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Oral Tradition of Epics and Folktales

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Oral Tradition of Epics and Folktales

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The West Asian Region, of which Afghanistan, Iran and Turkey are dealt with in this article, is a treasury of refined Arab-Persian culture and oral literature, and the folk songs of various ethnic groups of the Turkish and Mongolian cultures, whose long tradition originates in inner Central Asia. *Shāhnāmeḥ* and *Laylā Majnūn*, which belong to the first cultural tradition, and *Kōroḡlu*, which belongs to the second, in particular have for centuries demonstrated many stages of development as folk art. The first two had long lived in the popular culture, but were later compiled by great poets as magnificent heroic and romantic epics. Then, in turn, they produced songs, narratives, and tales reflecting much of the local character of various regions and promoted the organization of other new types of folk art. An unending cycle of accumulation of various sources and motifs, their integration and their diffusion can be seen. And through these processes, clearly defined characteristics have emerged regarding the value orientation and aesthetic consciousness of the people of this region who regard the themes of these great epics as their common cultural heritage. Moreover, while the tradition of elaborate courtly love still exists, the concept of Arabic *majnūn* (mad man), who wanders in the desert after becoming mad because of an unfulfilled love, is overwhelmingly popular throughout the entire West Asian Region and has often been incorporated into the themes of folk songs.

Nevertheless, certain types of folk art are not prone to being diffused over a large area. The most typical are the minstrels, called *ʿAsheq*, and their most representative epic, called *Kōroḡlu*. The extent of diffusion and variation of a given theme, hero, or style largely depends not only on its formative background, historical setting, and mechanical adaptability, but also on whether or not any particular function has been assigned to it. Performances involving certain religious sects, for example, recitation and chanting of *Rowzeh-khān*, *Maddāḥ*, and *Vāʿez*, which comprise *Taʿziyeh* of the Shiite, also have limited diffusion. Some aspects of heroes of comical folktales are also discussed in this article.

It is the purpose of this article to analyze the cultural and historical background of the present-day oral tradition by paying special attention to its penetration into everyday life.

I. INTRODUCTION

Minstrels and narrators or reciters have played an important role throughout West Asia. They served not only as entertainers but also as educators and agitators

who strengthened the unity of the community. Although some of their functions have been lost and some have undergone a drastic change, their existence still remains important. Whereas some minstrels transmit a society's traditions by incorporating a new, timely flavor into their performance, other presentations are being reappraised in order to continue appealing to people's emotions, by retaining ancient artistic skills. In modern times activities of this kind of artist were specifically noted in the travels of Olearius, a 17th century, Prussian ambassador to Persia, by Vámbéry, a Hungarian traveller of the 19th century, and others [OLEARIUS 1973: 63-72; VÁMBÉRY 1965]. Since the beginning of this century, anthropologists have been interested in these performing arts. Wilson, for example, provided a detailed report on a blind story teller and reciter of Persia:

Blind men often take to reciting poetry and telling stories for a living. Their ability to memorize vast quantities of poetry is astonishing. One such man I well remember meeting on a lofty plateau where caravans halted on the road from Ahwaz to Isfahan. He had made the spot his centre for that season, and he regaled the muleteers after the evening meal round the camp-fire with recitations from Sadi and Firdausi and from religious history, with a mastery of histrionic art which left on me an indelible impression. Seated in pitch darkness, relying solely on his subject and on the modulations of his voice, he told the tragedy of Sohrab and Rustam, of Laili, and Shirin, and, after an interval, of the fatal field of Karbala, with a pathos brought tears to my eyes no less than to those of his coreligionists. Thanks to such men...the population, though unlettered, is not unlearned, and has a better knowledge of the Persian classics than the average European has of the masterpieces of his own race. [WILSON 1929: 305]

A similar situation also exists in Afghanistan:

"The themes of the Afghan songs, love, religion, legend, romance, and politics," writes James Darmesteter, "touch upon all of the subjects of thought in the popular mind." Even today, when the newspapers (which, however, reach only a few) are published both in Persian and in Pashto in Kabul and in Jalalabad, the song remains the true press in this country, as it was at the time of Darmesteter's inquiry. [DOLLOT 1937: 299]

More recently Yasa and Pierce have noted the importance of tellers of folktales in the mountain villages of Turkey [YASA 1975: 33; PIERCE 1964: 21-23].

It is easy to understand that in urban, multi-structural, developed societies, a folksinger offers critical comments on social and political affairs, whereas in rural, unstructured developing societies he does not criticize his own group, but criticizes outside groups only to justify the existence of his own [DUPREE 1974: 2]. And it seems understandable, too, that criticizing other groups serves as an outlet which permits the release of tension [DUPREE 1975: 122]. In any case, folklore in its broader sense, being a vehicle through which the common feelings and values of the

society are transmitted, has nurtured folk arts that constitute the ethnic culture and the tribal culture. But the modernization movement that has taken place in Iran and Turkey since the last century has influenced those arts by transforming some of their native patterns, just as in the case of the *Karagöz* which has lost its original functions by maintaining only the superficial aspects, and by threatening others like the *Naqqāl* with extinction. On the other hand, the '*Āsheq*, another type of folk art, has taken initiatives in the popular movement of political reformation in Turkey. Obviously this means every one of these folk arts has been closely related to the transition of time. Nevertheless, the fact that various kinds of folk art persist, for all the barriers, clearly indicates how great and firm have been the forms and styles with which they have exhibited themselves.

It is generally said that styles, whether externally or internally conceived, have an important place in artistic formation and cultural maturity. In fact, in the Islamic countries of Asia the style of romantic epic represented in *Laylā Majnūn* and that of the heroic epic represented in *Shāhnāmeḥ* have, like a double-headed eagle, been dominant beyond the present political boundaries not only in oral and written literature but also in every other art form. From Azerbaijan, in western Iran, to Turkey, a style of '*Āsheq*, a singing, playing and narrating minstrel, has not been limited to just narrating folklore, but has permitted various artistic developments in fine music and literature proper. Moreover, Islamic rules which prohibit art as such, ironically brought forth a style of pathetic recitation on martyrs, the *Rowzeh-khān*, and as a consequence, religious performing arts have been considerably developed. Furthermore, as is confirmed in this study, in West Asian folktales as in those of other countries there are always one or two humorists, popular heroes sympathizing with people's sorrows and joys.

This article is intended to provide an overview of the origins, development, and present modalities of the romantic songs and heroic stories in West Asia, with special reference to Iran, Turkey and Afghanistan. Most data used here were obtained in January, 1975 in Afghanistan, and in Iran and Turkey from July-October, 1975. On the latter occasion I was a member of the Second Project of Ethnomusicological Research in Iran and Turkey, led by Professor T. Fujii, and financially supported by the Japanese Ministry of Education. The folktales and narration of West Asia have been partially discussed elsewhere [SUZUKI 1977]. In this paper the range of the subjects is widened, and is mainly discussed from the perspective of cultural intercourse in the heroic and romantic epics and their oral tradition. Here the general meaning of the term "folklore" is used to include folk literature, songs, stories, and narratives attributed.

II. THREE GREAT EPICS AND THEIR GROWTH

1. Overview

What villagers expect of folk-tellers or aged men is primarily the telling of the

heroic legends of the village. In a Turkish village, for example, a popular story may be one from the Ottoman-Persian War of the 18th century, in which some soldiers from the village showed their courage; or one from the recent war against the Russians. Afghan warriors who fought in the Anglo-Afghan War and brave Kurds from Iran who were victorious in intertribal combats are other heroes of folktales. These are a kind of historical story and Dupree in trying to trace the transmission of the historic facts obtained an interesting result [1974: 1-25]. In August, 1839, the British army in India entered Kabul to prevent Russian forces from coming south (the First Anglo-Afghan War). But in January, 1842, the British army was forced to retreat to Jalalabad only to be annihilated. In January, 1963, Dupree followed the route to Jalalabad taken by the British army and collected folktales on the topic of retreat in each village along the way. From this it emerged that, accepted historical facts mostly agreed with the version published by the British authorities, but events and figures of the first, the second (1978-81), and the third (1919) Anglo-Afghan Wars had sometimes been interchanged. The aim of the tales is the telling of and boasting about achievements of warriors from a particular village while ridiculing those from other villages, and the audience was prone to make additions by interrupting the story. Consequently, there existed a considerable number of variations. The same tendency in folktales of historical events in Turkey has also been reported regarding battles against Russia and Iran [PIERCE 1964: 21-22].

The preference for heroic stories rather than other kinds seems to be natural in a traditional rural society. Yet, it is the existence of a great heroic epic that makes their characteristics more distinct; namely, the mythological and historical heroic epic *Shāhnāmeḥ*, the book of kings, describing the period from the genesis to the fall of the Sassanid. People have selected and cherished stories from *Shāhnāmeḥ* concerning their own locality, just as they prefer to tell of heroes from their own village. *Shāhnāmeḥ* may have been a model which guided people in making up their own heroic stories.

A hero is proverbially said to be susceptible to female charms and this is also true for the heroes of *Shāhnāmeḥ*. In many parts of West Asia there exist romances about a hero of *Shāhnāmeḥ* meeting a lady who is destined to become his queen or lover. By separating the romantic portions from their mother work, people have converted them into fully mature romance epics. Niẓamī's *Khosraw va Shīrīn* is representative. But no other epic has such great influence and popularity among the West Asian peoples as *Laylā Majnūn*. Although it is doubtful, as in the case of *Shāhnāmeḥ*, if every listener knows thoroughly the outline of the story, people nevertheless talk and sing about *Laylā Majnūn* with various modifications acceptable to their own society.

Another heroic epic, famous in Turkey, is *Kōroğlu*. In the 11th century the Turkis under 'Abbāssid Caliphs established the Seljuq Dynasty and, at the same time, other Turkis set up the Ghznavids. Despite the tyrannical Mongol invasion, the Ottoman Dynasty was violently revived, and it put an end to the Byzantine Empire. Through this process, the Arabian- and Iranian-based Turkish culture acquired its

originality, and flowered. In those days the national hero of the Turks *Köroğlu* appeared in their legend. Compared with the former two epics, the history of *Köroğlu* is not long. But it may be that *Köroğlu* is the product of the integration of the heroic epic, *Shāhnāmeḥ*, and romance epic, *Laylā Majnūn*, judging from the spirit of *Köroğlu*, which forms a trinity of warrior, poet and lover.

Another legendary hero is the Afghan poet and patriotic warrior, *Khushhāl Khān Khaṭṭak* (1613–89), who appeared about the same time as *Köroğlu* and left his name on the earliest pages of Afghan literary history. His poems have already been discussed in another article [SUZUKI 1974]. *Khushhāl Khān* was a son of a *Khaṭṭaks* clan leader, who devoted almost all the latter half of his life to the struggle against the Mughal Empire, to protect the independence of the Afghans. But his thought and acts not being understood by others his contemporaries, he was labeled a rebel and ended his life as a solitary feeman. In short, his poems are of love and justice:

But we must march and still united stand.

Now is the time, now—'Up, and play the Man.'
 The sword alone can give deliverance,
 The sword wherein is our predominance.

I call to battle, but who heeds my calls?
 And I grow weary calling to the fray,
 If none will harken nor my call obey,
 Then welcome death, come speedily, sweet death,
 Life without honour is but waste of breath,
 In life and death be honour still my guide,
 So shall the memory of *Khushhāl* abide.

[HOWELL and CAROE 1963: 53]

Although *Khushhāl Khān* wrote many classical lyrics (*ghazals*) dealing with traditional themes such as wine cups, beauty and flowers, the most popular poems are those in which he appears as a warrior. Each national epic, such as *Ilias*, *Odysseia*, *Chanson de Roland*, or *Nibelungenlied*, originated from, and molded itself to, a set of historical circumstances. But in reality, it can perhaps be assumed that each time people are confronted with a historical crisis, such as war, they made additions to those epics at the level of folklore. *Khushhāl Khān*'s poems and those of *Köroğlu* suggest such formative processes of national epics.

2. *Shāhnāmeḥ*

(1) Formative Processes¹⁾

After having been dominated by the Arabs for more than two hundred years,

1) This section draws only what is necessary to the following discussion from Kuroyanagi's detailed interpretation and partial translation.

starting in the ninth century, Iranian dynasties began in different locations and the culture entered a period of renaissance. The national epic, *Shāhnāmeḥ*, with 60,000 verses, was written during this renaissance. Written by Ferdowsī who lived in Tus, a town near Mashhad, it was completed in about 1010, after 30 years of work. Although the four dynasties from the mythical period to the fall of the Sassanid, together with the struggles between Īrān and Turān, constitute the warp of the work, the birth, romances, and the brilliant achievements in war of the three generations of the Rostams (Sām, Zāl, and Rostam) that served Īrān dynasties constitute its weft. The most attractive parts are the numerous battles fought by the giant Rostam, son of Zāl and a princess of Kabul. The legend of such a giant as well as other episodes—that one of the heroes, Zāl, is raised by a holy bird; that Rostam murders his own son without being aware of his identity; and that a son and a daughter, Bīzen and Manijeh, of the two hostile families fall in love with each other—is a universal motif of folklore. *Shāhnāmeḥ* is undoubtedly a great compilation of Iranian myths and legends. The events take place in the Zābristān or Sīstān region, near the borders of Iran and Afghanistan, where the legend of Rostam originated. The Turān dynasties were also located in the northern districts of these two countries [KUROYANAGI 1969: 423–447].

(2) *Shāhnāmeḥ* as Folklore

The First Tus Festival commemorating *Shāhnāmeḥ* was held for five days in July, 1975 at Tus, the birth place of Ferdowsī. The newspaper reported daily on the festival, whose entertainment included lectures, movies, display of miniatures inserted into the manuscripts, performances of *Zūrkhāneh* (Iranian classical gymnastics), *Naqqālī* (narration of *Shāhnāmeḥ*), recitations and dramas. These provide a good indication of the way in which people relate themselves to *Shāhnāmeḥ*.

About the same time, *Shāhnāmeḥ va Mardom* (“*Shāhnāmeḥ* and People”), a collection of myths and legends created and added to *Shāhnāmeḥ* by the people of various districts, was published by A. Enjavī Shīrāzī, an Iranian folklorist. Traditional artists have made good use of the episodes contained in *Shāhnāmeḥ* to incorporate new community stories into the text, without changing the original substance. This flexibility has bestowed an eternal life on the folklore and has enabled other peoples to appreciate in their own ways *Shāhnāmeḥ*, the so called national epic of the Iranians. In Afghanistan, for example, the romance of Zāl with his queen Rūdābeh is reckoned among typical Afghan folktales, but no reference is made to Iranian dynasties: “Zāl was a son of Sām, a native of Sīstan. Since he was born with white hair, he was taken to the mountain and abandoned to die. On the mountain, mythological bird, the Roc, fed and raised him. Zāl, an attractive youth, resolved to make a tour. During his sojourn at Kabul, he fell in love with Rūdābeh, the princess of Kabul, and married her after overcoming many difficulties.” With few variations, the story thus far continues according to the Ferdowsī’s original. The question arises in the final part: “Rūdābeh, later on, became the mother of *Rostam, the legendary hero of ancient Afghanistan* [‘ALI 1969: 165]”.

Sohrāb, son of Rostam, is also one of the legendary Afghan heroes. When

Rostam's favorite horse disappears, he comes to the territory of Turān seeking for it. There he falls in love with the princess of Samangān, the future mother of Sohrāb. In this case, geographical identifications were clearly added to the original story that had been told prior to the existence of modern political boundaries. The Afghan legend of Sohrāb and Rostam begins like this:

...There were two kingdoms in what is today known as Afghanistan. In the north was Turkish kingdom of Touran. ...In the west was the Kingdom of Aran...whose capital was Balkh. These two Kingdoms were always at war with each other. At the time of this story the champion of Aran was a giant of a man called Rostam. [PARKER and JAVID 1970: 111]

Those two deliberate manipulations to consider the hero as a native of the given area and to emphasize that the geographical setting of the legend was in their own country must have been the essential conditions for conveying folk stories as their own. It would be quite natural for different episodes to be seriously added to established stories and epics if they are to be considered as "the symbol of the fundamental basis integrating the various sentiments of people of a given nation or community" [OYAMA 1966: 1141].

Since the appearance of the Arthurian Legends as *Historia Regum Britannia* in 12th century England, their influence rapidly expanded to France and Germany, where they came into contact with contemporary popular romances and *chansons de geste*. The Legends incorporated the stories of 'Knights of the Round Table' and 'the Holy Grail', which had the same Celtic origin but had nothing to do with the Arthurian Legends in content, and the great Arthurian cycle came into existence in the medieval European literary world. This, it appears, is also the case with *Shāhnāmeḥ*. It may be possible to obtain what may be called the *Shāhnāmeḥ* cycle by collecting and classifying every kind of folktale concerning *Shāhnāmeḥ* and by examining the variation in manuscripts.

(3) NAQQĀL

We also hesitate to define *Shāhnāmeḥ* as the national epic of Iran because of the existence of the Turkish *Naqqāl*. *Naqqāl* means one who does *naql* ("transmission" or "conveying"); in other words, a professional narrator. Until recently there was a school for story-tellers, and although dying out today, the profession of narrator was not an uncommon occupation [RYPKA 1968: 654, 652]. They appeared at annual fairs, feasts, wedding parties, and especially at the *chāikhāneh* (Iranian tea house), where they entertained audiences by narrating episodes from *Shāhnāmeḥ*, for example. Today, *Naqqāls*, as well as many other specialists of story-telling, have seriously decreased in number and no longer have young successors.

A *Naqqālī* (narration) performed in Āzarī Turkish in the Azerbaijan Region of northwestern Iran was studied during field research. Bordering Turkey, Azerbaijan, with many Turkish hamlets and villages, has a large Turki population. The

situation is basically the same in the cities of Tabriz (the center of East Azerbaijan) and Rezaiyeh (that of West Azerbaijan), where the survey was conducted and recordings made. Appearing at about 4 : 00 p. m. in a *chāikhāneh* located behind intricate alleys far from the center of the city, the *Naqqāl* narrates *Shāhnāmeḥ* for about an hour every afternoon. All 30–40 seats in the tea house are occupied mostly by men; especially by old men. Some silently sip *chāi* and others smoke water pipes. *Teryākīs* (narcotic addicts) whose faces are darkened are scattered here and there. After presenting melodic verses for the first few minutes the *Naqqāl*, apparently 60–70 years old, continues narrating by dramatizing and illustrating his recital with all manner of impersonations and gestures. But the audience remains silent with faces expressionless except when responding in unison to the words of prayer occasionally inserted in the narration. In such a way the story progresses through its stages on each following day.

The recording obtained in Tabriz was the story of Rostam's struggle against Afrāsiyāb, King of Turān, and of his selection of a horse for this purpose. At first it appeared strange that *Shāhnāmeḥ* was narrated in Āzarī Turkish, for it was understood that its main intention was to applaud the victory of the Iranian dynasty over that of Turān. It is still hard to accept more recent findings and interpretations of it. Apparently, *Naqqālī* has ceased to be a vividly popular art, and nowadays it is not the Iranians but the Turkis that sustain these enfeebled activities. Having enjoyed popularity for a thousand years in West Asia, where Iranian, Turkish, and Mongolian dynasties contended for mastery one after another, *Shāhnāmeḥ* has fully exhibited a cosmopolitan character that is generally native to a great style of art.

(4) ZŪRKHĀNEH AND THE RHYTHM OF SHĀHNĀMEH

Zūrkhāneh ("house of power") is Iranian classical gymnastics. Its origin is obscure, but it is said that *Zūrkhāneh* was begun to improve the physical strength of the youth making them suitable for military service. In Tehran it is performed conspicuously for tourists, following the old style and in a specially decorated room. But in a regional city, such as Tabriz, the *Zūrkhāneh* house is just like a gymnasium for boxing or body-building. At the time of field research, one house was open irregularly and the other about ten minutes away through the bazaar, was open for practice or performance almost every evening. Before the seven-o'clock opening, 50–60 men were already occupying the front rows of the second floor and watching the practice which was already taking place in the center of the room. Fourteen regular participants and some substituting members were all young, half-naked and with shaven heads and piercing eyes. Accompanying instruments were a *dombak* (drum) and a *zang* (ring). The performance was started with drumming. For the first few minutes the drummer gave a prayer and recited from *Shāhnāmeḥ*. In Tehran the recitation goes on much longer and is often inserted between performances. The gymnastic movement was accompanied by three-beat monotonous drumming. One or several performers with clubs, chains, and other objects in their hands showed

violent and artful movements. After finishing the show the promoter collected donations of 20–100 rials from the audience.

Whether by coincidence or by intent, the three-beat rhythm of *Zūrkhāne* (da-dan-dan, da-dan-dan, ...) was exactly the same as that of *Shāhnāmeḥ*, whose foot of meter consists of three vowel elements: short-long-long. Three sets of foot plus a short and a long element make a hemistich, and a distich makes one verse or *bait* in Persian; one unit of meaning. *Shāhnāmeḥ* consists of a repetition of this rhythm and *bait* [KUROYANAGI 1969: 441–42]. But it is doubtful how much the performers of *Zūrkhāneh* or the audience are conscious of this relationship with *Shāhnāmeḥ*. It would be premature to conclude that Iranian life is inseparable from *Shāhnāmeḥ* simply because it is recited at the opening of the gymnastic show or because it is invariably included in school texts. Okada [1975] notes that the louder the government applauds *Shāhnāmeḥ* and the more often essays or articles about it appear in literary journals to heighten public interest, the more frequent are the claims that it is just government propaganda to arouse national sentiment. Obviously it is important for students of ethnology to eliminate fabricated factors in folkloric affairs.

3. Laylā and Majnūn

(1) FORMATIVE PROCESSES

According to Bombaci [1970: 11–114], who is in charge of the interpretation of *Laylā and Mejnūn* by *Fuzūli* compiled for the UNESCO Collection, the formative process and development of the story can be summarized as follows: Originating in an Arabian old legend, Majnūn has often been considered to be a real poet, Qays Ibs Malawwah, to whom reference had already been made in the 9th century. In the 10th century *Kitāb-al-Aghānī*, by Abūlfaraj, there is a chapter entitled ‘Laylā’s Lover’, and it is clearly indicated that the source of the story lies in the oral tradition of the 8th century. Some other pieces of literature present fragmentary stories telling of a youth named Qays who falls in love with beautiful Laylā (Laylī, Leylī, etc.), but her parents are opposed to the union and force her to marry another man. Qays then becomes mad (*majnūn*) and wanders into a desert. Soon the story also became popular among the Iranians.

Its popularization was accelerated by *Laylī Majnūn*, a romantic epic of about 4,000 verses, composed in 1188 by Niẓāmī, at the request of Akhsatān I of Azerbaijan. At first the Arabian legend made Niẓāmī reluctant and caused him to complain that there were “neither gardens nor royal banquets. ... Among the arid sands and rugged mountains discourse at the end becomes sorrowful [BOMBACI 1970: 64].” But at last he completed a profound and even philosophical love story, consisting of the sorrowful monologues of Laylā and Majnūn; elegies calling on objects around them such as candles, clouds and the moon; letters exchanged with each other; pathetic soliloquies by Majnūn’s father; and so forth. Although Laylā returns to Majnūn after her husband’s death, the ideal of Laylā painfully wrought up within Majnūn’s

mind does not allow the flesh of Laylā to approach him, and drives her into death. At the end he also follows her in death.

Again according to Bombaci, since the story's origin their love had been evaluated not only as a simple romance but as a model of mystic love. The conditions of mystic love are in particular "the motifs of identity between the lover and the beloved" and "the abstraction of the lover from the physical body of the beloved" [BOMBACI 1970: 61]. There is evidence that the theme of Laylā and Majnūn, although not a few poets after Niẓāmī dealt with it and became famous in their own districts, had already been favored by mystics before his days. At Herat, now in Afghanistan, in the latter half of the 15th century, Jāmī completed his *Laylā Majnūn* by giving it a mystic meaning, and a little later Ḥatīfī did so by stressing the plot of the story. Field research revealed that the 'Laylā and Majnūn' being sung in Afghanistan was mostly that of Jāmī or Ḥatīfī. Fuzūlī (d. 1556) completed the story in Turkish in 1536. Like innumerable other Persian and Turkish poems, this was a reply (*javāb*) to Niẓāmī's poem. Composed with the same meter, the same subject, the same mood, and a very slight variation, his poem is said to be simpler and more objective than Niẓāmī's.

(2) THE IDEA OF LOVE AND PARADISE

Another famous hero who becomes *majnūn* (mad) as a result of a fruitless love is Farhād. In folk songs his image and Majnūn's often overlap [SUZUKI 1978]. The love of Farhād and Shīrīn is told as a highly characterful episode, although it is inserted virtually as a second or a third theme in *Khosraw Shīrīn*, another long romantic epic of Niẓāmī, by amplifying the love of *Khosraw* II and Shīrīn that is briefly referred to in *Shāhnāmeḥ*.²⁾ Okada's interpretation provides the details. Shīrīn is a niece of the Armenian Queen and Farhād, who may have been a real person [OKADA 1977: 365-67], is an artisan who tunnels through rocky mountains and makes engravings on walls. He also fruitlessly loves Shīrīn, the promised Queen of *Khosraw*, only to become mad and wander into the desert in a trance. He speaks of nothing but Shīrīn. Answering a question of King *Khosraw*, what he says on love "represents the author's profound knowledge about mysticism [OKADA 1977: 368]."

In contrast with the love of Majnūn and Farhād, whose lives have nothing to do with "gardens" and "banquets" and whose solution to the problem lies only in their struggle with themselves, the love of *Khosraw* and Shīrīn tenaciously exchange question- and-answer letters for a long time until she is welcomed finally to his court with dignity and as a legal wife. This is precisely the common style of traditional courtly romance in the medieval West. In other words, *Khosraw Shīrīn* in time, place, and modality parallels *Roman de la Rose*, of thirteenth-century France, as an instructional book in the manners of courtly love, and a work that greatly influenced later romantic poems. Such brilliant settings as banquets, music and musicians, hunting in green woods, and lavishly scattered flowers and jewels not only decorated

2) Two stories, *Kalilah v Dimnah*, introduced from India, and *Vis v Rāmin*, already published, are also said to have contributed to the completion of the work [OKADA 1977: 370].

Nizāmi's poetry, but later were splendidly depicted in Persian miniature paintings, so that poetic stories and paintings display an admirable coacting. How much have these background scenes contributed to the Persian aesthetic sense and lyrical mind? When we recall the masterpieces of such prominent Persian poets as Ferdowsī and Nizāmi, and their long-enduring popularity, we are reminded that "Literature always anticipates life," or "Life imitates Art far more than Art imitates Life."

The following expression, for example, might easily have influenced the Iranian sense of beauty far more than it represented real life. The beauty of Shīrīn, "sweet" in its literary meaning, is described as follows:

Her beauty, crowned beneath a tender veil,
 Far excels the moon's glory
 And nightly shines like a full moon.
 Like the water of life in the depth of darkness.

.....

At the thought of her being a ripe date,
 My mouth begins to water with sweet taste.
 Her bright teeth are comparable
 To rows of silver pearls.

.....

Her hair plaited and coiled up
 Is so neat as circling braids.

.....

Her dreamy eyes like narcissus
 Are inviting in a seductive way.
 That inviting ogle,
 The tender lines of her cheeks and chin:
 Can they be compared to an apple or a lemon?
 Oh, how can their charms be matched
 By millions of silver stars, the bright moon,
 or even by the golden sun?
 Her breasts are like a pair of silver pomegranates
 Fully ripened and ready to burst
 And on each tip lies a petal of rose.

.....

Oh, that sweet spring of beauty!
 By looking into her meek eyes like an antelope's,
 No brave can stand without losing his sanity.

[OKADA 1977: 13-14] (English translation by Hirose)

It is interesting to compare the song above with the concept of beauty described in *Roman de la Rose*:

Her hair was bright and gold.

.....

Her lips were soft and tender like a new-born chick.

.....
 Her forehead was smooth and fair.
 Her round eyes were large and pretty.
 Her nose was well balanced.
 Her eyes were as blue as a falcon's.
 Her breathing was so fragrant,
 And her face was white and fair.
 Her small mouth was so round and lovely,
 And the lines of her chin were quite appealing.

[OYAMA 1976: 31] (English translation by Hirose)

Roman de la Rose is allegorical literature. A poet, who has entered into the Garden of Love and has fallen in love with Rose, meets the hindrance of Slander and Jealousy and accepts the advice of Reason and Friendship, finally to win and pick the Rose through the intervention of Nature.³⁾ This process has a characteristic in common with that of discordance between *Khosraw* and *Shīrīn* as manifested in their question-and-answer letters and with the movements of people surrounding the two lovers. But what should be more emphasized here is the difference in the way of describing beauty. *Nizāmī*'s way is just like the miniature of words: beauty corresponds concretely with the moon, stars, the sun, fruits, flowers, spring and water. These fruits and water cannot but remind us of Paradise as explained in the Koran:

...proclaim good tidings to those who have faith and do good works. They shall dwell in gardens watered by running streams: whenever they are given fruit to eat they will say: 'This is what we used to eat before,' for they shall be given the like. Wedded to chaste virgins, they shall abide there for ever.
 [DAWOOD 1970: 327]

These verses suggest that the beauties created by *Nizāmī* were incarnations of the idea of paradise itself. Possibly, the folksongs of those countries that sing of and praise such beauties as depicted by *Nizāmī* and share a common Persian culture represent the idea of paradise.

Yet it could also be assumed that the images of *Majnūn* and *Farhād* were the straightforward reflection of the reality of Arabian and Persian men who always had to live in the desert. This can be more clearly illustrated by *Tristan und Isolde*, a tragic romance set in the culture of the North European forest. It originated in the same Celtic legend that produced the Arthurian Legends. Several motifs were successively compiled into courtly, romantic epics and bardic poetry by German and French poets of the 12th century. While *Tristan* is escorting *Isolde*—who is to become the queen of his uncle, King Mark—from Ireland by ship, they both accidentally take aphrodisiac and fall in love. Although they remain loyal in mind to the king, they are forced to flee into a deep forest, where they lead a severe but happy

3) Different authors separately wrote the first and latter halves of the story. So their attitudes toward love differ a little.

life. After a while, Isolde returns to Mark and Tristan is banished to an island where he dies of a war wound before Isolde could return to him. By confronting some of the medieval romances of chivalry such as 'The Holy Grail' and 'Knights of the Round Table,' Tristan and Isolde, by accepting their fate, preferred to disregard the law rather than to cast away their love. Whereas chivalrous love or that sung of by troubadours denied instinctive and sensual love, Tristan and Isolde admitted such love voluntarily. These are the two extremes of the Western archetype of love.

What should be noted here is the reason why Majnūn, who accepted his fatal love, as did Tristan, could not become chivalrous or like Tristan and remained as Majnūn (madman). Had he been a real poet named Qays, it would be more difficult to understand why he could not become a lover like a troubadour. But, it may be meaningless to apply here the idea of chivalrous love to the society where there is neither a chivalric system nor freedom of intersexual acquaintances. According to Bombaci, "Majnūn means 'the possessed of the djins', that is by the spirits who exist between the sky and earth according to primitive Arab animism, which was taken up by Islam, and thence the 'mad', 'the inspired'. ... More than one ancient Arabic poet has been given this designation" [BOMBACI 1970: 47].

The purpose of the first point was to explain the connection between Majnūn's character and his life and circumstances. *Tristan und Isolde* was chosen as a comparative example. It is on the ocean, a maternal symbol, that they fall in love, and a deep forest, a symbol of life, defends and protects their love when endangered. In contrast, it is only in the desert, a symbol of barrenness, that Majnūn and Farhād can find refuge. Even if a pair of lovers could run away hand-in-hand, it would be impossible for them to find a refuge that could conceal them. In a desert where nothing obstructs the view, and under a scorching sun one is always obliged to make a determinate choice. Even temporary satisfaction of love is not allowed: One either falls in love regardless of the consequences, or one does not fall in love. The problem to be resolved exists only within the individual's mind.

The story of Laylā and Majnūn not only originated in Arabian legends but faithfully represented an aspect of Arabian cultural modalities. It must have been Nizāmī's confidence that the theme would also be accepted in Persia and his sympathy with the thoughtful, mystic elements of the story that made him inherit the legend with all its background and sentiment. Had he wished, he could have added royal banquets and courts. But Qays was not even a poet. He was simply a son of an Arabian chieftain. From the moment he meets Laylā in school, and falls in love with her at first sight, he begins to change into Majnūn. This simple plot has been ceaselessly supported by people for centuries. Why is it? Tapping the abundant streams of imagination from both ancient Arabia and Persia, Nizāmī depicted, for one thing, the reality that a man who loved somebody was destined to go mad and, for another, the ideal, symbolized by banquets and plays of love with beauties like incarnations of the idea of paradise. More important is that in these descriptions people's life and mind, such as Islamic thoughts, way of life in a tribal group society, and the marital system with no free will, are all reflected more than he probably expected. This would

be one of the most important factors giving his works endless traditional character, and enabled people in different localities to create their own variations.

(3) LOVERS IN DIFFERENT LOCALITIES

As it has already been pointed out [SUZUKI 1978], there exist in different locations many versions of legends having the names of two lovers for a title. In the essential part of the story, if not in details, some tales seem to have replaced only the names of Shīrīn and Farhād or Laylā and Majnūn with other names relevant to the given district. Others, both in plots and details, clearly represent the social, economic, and historical characteristics of the place where the song or the legend has been fostered.

For example, near Peshawar there is a story of 'Ādamkhān (male) and Durkhānei' transmitted for more than two hundred years. It goes like this: A son and a daughter of chieftains of two neighboring clans, though being attracted to each other, are married-off to others. On meeting again a few years later, they run away hand in hand, with the result that he is killed and she is brought home where she wastes away to death. Is another story, a poetess, Rābi'a of Balkh imprisoned because of her love for a male slave, Bakhāsh. Later it became the theme of many *Bakhtāsh-nāmehs*. These Afghan stories become increasingly impressive because both are legends based on facts. Ādamkhān is said to have been a skilled player of the *rubāb*, a stringed instrument of the lute family. There are many other stories whose hero is a poet or a musician. From this it can be assumed that a poet and a musician were apt to be discriminated by common people for some reason. Were the data analyzed on the social status of heroes and heroines, there would almost certainly be an interesting correspondence with the social and geographical context of the love affairs. But that remains a topic for future discussion.

4. Kōroĝlu

(1) FORMATIVE PROCESSES

The letter "g" in *Kōroĝlu* denotes simply a prolongation of the preceding vowel: the approximate pronunciation is, therefore, *kōro:l*, although it is sometimes pronounced *kōrogl*. *Kōroĝlu* is considered to be a heroic epic of Ruşen Ali, who was called Kōroĝlu (*Kör*—"blind", *oĝlu*—"son") because of his blind father. It is also the best-known name of a hero who appears in folktales and folksongs presented by 'Āsheqs, poets and minstrels throughout the domain of Turkish culture from Azerbaijan to Turkey. As in many other cases of heroic tales, the stories of the legendary heroes and of other historical characters have become intermingled through the process of oral transmission. Of course there is no authorized text. Only *Türk Halk Şiiri Antolojisi* (Turkish Classical Series 9) contains verses from '*Kōroĝlu*'. By referring also to the literature, the interpretation of the verses can be summarized as follows: The legendary hero, Kōroĝlu, is believed to have become a chivalrous robber who hid himself in Mt. Caml Bel to take vengeance upon Bolu Bey, a tyrant by

whom his father had been made blind. The historical hero, Koroğlu, was supposedly a poet, who was in the *Yeni çeri* army and served under the Premier Sokollu Mehmet Paşa in the Turco-Iranian War (1577–1590). It would be natural to assume that these two figures combined to form the ‘Koroğlu’ of today. Moreover, it is also probable that the folk poetry of Koroğlu (Koroğlu) whose name appears together with Koroğlu in Evliya Çelebi’s *Seyahat-nâme*—one of the greatest Ottoman classical geographical works of the 17th century—has become mixed with that of Koroğlu.

Through the Turco-Iranian War the Ottoman Empire annexed Georgia, Azerbaijan, and other Iranian tributary states. But with the assassination of Mehmet Paşa, at Tabriz, the prosperous Empire began its decline [MAESHIMA 1972: 361]. Wrought up in this historical background, ‘Koroğlu’ seems to have attracted strong public sentiment. According to *Türk Halk Şiiri Antolojisi*, its entire work consists of 24 volumes, each of 50–150 pages. On every page Koroğlu appears to be a loving poet, sensitive to the beauty of nature, human life, and the popular mind, as well as a daring and self-possessed warrior. The following is a canto entitled ‘If those in grief couldn’t be comforted.’

In every quarter of the transitory world,
If youths so brave were none to find,
The country would be governed by anarchy.
If those in grief couldn’t be comforted,

The world would be ruled by injustice,
Dishonesty, and gloom with deepest darkness.
And lovers would be driven to madness,
If they couldn’t behold each other.

Be my love before my eyes.
Oh, God! Don’t you know the pain of love?
I would send a rose to my love,
Were it not so withered and faded.

Oh, brave Koroğlu! Go fight on.
Seek to save your comrades from such agony.
For those dying you must have a salvation.
Unless the decision is in God’s mind.

[MUTLUAY 1972: 99]⁴⁾

In this case four verses constitute a stanza, and four stanzas make a canto. Such a form is positive evidence that ‘Koroğlu’ was not originally born as literature proper like *Shāhnāme*, but as something to be sung. Actually, it is the typical pattern of the ‘*Āsheq*’ poetry that four verses make a stanza with rhymes a-b-c-d, d-d-d-b, e-e-e-b,

....

4) English translation by Hirose, from the Japanese translation by Katsuta.

(2) 'ĀSHEQ

The terms 'Āsh(e)q (pl. 'Osshāq) in Persian and *Āşık* (pl. *Asıklar*) in Turkish originate from Arabic 'eshq (love, being sick or dying for love), and now denote "amorous", "lover", and "minstrel" which are the derivatives of "lover". But the meaning of "minstrel" is known only in the Turkish culture where "'Āsheq" denotes a man who travels and plays the *sāz*, a nine stringed instrument, mostly singing poetic stories, classical and religious poetry, and popular songs. According to the custom of a given district, he is accompanied sometimes by the players of the *bālābān* (an upright pipe) or the *zūrnā* (*zrnā*, *sornā*) and the *qāvāl* (a drum of the tambourine family). The explanatory literature, 'Āsheqlār, translated from Turkish into Persian and compiled by Şadīq, tells of the origin and nature of 'Āsheq, which can be summarized as below:

'Āsheqs are assumed to have come into existence at about the same time as the Turkis rose up in Central Asia. That is, they have their origin in the religious figures *Kāhn* or Shaman, who chanted hymns. These were popularly called *Qām*, *Toyun*, *Bāksī*, and *Ozān*. Singing their delicate sentiments and a variety of popular wishes, "'Āsheqs" had originally a religious meaning. Their songs in *āvāz* ("melodious voice") were also a vehicle for transmitting myths and folktales. Only the name *Ozān* remained in use and a new term "'Āsheq" became to be used later on. Although there are several explanations for the introduction of this new term, there is no doubt that the character of *Ozān* had an image much in common with that of "'Āsheq" of Arabic origin. It was in the days of Shāh Ismā'il that 'Āsheqs attained their full growth with the first compilation of anthologies. More precisely, it was when the Turkoman Kara koyun yılı Dynasty (1378–1469) rose in Azerbaijan, after the collapse of the Timur Dynasty and before the rise of the Safāvids.

'Āsheq was a poet, composer, singer, reciter, story teller, player of the *sāz*, and even a dancer and actor. He was a creative artist commanding the world of poetry, music, and dance, and was a real *Honarmand* ("artist") in Persian. His artistic peculiarities were found principally in oral transmission through apprenticeship, improvisatory performance, flexibility of the text, and a deep relationship with folklore. In addition to the tunes of folk songs, he created at least seventy-two *Āhangs* ("tunes" or "melodies") of the *sāz*, each of which matches with a particular feeling or occasion such as joy, pain, anger, battle, victory, or defeat. The 'Āsheq poetry can be broadly categorized into two types: One includes general songs sung with special rhythm inherent in the native language, and the other includes narrative songs *Manzūmeh*, which consists of proses and verses. Dealing with lyrics, ballads, puns, religion, and philosophical and social matters, the former comprises more than twenty variations when classified according to their content and form. Examples that belong to the latter are the heroic epic 'Kōroġlu', romantic epics 'Farhād and Shīrīn' and 'Aslī Karam', and other popular legendary songs [ŞADĪQ 1976: 6–23].

(3) 'ĀSHEQ AND KÖROġLU

According to Şadīq, the 19th century 'Āsheqs showed their masterly skills in the

resistance movement against the oppression of landlords, the Kājārs, and Russian administrators in Azerbaijan, especially around Tabriz. There were many 'Āsheqs who participated in the movement themselves. Chubān-e-Afghān, for example, the author of the following verses, was one of them:

The great wheel of fate gives us only sorrow.
 Why can't it show us plain justice?
 It has only subjected us to landlords.
 And our sufferings it never turns to notice.

Oh, God! What days! What times!
 Stained are our hearts with what we've bled.
 Peasants torment life and landlords wallow
 In pleasure without mercy to tears we shed.

[ŞADIQ 1976: 90] (English translation by Hirose)

The research team was frequently told that the songs of 'Āsheq were those of the resistance of the common people and of humanism, although the term "humanism" was not known to them at that time. Because love was the greatest source of the power for resistance and the worthiest motive for the movement that 'Āsheqs sang of love more than anything else. Today strangers can hardly understand them, as they usually sing in an extremely inarticulate dialect of Āzarī Turkish. In Turkey, where the publicational industry is comparatively well developed, poems and anthologies of 'Āsheqs are sold in large quantities. But these are nothing but samples of what various 'Āsheqs actually sing before an audience. Of course 'Kör-oğlu' has also experienced the same process as mentioned above. Just as *Shāhnāme* has served as the model of heroic epics for centuries, 'Kör-oğlu' has been the best example for 'Āsheqs to praise the spirit of bravery and resistance.

Today 'Āsheqs are more or less forced to change in order to cope with the expanded mass communication and urban life. In the city of Tabriz, for example, which has a population of about 465,000, there are 2-3 designated *chāikhānehs* ("tea houses") where 'Āsheqs can exhibit their skills on ordinary days. In 1975 about 100 'Āsheqs belonged by contract to one of the three *chāikhānehs*. They perform at weddings and many other celebrations and accept calls to play overnights within their hometown as well as in the surrounding regions. They may perform as much as 300 km from home. On holidays many young men rush from the suburbs to the city and gather at the *chāikhāneh*, where they listen to 'Āsheqs who perform at specified hours. Sometimes the audience enjoys a day long over a single bottle of Coca-Cola. When a famous 'Āsheq appears the audience fills even the roads outside the *chāikhāneh*. More proficient 'Āsheqs take an active part on the radio. In a modern technological society what appeal do they try to have for the people, and what is their influence? Although many of the materials actually recorded during field research were love poems typical of the Persian classics, some belonged to other categories, as seen below:

Tabriz can exist only as a city of technology.
 A city does not exist without its technology.
 There can be no progress without technology.
 For techniques and knowledge are the glories of man.

Technology of many a city remain in our memory.
 We also would like to remain in glory
 As others do in people's memory.
 Look at the heritage left by our great teachers.

And devote yourselves to the following:
 Try to tread the right road.
 Try to listen to the word of truth.
 For man's capital is his reliability.

Hosein Tabriz* has successfully mastered
 his technique from his teachers.
 He would never forget their words:
 "Beware lest your value diminish."
 For this *sāz*, too, is a product of technology.

Note: * The singer himself

[SUZUKI 1975: 48] (English translation by Hirose)

It is clear from this that '*Āsheqs* exist not simply for the amusement.

III. POPULAR HEROS

Unattainable for the average man is that dream-like ideal both of being a hero such as Kōroğlu and of living, surrounded by beauties, in an incarnation of paradise. In a sense, the analysis has so far been an investigation of the substance of popular dreams in relation to the three great heroic and romantic epics. Here the focus is on the favorites or heros that are considered to be more familiar to the people. An anthropologist who lived among Turkish villagers classified their entertainments into three main groups: Nasr-ed-Din Khoja, Keloğlan and what concerns the village and their animals [PIERCE 1964: 93].

Khoja is a hero in comical and witty tales arising from the daily lives of the common people. In contrast to this, Keloğlan is a fantastic hero of a supernatural story called '*Keloğlan*'. It seems that these two heros, as little objects of everyday amusement, are far closer to the people than Kōroğlu or Rostam of *Shāhnāmeḥ*. Karagös, an important character in the Turkish shadow play, is also a favorite like Khoja. However, today it may be difficult to put him into the category of a hero of folktales. These fictitious characters and heros are not like those in epics who try to wrestle with difficulties of love and battle. Rather they are humorous and witty fellows who are always dodging the social and political oppressions with ironical and

critical attitudes. As a consequence the government caused the shadow play, *Karagöz*, to be transformed into a nonsensical amusement for children.

1. *Karagöz*

In the 17th century, during the Ottoman Dynasty, the Turkish shadow play called "*Karagöz*", whose main character was Kara ("black")-göz ("eye"), began its performance, and flourished particularly in Istanbul and Bursa. Professor And of the Department of Drama at Ankara University explains the origin and nature of *Karagöz* in his recent academic work *Karagöz*. According to him, there are various views regarding the direct origin of Turkish shadow plays such as Greek plays, gypsy performers, and Egyptian plays introduced by the Arabs from India and Java. In any case, as was noted by a Frenchman who lived long in Turkey, one of the objects in the early days of *Karagöz* was an ironical and critical appeal to the people regarding contemporary social and political events and personalities [AND 1975: 68]. Various types of characters with different nationalities and jobs reflect the internationalism of Istanbul and represent the fixed ideas conceived by the Ottomans. Among them are Arab merchants, Albanian gardeners, Frankish physicians, Kurdish watchmen, and so forth. By taking up everyday happenings and manners as main themes, the narrator also dealt with famous legends such as 'Farhād and Shīrīn'. He had to be knowledgeable about the classics and popular songs, because their parodies played an essential part in the entire drama. Besides, since the performances were often concentrated in the fasting month of Ramaḡān and the shadow play had to be held every evening as an entertainment, he had to be able to perform at least twenty-eight repertoires.

During the project team's stay at Ankara, in the latter half of Ramaḡān in 1975, there were nightly television broadcasts of *Karagöz*. It is generally impossible to enjoy it today except on such special occasions. There are few authorized successors to the art. A puppeteer who operates puppets made of camel skin on a transparent screen with a stick attached to the puppet, is also the narrator and singer who imitates each character's voice. Sometimes an assistant attends and helps him with piping and by beating the tambourine. Its exquisiteness lies in an incoherent cross-talk between *Karagöz*, who is extremely realistic and knows nothing but vulgar language, and *Hacivat*, who can use very sophisticated language pedantically sporting his knowledge of classical poetry and music. But there is a much more interesting point; it is not *Karagöz* but *Hacivat* that is always humiliated and loses face though he appears to be far better educated than *Karagöz*. One wonders, therefore, if the common people had so much sympathy with refined classics as has always been assumed. Possibly they paid most of their attention only to the superficial meanings and to the plot of the epics and poems, and not to the profundity of artistic taste. And a man like *Khoja* (see below) even joked about the teachings of the Koran.

2. *Nasr-ed-Din Khoja*

Nasr-ed-Din ("the victory of faith") *Khoja* ("teacher of Islam") is generally

considered by Turkish academics to have been a real person who most probably lived in 13th century Anatolia, under the Seljūkids [MORI 1965: 297]. Khoja is a man of extremes being both a coward and a brave man, a barbarian and a scholar, a stupid and a man of wit, and a braggart and a sage. The very person who is often mocking and sarcastic toward a ruler, and who remonstrates with him, even one like Timur, sometimes becomes a sycophant in other places [MORI 1965: 305].

His story remains popular throughout the Islamic world and every minor ethnic community. Among the Kurds there exists a hero of the same nature, Bahlūli-zāna, and in Iran there is a similar hero named Juhī, who was originally popular among the Arabs and North Africans and who supposedly influenced the formation of Khoja [РЫПКА 1968: 656]. In Iran and Turkey illustrated books telling the story of Khoja are sold. Their covers depict the bearded figure Mollā (Islamic teacher) riding on a skinny donkey and attract even the eyes of travelers.

3. Keloğlan

Kel (“bald”)-oğlan (“boy”) is a legendary hero who ranks with Karagöz. With the limited available literature, it is not possible to ascertain if a correlation exists between the sounds Keloğlan and Kōroğlu, or between Keloğlan and Karagöz, both of whom are supposed to be bald,⁵⁾ or what is the historical background of the character. Hence, only a rough summary of the plot is given here: Keloğlan obtains three pieces of magic fur from three horses by saving their lives when they are being punished for damaging a village wheat field. Each of the three pieces of fur enables him to obtain a daughter of the Sultan. He presents two of the women to his brothers. But the two jealous brothers throw him into a well and he descends into the underworld, where he saves a sacrificial princess by killing a goblin. Then he saves a squab when it is about to be eaten by a snake. The mother bird, in return, volunteers to carry him back to the world. Offered food and water by the king, he returns safely on the bird. His brothers repent. Keloğlan lives happily everafter in the place with his wife [PIERCE 1964: 94–96]. Obviously many popular motifs of folklore constitute the story. His strong sense of justice and warmheartedness may attract the audience. It is reported that the names of villagers’ favorite newspaper are ‘Kōroğlu’ and ‘Keloğlan’ [YASA 1975: 33].

IV. ROWZEH KHĀN

In discussing the tradition of story telling, *Rowzeh Khān*, narration about Islamic martyrs, cannot be overlooked. Some 93 percent of the Iranians belong to an Islamic sect known as the Twelve Imamis of Shi‘ism. They devoutly worship the three generations of Imams, ‘Alī and his sons Ḥasan and Ḥosein, as well as Fāṭemah, ‘Alī’s wife and a daughter of the Prophet. There are several memorial days and

5) Among the Iranians, as well as among the Kurds, there often appears a comic hero named *Kachal* (“scald head”).

holidays for them. Especially in the first ten days in the month of Moḥarram, to mourn for Ḥosein, who was murdered by the Umayya, at Karbalā, Iraq, the wailing of people has been evoked in many ways: narrating, performing, elegizing of the tragedy and preaching in public. Such events formerly took place throughout the country and it is not clear when they ended, but even today in religious towns such as Yazd and Mashhad, part or all of the same scene can be observed.⁶⁾

In Yazd, for example, on the 10th of Moḥarram there are wooden floats of 7–8 m tall named *Naql*, which are carried on shoulders by those called 'Ashurān. This day is also called *rūze-qatl* or *rūze-'Ashurān*. Communities in the city possess seven of these floats and another six are owned by those outside. At that time, many people follow the 'Ashurān crying, shouting the names of 'Alī and Ḥosein, and beating their chest in an expression of sorrow. These people are called *Sineh-zan* ("chest-beat"). The *Ta'ziyeh* starts when the *Naql* is carried into an open space or the courtyard of Masjd. This is a performance just like the Christian passion play, and it is generally performed on a specially erected platform in a rich person's courtyard or in a public square. Some literature describes a typical pattern of *Ta'ziyeh* as follows:

It consists of three major parts and corresponding roles, but the number of performers is not fixed. He who enlivens it most and plays the part of prompter throughout the play is *Rowzeh-khān*; it is he who sonorously narrates the play. He tells of the tragedies of the Prophet's family, including the murder in Karbalā, by inserting some religious poems. Female parts are played by men or boys disguised as women. Then a person, often a dervish, called *Maddāh* recites his own poetry or long hymns and elegies quoted from the classics. According to some accounts, occasionally *Maddāh* used to practice independently a clamorous recitation of the heroic activities of the Prophet and soldiers before Masjds or mausolea of saints [VÁMBÉRY 1965: 217–8]. Finally, a preacher called *Vā'eż*, often actually a Mollā, solemnly completes the *Ta'ziyeh*. He begins his presentation with ethical and moral admonitions and finishes it with funeral songs [MASSÉ 1939: 114].

At first the performance took place in a private yard and at the expense of the householder, in order to show it to the followers of the house. But later outsiders were gradually permitted to take part, both as audience and performers, and public performances were given [RYPKA 1968: 683–85]. And just as the English interlude arose from the passion and miracle plays and developed into the modern play, a kind of farce emerged from *Ta'ziyeh*, while the people were reproaching and insulting the second Orthodox Caliph 'Umar [RYPKA 1968: 685]. But there are still many unanswered questions regarding the relationship between *Ta'ziyeh* and the origin of modern Iranian plays, or the historical background of the formation of *Ta'ziyeh*.

6) Imoto [1977: pers. comm.] made a supplementary remark concerning this: "...for example in Tehran, violent scenes are still observed in the bazaar, in Shahr-e-Rey (a southern city), and in the old towns of the northern district, part of which has become a newly-developed area. In Gorgan and other local cities they still have a traditional procession of coffins, festival cars, celestial children, and marriage dolls. So do the people in the bazaar of Tehran."

Putting aside the question of whether they should be considered as narratives or dramatic shows, there is no doubt that *Ta'ziyeh* provides interesting and abundant material for further research. It consists of 40–50 scenes, each with several variations that are further developed and added to with each new performance [RYPKA 1968: 684].

Although *Ta'ziyeh* was at its zenith in the latter half of the Kājār Dynasty (1779–1925), probably reflecting an upsurge of national sentiment, it was prohibited in the course of general reformation by Rezā Shāh (1925–41). No information was collected on current governmental attitudes toward *Ta'ziyeh*, but it is clear that political measures have a great direct influence on folklore.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND TOPICS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

This article has not attempted to provide a comprehensive explanation of the oral tradition of West Asian folkstories. Rather, focusing on the heroes and heroines that have been widely favored, especially in the epics, discussion has been on modalities as folklore, and the relationship between characters and their nationality or historical background. The following conclusions emerge from this study:

First, the cycle of oral narratives is repetitive: Accumulation, integration, and diffusion. This may be a universal attribute of the tradition of oral literature. As exemplified in the three great epics dealt with here, especially in *Shāhnāmeḥ* and *Laylā Majnūn*, various folktales accumulated for centuries from different sources were compiled into a complete literary work as a form of integrated popular mind of earlier and contemporary generations. In the cases of *Shāhnāmeḥ* and *Laylā Majnūn* the two eminent authors Ferdowsī and Niẓāmī added affluent lyricism, dramatically and psychologically elaborate plots, flowing and elegant styles, and philosophically profound elements to what originally were very simple tales. Then their works returned to the popular cradle of transmission to be diffused throughout the country, where selection of themes and addition of new motifs were made through the accomplished sense of beauty and system of values. New variations again emerged, which have the potential of developing into another cycle of stories.

Second, there is a significant correlation between the manner of diffusion and the character of variations in each story. The broader the locality it covers, the more themes and motifs the story contains. In the case of *Shāhnāmeḥ*, for example, the people have the wider possibility of choosing themes and locations which they are more familiar. Consequently, in diffusing and creating variations, the story makes a great development with various heroes and localities. In contrast, when a story lacks in the dramatic movement and potential geographical expansion, as in the case of *Laylā Majnūn*, it obtains a universally acceptable psychological pattern and its variations are generated by closely relating to the characteristics of nature, life, and human relations peculiar to a given district. In the latter case, the simple replacement of hero's and heroine's names with those peculiar and familiar to a given district may be the first condition of exhibiting the locality. This does not necessarily mean that the heroic mental character changes so much. It seems to be one of the essential

properties of the variations of *Laylā Majnūn* that psychological emphasis is always placed on the hero and the heroine is generally treated only as a symbol of beauty and love. In Afghan ballads and songs both Majnūn and Farhād, another majnūn (madman), are sung rather symbolically either as one who tortures himself because of his love or as one who achieves fana in the interpretation of Sufism. On the other hand, the heroines Laylā and Shīrīn are both pictured as incarnations of paradise, not only in their physical appearance but also in the idea that has supported their existence, and are not treated as those who are agonized by the pain of love so much as the heroes.

Third, after the rise of the modern states and the subsequent border disputes, narratives that have supernationalistic or universal characteristics have become rare. This is especially true in the case of '*Köroğlu*'. In other words, a folktale with even the hint of modern nationalism in its background limits its own universality which may be inherent. And all the related folktales of the same nature are also limited in their restricted sphere of activity. If this is true, it possibly explains why the excellent '*Āsheq*, a versatile popular art, did not diffuse into the neighboring districts of Iran. Supposedly originating in Central Asian shaman's hymns, '*Āsheq* was in reality an art of Turkish wandering artists who developed themselves by being spokesmen of the public in Azerbaijan, an area disputed between the Iranians and the Turks, or the Ottomans since the rise of Turki power. This indicates that nationality has been a major factor in obstructing the diffusion of '*Āsheq* among the Iranians, despite some intercourse in musical instruments and song themes.

The same is true of the religious narrations and recitations of poetry belonging to a certain sect. These not only clearly illustrate the third conclusion but also present new aspects. *Ta'ziyeh*, and its dramatic performances during the month of Moḥarram, such as *Rowzeh-khān*, recitations by *Maddāh*, and sermons by *Vā'ez*, are not observed except by the Twelve Imamis of Shi'ism. Needless to say, neither the terrible body beating nor the shouting as an expression of lament for 'Alī is seen anywhere in non-Shiite countries. It is easy to guess, then, that this form of art which is directly related to the commandments of a religious sect is less diffusible than the art of '*Āsheq* which is simply a reflection of nationality. With regard to this, the following suggestion has been offered: "Injuring of body and wailing were commonly observed in Asia Minor. ...In the Mesopotamian Tammuz festival, that is the Festival of Spring, the theme of the dying god and the lamenting goddess was performed, followed by the chorus of wailing and elegies dedicated to the figure of the god.... it may be said that these old traditions of Orient are still living in the form of Shi'ism" [MOTO 1977: 550-52]. From this point of view, if inquiries are made into the historical motives by which the Iranians accepted Shi'ism as their proper religion, it may be possible to assume that the characteristics of the Iranians' basic mind and belief that have supported their life as a whole are reflected in other artistic activities, including oral literary traditions.

In contrast with those connected with religion, stories like those of Khoja, which deal with popular laughter and sorrows, enjoy the widest appeal in every kind of

folklore. This needs no special explanation. But as yet there has been no comparative study by distinction or nations of what makes people laugh or grieve. It appears that some of the most peculiar characteristics of nationalism, regionalism or tribalism can be found by pursuing these topics. As stated in the section, 'Popular Heros,' the circumstances that gave life to Khoja and Karagöz, and to their original characters, suggest such a possibility.

Finally, oral literature, the functions of which range widely from describing popular dreams and ideals to adding criticism and wit to the understanding of the reality, is one of the most refined vehicles with which people can identify, and, at the same time, transmit these recognized identities to their descendants.

Before ending this discussion, several other subjects, not been treated in this article but relevant to the study of story-telling in West Asia, should be briefly mentioned. The first is the narratives of minorities. Although this article has classified the folkloric area according to the three national categories of Iran, Afghanistan, and Turkey these areas also include a variety of tribes and communities such as the Pash-toons, the Hazaras, and the Nuristanies of Afghanistan, the Kurds of Iran and Turkey, and also the Armenians, the Assyrians, the Jews, and the Zoroastrians. Their own language, religion, and culture should not be dismissed simply because they are minorities. But unfortunately, only a few primary data concerning them were obtained during field research, and the available literature is extremely limited. This subject has not, therefore, been discussed here, but will be the subject of future research.

Second are religious narratives, of which only the *Tā'ziyeh* has been mentioned here. Before the modern school system was established those pupils fortunate enough to go to private elementary schools had to learn many religious stories as well as the teachings of the Koran. Many stories contained in the Koran are similar to those in the Bible: Ādam and Havā (Adam and Eve), Hābil and Qābil (Abel and Cain), Maryam and Īsā (Maria and Jesus) and so forth. Naturally some of these are, on occasion, also narrated to the common people. In Afghanistan, the story of Yūsuf (Joseph) and Zulaika is told as a popular love story. But these studies are not essential to this article, and have been omitted.

Finally, it should be noted that there is a strict distinction between narration by professional story tellers or bardic narrators, and that by amateurs or simple folktales told by old people. But in reality, as Rypka, the specialist in Iranian literature, states, "it is often very difficult to distinguish between adaptation for polite literature and popular tradition in folk-tales, since the latter are in fact frequently reflections of an earlier literary work" [RYPKA 1968: 652]. Therefore, it is also difficult and dangerous to try to clearly distinguish between themes requiring professional, artistic narration and those that do not. Moreover, in the former Persian culture area, the advancement of poetry was so remarkable that even prose was given the consideration of sound, and frequently some verses were inserted into the narration of prose and story telling. For these reasons this article has discussed only the types of subject

matter and the characteristics of content of general narratives, both in prose and verse, without referring to the phenomenal aspects: how and by whom they are sung and narrated.

There are still more questions to be investigated in the future: How many story tellers, including both professionals and amateurs, exist today? Where are they? What are the contents of folktales, their extent and paths by which they are transmitted? How do variations occur? How does a certain story become connected with tribes and locality? What makes each of the variations of a given story develop and decay? Even a general answer to these questions would require the help of local folklorists. And the true picture of oral tradition will not emerge in its entirety until scientific and analytic evaluation has been added to the folk evaluation given by the local people.

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