for a girl because of the sullenness and bitterness of its onomatopoeic sound. Unlike her sisters with names as *Maah Farang*, *Maah Sultan*, *Maah Khorsheed*, *Maah Beygom*, *Maah Molook*, *Maah Logha*⁶⁷ whose high-society two-word names give them an aura of corporal desirability, Talkhoon’s name implies the melancholy that keeps her apart from her joyful sisters and signifies that lack that makes her sigh—a recurring motif throughout the tale. “Talkhoon” is an elaborated folktale or a *kunstmarchen* that compared to her sister tale “The Tale of Sigh,” is has a more complex plot and sophisticated characters; however, the two tales are quite compatible and the readers of “Talkhoon” would hardly recognize or remember the subtle difference between Behrangi’s modernized version and the *original* collected by the author. As AT425 variants, both tales have a heroine with an abrupt transgression, an unexpected desire and a heroic conscience. The girl of “The Tale of Sigh” is unnamed, but to the Behrangi’s readers, she is *Talkhoon* only

⁶⁷ ماه or *Maah* meaning Moon in is the symbol of feminine beauty and is traditionally used in two-word girls’ names.

on a simpler quest. Such metadiscursive practices, prevalent in Behrangi's collections, are arguably a focused undertaking on behalf of a radical socialist who finds the rhythmic voice of oral tales to be an effective medium of communication with lay audiences. In his own words:

I don't know if ordinary literate people remain oblivious to the author's point or hardly grasp it, would this be the author's strength or weakness. But, I do know this that if we believe in "art for the society" and accept that a big part of the society is made up of ordinary people, we cannot ignore them. *Va' Salam*⁶⁸. ("Poetry and Society" 116)

Talkhoon the Sacrificial Heroine

If Talkhoon holds her lover tightly riding the white horse that dashes through ages of darkness and fear, it is because she has *the guts* to break the taboo of eloping, but Behrangi does not leave his readers with such mundane catharsis. Talkhoon's tests and trials begin with her abjection of familial and societal norms, but this self-serving act is only an initiation to sacrificing her soul for *the greater good*. In fact, Behrangi only bullet-points Talkhoon's introductory ordeal that concludes with a brief honeymoon in paradise to pinpoint

⁶⁸ A popular phrase from Arabic that connotes the ending of an action, speech or ordeal: "Done Deal!"

the futility of fulfilling ordinary albeit tabooed instinctive desires. In order for Talkhoon to become a true hero, she first needs to see devastations, learn tricks and suffer lacks in bewitched larger-than-life proportions:

ماه ها و سال ها از دریا های آب و آتش گذشتند، ماه ها و سال ها دره های پر از ددان خونخوار
را زیر پا گذاشتند، ماه ها و سال ها عرق ریختند و از کوه های یخ زده و آتش گرفته بالا رفتند
و از سرازیری های یخ شده و آتش گرفته پایین آمدند. ماه ها و سال ها از بیشه های تیره و
تاریک که صدا های "می کشم، می درم" از هر گوشه ی آن به گوش می رسید، گذشتند. ماه ها
و سال ها تشنگی کشیدند و گرسنگی دیدند، ماه ها و سال ها با هزاران دام و تله روبه رو آمده و
به سلامت در رفتند. . . لیکن تمام این ها در نظر تلخون به اندازه ی یک چشم بر هم زدن طول
نکشید.

For months and years they passed through seas of fire and water, for months and years they trespassed valleys full of bloodthirsty beasts. For months and years they sweated and climbed mountains of fire and ice, and descended burning and frozen slopes. For months and years they passed through dark and dim groves where the sounds of "I kill, I rip" could be heard from every corner. For months and years they saw hunger and suffered thirst, for months and years they came across thousands of traps and snares safely got away. . . however, in Talkhoon's eyes, all of these did not take longer than a blink of an eye. (170-1)

Their happy life as a couple ends the day Talkhoon's lover climbs the apple tree to pick the best apple for her. While admiring his beauty, she sees a feather on his waist; the second she pulls the feather, he falls and dies and makes Talkhoon a wandering widow. Her Proppian "dispatch and departure" after the initial "violation" takes ten long years of eventful enslavements in three episodes of "tests, interrogations and attacks by villains" who have nothing against her and never really hurt her, but hurt others for whom she endangers her life multiple times. Alone in her battles, the magical Sigh never comes to her assistance. In fact, through all of her challenging quests, Talkhoon solves the problems *of others* on her own without expecting a reward. Sigh only shows up after each "victory" to "transfer" her to another location, and after many adventures, back to her sleeping lover who has been asleep for the many years that seem to have passed *in a blink of an eye*.

Although looking for a remedy to bring her man back to life was never the goal of her quest, she finds the magic glue to stick the feather back to his side. This same glue was the potion that an unfaithful wife would use to stick back her husband's head to his body after beheading him every night so that he would not know of her nightly escapades. Now that Talkhoon has proved that she is worth being *the chosen one*, she lives with her lover happily ever after (Propp, 386-7). Nevertheless, Behrangi's concluding words leave his young readers wonder if for the weathered Talkhoon true happiness is an ever-after possibility:

"Talkhoon, why didn't you wake me up? I think I slept too much."

Talkhoon said: "You were not asleep; you were dead. Do you hear me?"

You were dead . . . I have been mourning your loss for ten years."

This glum ending echoes the epigraph from Mehdi Akhavan Sales’ poem “Chavoshi” that Behrangi uses as the epigraph to the story of “Talkhoon.”

I am so heavy heated here
And every melody I see is out of tune.
Let us pack provisions for our journey,
And start on the road of no return;
And see if the sky is the same color everywhere?

Questioning the Persian proverb “wherever you go, the sky is the same color” that implies a tradition of collective submission to destiny or God’s will, Talkhoon braves the passivism and consent that Behrangi and his contemporaries outline as the staple of many of the country’s problems. Talkhoon, Oldooz and Yashar, but also The Little Black Fish _the most famous fish in the history of Iranian letters, and the hero in Behrangi’s most famous work, disclaim their familiar surroundings on a quest for a better alternative. In the words of the Little Black Fish: “I want to know if life really really means that you just come and go in a scratch of a place until you get old and nothing else, or that there is another way to live in the world,” echoing the

author's sullen report in the same year on the poverty of villages of Azarbaijan such as the glum Koosh Safar ("Mahi Siah-e Koochooloo" 326-7):

In one place a shapeless woman is squatting by the wall and sorting the lice off of her bare naked grandchild and the flies have gathered on the child's belly button and he is chewing on a black *tootak* (flute). In another place the men are fighting over water and cussing each other's sisters and mothers . . . and one would wonder how people could hold on to a place like this and say God's grace. ("Visiting the Villages" 231)

In most Iranian folktales, *leaving all behind* or divorcing one's habitual knowledge and familiar setting is an anticipated function that is implied in the mnemonic three-verb structure of *raft-o-raft-o-raft* or "went 'n went 'n went" that make the central action of most fairytales. In effect, the reoccurrence of the linear shift that controls most plots by *raft-o-raft-o-raft* entices Iranian children with the paradox of the necessity of uprooting oneself in a heroic action in order to bring back change. In poems and pop music too "leaving" as self-imposed exile is a recurrent theme and the only solution to the persona's disillusionment with the mundane. In Sohrab Sepehri's (1928-1980) words:

باید امشب بروم.

باید امشب چمدانی را
که به اندازه پیراهن تنهایی من جا دارد بردارم
و به سمتی بروم
که درختان حماسی پیدااست.

I must leave tonight.
I must take the suitcase
that has enough room for the shirt of my loneliness
and take the path
where the trees of myths appear. ("Call of Beginning" 390)

To Sepehri's poetic voice, the mundane becomes unendurable when he sees the girl next door studying *Feqh*⁶⁹ under an inimitable elm tree. The typical picture takes an atypical frame as the poet questions the relevance of religion to an adolescent girl oblivious to the beauty of the tree as she substitutes religious knowledge for *natural instincts*:

من به اندازه یک ابر دلم می گیرد
وقتی از پنجره می بینم حوری
دختر بالغ حمسایه
پای کمیاب ترین نارون روی زمین
فقه می خواند.

⁶⁹ فقه or Islamic law, but here the poet refers sarcastically to any Islamic or Koanic text.

My heart becomes as clogged as a cloud⁷⁰

When I see out the window Hoori⁷¹

the pubertal ⁷² daughter of the neighbor

By the foot of the most exceptional elm tree on the earth

Reads *Feqh*.

The Iranian Heroine and the Power of Passivity

In Behrangi's tales, displacement is usually an involuntary move by the protagonist whose alienation is the result of his or her defiance against the familiar and the comfortable. Movement and removal, however, are one, and as the protagonist goes through dispatch and exit, the society joins in to disown, displace and isolate him or her. In other words, the voluntary exit of the protagonist is a paradoxical disobedience of decreed alienation and imposed exile. Exclusion and segregation seem to follow two empowering lacks: femininity and youth. Young female personae like Talkhoon and Oldooz take advantage of their culturally imposed voicelessness, go on a silence strike and as social outcasts, disclaim their surroundings and run free. Just like Oldooz, Talkhoon has an eerie silent gaze that is not out of desperation, but of stubborn determination that separates her from a familiar sea of other voiceless women around her. In the beginning of Talkhoon's tale, "it is as if she believes herself to be from another land, or has an eye for something that is beyond these hecks and pecks." Her silence

⁷⁰ Dark and dense like a cloud

⁷¹ A Proper name after the beautiful heavenly nymphs in the Koran www.aryanpour.com

⁷² The word بالغ denotes puberty and adulthood, but connotes wisdom as well as sexual maturity.

does not imply indifference, apathy, domesticity or femininity; neither does her gaze invite pity. Talkhoon is as fearless as a fairy and as watchful as a slave. In order for her to win her tasks, she needs to be an alien, the *other* who objectively looks and listens. In addition to the power of her gendered identity, youth and physical vulnerability are important factors that ironically benefit Behrangi's heroes. Talkhoon, Oldooz, Yashar and even The Little Black Fish win their radical quests because their youth makes their presence a dismissible irrelevancy. Presumed innocent and incapable, the youth are the unlikely heroes who successfully threaten the establishment; a memo that Behrangi seems to covertly pass on to his young readers.

As expected of a girl her type, Talkhoon has to undergo an initiatory ceremony to retrieve her reward, and "remedy" the "lack" of a loving man, but unlike most other AT425 female types who are ousted, she initiates her dispatch and asks Sigh to sell her in the slave bazaar. Her ordeal goes beyond her personal interest and includes other people's "lacks" so much so that the reader forgets why Talkhoon started her journey in the first place. While she could have played victim like Merveilleuse, passive-aggressive like Princess Zeineb, masochistically patient like Beauty, or strictly self-serving like the third sister in "The Singing Springing Lark," Talkhoon chooses to roll up the sleeves of her black widowhood dress and save the world. In his analysis of Propp's functions, Levi-Straus hints at the possible fork after the first seven functions, and the hero's subsequent actions and reactions:

There are now two possible paths. The victim may become the hero (heroine) of the tale, or the hero may be distinct from the victim and come to his or her rescue . . . a choice is offered between two sequences: (1) appeal to the

seeker-hero, the hero's departure on a quest; or (2) dismissal of the victim-hero and perils to which he or she is exposed. . . . Several tales end with the hero's return and his subsequent marriage. Other tales go on to what Propp calls another "move." Everything begins anew--- villain, hero, benefactor, tests, supernatural help—after which the narrative follows another direction. (171)

Talkhoon is enslaved three times, exposes three villains, saves three victims, and finds three eligible suitors. It is at the end of this triadic repetition that Talkhoon finds the magic glue and asks Sigh to take her back to her unconscious lover. Syntactically, the three episodes work as one task that she has to undertake to achieve recognition and recovery. The three stand in polar opposition to her violation. Semantically, however, each episode is a fairytale in its own with separate personae and functions. While in the big picture she has to put the pieces back together, in each small one, she has to put the pieces together and find a solution—not a resolution. In other words, while she is the cause of the big dysfunction, she is the redeemer of the small ones. In each episode, there is an unsuspecting group of people versus a villain in disguise and a deceitful trusted member of the "in circle." Talkhoon cannot just kill the villain and let the victims free; she has to prove their villainy by providing evidence because, the villain, unlike herself, is an insider hence much more trusted by the community. In the first episode, she is bought by the key-holder of a rich man -a missing rich man- for the man's mother. She finds out that the son is held captive by a favorite female slave whom they had respectfully wed to the cook:

The cook's wife opened a door; there was a room; she opened another door; there was another room; and so she opened forty doors and she passed through forty rooms until she reached a flower patch with a pool of clear water in the center. The cook's wife opened up the drainage. There was a rock in the bottom of the pool. She removed it. There was a staircase much spiral and deep. She descended; Talkhoon too followed. They passed though many damp cellars until they reached a chamber where a young man in chains hung from the ceiling . . . The cook's wife said, "Boy, this time around, will you make your head one with me⁷³?"

Demanding sex, the woman repeats her question three times flogging the man every time she hears the word "No." After saving the young man and rejecting his affection, Talkhoon is purchased by a miller whose pet dragon covers the source of the village water. Pretending to be desperate, he tricks the villagers into thinking that the dragon has to eat a girl a day in order to let the water flow; whereas, he actually bribes the dragon with young girls to keep it there as an obstruction. Talkhoon, as his slave, is responsible for bringing the dragon its food. She tricks the dragon three times until it falls into a ditch and the water starts running towards the wheat fields of good. In her third journey, she is sold to an infertile merchant whose adulterous wife cuts off his head every night only to glue it back again after her return from erotic escapades in a large chamber buried deep in a graveyard:

⁷³ سر خود را با کسی یکی کردن means putting heads side by side and connotes sleeping with each other and having sex.

Around midnight, Talkhoon opened her eyes to a noise. She saw that the merchant's wife woke up, took a sword from the closet, cut her husband's head ear to ear and put it on the shelf. Then she took out her best clothes from a chest and wore them. She put on seven layers of make-up and became as beautiful as a bride. She left home – Talkhoon followed- and reached a cemetery. Seven tombs across, seven tombs to the right, and seven tombs to the left; she knocked on the eighth tombstone with a rock. It opened like a door. She went in and Talkhoon followed. They descended a staircase and reached a big salon. Forty vagabonds with ear to ear mustaches sat around smoking opium. (184)

Exposing the unfaithful wife and saving the husband from a life of torture and treachery, makeup Talkhoon's quest. As soon as she refuses the merchant's marriage proposal, she is transferred back to her lover's garden with the spell of a deep sigh, and the ultimate prize of magic glue.

Although as a socialist, Behrangi seems preoccupied with binaries, the polarity that advances the story of Talkhoon elevates her above the limitations of gender and class. To begin with, Talkhoon is in an intellectual conflict with her sisters. To oppose six women (instead of the typical one step-sister or the usual two blood sisters) is a great burden that only she can handle. This initial difference reveals in her indifference to luxury commodities, childish joyfulness, and most importantly, obligations of kinship. Like real life *heroes and heroines* of the author's era, Amir Parviz Pooyan⁷⁴, Hamid and Simin Tavakoli⁷⁵, Saeed Aryan⁷⁶, Behrooz and Ashrafi

⁷⁴ Amir Parviz Pooyan (1946-1971)

⁷⁵ Hamid Tavakoli (-1972); Simin Tavakoli (-1974)

⁷⁶ Saeed Aryan (-1972)

Dehghani⁷⁷ and many other members of militant groups who rejected societal conventions for a *higher purpose*, Talkhoon has to do without. In fact, Talkhoon is supposed to lose her lover in order to begin her “ideological” mission with no strings attached. Whereas in the orchard she is safe, passive and domestic similar to life in her father’s house, and a non-hero who suffers by losing her man just like she caused pain to her father by leaving him, she is a hero in the three quests that follow. In three-part journey as a slave, Talkhoon is neither confusing nor confused; instead, she is determined _even cunning_ leaving the adventures a mythical dragon slayer and a typical folktale hero. Of course, her journey of self-discovery and breaking casts is foreshadowed as from the very beginning, she asks her father for “a heart and a liver;” the symbolic words that in the Iranian culture connote masculine bravery and manly valor. Talkhoon transforms the typical folktale motifs to revolutionary metaphors that become even more explicit and severe every time she is sold for the price of “a tear drop and a drop of blood.” In fact, the irony of her pacifist nature causing such harsh punishments for the villains is reminiscent of the astonishment of the family and friends every time they would learn about the arrest of their timid sons and daughters accused of armed robbery, terrorism or hostage taking in the 60s Iran: Talkhoon’s first victory leaves a female villain tied by her hair to the tail of a mule “so that every piece of her is taken by a rock or a dog.” This, of course, comes only after the woman is made to confess by feeding on her own toes! In her second adventure, she kills a dragon and its owner, and in the third, she helps a husband kill an unfaithful wife. To Talkhoon there is no horror or honor in flesh. Unlike most other fairytale princesses and heroines, she is made of and gradually gets accustomed to guts and blood. Talkhoon does not honor kinship and clan, and is instead ready, like a radical revolutionary, to sacrifice all for the good of others; just as many of Behrangi’s contemporaries did.

⁷⁷ Behrooz Dehghani (1939-1971); Ashraf Dehghani (1949-)

A Structural Analysis of “Talkhoon”

While most folk heroes and heroine are content with abstracts, Talkhoon needs the concrete. Her tears, trials and sighs do not resurrect her man; the potion that she obtains in her final task does: “she dipped the feather in the water and rubbed it on his waist. The young man sneezed and woke up.” For every unknown, Talkhoon finds a known. For every mystery she brings evidence, and for every crime she calls for a witness. While the third tale tells the story of a man oblivious to infidelity, the middle one is about a people’s desperate surrender to authority, and the first is about the wrongful acceptance of destiny. While the merchant’s wife, the cook’s wife, and the miller betray, the other characters are either too naïve or too submissive, and if it were not for a hero like Talkhoon, the lusty, the greedy and the unfaithful would forever win over the ignorant, the desperate and the fatalist.

Talkhoon does not look like other fairytale princesses and heroines. She is silent and unaffected, her dress is wrinkled, and “like the lost fairies of fairytales” her hair is back and wild.” Although her story has the happy elements of a fairytale as she seems to live in the Garden of Eden where “she laughed, she was happy, she worked and did everything that humans do,” the fast-reached happily-ever-after is soon reversed as Talkhoon’s Eve-like appetite for apples makes the young prince reach up for the best apple baring his side where a small feather seems to be stuck. As she pulls the feather, the man falls “dead” and so her “trickster” adventures begin. The symbolic opposition of high and low moves her story forward, down and up. Talkhoon becomes a slave and the lowest of the low, and witnesses as the cook’s wife descends through the darkness of the underground. The merchant’s wife too goes down to the company of

the underground under the ground, and the miller with a mill downhill and a dragon up the mountain, follows the high/low structure as well: Not only is the dragon tricked to come down to fall in a ditch, but both the miller and his mill are washed down in the flood that he himself once controlled. It is important to note, however, that the high/low and up/down binary oppositions, as the supposed structural components of most folktales would be irrelevant unless attached to the theme. Though Talkhoon's ups and downs, Behrangi challenges our habitual assumptions of high and up as "good" and low and down as "bad" hence questioning social cliché and cultural presuppositions. Talkhoon ascends and descends for a purpose. In her first adventure, as a maid gives her power to freely roam about the many corridors of the mansion that is the setting of her first quest. With an internal ward where the kin-and-the-in _ wives and children, maids, female slaves and a certain group of relatives- are allowed to see women without a head-covering, the external ward is where business meetings and social occasions take place. Only Talkhoon can move about without gossip or permission as she has the power of a young female slave. Next, as the slave of the greedy miller, Talkhoon is burdened with feeding the dragon or being its food if she cannot make the villagers sacrifice their daughters to feed the dragon. Making a plan to drown the dragon in the water that it controls, she liberates the villagers from servitude to the miller who drowns too. Finally, as the adopted daughter of the childless couple, Talkhoon is allowed to sleep in the couple's room hence the only witness to the wife's treachery and betrayal. As the companion to the merchant's wife, Talkhoon's power initiates from her gender as the merchant explains: "I have bought this slave for you to be our daughter, and to fill your loneliness when I come home late. Moreover, she can help you with the chores."

A structural reading of "Talkhoon" calls for a heroine who progresses from the negative to the positive. In "Problems of the Structural Analysis of Fairytales," Meletinsky et al

explain such ascend as the hero's main purpose. As they argue, the smaller quests in a fairytale are puzzle pieces that when put in the right place, give the bigger picture of the hero's progress. In their argument, the change in the fate of the personae in sub-stories is not as important as the transformation that the main hero experiences:

The tale itself is organized not to present and explain the conditions of the world and its changes as the result of the hero's actions, but to present the condition of the hero and the change of that condition as a result of the successful overcoming of mishaps, misfortunes, and obstacles (93).

I would argue that in this rewritten version of a heroic quest, the smaller episodes are as important as the hero's greater quest about love, loss and redemption.

Talkhoon starts naïve, but unlike most other folk heroes like The Little Red Riding Hood or Cinderella, her quest begins after experiencing love, sex and heart-break. Talkhoon is the outsider who is initiated and earns the title of a hero. She is the master who becomes a slave, the lady who becomes a maid, and the gentry who becomes a folk. Talkhoon, by the end of Propp's linear functions, has proved her bravery and has earned her heroic status: hence she earns the right of return. Nevertheless, the folk of the rewritten tales of Behrangi are hardly fair or right. In his nonfiction, Behrangi clearly rejects a romanticized version of the country's village life and instead pinpoints the glum reality caused, on the one hand, by the villagers' harsh nature and culture, and on the other, by the government's irresponsibility towards them. The village folk are either illiterate, in the Durantian political sense of the word, and do not know of a way to contemplate a solution to their problems _as long as there is no written word, there is no logical

debate, hesitation or scrutiny and so forth as Levi-Straus would suggest (1423)_ or are literate, but do not know of an alternative method to the one introduced by the authority thus moving within the boundaries that the authority has already placed them in.

As Iranian authors hide their political views in the subtle language of tales, the audience becomes even more sensitive to the inferring social clues from the texts. In symbolic lessons of socio-political change, the narrators prosecute the kings and the queens of their tales, and humiliate them with infertility, unfaithful spouses, unruly children, incestuous desires, beastly son-in-laws, indestructible ogres and magical fairies that outsmart them and expose their vulnerabilities. The genre of folktale is the folks' weapon against the written word, defying the authority and the literature of the establishment with the simplicity of orality and the predictability of its structure. Hence, as long as there is the gentry, there are the folk, and there are folktales. In this syntax, we can set Jakobson's semantic binary oppositions and find the basic units of Propp's folktales: As long as there are fathers, there are sons who disobey; as long as there are husbands, there are wives who betray; as long as there are brothers, there are sisters who breach; as long as there are teachers, there are pupils who defy. This binarism between variables does not follow gender, race or class. Instead, it follows a pattern of power struggle that opens the plot, connects one "function" to the next, and ends with a resolution. In folktales the truth wins, but logic and justice hardly do. Moreover, just like the mottos of the militia groups of the 60s, the ending of the stories justifies the means, and the heroes and heroines, as long as they suffer and deliver, are fully forgiven no matter how much heartbreak or bloodshed they have caused.

Bijan Mofid and *The City of Tales*

Propp's "Folklore and Reality" leaves little for other folklorists to unfold. Quick to quote Lenin's "In every folktale there are elements of reality," he sugarcoats an obsession with the pre-Soviet folk literature, non-Bolshevik topics and formalist non-materialistic approach to art. A masterful point by point analysis leading to too many "realistic" conclusions, Propp gets away with a historical analysis of folktales and wondertales where kings and queens embrace fairies and fortune, every peasant longs for the hand of a princess, and every folk looks up to the heavens for a happily ever after. Propp must have been a trickster himself to have easily sold his ideas to the Communist Russia:

The most cursory glance at the folktale will bear out the truth of this [Lenin's] Statement. In wondertales such elements are fewer; in other types of folktale they are more common. The fox, wolf, bear, hare . . . are the very animals the peasants deal with; peasants and their wives . . . priests, and landowners also entered the folktale from life. The folktale reflects prehistoric reality, medieval customs and morals, and the social relations of feudalism and capitalism. (17)

To Propp, folklore like any other form of art has its roots in historical materialism, and derives from reality. Even the most fantastic images, he contends, are rooted in

reality (38). In order to develop the interpretation of Russian folktales Propp turns to material culture and economy as the breeding ground where the elements of production are determined by political ideology, rites and rituals, and the intention of the tellers. Similarly, material culture and economy, the channels for turning folktales into print thus opening them up to widespread interpretation, analysis and censorship, were powerful forces in 60's and 70's that effected the production of the modern variants of folktales as part of a system of appropriated meanings, ideologies and hegemonies. Despite the better economic facilitations that answered the demand for controversial yet culturally familiar narratives, the political hindrances of production and reception effectively influenced the production and availability of tales and the ideology developed within them. The readers too, unaware of their Jaussian "horizon of expectations" and their positioning within a community of expectations and interpretations influenced the production of imaginative literature in its variety of genres.

With the gradual development of an Iranian middle class and the increasing oil revenues, the young and educated public was growing in numbers while their democratic expectations remained unfulfilled and even shunned by the monarchy's unbending repression. While many young activists launched underground political parties that advocated guerrilla warfare, many writers, poets and artists inscribed their popular work with radical ideologies. Folktales safely became a symbolic weapon and their humble everyday language lured the readers to accept their ethics as a natural and organic alternative. On the other hand, the dialogic structure of folktales, and the innate instability of the oral language that distinguishes them, would resist such closed circuit, causing a crack that would parody any systematic production of hegemonic discourse that might try to oust other discourses. The assumed stability of meaning would thus be poked at with an inter-textuality that mediated between the audience and the teller

in the heteroglossia of the immediate culture in continuous struggle with history, on the one hand, and the status quo on the others. If the folktales of Iran are still read and continue to be relevant, it is because of such fluidity.

Shahr-e Ghesseh or *City of Tales* is such a fluid narrative. A musical fable where animals wear human clothes and hold stereotypical social roles, the characters are thrown into modernity just like the people they mock. A paradoxical combination of past and present, old and new, children's tale and political commentary, the play astounds the audience into recognition of the comedy in their immediate society and the tragedy of a timeless past dragged along for far too long. The female teller, like a modern and wise Shahrzad mediates between the characters and the audience, between the world of the play and that of every day. Initiating the tale with the Persian mnemonic device: "*Yeki bood, yeki nabood*;" "One was, One wasn't," she envisions an ideal city in the middle of the forest bordering a majestic mountain to one side and a wide-open field to the other. The collective recognition of Damavand and the fields surrounding the Capital bring the audience home where characters are busy performing their social roles. The love-drunk donkey is the carpenter who complains about people's lack of interest in his old manual art resisting the advice of others who urge him to make plastic and melamine plates instead. The educated monkey writes love letters on behalf of the illiterate townspeople by night, and is a farmer by day whose wheat is soon snatched away by this and that; the fox is the cunning mullah __the cleric in charge of the kids' schooling, and the parrot is the nagging poet constantly complaining about the ignorance of the populace who have never truly appreciated his art. Soon after the play begins, Parrot the poet is sued and dragged to court by the donkey accused of identity theft for calling himself a "donkey" __the popular swear word "ass" that implies stupidity and conformism. The donkey with his heavy Tehrani accent, symbolizes a large

population in the metropolitan capital who are unemployed, alienated and irrelevant to the new economy. Meanwhile, the well-dressed polite and educated elephant comes to town, and before he knows it, he falls and breaks his tusk. As bear the fortune teller insists on selling traditional medication to sooth the elephant's pain, everyone takes advantage of the elephant's vulnerability trying to either sell something to him or steal something from him so much so that they cut out his trunk and pull out the other tusk and turn him into a no name animal deformed beyond recognition. The elephant is too passive to resist the aggression of the traditional society and loses his identity in the process. But the play does not seem to look for the roots of the town's chaos in illiteracy or traditionalism; neither does it find the solution in modernism. When the teller goes around town to find a maid's job ___ a widespread common form of labor for village girls to move into the big city, have room and board with pay, dress like a modern woman, take vocational classes such as hairdressing or dress making and become educated while helping the family with cooking and cleaning ___ the fortune teller asks her for all kinds of irrelevant certificates and diplomas. The teller has all but English. As the puzzled teller and asks why she should know English to work as a house help, the fortune teller accompanied by the cleric responds that it's illegal to hire someone who does not speak English. The other characters join in dancing and singing in a combination of English and Persian describing the rising inflation, widespread unemployment and other shortcomings of modernization in their city.

The play, first on stage in 1968, is a quintessential 60's production. As the passionately pursued *Khaleh Sooskeh* brags about her foreign and domestic suitors she goes through a list of historic captors and conquerors of Iran starting with the Mongolian Chingiz and ending with Uncle Sam the latest of her suitors about whom the chorus of animals makes satirical jokes mentioning his strength, state-of-the-art bombs and the deadly weapons he uses

against “the barefoot Vietnamese.” *Khaleh Sooskeh* although young and coquettish, she is neither too innocent nor too inexperienced. A household name for the audience who is raised with her quintessentially feminist adventures when leaving her parents’ household looking for a suitable husband and not surrendering to any man other than the lovesick Mr. Mouse, the fable of Auntie Cockroach is a quintessential oral tale the details of which alter between generations and households. Sadegh Hedayat, Fazlollah Sobhi and Farokh Sadeghi each present a version of the story with minor alterations. The celebrated lyrics of the cockroach who flirtatiously demands the suitors to court her with adoring words, and bargains over the post-honeymoon disputes and the consequent punishments the husbands may expose her to, give the black cockroach a vivid feminist voice that no matter what the region where the story is collected, the paradox of her fragile yet strong posture, her black skin and her exaggerated rainbow colored makeup, and her nontraditional route to find a lover and husband alters the cultural positioning of women within the vast matrix of Iranian society. In the version I was told as a child:

خاله سوسکه رفت و هفت قلم آرایش کرد . چادر پوست پیاز سرش کرد. رفت و رفت و رفت تا

رسید به دکون بقالی. اقا بقاله پرسید: "خاله سوسکه کجا میری؟

"وا! خاله و درد پدر!! من که از گل بهترم! من که تاج سرم!"

بقال گفت: "پس چی بگم؟"

"بگو خاله قزی. . . چادر قرمزی. . . کجا میری؟"

Auntie Cockroach left and did a rainbow of makeup. She put on her *chador* of onion skin. Went and went and went until she reached the grocer's shop. Mr.

Grocer asked: "Auntie Cockroach, where are you going?"

"What!? 'Auntie' is the pain on your father's back! I am better than a flower. I am the crown on top of a head!"

The grocer said: "Then what should I say?"

"Say dear auntie . . . red-scarfed . . . where are you going?"

The give and take of flirtatious greetings continue from one corner shop to the next as Auntie Cockroach rejects her suitors one after another when she finds out how graphically each future husband may punish her if the couple gets into an argument. The butcher's knife and the grocer's weighing stone deter the smart roach and make her move on to the heart broken and soft spoken Mr. Mouse who is so in love, and jokingly says that he will hit her only with his soft and fluffy tail. Works at a pastry shop, he promises her sweet love and passion, capturing the heart of the roach when he says he will never hit her with his tale; instead, he will dip the tale in *sormeh* (a traditional black makeup ink) and will use it as eyeliner to enhance her beautiful eyes. Although in some versions the tale ends with the wedding of the roach and the mouse, in other versions the love affair concludes with the tragic drowning of the mouse hence the justification of the roaches' long black mourning costume (Keshavarz 237). Mofid's Auntie Cockroach, however, is already emancipated; she does not walk around covered from head to toe like the traditional Iranian women were; she wears the 60s mini skirt and breaks hearts as she strolls around the bazaar where each animal is busy yelling and selling from a

corner shop. The irony of hearing the animal shopkeepers calling customers in vernacular Persian to buy their state-of-the-art foreign made products mirrors the unsettled modernity that the country was experiencing at the time. One of the examples of such amalgamation is the mule's loud summoning of the customers to his corner:

آقایون بفرمایین!
خانوما بفرمایین!
یک حراج واقعی!
یک حراج بی نظیر!
نعلو ارزون کردم.
باغت آباد بشه, نعلو ببین!
واسه پای خر خوبه!
واسه پای اسب خوبه!
خانوما که سم دارین!
آقایون که سم دارین!
نعلهای شیک داریم.
نعلهای آهنی.
نعلهای چوبی و چرم و پلاستیک داریم!
...
مدل امسال مکزیکی داریم!
...
همه آخرین مدل,

مال اولين مزون!
از روی ژورنال نعل این سزون!
خانومای با سلیقه میدونن من چی میگم!

Gentlemen here you are!

Ladies here you are!

A real sale!

An extraordinary sale!

I have reduced the price of horseshoe.

Your garden be fertile, look at the horseshoe!

It is good for a horse's foot!

It is good for a donkey's foot!

Ladies who have hoofs!

Gentlemen who have hoofs!

We have *chic* horseshoes.

Iron horseshoes.

We have wooden, leather and *plastic* horseshoes!

...

We have Mexico's style of this year!

...

All of the latest *model*,

Of the first *maison*!

From the horseshoe *journal* of this *saison*!

The City of Tales first went on stage in the prestigious *Shriaz Celebration of Arts Festival* in the summer of 1968 and became known to the general public through its TV version in the later years. In Mofid's brief description of the play:

Shahr-e Ghesseh is originally taken from a folktale. However, I have given the story a symbolic shape. I have been trying in this play to keep the rhythm, specific to the language of such folktales, in the dialogues of the characters of the play. Shahr-e Ghesseh is the tragic narrative of a man whose life is restricted by ignorance, superstitions and traditions and imposed diktats. (3)

Although the animals are portrayed in traditional Iranian clothes representatives of their individual trade, their heads are covered with oversized masks that emphasize a grotesque yet fragile humanity. Other than the teller, the cockroach and the mouse are the only characters without a mask, played by child actors whose physical and emotional vulnerability make the audience root for their gentle love to win in a patriarchal culture where marriages hardly follow the heart. *Khaleh Sooskeh* has rejected many powerful and skilled suitors before she surrenders to the mouse's love. Like the young country waiting for a new generation of idealists unimpressed by the proletariat ideology of the east, the industrial promises of the west, and, most

importantly, its own cultural baggage, the roach is the uninhibited muse who mesmerizes the male characters in the city and as the only female citizen, and the smallest of all, stands as tall or even taller than the rest. The love affair of the cockroach and the mouse is a foil to the sadness of the elephant's story which targets the vulnerability of a misfit whose only flaw is his inexperienced optimism. Written in colloquial Persian, with intervals of modern and classical music in the background, and the interplay of a soft sounding piano and rhythmic Persian drumming accompanying the character's lines, the story is told by a bard like narrator who is herself much amazed by the combination of Shiite symbolic lamentations, traditional urban ballads and western-style soliloquies that make up the discourse of the play. The endearing tone of the characters, and the recognizable melancholic voice of the donkey, the mouse, parrot, the monkey and the elephant, along with rhythmical Persian lyrics sung by fox the mullah, hooked a generation of Iranians to the cassette players memorizing the lines of the play and imitating the words and accents of the characters to apply them in real-life comic situations. A parody of contingencies, the play makes a mockery of newly invented traditions and irrelevant old conventions, questioning cultural assertions and epistemologies that are not only irrelevant to modern Iran, but also hardly a cause for celebrating the old times. In effect, *The City of Tales* is a comedy of manners that roots for the pragmatist and rejects any notion of cultural exigency __ a Rortian critique of an old country that in the name of transformation adheres only to putting on new costumes. In a period of great flux, the story questions, on the one hand, the belief that Iranian society is essentially conservative and unchangeable, and on the other, the superficiality of the transformations from a traditionally agrarian society to an industrialized nation-state. Mofid's metamorphosed city is a displaced old and a misplaced new:

یکی بود، یکی نبود.
اون زمونای قدیم،
زیر گنبد کبود،
میون جنگل سبز، لای درختای قشنگ،
شهر با صفایی بود.
دور تا دورش گل سرخ.
روبروش کوه بلند.
با چمن های وسیع
که پر از شاپرک
مردمانش همه خوب
همه پاک و مهربون
همه پرکار و زرنگ
همه روز صبح سحر وقت اذون،
همه بیدار می شدن،
تا برن با عجله،
سر کار خودشون.

One was, One wasn't.

In those olden times,

Under the blue dome,

In the middle of the green forest, amid beautiful trees,

There was a lively city.

All around it red roses.
Facing it the high mountain.
With vast meadows-
That is full of butterflies-
Its citizens all good-
All pure and kind-
All hardworking and smart-
Every day at dawn at the call for prayer,
Everybody would wake up,
To quickly go,
To their own jobs. (4)

The upbeat fairytale setting soon gives way to an absurdist *maktab*⁷⁸ where the fox in charge of educating the town's pupils and dressed in a clergyman's costume, starts the lesson with an expectedly stern Koranic style teaching method. As one by one the students enter the classroom, we see the change in the fox's tone. Despite the clear age difference between the fox and his pupils, he cannot overcome his lust for the little cockroach who, aware of her mesmerizing effect, coquettishly enters the room looking around for a place to sit. Following the popular trope of a mullah who earns a living by making the audiences cry during funerals and religious holidays, the fox shifts the tone of his lecture to a lamentation, wailing and weeping to a parody of popular Shiite tunes. As the students find the fox in a reverie over the roaches' beauty, they collectively trick him into thinking that a genie is hiding in the classroom hence mocking the

⁷⁸ traditional classroom setting

teacher and canceling the lessons all together. Tricking the trickster by his own rules, the students know that the fox is a believer in extra-terrestrial beings like *the Jins* which as introduced in Chapter 27th of the Koran, are man's powerful nemesis⁷⁹.

The City of Tales is a not only an enhanced retelling of a popular children's poem collected by Hedayat, but begins with the narrator's introducing the familiar characters with the same mnemonic rhythm that everybody knows:

یکی بود یکی نبود
 سر گنبد کبود پیر ز نیکه نشستہ بود.
 اسبہ عصارى میکرد خرہ خراطى میکرد،
 سگہ قصابی میکرد گربہ بقالی میکرد،
 شترہ نمد مالی میکرد پہ رقاصی میکرد،
 عنکبوتہ بمبازی میکرد موشہ ماسورہ میکرد،
 مادر موشہ نالہ میکرد. فیل آمد بہ تماشا
 پاش سرید بہ حوض شا افتاد و دندونش شکس!
 گفت: چکنم، چارہ کنم، روم و بہ درمازہ کنم
 صدای بز غالہ کنم: اوم اوم اوم... بہ!
 دنبہ داری؟! نہ! پس چرا میگی: بہ؟

One Was, One Wasn't⁸⁰

At the blue dome

the old woman was sitting

⁷⁹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rt2MxtF4N0k>.

⁸⁰ One was and another was not there: The mnemonic device of fairytale-openings in Persian; equivalent to: "once upon a time." The clause might refer to the plausibility of the story and that the teller cannot verify its truth.

The horse was oil-pressing	the donkey was wood-working
The dog was the butcher	the cat was the grocer
The camel was the carpet-felter	the mosquito was the dancer
The spider was rope-walking	the mouse was spooling
The mouse's mother was wailing.	The elephant came to look
Slipped on his foot by the King's pool	fell and broke his tooth!
Said: What shall I do, how shall I resolve	shall I face the gate
Should I make the sound of a kid:	um um um . . . baaaah!
Do you have fat? . . . No!	So why do you say: baaah?

(Hedayat, *Scattered Writings* 299)

Taking the audience beyond the ease of the old ballad by introducing the elephant who breaks his trunk, Mofid builds his narrative around an animal that based on the geopolitical borders of the country cannot be considered Iranian. An oddity to and among the other animals in the play, Mofid's atypical central hero aims to demystify our cultural habits forcing us to reconsider our expectations of the traditional Iranian society as introduced by the narrator in the beginning of the play. The elephant, who is already a stranger in the city, is gradually deformed beyond recognition by the ignorant crowd who both pity and mock him. By the end of the play, the soft-spoken elephant loses his sense of identity and doubts if he had ever been an elephant. Without a trunk, and with the tusks fixed on his head, the grotesque creature has to apply for an identity card in order to be recognized. After long days of consultation with the other animals who introduce him to the stagnant beurocracy of their city, the elephant's being is finally validated by

a birth certificate that misspells has his first name to an irrelevant new one: *Manoochehr*. A popular pre-Islamic Persian name, the disconnect between the traditional setting of the play and the quasi-nationalist name of the deformed elephant not only makes the animals laugh as they gradually abandon the elephant, but also ends the play in a tragic finale that follows the anxious audience well after the play ends. With his queer stature and polite manners, the gentle freak is the only character with a true identity behind the mask that everyone wears and hides behind. The play ends as the chorus of masked animals dance around the elephant who mourns the loss of the identity that kept him masked throughout the play:

همه به شدت می خندیدند فیل چند لحظه مات و گیج به شناسنامه و نام بی مسمایی که بر او
نهاده اند خیره می شود و بعد با یک حالت عصبانی ماسک خود را بر می دارد و به دور می
اندازد و با صدایی که از اعماق وجودش بر خواسته فریاد می کشد.

They all laugh hard. The elephant, puzzled and confused stares for a few seconds at the birth certificate and the irrelevant name that they have given him, and then, with an angry posture takes off his mask and throws it away, and with a voice that comes from deep inside his soul, he screams.
(63)

Economic development famously phrased as the “wheels of industry” introduced Iranians to a social progress that they considered unlikely and unachievable. Industrialization too

was an imposition on numerous groups who objected to welding their “culture” into the new form of conformity. Those in favor of “progress” were generally dismissed as westernized and inauthentic as they believed the state-sponsored progress to be a sham; the alternative, as advertised by the opposition, was a binary choice between static immobility and radical change: Orientalists grieved the shift from a traditional Iranian society to a developing nation-state, nationalists found the antidote to the new “ruin” in returning to an imaginary past, the religious left were disturbed by the country’s loss of Islamic identity as well as its allegiance to an infidel west, and the secular left lamented the plight of the underprivileged of the peripheries and searched for the solution in the texts of the Red. The rigidity of such coding on par with other historical forces pushed the country towards an explosion that failed to accommodate any.

The quiet ban on fairytales and children’s stories with “pagan” inducing motifs with the onset of the Cultural Revolution of the early 1980s, followed the same ideological paradigm that many revolutionary ideologues advertised in their pre-revolution prime. Behrangi was one such popular writer who insisted on replacing the magical idealism of happily-ever-after stories with the glum reality that he perceived to exist around him:

Now is the time to focus on two points in children’s literature and largely take these two points as the basis of work. First Point: Children’s literature must be a bridge between the colorful and uninformed world, and sweet thoughts and childlike dreams, and the dark and informed world, drowned in bitter and painful and tenacious society of adults. The child must pass this bridge and consciously and armed and with the light in hand reach the world of the adults. It is in this

way that the child can be a true help and a life partner to his father, and a positive and knowledgeable actor in the stagnant and ever- plunging society.

With vivid examples of the desperation of the poor and the ignorance of the nation's youth who unknowingly take their unheroic fathers as heroes, Behrangi warns about raising a generation of content cowards who, like their fathers, will be too weak to have an impact on Iran:

Children's literature should not be only a missionary for "kindness and humanitarianism and contentment and humility" of the Christian charity sort. Children should be told to detest all of which and all who are inhumane and anti-humanity and ban the historical progress of the society, and this detestation must find its way into children's literature. (*Collection of Essays* 119, 121)

The Lyotardian grand narrative of the pre-revolutionary discourse that ousted any story other than that of the flooded and the peripheral poor, took so much space in the Islamic Republic that it left no legroom for kings, queens and magical fairies for the fear _among other_ of the escapism that such literature would endorse. Not only were children's fairytale stories banned from the public space but so were children's toys or games that might engage a child in an imaginary world other than the one marketed by the new state. Fairytales disappeared from the libraries and bookstores as fast as did *The Communist Manifesto* which in the chaotic

freedom of the early day of the victory over Shah had abruptly found welcoming space on bookshelves. With the oneself of the forceful purging run by the agencies of the Cultural Revolution, Iranian fairytales became the new emblems of resistance and reclaimed symbols of a cultural battle against the new decree of pious living. In the all-encompassing Cultural Revolution, there could be more to fairies than what met a child's eye, and Talkhoon, the radical daughter of an urban merchant, could be as much a threat as her more traditional foils. In the conclusion, I give a detailed analysis of the complexities of the post-revolution treatment of Iranian folktales.

In the two decades preceding the revolution, a merchant's daughter endures displacement, alienation, labor, hunger, and slavery only to learn about the miseries of humanity; a petit bourgeois who has to overcome numerous obstacles in order to be granted a metropolitan social status. In such tales, the civilian replaces the old nobility but the exclusivity of the circle of the elite remains a constant that the folk are unable to diminish. Instead, they are content with imposing a quest on the modern Iranian hero or heroine who carries the burden of leading the folk toward a better future. Their tales recycle kings and queens into depressed urban dwellers whose struggles are similar to those of the folk. In fact, the Iranian tales of the pre-revolutionary era find little glamour in searching for the hand of a real prince or princess perhaps because being a member of the nobility has been an arbitrary contingency in a country where violent and velvet coups can easily distort the fairytale ending that most European tales entail. Instead, they assume an active role in educating the country's youth about conformity and passivity. Defying religion, politics and culture of their past and present, under the pseudonym of children's stories and musical performances, such narratives feed a generation of revolutionaries who are trained in dissecting metaphors to find the political discourse. The revised folktales of Iran neither

reminisce over a glorious past nor mirror a hopeful proletarian future; Iranian folktales in the height of the monarchy's technocratic advancement and industrialization, whisper change for an ideal better that had never been nor could ever be. Story telling as the Jamesonian socially symbolic act has continuously filled a problematic space in Iranian cultural history so much so that an epic as ancient as Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh* continues to be castrated from any immediate equivalency by being sardonically marketed as the *myth* about Iranian mythology. One can argue that Iranian literature continues to be the quintessential model of coercion and resistance, yet to be self-contained, autonomous or free.

Conclusion

Post-Revolution and a Feverish Reframing of Tales

قصه ما دروغ بود

پایین آمدم دوغ بود

Payeen amadeem doogh bood

Ghesseh ma doroogh bood

We went down, there was kefir⁸¹

Our story was a lie

After the victory of the 1979 revolution, the birth of the new revolutionary era called for a new identity and novel traditions. The Islamic state soon initiated an examination of familiar signifiers by cleansing the logos from the remainders and the reminders of the immediate and the far past. Islam Persian style was replaced by a fundamentalist reading that vastly affected the individual and collective associations of the citizenry who was supposed to believe that the history up to this point had simply been *a lie*. The name, the flag and the national anthem of Iran were altered to reinforce the country's geo-political relevance to the *Moslem Ummat*⁸². Murals of young bearded men in long sleeves and dark pants leading women in black chadors, and massive billboards with Arabic verses from Shiite Imams mirrored the country's new cultural identity. With the emergence of The Islamic Republic of Iran as a religiously bound state, folklore too went through a solemn makeover and was systematically altered to include an Islamic essence. Art in all its branches became the question mark that paused for permission: Choreography was forbidden, tunes were replaced with marches and hymns, fairytales were

⁸¹ A traditional beverage made up of mixing yogurt with water; also, the worthless watery remainder during the process of butter making. In both cases, it connotes lack of solidity or substance.

⁸² Moslem populace

removed from cultural and educational agenda, men and women were preyed upon as incestuous delinquents, children's tales with princes or princesses were feared to remind of the Pahlavis, and fairies were disliked as sacrilegious falsities. There was a supposed danger looming in every corner of being _imaginative or real_ that could wrongly influence the youth who were soon to be the future *soldiers of Allah* in this new Platonic republic. While Persian and ethnic folklore were gradually removed from societal consciousness, *hadith*⁸³s and narratives about Shiite Imams took centers stage. Hence a long intellectual stillness that followed the shutting down of universities, and the exodus, exile and seclusion of Iran's many storytellers and artists within the first two years of the Islamic Revolution as well as the rise of new faces in the country's state-controlled scholarly circles. Erudite clergymen like Morteza Motahari (1919-1979) the quintessential literary voice of the religious elite filled the post-revolution vacuum and became the locus of the early days of the Islamic Republic. Although assassinated in May of 1979, about four months after the victory of the revolution, his philosophical approach to Islam continues to be a blueprint for the doctrinaires of the Islamic state. One of the standard literary texts at the time recommended for raising a moral population was Motahari's *Dastan-e Rastan*,⁸⁴ a two-volume collection of tales from early Islam and *hadiths*, intended by the author to redeem the moral void within the literary genres of Iran. As he explains in the introduction, the collection was named after ⁸⁵"صديقين" or "The Righteous" cited and defined in the Koran as those who followed "صراط مستقيم"⁸⁶ or "The Path of the Truth" because both the characters in the book and the readers of the book were but the followers of the truth. Most importantly, as the stories were factual, the title would assert the truth within the tales (19, 20, 23). Motahari, like most of the

⁸³Adventures and advices of Prophet Mohammad.

⁸⁴داستان راستان: The Story of the True.

⁸⁵*Sedeegheen*.

⁸⁶*Seraat-e Mostagheem*. The Straight Path.

theologians of the early days of the Islamic state, had begun his career during the Pahlavi era. Most of his texts were published before the revolution and aired on the radio during religious months like *Ramazan* (210). However, after the revolution, his writing was celebrated as the spirit of the new era and a reflection of the shift in readership. In order to understand the relationship between the new times and the old stories, "بنده است یا آزاد؟" or "Is He a Subject⁸⁷ or Free?" makes a great example:

There was a loud noise of music and singing. Anyone who passed by that house, could guess what was happening inside the house. The setting for drinking and pandering was well spread and the chalice of wine was being supped again and again. The young slave had tidied up the interior and was leaving the house to empty out the trash. Right at this moment, a man whose face showed much devotional reverence and his forehead, was a witness to his many prostrations⁸⁸, was passing by, and asked the slave:

"Is the owner of this house a servant or free?"

"Free."

"Of course he is free. If he were a servant, he would fear the Owner and the Holder and his God and would not lay out such a setting."

As the story goes, the owner of the house realizes his sins, follows the holy Imam who gave the advice, repents and becomes a man of God (128-9). Stories such as this one were supposed to lead the public to take the right path and follow the examples of early Islam.

⁸⁷ In the title "*Bandeh Ast Yaa Azaad?*" the word *bandeh* can mean a slave, a servant or a servant of God: a devout person. The title is thus a pun on both *free* and *slave*.

⁸⁸ Hours of kneeling and prayer is believed to leave a mark of the prayer-clay *Mohr* on the forehead of the devotee.

Parallel to such devout literature, one could experience, on the one hand, the excitement of finding an underground facsimile of popular classics such as Hedayat's novels, and on the other, the terror of being caught with a copy in hand. Motahari's words about Hedayat, for instance, were threatening enough to make the reading public reconsider where they held their favorite Hedayats⁸⁹:

صادق هدایت چرا خودکشی کرد؟ یکی از علل خودکشی او این بود که اشراف زاده بود. او پول توجیبی بیش از حد کفایت داشت اما فکر صحیح و منظم نداشت. او از موهبت ایمان بی بهره بود، جهان را مانند خود بوالهوس و گزافه کار و ابله می دانست. لذتهایی که او می شناخت و با آنها آشنا بود کثیف ترین لذتها بود؛ و از آن نوع لذتها دیگر چیز جالبی باقی نمانده بود که هستی و زندگی، ارزش انتظار آنها را داشته باشد. او دیگر نمی توانست از جهان، لذت ببرد. . . امثال هدایت اگر از دنیا شکایت می کنند و دنیا را زشت می بینند غیر از این راهی ندارند؛ نازپروردگی آنها چنین ایجاب می کند. آنها نمی توانند طعم مطبوع مواهب الهی را احساس کنند. اگر صادق هدایت را در دهی می بردند، پشت گاو و خیش می انداختند و طعم گرسنگی و برهنگی را به او می چشانند و عند اللزوم شلاق محکم به پشتش می نواختند و همین که سخت گرسنه می شد قرص نانی در جلوی او می گذاشتند، آن وقت خوب معنی حیات را می فهمید و آب و نان و سایر شرایط مادی و معنوی حیات در نظرش پراج و با ارزش می گردید.

Why did Sadeq Hedayat commit suicide? One of the reasons for his suicide was that he was an aristocrat. He had too much pocket money but did not have correct and orderly thought. He was devoid of the blessings of faith, and knew the world to be like himself idle and impulsive and idiotic. The pleasures that he knew and was familiar with were the filthiest

⁸⁹ Many people hid questionable books in dug-up holes in their yards.

pleasures; and from those pleasures there was nothing interesting remaining for being and living to be worth the expectation. He could no longer enjoy the world . . . The likes of Hedayat if they complain about the world and view the world to be ugly, they have no choice but this (suicide); their pamperedness necessitates this. They cannot taste the blessings of God. If they took Sadegh Hedayat to a village, threw him behind a cow and a harrow and made him suffer hunger and nakedness and when necessary they would thrash his back with a lash . . . then he would fully learn the meaning of life. (186)

With the onset of the *Imposed War*⁹⁰, Shiite passion plays and their corresponding tales of jihad and martyrdom captured the revolutionary realm leaving little relevancy for production and consumption of make-believes. Propagandist literature was the only tolerable literature and its boundaries were strictly enforced through state controlled publishing houses where not only politics but also war-related shortage of paper and ink heavily limited productivity. At this point, there was hardly a distinction between the voices of the official and the vernacular, and hegemonic appropriation of religious motifs developed timely narratives of bravery, perseverance and innocence of Shiite Imams into ideological anecdotes of war against the Sunni-ruled Iraq⁹¹. The bravery of the Iranian *Basiji*⁹² forces in combat with Iraqi military

⁹⁰ The eight-year war with Iraq (1980-1988) is known as the Imposed War.

⁹¹ Although the majority of Iraqi population is Shiite, the war was propagated as a war against the infidels. In Khomeini's words:

⁹² "civilian mobilization;" volunteers in combat later stamped as "The Twenty Million Member Army" connoting that the Iranian army was made up of the whole population of Iran.

was introduced as the mirror image of the virtue of Hussein's⁹³ army in the fatal war of Karbala (680 A.D.) and was featured every evening on prime-time TV. In effect, the narrative of Imam Hussein's fatal war against Yazid the Caliph at the time, for centuries told throughout the month of Moharram⁹⁴ in nightly sessions of at mosques, was now reframed to encompass the eight-year war in which the *Followers of the Truth* were fighting an unjust war against the *Army of the False*. The holy city of Karbala where Hussein was murdered and buried was now the symbolic destination for the Iranian troops and Saddam Hussein was now renamed by Iranians as Saddam *Yazid* the symbol of devilish cruelty. The entangled relationship between fighting against tyranny and injustice, and the story of Hussein's struggles and martyrdom, has always been an integral component of Shiite narrative, but associating it with modern-day struggles of Iranians was a specifically modern twist that ironically reflected the polemic ideologies of the newly ousted leftist groups of 60s and 70s. In the first-ever televised military court where Khosro Golsorkhi (1944-1974) a self-proclaimed Marxist was defending himself on live TV against allegations of aiming to abduct members of the monarch's family, Golsorkhi introduced himself in the most solemn yet familiar religious terms:

□□□□□□ □ □□□□□ □□□□□□ □□□
 حسین شهید بزرگ خلق های خاورمیانه آغاز می کنم. من که یک مارکسیست
 لنینیست هستم، برای نخستین بار عدالت اجتماعی را در مکتب اسلام جستم و آنگاه به
 سوسیالیسم رسیدم. . . از اسلام سختم را آغاز کردم. اسلام حقیقی در ایران همواره
 دین خود را به جنبش های رهایی بخش ایران پرداخته است . . . هنگامی که

⁹³ Hussein was the son of Ali and the grandson of Mohammad; the third in line to become the caliph according to the Shiite doctrine.

⁹⁴ The first month of the Islamic calendar and a sacred month of mourning specifically for Shiite Moslems as their third Imam, Hussein, was killed on the 10th day of Moharram.

مارکس می گوید در یک جامعه طبقاتی ثروت در سویی انباشته می شود و فقر و گرسنگی و فلاکت در سوی دیگر در حالی که مولد ثروت طبقه محروم است، و مولا علی می گوید قصری بر پا نمی شود مگر آنکه هزاران نفر فقیر گردند، نزدیکی های بسیاری وجود دارد. میتوان در تاریخ از مولا علی بعنوان اولین سوسیالیست جهان نام برد. . . زندگی مولا حسین نمودار زندگی اکنونی ماست که جان بر کف برای خلق های محروم میهن خود محاکمه می شویم. او در اقلیت بود و یزید بارگاه، قشون، حکومت، قدرت داشت. او ایستاد و شهید شد. هرچند یزید گوشه ای از تاریخ را اشغال کرد، ولی آنچه که در تداوم تاریخ تکرار شد، راه مولا حسین و پایداری او بود، نه حکومت یزید. آنچه خلق ها تکرار کرده و می کنند، راه حسین است.

“Life is but Ideology and Struggle.” I begin my speech with the words of *Mola Hossein*⁹⁵ the grand martyr of the peoples⁹⁶ of the Middle East. I as a Marxist Leninist, for the first time, explored social justice in the Islamic Ideology, and then reached Socialism . . . I began my speech with Islam; True Islam in Iran has continuously paid its dues to the liberation movements of Iran . . . one can name Ali⁹⁷ as the first socialist in the world. . . . The life of Mola Hossein is a manifestation of our life at the present as, with life in the palm of our hands⁹⁸ for the underprivileged peoples of our homeland, we are thus being tried. He was in the minority and Yazid owned the throne, the platoons, the reign, the power. He stood up and was martyred. Although Yazid filled up a corner of history, but what repeated throughout the continuity of history was the path of Mola Hossein and his perseverance, and not the reign of Yazid. What the

⁹⁵ *Mola* is the endearing term for master, leader or sage. Mola Hussein: Imam Hussein.

⁹⁶ خلق ها: the popular communist term for the working class, the poor and the masses.

⁹⁷ The son-in-law and cousin of the Prophet, and the Shiite's first Imam.

⁹⁸ Metaphor for readiness for jihad and martyrdom.

masses have repeated and repeat is the path of Hossein.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jyvjhUsJyNg>

An integral symbol in Iranian psyche, Shi'ism as a revolutionary ideology, had also been introduced earlier by the influential Ali Shariati (1933-1977) who had insisted on politicizing Islam by interpreting the religion as a symbolic manifestation of fighting for the truth. In effect, the uprising against Shah was publicized as “شور حسینی” or *Hosseini Fervor* that would erase the fear of dying, and would lead people to embrace martyrdom as did Hussein. One of the famous slogans during street demonstrations of 1978-1979 included a reframing of the story of Kufa whose citizens famously betrayed Hussein by refusing to join him in combat:

ما اهل كوفه نیستیم، امام تنها بماند مگر امت بمیرد، امام تنها بماند.

We are not from *Kufa* to leave Imam alone!

Unless *Omat* dies for Imam to be alone!

In his historical criticism of Shiite poetic culture, Jafar Mahjoob explains the ritual of collective wailing while listening to a bard singing the praises of the Prophet and his household, may go as far back as the early days of the disagreements between the Shiite and the Sunni fractions of Islam. With the passing of the prophet, each group started a campaign to legitimize its position within the Islamic community. Those who believed in the succession of

Ali, Mohammad's cousin and son-in-law, as the new caliph, began weeping loudly as they heard their nominee had lost thus broadcasting their grievances against the competitor Abu Bakr⁹⁹ who was announced as the new caliph; although a political gesture at the time, the weeping would gradually become a Shiite ritual that involves thrashing the head, flogging the body and stabbing oneself to bleed during the month of Moharram to acknowledge the suffering of Hussein and his household in the war of Karbala (1207-1209). Throughout the Iran/Iraq war the wailing and self-beating became a routine beyond the month of Moharram, and the military operations got names as Karbala I, II and so on. One popular march that was continuously aired included the names of recently assassinated seventy two leaders¹⁰⁰ of the new state as martyrs whose vengeance justified the seizing of Karbala. In other words, the twice told tale of *Karbala-ye Hosseini* where the minority Shiite family was unjustly massacred by the Sunni majority in power was now the story of the fragile Islamic Republic and its multifaceted enemies¹⁰¹. In addition, the audaciousness of the warriors was soon compared with the fervor of the disciples paving the way for the reappearance of the Hidden Imam who is believed to avenge Hussein and punish his living enemies¹⁰²:

Oh the Platoon of the *Holder of Times*¹⁰³

Be ready! Be ready!

⁹⁹ The first elected caliph in charge of leading the Moslem population following the death of Prophet Mohammad in 632 AD. The choice is considered to raise the first of many disagreements between the Shiites and the Sunnis (Munson 17-18).

¹⁰⁰ The 1981 bombing of the headquarters of IRP resulted in the death of many high status members who got the epithet “هفتاد و دو تن” or *seventy two souls* as a metaphor for the number of the assassinated companions of Hussein.

¹⁰¹ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DfGiK7bkl-U>

¹⁰² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hSzZfvEgACI>

¹⁰³ Mahdi, the 12th Imam who is believed to have never died but lives miraculously in hiding as the redeemer of Islam until close to the Day of the Judgment.

For a merciless combat

Be ready! Be ready!

Oh Combatants with life in the palm of your hands

The time for bravery has come!

Oh Combatants of the Soul of God¹⁰⁴

Time for martyrdom has come!

Shiite folklore was thus recruited not only for patriotic purposes, but most importantly, as the goal of the combat gradually shifted to include clearing the vast Moslem territory of the “infidels” and the Zionists, classical Shiite tales of martyrdom were the blueprints for a pan-Shi’ism led by the Iranian *Imam* Khomeini. There are various approaches to the historical accounts of the formation and development of Shi’ism, and in order to understand the relationship between Shiite warrior culture and the corresponding war with Iraq, I brush upon a few key elements that make that latter historical phenomenon a warranted continuation of the former account. In *What does the Shiite Say and Want?* Reza Niazmand introduces the ideology of Shi’ism to be revolutionary as the sect replaces the traditional concept of the elected caliph with a sacred Imam who, as the holy representative of the Prophet, cannot be voted in or out by

¹⁰⁴ “Rooh-e-Khoda” is the Persian translation of Rooh-o-llah or “God’s Soul” the first name of Khomeini the leader of the Islamic Republic.

the populace¹⁰⁵. Moreover, as the religion itself is understood as an anti-establishment entity¹⁰⁶, Shiites are expected to be continuously valiant and revolutionary:

Shi'ism is the religion of rebellion. In the history of no religion or sect, would one see so much rebellion and revolt. Shiite rebellions have never been a nationalist rebellion, but a "religious" revolt and it would end up with swords and massacres and murder and martyrdom. A rebellion that if you kill, you will go to Heaven and if you are killed, you will still go to Heaven . . . In the belief of the Shiites, the principle of "*Imamat*" is left out of public jurisdiction: meaning the populace does not have the right to appoint Imam and his successor.

(25)

According to Hassan Ibrahim Hassan, the massacre in Karbala was a turning point in the history of Shi'ism as it strengthened the group's alliance with each other and their neighboring Iranians, and affirmed their oppositional ideology as a possible alternative for governing the ever-expanding Islamic world. In this regards, as Ibrahim Hassan contends, Iranians felt a strong affinity with Hussein and were among his most zealous followers partly because he had married the Iranian princess Shahrbanu, the daughter of the last Sassanid king and would hence preserve the Iranian bloodline (399). In addition to the reverence for Hussein's

¹⁰⁵ In early days of Islam, the caliphs were hardly chosen to office by the vote of the public; instead, the powerful elderly chose the new caliph and asked /ordered the public to accept them as their leader with a بيعت *bey-at* a symbolic shaking.

¹⁰⁶ Rejecting سنت *Sunna* or Islamic tradition.

Arab-Iranian bloodline, his minority status must have made him favorable to Iranians who were yet to adjust to their new status as a subjugated people. The war with Iraq was thus a reawakening of Iranian symbolic memory of Hussein's martyrdom and the minority status of the Shiite nation within the Islamic world. It is important to mention that Iran was ruled by the Sunni caliphs for about nine centuries before the Safavids changed the official religion to Shi'ism (Munson 30).

Until the reappearance of Imam Mahdi, the leadership of the Shiite community, as established by Ayatollah Khomeini in his revolutionary text *Hokoomat-e Eslami, Velayat-e Fagheeh* is assumed by ولايت فقيه (Velayat-e Fagheeh), the *Governance of the Jurist*, who exercises the Shiite legacy of political Islam and Islamic politics over the Moslem populace or *Omat*¹⁰⁷ (<http://books1.blogfa.com/cat-8.aspx>). The idea of an all-inclusive leadership, however, is not a Sunni principle partly because the Sunni interpretation of leadership is different from the Shiite's, and what is historically a political tradition in the Sunni doctrine, is illegitimate usurpation as far as the Shiites are concerned. According to Abdolhossein Zarinkoob, after the death of the Prophet, rebellions were quite common within the ever-expanding Islamic land. (Roozegaran 315). Hussein's revolt, despite the complexity of the situation affected by his high status within the Islamic community as the Prophet's grandson, hence of a most holy lineage, was expected to be crushed as fiercely as, or even more viciously than, other political disobediences. In effect, what is known as the gloomiest narrative in the Shiite tradition of oral story telling is to the Sunnis a blasphemous recounting of an untrue story. In his extensive analysis of the development of Shiite elegiac eulogies as an oral story telling tradition that distinguishes Shiites from mainstream Sunnis, Mahjoob brings examples from a classical text

¹⁰⁷ For an English translation of the full text please look at (http://www.iranchamber.com/history/rkhomeini/books/velayat_faqeeh.pdf).

□□□□□□ □□□□□ □□□ or *Some of the Disgraces of the Rafezeen*¹⁰⁸ by an unanimous Sunni critic who scrutinizes the oral traditions of the Shiite مناقب خوانی (*managheb Khaani*) to be a sacrilege. As Mahjoob argues, the bards would sometimes be ruthlessly punished by tortures such as having their tongues cut when they engaged in recounting the sufferings of Hussein and his family (1209-10, 12015). Nevertheless, singing about the sufferings of Ali's descendants in the hands of the Sunni rulers or *Rozeh Khaani* becomes a Shiite tradition in Iran within the lunar month of Moharram. The resurgence of this ritual during the war with Iraq, becomes an indispensable component of combat for the drafted soldiers, the volunteer Basij and the civilians who believe the war mirrors the third Imam's *jihad* against injustice.

Offering a new perspective on the dynamics of imaginative productions in Iran, I place the reframed folktales of Iran in a historical setting where political economy is in continuous discourse with the triad of tellers, audience and retold tales, where folk heroes and heroines create historical reality, and fairies plot political activism. Along the bumpy road of Iranian politics, ideology appropriates the fictional, alters it, and inserts a hegemonic message in the old text directed at an audience who is already familiar with the old and the new discourse, and is eager to participate. While the first generation of Iranian folklorists were mostly foreign-educated elite looking to the pre-Islamic Iran as the cradle of Iranian civilization, 60s and 70s saw a radical cluster of intellectuals unimpressed with western secularism that seemed to be

¹⁰⁸ Atheists, derogatory term for Shiites connoting their rejection of Islamic tradition.

haphazardly injected into the veins of the country by a dictatorial monarch backed by imperialism. A combination of Shiite revolutionary ideas and Marxist egalitarian slogans gave this generation a polemic identity that distinguished them as a collective one anti-monarchy militia despite the differences in their ideology and tactics, and made them popular with both the lower classes -as their main concern seemed to be the plight of the Iranian poor, and the upper classes -as the college educated Iranian now demanded political freedom the one thing that the monarchy refused to provide. Despite the heavily inscribed censorship, however, there were numerous translations of ideological literature from 19th century German thinkers to 20th century South-American storytellers that captivated the reading public. The worldwide fascination with anti-capitalist movements, the dread of military coups, and the cold war, Algeria, Palestine, Vietnam, Chile and Cuba were now household names that gave young Iranians the courage to join in via weapon or pen. After the revolution, the censorship by the new government was much more effective in erasing the publishing world of *non-Islamic* texts hence the falling into abeyance of folklore that was not considered ¹⁰⁹ متعهد (*mot-e-ahhed*), *devout* and *devoted*, or committed to the principles of the new state.

In 1997 about a decade after the tumultuous *Eight-Year War* and starting with Mohammad Khatami's presidency, the dormant folkloristics of Iran found a semi-safe venue of expression and research, and exciting collections of oral and ethnic tales could be seen on the shelves of bookstores. In 1999, both Hamid Reza Khazaii's multiple-volume collection of oral tales of Khorasan افسانه های خراسان *The Folktales of Khorasan* transcribed by the author who personally taped all the folktales in their original dialect, and Ali Ashraf Darvisihian's serial collection of Iranian folktales فرهنگ افسانه های ایرانی or *Encyclopedia of Iranian Folktales* were

published. In addition, in 2002, Kalimollah Tavakoli's publication of Kormanji folklore in the original language was an unprecedented move in the history of Kormanji literature.

Folktales have always had a contingent place within the dominant narratives of Iran where constant repositioning of the official and the vernacular revisits the intermediary ethnic, minority and political signification of folktales. In Iran, hegemonic appropriation of motifs and the collision of difference and identity bind the tales to permanent transition and displacement. In Iran, categorized and generic readings of tales is impossible; instead, tales are in continuous negotiation over values, and a fusion of voices on gender, generation and geography realigns the traditional binaries of cultural expectations to mediate the complexity of a hybrid culture that is far beyond homogeneous. It is in effect the dynamic agency of folktales that places them outside the trajectory of the established wisdom of the dominant culture that distributes social roles and assigns political power. Oral tales of Iran bargain for autonomy from the country's centrifugal cultural and political dominance by generously inviting every ideology and creed to reframe them for a short while.

The problematic role of Iranian folktales vis-à-vis the dominant culture, and the contingent status of vernacular literature in the ever-changing political scene of modern Iran revisits the conventional perception of folktales as antiquated treasures that bind a people to their past. Alternatively, historical reading locates folktales of Iran within their immediate surroundings as both the rewritten folktales of the 20th century and popular classics such as *Shahnameh*, *Rostam Nameh*, *Hussein Kord*, and *Amir Arsalan* entrap the societal preoccupations of their time, resist static interpretations, and like other commodities, are continuously processed to embrace immediate ideologies — the Althusserian “imaginary representation of a subject's relationship to his or her real conditions of existence” both by the author/teller and the

reader/audience, and many a time, with direct social consequences for both (Althusser 162). Indeed, little can be said about Iranian folktales reproduced in the twentieth century without a political understanding of modern Iran. If a nostalgic search for a lost empire and a nationalistic fervor against state-sponsored modernization prompted early modern folklorists to collect the country's ethnic and urban tales, the mission of mid-century Iranian authors was to write ideology into rewritten tales and to juxtapose their ideas with the simple Proppian functions of "Once Upon a Time" only to witness the banning of their fairies from the mass market of revolutionary realism throughout the Islamic Republic. When written in Iran, the Aarne-Thompson *Goldie Locks* finds herself to have more than jet-black mane and a Persian name. She symbolizes Persia when written in the 30s, is a social activist when written in the 60s, and in the 80s becomes *Zeinab's Sister*¹¹⁰ fighting the *Great Devil*¹¹¹

The fusion of nationalism, modernism and secularism produces a specific body of work with a polemic ideology behind selection, omission and revision of tales written by Hedayat's generation who on the one hand defy the state sponsored Hobsbawmian *Invention of Tradition* and on the other, dismiss the Shiite culture that is so heavily intertwined with Iranian mores (Hobsbawm 15). Following the world wide zeal for claiming a national identity, the Iranian elite of the 30s take such modern undertakings as collecting old tales, recording folkdances, and documenting ethnic ceremonies. As a pioneer in collecting popular tales, however, Hedayat battles, on the one hand, the state's expectations of a national pulp fiction, and on the other, the conventional accounts of foreign collectors whose work has already given the outside world a taste of Persia and a pre-drawn map for collectors to follow. If the trend of saving the nation's heritage is partly a learned European idea, it is also an agnostic gesture that

¹¹⁰ Zeinab was the revolutionary daughter of Ali who survived the Karbala war and campaigned against Yazid. The title was given to Basiji women and female cultural police to emphasize their devout and powerful status.

¹¹¹ America

blames the country's social problems on the Shiite clerics and their widespread influence a major hindrance to civil progress. To Hedayat, modernizing the nation while keeping its cultural heritage intact is a dilemma that he seems to grapple with all through his career hence a complex collection of work that continues to attract the attention of scholars who have yet to outline his theoretical standing, and instead take the easy street of *fatalism* as the signifier of his work.

What Behrangi and his contemporary revolutionaries produce two decades later is a continuation of their predecessors' agenda with a twist. Anti-government slogans now hide within popular themes and motifs. Not the time for straightforward political maneuvers, the cautiously critical works are written in secret codes and received as allegories by a reading public who expect their authors to be political. Behrangi's "*Hassan Kachal*" or "Bald Hassan" a well-known celebratory folktale where the unluckiest of all men ends most triumphant and marrying the princess, reverses the tale's predictable ending by shifting the happily-ever-after from the kingly estate to *Kachal*'s shack. Behrangi and his contemporaries continue the trend of telling stories about the marginal and the periphery, but the bitterness that Hedayat's generation expresses towards religion and philistinism of the Iranian common man, is now replaced by an appreciation of the hard work of the common man, and a blind fury against the monarchic regime which is soon to be replaced by the Islamic Republic. The homecoming of religious symbols and retelling Shiite popular tales mark a radical shift in the political expectations of the new citizenry who after establishing an Islamic state, is caught up in an eight-year war with *infidels*.

The dialectic of these cultural movements and their reframed tales in the Jamesonian *political unconscious* of modern Iran present the problematic of folktales as tales about the unreal and the fantastic serving a pragmatic purpose in a society where politics and

magic are continuously intertwined. Ideological omissions and revisions of textual productions, and political codes woven to folk language make the focus of my approach to folktales as an ignored body of cultural representation in modern Iran. As the irrational, the passionate and the exotic continue to be the epistemological core of most Iranian studies done in the west, what such methodical research disregards is the cognition that in Iran, metaphors continue to sit for reality, and fiction and poetry continue to be the vital sources of the nourishment of a democratic imagination. Limitations on argument and discourse in Iran lead to the veiling of the truth in layers of metaphors. As an integral element in social formation, oral tales of Modern Iran engage in a larger system of national discourse where telling tales ends in historical beginnings, and the simple opening of یکی بود، یکی نبود¹¹² leads a hopeful audience on a winding political quest.

¹¹² *Yeki bood, yeki nabood*: “One was, One wasn’t”

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