

CHAPTER 9

PERSIAN POPULAR LITERATURE

ULRICH MARZOLPH

Iran is, and has always been a multi-ethnic nation. Besides the various Iranian ethnic groups—such as, to name only the largest, the Bakhtiyâris, Lors, Kurds, or Baloch—the population of Iran in its present boundaries comprises comparatively large ethnic groups of Turko-Mongolian and Arab origin. The folklore and popular literature of each of these groups naturally have their own specific characteristics, but they have been studied only to a minor extent. The present survey, while aiming to present the main characteristics of Persian popular literature, will focus on available sources, most of which have been published in the Persian language regardless of the original language of performance. The only comprehensive survey of Persian folk-literature previously published in English (Cejpek 1968) is still highly informative today. Due to its frequent pro-Iranian bias it should, however, be read with a critical distance.

1. History of research

Early preoccupation with Persian folklore appears to go back as far as the Safavid period, when Âqâ Jamâl Kh^wânsâri (d. c. 1703) compiled his booklet *Kolthum Nane*, a treatise on women's customs (Katirâ'i 1970). The beginning of Persian folklore studies coincided with the keen interest early Western travelers took in Iran since the seventeenth century (Burnikel 1992; Osterhammel 1998). Apart from their curiosity, the main impetus for the developing

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field of Persian studies resulted from the strategic interest of the European powers. In India, where the British ruled since the mid-eighteenth century, the Persian language maintained its position as the language of court and intellectual lingua franca. The Russian empire, Iran's northern neighbor, also had a strategic interest in the region (see Shvarts 1974, pp. 8–21). At first, since the discovery and translation of the *Avesta*, Western scholars had focused on religious studies. This in turn prompted a linguistic interest in dialects, which soon turned to collecting items of folklorist relevance, such as folk-tales, riddles, songs, or narratives of everyday life. Pioneers in the field include the Polish diplomat A. Chodzko (1804–91), Russian scholar V. Zhukovski (1858–1918), British consuls D. C. Phillot (1860–1930) and D. L. R. Lorimer (1876–1962), Danish scholar A. Christensen (1875–1945), and French scholar Henri Massé (1886–1969). For most of these authors, folklore and popular literature constituted a pleasant distraction from their "serious" linguistic, religious, or historical concerns, and folklore data were rarely valued in their own right. Exceptions include B. A. Donaldson's study of Muslim magic, which is based on information collected mainly from women in the holy city of Mashhad (Donaldson 1938), and H. Massé's two-volume publication *Croyances et coutumes persanes* (1938), a highly meritorious survey of the field of Persian folklore, whose information derived from close cooperation with a number of renowned Persian intellectuals. Later comparative studies in Persian popular literature, such as those by F. Meier (1967, 1974), are also of prime importance.

The nineteenth century witnessed a strong orientation on the part of the Iranian elite towards the scientific achievements of the West. Folklore, with its associations of maintaining tradition, was regarded as anti-progressive and hence as undeserving of serious study. It was not until the Constitutional period in the 1920s that Persian scholars began to devote themselves to the study of folklore. At this time, strong patriotic feelings were combined with a growing awareness of the "common people," mingled with a romantic urge for unspoiled tradition. Iranian intellectuals such as Mohammad Ali Jamâl-zâdeh, Ali-Akbar Dehkhodâ, Sâdeq Hedâyât, and later Samad Behrangî or Jalâl Âl-e Ahmad began to prefer plain

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colloquial Persian to the refined and highly artificial language that was previously used. In 1922–29 Dehkhodâ published his comprehensive collection of proverbs and proverbial phrases, *Amtbâl o hekâm*, while Hedâyât was the “first Iranian to study folklore and outline the methods of scholarship” (Radhayrapetian 1990, p. 94). In his *Neyrangestân* (1933), Hedâyât published a survey of superstitions and customs. Following French ethnographer Pierre Saintyves, he supplied general guidelines as to how to collect and document folklore in his essay “Folklor yâ farhang-e tude” (1945). Hedâyât’s agenda, though highly influential in the subsequent Iranian attitude towards folklore, was first put in practice by Sâdeq Homâyuni in his fieldwork study on the folklore of Sarvestân in the Fârs province (1970).

As official institutions became interested in the preservation and study of folklore, the Iranian Academy, the *Farhangestân*, in 1938 publicized its intention to collect “regional (*velâyati*) words, expressions, poetry, proverbs, tales, stories, songs and melodies” (see Jamâlzâdeh 1962, pp. 92ff.). Meanwhile, in the 1940s Fazlollâh Mohtadi (known as Sobhi), probably imitating a method first attempted by L. P. Elwell-Sutton (1980), initiated a radio program of folktales, asking his listeners to send in their tales; he eventually published a series of booklets of Persian folktales (Rahgozar 1994). Sobhi’s primary aim, however, was to entertain. Accordingly, although his publications are pleasant to read, they do not match modern academic standards. On the other hand, journals such as *Payâm-e now*, founded in 1944 by Sa’id Nafisi and later edited by Bozorg Alavi, started to publish many short articles on various genres of popular literature. In 1958 the *Edâre-ye Farhang-e Âmme* (Office of Popular Culture), under the direction of the Ministry of Culture and Arts, was founded; it was reorganized in 1970 and renamed *Markaz-e Melli-ye Pazhubeshhâ-ye Mardom-shenâsi va Farhang-e Âmme* (National Center for Studies in Ethnography and Popular Culture); until the Revolution of 1979 it continued to work under the name of *Markaz-e Mardom-shenâsi-ye Irân* (Center for the Ethnography of Iran). This institution and its team of researchers played a leading role in folklore research, above all through their series of monographs (for folktales see Honari 1973;

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Mihandust 1973; Sâdât-e Eshkevari 1973) as well as the journal *Mardom-shenâsi va farhang-e âmme* (Ethnography and Popular Culture; founded in 1976). Between 1968 and 1974, field investigations conducted by researchers from the institution resulted in the survey of almost 400 villages and the publication of more than 20 monograph studies (see Radhayrapetian 1990, pp. 106ff.).

Since the early 1960s, Sobhi's method of utilizing radio broadcasts for the purpose of collecting and propagating folktales has been successfully taken up by Abu'l-Qâsem Enjavi (d. 1993), a friend of the late Hedâyât. Enjavi initiated the weekly program *Safine-ye farhang-e mardom* (Ship of Popular Culture), educated a considerable staff of assistants and founded an institution named *Markaz-e Farhang-e Mardom* (Center of Popular Culture) within the National Broadcasting Company. In order to publish the collected texts, he established the series *Ganjine-ye farhang-e mardom* (Treasury of Popular Culture), to which he himself contributed ten volumes of annotated texts. Three volumes contain folktales (Enjavi 1973, 1974, 1977), and another three, later published together under the title *Ferdowsi-nâme*, contain popular tales connected with Ferdowsi, his *Shahname*, or the latter's heroes (Enjavi 1990). Enjavi was not only a captivating orator but also had great talents of organization. His nationwide contributors received not only pencil, preprinted paper, and envelope, but also his booklet *Tarz-e neveshtan-e farhang-e âmiyâne* (How to Document Popular Culture; 1967), containing general guidelines. Until the early 1980s, when his radio program was discontinued, Enjavi succeeded in collecting an archive of several hundred thousand manuscript texts on numerous aspects of folklore, everyday life and popular literature in Iran. His archive is a mine of information on traditional language, customs, beliefs, tales, oral history, and the like, unparalleled in any other Middle Eastern country.

Resulting from the strong national interest and considerable support by both official institutions and the royal family, folklore studies in Iran were thriving in the mid-1970s. The International Congress of Iranian Popular Culture (*Majma'-e beynolmellali-ye farhang-e âmme-ye Irân*), held in Isfahan in the summer of 1977, was attended by many qualified scholars from Iran and various

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Western countries. The Revolution of 1979 caused contacts with Western scholars to be broken off, and Iranian publications on folklore to be discontinued. It took many years for folklore and popular literature to attract significant interest again (see Marzolph 1994b).

In 1986, as a result of the re-evaluation of cultural values in the Islamic Republic, the *Sâzmân-e Mirâth-e Farhangi-ye Keshvar* (Organization for the Country's Cultural Heritage) was founded. Today, the responsibility of this centralized institution includes supervising all kinds of cultural activities, encompassing archaeology, anthropology, and folklore. Its Ethnographic Department, for many years headed by Mohammad Mir-Shokrâ'i, has educated junior folklorists (up to M.A. level), and conducted various fieldwork research projects, including one on popular literature in 1994–95. The first monographs to result from this research project recently came out (Vakiliyân 2000; Jaktâji 2001). The *Markaz-e Farhang-e Mardom*, founded by Enjavi, is at present associated with the research department of the national radio institution *Sedâ va Simâ-ye Jomburi-ye Eslâmi-ye Irân* (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting [IRIB]). The few major publications from the archive's materials after the Revolution deal with popular sayings and proverbs (Vakiliyân 1987), and popular customs in the month of Ramadan (Vakiliyân 1991). In spring 2002, the first ever scholarly Iranian journal of folklore, the quarterly *Farhang-e mardom*, was published on the initiative of the leading Iranian folklorist Sayyed Ahmad Vakiliyân.

2. Fields of study

Resulting from its historical development, Folklore Studies in Iran have always been, and still are, deeply concerned with popular language and verbal expression (Katirâ'i 1978). Milestones of this branch of Folklore Studies include Jamâlzâdeh's dictionary of popular language (1962) and Dehkhodâ's comprehensive collection of proverbs (1922–29). Proverb Studies have remained a major field

of research, from Amir-Qoli Amini's pioneer study on the stories connected with proverbs (1945) to the two-volume publication of texts drawn from the archives of the *Markaz-e Farhang-e Mardom* (Enjavi 1973; Vakiliyân 1987) and other recent publications (Partovi Âmoli 1990; Shahri 1991; Afifi 1992; Shakurzâdeh 1993; Abrishami 1996, 1997).

Probably the best researched category of Iranian folklore is that of folk narrative (Radhayrapetian 1990; Marzolph 1993; Rahmoni 2001). Early publications of folktales include the ones by Hoseyn Kuhi Kermâni (1935), Amir-Qoli Amini (1960) and Abolqâsem Faqiri (1970). The major collection of Persian folktales is still the one published by Enjavi (1973, 1974, 1977). It is in this branch of Folklore Studies that the impact of cooperation with foreign researchers is most productive (see Boulvin 1971, 1975; Marzolph 1984). The first major collection of Persian folktales published after the Revolution presents the tales originally collected in the 1940s by Elwell-Sutton from the oral performance of the Persian maid Mashdi Galin. Besides the tales collected at the beginning of the twentieth century from the Persian language teacher Sayyed Feyzollâh Adib, this collection constitutes the largest available corpus of any Iranian storyteller's repertoire (Elwell-Sutton 1980; Marzolph et al. 1995). Other recent scholarly publications of folktales are either republished (Homâyuni 1993 [Shirâz 1972]) or comparatively small (see, e.g., Moharrer 1986; Mir-Kâzemi 1988, 1994, 1995; Ravânipur 1990; Mihandust 1991–2001). The projected multi-volume *Dictionary of Persian Folktales (Farhang-e afsânehâ-ye mardom-e Irân)* by A. A. Darvishiyân and R. Khandân (1998ff.) contains no more than an alphabetically arranged comprehensive selection of previously published material.

The comparatively low standard of Iranian publications on popular literature may to some extent be caused by the difficulties Iranians have in reproducing their data. Verbatim quotations of texts collected during fieldwork often clash with literary standards, and may further contain passages liable to offend current moral standards. Before publication all folklore texts are therefore made to undergo various stages of editing, a process which tends to alter the authentic form of the texts. Moreover, important Western studies

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have only recently been made available in Persian translation, including Vladimir Propp's structuralist approach (Propp 1989, 1992); the international classification system for folktales developed by Antti Aarne and Stith Thompson (Marzolph 1992); and Mircea Eliade's mythological studies (1983, 1995). F. Sajjâdpur (1999) recently published a study of a limited corpus of Persian folktales analyzed according to a modern psychoanalytical approach.

As to the connection between popular and classical literature, Foruzânfar's admirable study on the sources of the tales in Jalâl-al-Din Rumi's *Mathnavi* (Foruzânfar 1954, 1991) has been paralleled by a similar study treating Farid-al-Din Attâr's *mathnavis* (San'atiniyâ 1990). While Rumi's impact on subsequent popular tradition has been studied (Mills 1994; Marzolph 1995), the popular reception of other classical authors still awaits adequate treatment. Enjavi's three-volume collection of popular renderings of tales from, or relating to the *Shahname* or Ferdowsi is still in print (Enjavi 1990). The narrative literature of the Qajar period, of which several items were popular reading matter until well into the second half of the twentieth century, has been studied to some extent by M. J. Mahjub (1959ff.). Meanwhile, the "chapbook" literature based on classical works has been documented for the Qajar period (Marzolph 2001b), and for the mid-twentieth century (Marzolph 1994a).

Comprehensive folkloristic and/or ethnographic studies of specific localities or regions often contain authentic samples of popular literature collected during fieldwork. This branch of Folklore Studies, inaugurated by Âl-e Ahmad's three small studies (1954, 1958, 1960), and its follow-ups by Kh. Khosravi (1963) and S. Tâhbâz (1963), was pursued on a larger scale by E. Shakurzâdeh (1967, 1984), and Homâyuni (1970, 1992). While many minor ethnographic studies on various localities exist, even today only a few regions have been explored more thoroughly, notably Fârs (Homâyuni 1974; Faqiri 1978; Habibi-Âzâd 1993), Gil and Dailam (Pâyande 1973, 1976; Asadiyân-Khorramâbâdi, Bâjelân-Farroki, Kiyâ'i 1979), Boir Ahmadi and Kohgiluyeh (Lama'e 1970). Recent major studies were prepared by A. Lahsâ'izâdeh and A. Salâmi (1991), H. Habibi Fahlyâbi (1992), A. Shari'atzâdeh (1992) and S. Atâbak-zâdeh (1994).

Since the establishment of the Islamic Republic, all cultural activity in the country is screened by the powerful ministry of Islamic Guidance for its compatibility with the prescribed set of values. As a result some topics, especially those with religious associations, are obviously qualified as particularly desirable, e.g. the popular drama *ta'ziye* (Homâyuni 1989, 1976, 1992; Shahidi 2001), a work on popular customs during Ramadan (Vakiliyân 1991), or popular tales about the first imam, Ali (Vakiliyân/Sâlehi 2001). Other areas of popular culture, on the other hand, risk being qualified as undesirable, either because of their pre-Islamic origins, or because they are regarded as superstitions simply because they lack any obvious educational value (see Marzolph 1994b, 1994c).

3. Traditional popular reading matter

The great epics of Persian literature, such as Ferdowsi's *Shahname*, the anonymous *Eskandar-nâme* and *Romuz-e Hamze*, have been appreciated by both elite and popular strata of Persian society for centuries. Before the nineteenth century, and well into the twentieth, they were presented to the illiterate by professional storytellers (Omidshah 1999; see also K. Yamamoto in this volume). When printing was introduced in Iran in the first decades of the nineteenth century, the reception of this type of popular literature gained an altogether new quality, as epic literature was gradually adapted to popular reading. It is particularly interesting to note that some of the shorter epical tales published in the nineteenth century, such as *Hoseyn-e Kord*, were comparatively young and had first been committed to writing not much before their first printed editions were published (Marzolph 1999b). Probably some of the later publishers even had direct recourse to manuscript collections of popular narratives, such as the comprehensive *Jâme' al-bekâyât* (Haag-Higuchi 1984). At any rate, publication of this type of literature in print decisively increased its distribution, and hence popular knowledge of tales and motifs as well as embedded social and moral concepts.

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Thanks to a carefully drawn-up list published in 1865, we have access to the traditional popular reading matter of the Qajar period (Marzolph 2001b). The list is appended to the 1864–65 edition of the *Ketâb-e Ganjine*, a collection of writings by Mirzâ Abd al-Wahhâb Mo'tamed al-Dowle Neshât (d. 1828). Compiled by the book's publisher, a certain Hâji Musâ, the catalogue lists a total of 320 Persian and fourteen Arabic items. After listing books relating to the basic fields of Islamic law (*feqh*, *osul*, *tafsir*) and a large variety of profane sciences (dictionaries, history, medicine, philosophy, grammar etc.), the catalogue's final sections are concerned with non-scientific moralistic, educative and entertaining literature. These sections list *kotob-e ahâdith va akhbâr* (books on persons or events considered to be historical), *kotob-e ad'iyeh o kotob-e mosibat* (books on prayers and on the tragedy of Karbalâ), *divânât* (collections of poetry), *qese o hekâyât* (tales and stories), and *bachchekh-wâni* (reading matter for children). The categories dealing with (pseudo-)historical or religious literature are treated to some extent by P. Chelkowski in this volume, and do not concern us here. It is the two final sections that are of particular interest to the study of popular literature in the Qajar period.

The first section lists such well-known items as the *Anvâr-e Soheyli* (by Kâshefi), *Jâme' al-tamthil* (by Mohammad-Ali Hablerudi), and *Ajâ'eb al-makbluqât* (by Mohammad b. Zakariyâ Qazvini, thirteenth century), besides the anonymous *Eskandar-nâme*, *Alf leyle*, *Romuz-e Hamze*, and *Rostam-nâme*. The compiler of the list obviously grouped these items together because of their common narrative character. As to the narratives found there, the first is a collection of fables, actually the most widely read Persian adaptation of the famous collection *Kalile o Demne*; the second is a collection of proverbs and related stories (Marzolph 1999a); the third is the Persian translation of an Arabic classic of *mirabilia*-literature; besides *Alf leyle*, the nineteenth-century Persian translation by Abd-al-Latif Tasuji and Mirzâ Soroush of the Arabic *Thousand and one Nights* (following the Bulâq edition of 1835), the remaining three items are lengthy epics on Alexander, Hamza b. Abd-al-Mottaleb, and Rostam, respectively.

The second section lists more than thirty items, the majority of which belong to the standard stock of traditional narrative litera-

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ture: *Hoseyn-e Kord* (Marzolph 1999b); *Nush-Âfarin*; *Bahrâm o Golandâm*; *Leyli o Majnun*; *Shirin o Farhâd*; *Dalle-ye Mokhtâr*; *Dozd o Qâzi*; *Rend o Zâbed*; *Chebel tuti* (Marzolph 1979); *Heydar-Beg*; *Kolthum Nane* (Katirâ'i 1970); *Yusef o Zoleykhâ*; *Javâher al-oqul*; *Shiruye*; *Qahramân-e qâtel*; *Hormoz o Gol*; *Chahâr darvish*, to name but the most popular. It is difficult to evaluate the compiler's intention in labeling this section "reading matter for children." It is hard to imagine that the items listed were indeed read by children themselves, as children in those days would rarely be literate. Presumably he intended to point out the entertaining and educative character of the listed works, most of which convey social and moral standards of the time in the garb of a narrative.

As to the question of readership no contemporary evidence is available. On the other hand, Mahjub's survey (1959ff.) of his own reading experience in Persian popular narratives (*dâstân-hâ-ye âmmiyâne-ye fârsi*) lists pretty much the same titles, grouped into the following categories:

1. purely fictitious stories, such as *Amir Arsalân*; *Malek Bahman*; *Badi' al-molk*; and *Nush-Âfarin*;
2. stories vaguely connected with history, such as *Romuz-e Hamze*; *Eskandar-nâme*; *Rostam-nâme*; and *Hoseyn-e Kord*;
3. stories about religious figures, such as the *Khâvar-nâme*;
4. stories embellishing the historical role of religious characters, such as the *Mokhtâr-nâme*;
5. stories about amorous or other adventures, such as *Haft peykar-e Bahrâm Gur*; *Chahâr darvish*; *Salim-e javâheri*; *Dalle-ye Mokhtâr*; this category also includes collections of stories such as *Alf leyle*;
6. (collections of) stories focusing on animal actors, such as *Chehel tuti*; *Khâle Suske*; *Âqâ Mushe*; *Mush o gorbe*;
7. minor works by classical Persian poets in popular editions.

Mahjub was born in 1923, and when he was writing in the 1950s about his reading experience as a youth, he must have had in mind the popular literature available in the 1930s. The evidence supplied by Mahjub's studies is further corroborated by a list published in the recent *History of Children's Literature in Iran*. The list is

a statistical survey aimed at naming the reading matter that was popular at the beginning of the twentieth century. Its data result from recent interviews with (male) senior citizens aged over sixty (Mohammadi and Qâ'eni 2001, vol. 3, pp. 140–54). Besides their age, level of education, and place of origin, those interviewed were asked to specify the persons who promoted their interest in reading, the books they read, and the influence reading had on them. In addition to European literature in translation (such as the novels by Alexandre Dumas), we again find many of the items already listed in Hâji Musâ's list, the most frequently named ones being *Amir Arsalân* (first published in 1899; see Marzolph 2001a, p. 232), *Hoseyn-e Kord*, and *Amir Hamze*. In the middle of the twentieth century, many of these items were still produced and sold nationwide in Iran by itinerant booksellers and sidewalk peddlers. The most active publishers in this field were Sherkat-e nesbi-ye kânun-e ketâb, Mo'assese-ye châp va enteshârât-e Elmi, Mohammad-Hasan Elmi, Rajabi, and Atâ'i (Marzolph 1994a, pp. 18–20).

The stock of popular reading matter did not of course remain unaltered in the period concerned. Some items, such as *Hoseyn-e Kord*, remained “evergreens” until the twentieth century; others, such as the voluminous *Eskandar-nâme* and *Romuz-e Hamze*, were gradually reduced in size; while yet others vanished completely. At the same time, new items were produced such as versified adaptations of Persian folktales (*Shangul o Mangul*, *Khâle Suske*, *Khâle Qurbâghe*, *Khorus o rubâh*). Moreover, an increasing amount of pedagogical and entertaining literature for children, including schoolbooks, conveyed traditional narrative material to its young readers (Marzolph 1995b; Mohammadi and Qâ'eni 2001).

4. Folk- and fairy-tales

Judging by the number of publications on this genre of popular literature, folk- and fairy-tales were highly appreciated in the original setting in which they were recorded, and are no less popular with contemporary readers. Given the impact of modern media and the

ensuing changes in society, it is difficult to ascertain the degree to which folk- and fairy-tales are still alive in the modern times. They were very popular until quite recently, and still are in rural areas. Beside nostalgia, the current popularity of folk- and fairy-tale collections may also reflect a continuous human need for this genre of tales.

Terminology

Folk- and fairy-tales are usually denoted by one of the three terms *qesse*, *afsâne* (with such variants as *afsân*, *fasân*, *fasâne*, or the dialect variants *owsun*, *owsâne*, see Honari 1973; Mihandust 1999a-d), or *matal*. The word *qesse* retains a somewhat vague relation to historical or personal realities; even characters within a given tale will relate their *qesse*, i.e., their personal history. In recent terminology, *qesse* has come to denote the literary genre of the short tale. Fictitious tales of wonder and imagination, and particularly tales relating to sorcery and magic, are usually labeled *afsâne*. This term shows an obvious etymological and semantic link with terms such as *fasâ'idan* (*fasânidan*), 'to charm, fascinate, enchant,' or *fosun*, *afsun*, 'incantation, fascination.' The term *matal*, indiscriminately used to denote popular stories (Vakiliyân 1999), is not to be confused with *mathal*, which denotes a popular saying or proverb.

Language and formulaic expression

Even though folk- and fairy-tales are usually narrated in plain language without refined embellishment, narrators may draw on a large stock of formulaic expressions. Tales of a realistic or historical background, particularly romantic or epic tales in writing, usually begin with the rhymed formula *râviyân-e akhbâr va nâqelân-e âsâr (va tutiyân-e shekar-shekan-e shirin-goftâr) chenin revâyat karde'and ke ...*, "The tellers of stories and the transmitters of ancient legends (and the sugar-cracking and sweet-talking parrots) have related that ..." (Marzolph et al. 1994, vol. 2, p. 25).

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This formula, by taking recourse to previous authorities, makes the listeners expect a tale whose grounding in reality is at least formally acknowledged.

Introductory formulas

In contrast, the standard formula for fairy-tales—more or less equivalent to the English “Once upon a time”—introduces the readers and/or listeners to a world of fantasy and imagination. It is: *yeki bud, yeki nabud*, “There was a one, and there was not a one”; at times the formula *gheir az khodâ hichkas nabud*, “There was nobody but God” is added to this. In oral performance, the story-teller may then say: *har ke bande-ye khodâ be-ge “yâ khodâ,*” “All true believers (lit. all bondsmen of God) now say ‘O God!’,” to which the audience replies: *Yâ khodâ*, “O God!” Another, less common formula for the introduction of fairy-tales is *ruzi (bud), ruzgâri (bud)*, “(There was) a day, (there was) a time.” Only after either one of these formulas does the actual tale begin, most commonly by a sentence like *yek pâdeshâhi (mardi, rubâhi etc.) bud*, “There was a king (man, fox etc.)” Sometimes the latter is further introduced by specifying *dar zamân-e qadim*, “in the old days.”

The introductory formula *yeki bud, yeki nabud* finds an exact equivalent in the Turkish *bir varmiş, bir yokmuş* and in several other Near Eastern languages; all are related to the Arabic *kân mâ kân* (Asmussen 1968, p. 14ff.). While there are various ways to translate the formula—the Arabic can also mean “There was what there was”—it is most probably meant to introduce the readers/listeners to the never-never-land of the fairy-tale.

Closing formulas

Likewise, when the tale is over, closing formulas point out the unreal character of the preceding tale and make it clear that the action took place in an imaginary world, even though there might have been parallels to the social and historical reality of the nar-

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rator's context (Motaref 1979, 43 ff.). Closing formulas in fairy-tales, while also structured by means of simple rhymes, show a greater variety than introductory formulas. Most include nonsense rhymes, bringing the readers/listeners back to the real world. One of the more common formulas is *qesse-ye mâ be-sar resid, kalâghe be-khân(e)ash naresid*, "Our tale has come to an end, the crow has not reached its home" (Enjavi 1973, pp. 55, 205, 270 etc.). There are several variations to this formula, such as: *vaqti resid, ghazâhâsh gandide bud, aruse londide bud*, "When it arrived, its food was rotten, the bride had complained" (ibid., p. 311). A jocular variation is given in a variant from Isfahan: *qesse-ye mâ be-sar raft, kalâghe guzid o dar raft*, "our tale has come to an end, the crow farted and flew away." (Faqiri 1963, p. 91).

Less ambiguous than the previous formula is another one, which clearly shows the fictitious character of the tale: *bâlâ raftim, mâst bud—qesse-ye mâ râst bud; pâyin âmadim dugh bud, qesse-ye mâ dorugh bud*, "We went up, there was yoghurt—our tale was true; we went down, there was *dugh* (a drink prepared from yoghurt)—our tale was a lie." (Enjavi 1973, pp. 278, 321, etc.). A more pragmatic version of this formula includes the following variants: *raftim bâlâ, ârd bud, âmadim pâyin khamir/panir bud—qesse-ye/ bekâyat-e/sar-gozasht-e mâ hamin bud*, "We went up, there was flour, we came down, there was dough/cheese—this was our tale." (Marzolph et al. 1994, vol. 2, p. 28).

Other, less common closing formulas are: *qesse-ye mâ kh^wosh bud, daste-ye goli jâsh bud*, "Our tale was nice, a flower bouquet was in its place" (Enjavi 1973, pp. 259, 308); *qesse-ye mâ tamum shod, khâk be-sar-e hamum [= hammâm] shod*, "Our tale is finished, there is dust on the head of the bath house" (ibid., p. 34); *qesse-ye mâ be-resht, be-resht—morde-ye mâ konj-e behesht*, "Spin, spin our tale—our deceased one [has a] corner in paradise" (Faqiri 1963, p. 91).

In romantic tales, particularly those about lovers who are finally united after overcoming a number of obstacles, we find yet another common type of closing formula: *enshâllâh hamân-towr ke ânâ be-morâd-e del-e-shân residand, shomâ ham be-morâd-e del-e-tân be-resid*, "God willing, you will attain your heart's desires in the

same way, as they [= the characters of the tale] have attained their hearts' desires." (Enjavi 1973, pp. 115, 119, 133, etc.). The gifted Persian narrator Mashdi Galin, who narrated the documented repertoire of her tales during World War II, even amended the formulas several times to include direct references to the political party of her English listener: ... *hame-ye mottafeqin beresand*, "... may all the Allies attain"; *dustân-e mottafeqin be-maqsudeshân beresand*, "may the friends of the Allies attain their goal"; *doshmanân-e mottafeqin nâbud shavand*, "may the enemies of the Allies be annihilated." (Marzolph et al. 1994, vol. 2, p. 29).

Formulas within the tale

While both introductory and closing formulas are fairly standardized, narrators can draw on a large stock of formulas within a given tale. These formulas often relate to the tale's content and are employed according to the narrator's skill. The repertoire of Mashdi Galin (see above), which has been analyzed in detail, contains a large number of formulas within the tales (for the following see *ibid.*, pp. 25–27). Besides short words such as *al-qesse* or *al-gharaz*, both meaning "in short," the formula most commonly used to structure a tale goes as follows: *XY dâshte bâsh, biyâ/borow (berim/berid) sar-e YZ (az YZ beshnow/begir)*, "(Now) leave XY (here), go/come (let us go/come) to YZ (listen about YZ)." In addition, there are several formulas for special occasions:

- Departure: *posht be-shahr, ru be-dasht-e biyâbun*, "The back (turned) to the city, the face (turned) to the open plains."
- Travel: *manzel be-manzel tey-ye manâzel*, "Station after station, across the stations."
- Threatening an enemy who tries to escape: *in mâhi nist be-daryâ be-re, kaftar nist be-havâ be-re*, "He is not a fish that could dive into the water, nor a bird that could fly in the air."
- Beauty: *ânqadr khoshgel o vajih [bud] ke engâr [kardi] mâh tolu' karde*, "She was so beautiful and handsome that you thought the moon had risen"; *javâheri bude dar zir-e khâke-star*, "She was (like) a jewel under the ashes."

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In romantic stories a particularly extensive formula is used by Mashdi Galin at various occasions to picture the process of falling in love: *yek tir-e khabang-e softe, sufâl-e âq-par, az kânun-e sine-ye dokhtar jastan kard dar sine-ye pesar tâ par neshast—pesar yek del na, sad del âsheq-e in shod*, "A pointed arrow made of poplar [or: a straight arrow], its shaft [lit.: notch] adorned with white feathers, sprang from the young woman's breast and settled deep down in the young man's breast—the young man fell in love with her, not with one, but with a hundred hearts."

Finally, the despair that lovers experience when longing for their beloved or when separated from them, is expressed in the formula *sukhtam o sukhtam, az ravesh-e eshq-e-to âmukhtam, khâm budam, pokhte shodam, ey bi-hayâ-ye bi-ensâf, sukhtam*, "I am completely set on fire, I learned from your love; I was raw and became cooked; oh you shameless and unjust one—I am on fire!"

Categories

As has convincingly been demonstrated by the application of the international system of tale-types (Aarne/Thompson [AT] 1963) to the Persian data, Persian folk and fairy-tales fit into the general concept of the Indo-European tradition with only minor adaptations (Marzolph 1984). By the early 1980s, a total of 351 different tales from the Persian tradition of the twentieth century was available for analysis, including 50 animal tales (AT 1–299; see now Taqvâ 1997), 81 tales of magic (AT 300–749), 19 religious tales (AT 750–849), 50 romantic tales (AT 850–999), 16 tales of the stupid ogre (AT 1000–1199), 126 jokes and anecdotes (AT 1200–1999), and 9 formula tales (AT 2000–2199). According to the available data, the three most frequently published tales were AT 408: *The Orange Princess* (23 texts); AT 894: *The Patient Stone* (22 texts); and AT 20 D*: *The Fox on Pilgrimage*. Other frequently encountered tales include AT 123: *The Wolf and the Goat Kids*; AT *314: *The Magic Horse*; AT 311A: *Namaki and the Div*; AT 325: *The Magician's Apprentice*; AT 613: *Good and Evil*; and AT 2032: *The Mouse That Lost Its Tail*.

Characters

Like the folk- and fairy-tales of many other areas, Persian tales rely on a standard set of protagonists with their stereotype functions, of requisites and of actions (for the following, see Marzolph 1984, pp. 24–31).

The most common hero character is the prince, often referred to merely as *javân* (young man). Frequently, the prince is the youngest of three brothers who has to make up for the faults or incompetence of his brothers. The hero experiences dangerous adventures, fights with demons and monsters, and accomplishes difficult tasks. In the end, he receives his beloved princess and inherits the kingdom.

A typically Near Eastern heroic character is the *kachal* (bald-headed, scald-headed), often a shepherd (Elwell-Sutton 1965). At the beginning of the tale, the *kachal* is an outcast, a sluggard or a coward, and always a pauper. During the action and when he is challenged, the *kachal* proves to be clever and witty, courageous and reckless. With these qualities, he masters the most difficult tasks, often wins the favors of the princess, and becomes king. Sometimes, as in the tale of the magic horse, a prince disguises himself as a *kachal*. Another typical hero is the gatherer of thorn-bushes for fuel (*khâr-kan*, *khâr-kesb*), corresponding to the poorest level of society. Although very poor, the thorn-bush gatherer is generally a true believer, which helps him to overcome his fate and eventually to acquire wealth and happiness.

While the hero's only standard helper (besides his horse) is the thin-beard (*kuse*), his range of adversaries usually comprises the female members of his larger family. His mother-in-law, stepmother or aunt, in particular, tend to be motivated by envy, trying to destroy the hero by calumny. Other relatives, including his father and elder brothers, also agitate against him, and the only close relative who is described in a positive way is his mother. Another major adversary is the king, who is often depicted as a powerless object of his scheming advisers.

The role of women in Persian folk-tales is of a marked ambivalence. As active characters, women are wily, deceitful, and often simply evil. Only when counseling the hero, do active women—often in subordinate function—have positive traits. As passive char-

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acters, women are seldom more than objects which the hero strives to acquire, often motivated by perfunctory external matters: The hero falls in love with an unseen beauty by seeing one of her hairs floating in the water, or by hearing someone mention her name.

Secondary characters in Persian folk-tales fall into two groups. The first comprises characters from the real world, such as the above-mentioned shepherd and the thorn-bush gatherer, or a merchant, who usually has negative traits. Ethnic or linguistic minorities are usually depicted with the arrogance of the dominant culture: Jewish merchants, black slaves, and gypsy girls are malevolent characters, while members of the Kurdish or Lor populations are at best portrayed as fools. The second group comprises characters from the world of the unseen. Here one encounters a strict dichotomy. The demon (*div*), most often male, is usually both malevolent and stupid. His standard role, besides fighting with the hero, is to abduct human women in order to force them into marriage. The *div* usually possesses an external soul which he keeps in a secret hiding place. He can only be vanquished when this soul is discovered and destroyed. On the other hand, the fairy (*pari*), who is often (but not necessarily) female in folk-tales, is a perfectly positive character (Omidshar 2002). She uses her supernatural powers, such as sorcery and the ability to fly, to help the hero achieve his tasks. Marriage between a *pari* and a human male is not infrequent. However, although the world of the *paris* appears to be organized like the human world, these marriages rarely end happily, as the man is bound to succumb to his human foibles and to lose his fairy wife.

The action in Persian folk-tales is driven by two forces. The most powerful force in the story itself is fate. The pauper trusts in fate and is redeemed. The king challenges fate and is punished. Religion in its official form does not play any important role. If religious sentiments are voiced at all, they are concerned with popular admiration of venerated saints such as Imam Ali or Kheyr, often asking for their intercession to be saved from misfortune or to achieve a particular goal. The other force, which is to some extent external, is the wishful thinking of both narrator and audience. As folk- and fairy-tales are *Wunschdichtung*, human wishes transformed into narrative, they both require and have a happy ending,

thus enabling participants to have some hope of an ultimate happiness not suggested by their experiences in real life.

Aspects of performance

Romantic scholars were convinced that narrators memorize their tales *verbatim* and are capable of reproducing their repertoire word for word without the slightest change. Field research all over the world has proven that this notion generally does not correspond with the actual performance. In fact, rather the opposite is correct. Gifted narrators shape their narrative in the course of narration. In a process of constant interaction with their listeners, they may present short or lengthy versions, intersperse their narration with personal remarks, mingle versions of different tales, and so on. So far, in Iran no research has yet been undertaken on questions of context and contextual variations of narration. However, the tales collected by Elwell-Sutton from the oral performance of Mashdi Galin contain one particular tale that has been narrated three times (Marzolph 2000). Although the tale's essential structure is preserved, the three versions were clearly narrated on three different occasions, as both their content and wording differ considerably. In one case the tale was narrated in an extremely short and rather rudimentary version of some 350 words; there is a version of medium length (470 words), and an extended version (1200 words). These versions demonstrate the skillful creativity practiced by the narrator in the way she perceived and gave meaning to the tale by textualizing it in contrasting ways, each of which was presumably conditioned by a different mood and context.

Dating Persian folk-tales

Judging the age of folk-tales is a difficult affair. As soon as scholars are tempted to rely on internal data, such as the tale's psychological constitution, any kind of historical evaluation becomes hypothetical. The only way to arrive at a sound judgment is the pragmatic

comparison of available external data. As data about the oral tradition of the past are almost completely lacking in Iran, the number of Persian folk-tales that can be reliably dated is extremely small.

A rare case in tracing the origin and dating of a Persian folk-tale is represented by the Persian versions of AT 123: *The Wolf and the Goat Kids*. A rudimentary version of this tale, in which a mother goat advises her children to heed the wolf, is already included in the so-called *Romulus* corpus of fables from late antiquity. This version apparently gave rise to both Oriental and Western versions of the later folk-tale, Western versions being attested since the twelfth century. Long before the first folk-tales were recorded from Persian oral tradition (Marzolph 1984, Type 123), in the late nineteenth century a rhymed chapbook version containing all major elements proves the tale to be known, if not current, in Iran (Mohammad and Qâ'eni 2001, vol. 3, pp. 51f., 55–60). Up to the present day the tale, with its simple educative message, is popular throughout Iran. Apart from the content, its structure and the fact that part of the action is narrated in verse, probably added to its appeal. The following specimen is taken from the oral performance of Ghazanfar Mahandi, a boy of about 16 from Gurchân. It was recorded by L. P. Elwell-Sutton in 1958, and lasts about four minutes in performance.

yek boz bud. in se bachche dâsht.
yeki Shangul, Mangul, Daste-
Gol. In har ruz miraft dar biyâbân
micharid, barâ-ye bozghâlehâsh
shir miyâvord o sedâ mi-kesh[id]:
 “Shangul, Mangul, Daste-gol.”

inhâ dar miyâmadand o
shireshâno mikhordand, ba'd be
khâneshân miraftand.

yek ruz gorg as in kâr bâ-ettelâ'
shod. gorg ham âmad o sedâ kard
ke: “Shangul, Mangul, Daste-gol.”

Shangul o Mangul ke dar
âmadand, in gorg ishunrâ gereft o
khord. Daste-gol raft tu-ye kure.

There was a goat. It had three children, [named] Shangul, Mangul, and Daste-gol. Every day it went out to graze in the pasture, brought milk for its kids and shouted: “Shangul, Mangul, Daste-gol.”

They came out, drank their milk and went back into the house again.

One day the wolf got news about this. The wolf also came and shouted: “Shangul, Mangul, Daste-gol.”

As Shangul and Mangul came out, the wolf grabbed and ate them. Daste-gol went into the oven.

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Boz az sar âmad. do daf'e sedâ keshfid: "Shangul, Mangul, Daste-gol." *did ke javâbi nayâmad. daf'e-ye sevom sedâ kard, faqat did Daste-gol dar-âmad o goft ke ... bale*: "gorg âmad o rafiqhâ-ye mârâ khord o man tanhâ mândam.

boz raft sar-e lâne-ye khargush. yey in taraf raft o yeki un taraf raft o khargush goft: "kist dar bâm-e mâ taraq o toruq mikonad, kâse-ye âb dar jâm-e mâ cherk-e khun mikonad?" *goft*: "manam, manam, boz bozake. do shâkh dâram dar falake. Shangul-o Mangul-o to khordi?" *goft*: "na va-llâh, be-llâh!"

raft dar bâm-e rubâh. yey in taraf raft o yeki un taraf raft o rubâh goft: "kist dar bâm-e mâ shalaq o sholuq mikonad, kâse-ye âb dar jâm-e mâ cherk-e khun mikonad?" *goft*: "manam, manam, boz bozake. do shâkh dâram dar falake. Shangul-o Mangul-o to khordi?" *goft*: "na va-llâh, be-llâh!"

raft khâne-ye khuk. yey in taraf raft o yeki un taraf raft o [khuk] goft ke: "kist dar bâm-e mâ taraq o toruq mikonad, kâse-ye âb dar jâm-e mâ cherk-e khun mikonad?" *goft*: "manam, manam, boz bozake. do shâkh dâram dar falake. Shangul-o Mangul-o to khordi?" *goft*: "na!"

raft khâne-ye gorg. raft in taraf o un taraf o gorg goft: "kist dar bâm-e mâ taraq o toruq mi-konad, Shangul o Mangul dar kâse-ye

When the goat came back, it shouted twice: "Shangul, Mangul, Daste-gol." As there was no answer, it shouted a third time. Only then did Daste-gol come out, and said ... well: "The wolf came and ate my siblings. I am the only one left."

The goat went to the rabbit's nest. It walked here and there [until] the rabbit said: "Who is that stamping about on my roof, spilling dirt into my water-glass?" [The goat] said: "It's me, it's me, the goat. I've got two horns [pointing] to the sky. Did you eat Shangul and Mangul?" [The rabbit] said: "No, by God!"

[The goat] went to the roof of [the house of] the fox. It walked here and there [until] the fox said: "Who is that trampling about on my roof, spilling dirt into my water-glass?" [The goat] said: "It's me, it's me, the goat. I've got two horns [pointing] to the sky. Did you eat Shangul and Mangul?" [The fox] said: "No, by God!"

[The goat] went to the house of the wild boar. It walked here and there [until the boar] said: "Who is that stamping about on my roof, spilling dirt into my water-glass?" [The goat] said: "It's me, it's me, the goat. I've got two horns [pointing] to the sky. Did you eat Shangul and Mangul?" [The rabbit] said: "No!"

[The goat] went to the house of the wolf. It walked here and there [until] the wolf said: "Who is that stamping about on my roof, spilling

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mâ cherk-e khun mikonad?” goft: “*manam, manam, boz bozake. do shâkh dâram dar falake. Shangul-o Mangul-o to khordi?*” *avval* goft: “*na!*” *o do-bâre* goft: “*âre, man khordam.*”

boz goft *ke*: “*pas fardâ mâ da’vâ dârim.*” *in boz âmad o az shir-e khodesh dushid o ye kerre-y o mâst o khâme-v o fatir dorost kard o barâ-ye ostâd najjâri bord. gorg ham pâ shod o [...] gobhâ-ye bachehâshro, ostokhânâ-ye khorde-y o ... jam’ kard o barâ-ye ostâ bord. ostâd goft ke*: “*bebin boz chi âvorde.*” *zan-e ostâ var-khâst o did ke fatir o kerre-y o khâme-v o roughan âvorde. goft*: “*bebin gorg chi âvorde.*” *negâh kard o goft*: “*savâ az goh-e bachehâsh chizi nayâvorde.*” *goft*: “*pas bemânad.*” *goft*: “*yey sowhân biyâr!*” *sowhân o âvord o shâkh-e boz râ tiz kard. goft*: “*gâz biyâvar!*” *gâz âvord o dandânâ-ye gorgo keshid o pambe-dâne dar jâsh gozâsh[t].*

mowqe’i ke raftand be-meidân-e da’vâ, gorg hey in taraf ân taraf jast o pambe-dâne bud, dige rikht o boz bâ shâkh-e tizesh zadesh, shekam-e gorgrâ darid. bachehâsho dar-âvord o gorgo dar gushe-i khâk kard.

va-s-salâm.

dirt onto Shangul and Mangul in my water-glass?” [The goat] said: “It’s me, it’s me, the goat. I’ve got two horns [pointing] to the sky. Did you eat Shangul and Mangul?” First [the wolf] said: “No!” but then it said: “Yes, I ate them!”

The goat said: “Let us fight tomorrow.” The goat went, milked some of its milk and prepared some butter, yoghurt, cream, and dough, which it brought to the carpenter. The wolf also got up, [...] gathered some of his children’s excrements, chewed bones and ... brought it to the carpenter. The master said [to his wife]: “Look what the goat brought.” The master’s wife got up and saw that [the goat] had brought dough, butter, cream and oil. [The master] said: “Look what the wolf brought.” She looked and said: “He brought nothing but his children’s excrements.” The master said: “Bring a file.” She brought the file and he sharpened the goat’s horns. Then he said: “Bring me the tongs.” She brought the tongs, and he pulled the wolf’s teeth and put cotton-seeds in their place.

When they went to fight, the wolf jumped here and there and the cotton-seeds fell out. The goat hit him with her horns and slit open the wolf’s belly. She took out her kids and buried the wolf in a corner.

That’s it.

5. Proverbs and popular sayings

Maxims, popular sayings, and proverbs form an essential component of spoken Persian. While maxims are often quoted from the Persian classics, notably Sa'di's *Golestân*, proverbs and proverbial expressions rarely derive from classical literature. The Persian proverb (*mathal*, *tamthil*) often alludes to a condensed form of a narrative, and thus represents a common form of popular literature. Stories connected with Persian proverbs have been collected and documented as early as the seventeenth century. Mohammad-Ali Hablerudi, a Persian living in the Deccan kingdom of Golkonda during the reign of Abd-Allâh Qotbshâh (r. 1626–74), is credited with compiling the first major classical collection of Persian proverbs, and thus with inaugurating the discipline of Persian paremiological research. By providing illustrations for several proverbs, nineteenth-century lithographed editions of his famous and oft-reprinted collection *Jâme' al-tamthil* (Collection of Proverbs), added the further level of visual reception to the combination of proverb-*cum*-tale (Marzolph 1999a). These proverbs, all of which are supplemented by a corresponding tale, include counsels such as *avval rafiq, âkhar tariq*, "First a friend (to keep you company), then the (travel on your) way," proverbial hemistiches such as *pashshe cho por shod, bezanad pîrâ*, "Gnats, when great in numbers, (even) beat the elephant," and elementary wisdom such as *herfat-e mard zinat-e mard ast*, "A man's profession is his adornment" (referring to AT 888A*: *The Basket-maker*). The stories connected with proverbs have further been studied in Amir-Qoli Amini's modern folklore study (1945), and more recently in the two-volume publication of texts drawn from the archives of the Markaz-e Farhang-e Mardom (Enjavi 1973; Vakiliyân 1987). The latter collection contains narrative versions related to such widely known proverbs as *khar-e mâ az korregi dom nadâsht*, "Our donkey never had a tail, even from the time it was a foal" (Enjavi 1973, pp. 74–84; a version of AT 1534: *Series of Clever Unjust Decisions*); *shotor didi? nadidi!* (ibid., pp. 120f.; a version of AT 655 A: *The Strayed Camel and the Clever Deductions*); or *na shir-e shotor, na didâr-e arab*, "Neither camel's milk, nor a meeting with the Arab" (ibid., pp. 159–63; a version of AT 285 D: *Serpent Refuses Reconciliation*).

6. Folk humor

It is extremely difficult to assess the role of Persian folk humor. Humor is by definition aggressive, as it offers a jocular treatment of conflicts, be they political, social, economic, moral, or individual. As for style, humorous verbal expression is usually short (as in jokes and anecdotes), sometimes interactive (as in humorous riddles or jocular questions), and often arises spontaneously. Both the subversive quality of humor and its spontaneity imply severe restrictions on the availability of documentation.

Persian literature preserves several outstanding examples of humor and satire, and although these specimens were produced by members of the literate elite, they may contain elements of folklore. Even a literary collection of anecdotes such as Obeyd-e Zākāni's (d. 1371) *Resāle-ye delgoshā* may to some extent represent contemporary folk humor. On the other hand, the very popularity which a collection gained through the process of retelling may result in its jokes and anecdotes becoming elements of folk humor, even though they originate to a large extent from Arabic and Persian literature (see Halabi 1980; Marzolph 1992, vol. 2, index). In fact, the publication and popularization of humorous texts from literary works is a continuous phenomenon.

When the British colonial officer, Francis Gladwin, published his Persian grammar, *The Persian Moonshee* (1795), he appended a section of short humorous texts entitled *Hekāyât-e latîf dar ebârat-e salis* (Marzolph 1995c). The anecdotes were apparently compiled by his Persian secretary from various works of Persian and European literature, the latter being translated in the peculiar style of Indo-Persian idiom. Gladwin's selection, originally intended as reading material for further practice, became extremely popular in the Indian subcontinent. Soon it came to be published independently; later it was translated and adapted in chapbooks in India and other areas, such as in the Pashto *Hagha Dagha* (1930). Before long some of the anecdotes it contained were collected in fieldwork from "living oral tradition" (Marzolph 1992, vol. 1, pp. 126–29). However, it was only recently presented to the Iranian public (Javâdi 1996).

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The nineteenth century saw the publication of what was probably the most influential book in terms of Persian folk humor, the *Motâyebât-e Mollâ Nasreddin* (first Persian edition 1886; see Marzolph 1995d). The protagonist of its humorous stories is known in the Turkish cultural sphere as Nasreddin Hoja (Greek: Nastratin), and in the Arab world as Juha (Berber: Si Djeh'a; Italian: Giufà). This figure was introduced into Persian literature, by way of Arabic literature, around the eleventh century (under the adapted name of Johi or Juhî), when Persian authors began referring to him in their works, and quoting a number of anecdotes about him. A remark by the editor of the first printed Persian booklet containing anecdotes on Mollâ Nasreddin suggests that by the nineteenth century, probably through interaction with the Turkic population in Iran, the character of Mollâ Nasreddin had become popular in Persian oral tradition. To be exact, the *Motâyebât-e Mollâ Nasreddin* did not contain folk humor; rather, they constitute an adapted and enlarged translation of an Arabic booklet, which itself constitutes an Arabicized version of a Turkish original (Marzolph 1999c). Mollâ Nasreddin superseded, and in fact replaced Johi, and eventually became one of the most popular characters of Persian humor until the 1970s. When Mohammad Ramazâni published the standard Persian collection of anecdotes on Mollâ Nasreddin in 1936, he was able to include some 600 items. Most anecdotes in this volume are translated from either Turkish or Arabic sources. As its illustrations prove, it is closely connected to the standard Turkish collection compiled by Veled Chelebi Izbudak "Bahâ'i," which was first published in 1907. Ramazâni, moreover, announced the publication of a second volume containing the same number of anecdotes documented from oral tradition, a volume that unfortunately never materialized. Mollâ Nasreddin is a simple folk philosopher, who in his naiveté mirrors the limited capacity of human intellectual understanding. He wonders why melons do not grow on trees—until a nut falls on his head (AT 774 P: *The Melon and the Walnut-tree*); he forgets to count the donkey he himself is sitting on (AT 1288 A: *Numskull Cannot find the Ass He Is Sitting on*); he pretends that a pot can give birth and die (AT 1592 B: *The Pot Has a Child and Dies*). Many of his anecdotes have become proverbial in the form of

compounds such as *lehâf-e Mollâ Nasreddin*, 'Mollâ Nasreddin's quilt,' denoting a dispute whose apparent cause is not the real one (Dehkhodâ 1922-29, vol. 2, pp. 816f.; Amini 1972, pp. 230f.; Shahri 1991, p. 366):

One night, Mollâ heard a noisy quarrel in the streets. He got up, wrapped his quilt about his body and went out to see what had happened. When he got there, one of the persons involved grabbed his quilt and ran away. When Mollâ went back into the house, his wife asked him about the reason for the quarrel. He answered: "Nothing in particular! It must have been about my quilt, because as soon as they had it, the trouble stopped!"

After the Revolution of 1979, it appears as though the telling of anecdotes about Mollâ Nasreddin is officially regarded as an undesirable element of folk humor. In contrast to the dwindling number of popular booklets on Mollâ Nasreddin, there is now a growing amount of popular literature on Bohlul, the wise fool and alleged half-brother of Abbasid caliph Hârûn al-Rashid. In the Shi'ite tradition Bohlul is regarded as a faithful disciple of the sixth Imam Ja'far al-Sâdeq, and he is therefore linked directly to a venerated representative of the Shi'ite creed (Marzolph 1983, 1987; Nur-bakhsh 2003).

Jocular chapbooks that were widespread since the Qajar period and until the first half of the twentieth century further include *Mahbub al-qolub* (compiled about 1700) by Momtâz, and the anonymous *Latâ'ef o zarâ'ef*, or *Reyâz al-bekâyât* by Mollâ Habibollâh Kâshâni (d. 1921). The latter enjoyed great popularity at least up to the late 1970s (Marzolph 1994a, no. 81) and may well be responsible, therefore, for transmitting older humorous notions to the contemporary tradition.

Towards the middle of the twentieth century the available methods of printing permitted the production of cheap booklets in large quantities. These booklets, distributed by sidewalk peddlers, bazaar bookstalls, and itinerant merchants, are decidedly popular in character, while others present jocular tales compiled more or less from the Persian literary tradition. Comparing books of jokes published at various dates over the past fifty years, a change in jocular

focus as well as moral limitations can be noticed. Earlier books of jokes, while drawing heavily on European models, possessed a strong misogynous tendency. Since the Revolution, however, such books similarly exploit foreign tradition, but they show a tendency to curb their aggression and stress verbal artistry and a refined mental appreciation of jokes.

As for the dimension of folk humor in living oral tradition and performance, there are few clues at hand. None of the published collections contain jokes collected from unrestrained oral performance. Rare specimens found in dialect studies and anthropological surveys (see, e.g., Lama'ei 1970, pp. 125–27) support the claim that Iranian folk humor in its unrestricted form focuses on topics which are also popular in other regions, such as scatology, sexuality, (political) power and injustice, and the uncertainties and absurdities of life in general. The closest one might come to a general survey of folk humor in living tradition at the beginning of the twentieth century is the relevant section on *latifehâ* in the *Markaz-e Farhang-e Mardom*. Towards the end of the twentieth century, the Internet became an ideal medium for jocular expression. One of the most popular sites is the California-based *Jokestân*, to which Persian youngsters from all over the world, but presumably predominantly expatriates residing in the US, contribute individually. The site is divided into various sections, some of which represent traditional areas of Persian folk humor, such as ethnic jokes on Rashtis, Kurds, or Turks (Marzolph 2008).

7. Folk poetry

In relation to its high frequency in everyday life, folk poetry is probably the most under-researched field of Persian popular literature (Cejpek 1968, pp. 694–700; Kreyenbroek 1999). Various reasons account for this apparent neglect. Foreign Iranist scholars have often concentrated on elite literature or published mere specimen collections of popular poetry (Chodzko 1842). The growing number of Iranian publications on the subject (see e.g. Panâhi Sem-

nâni 1997, 2000) has not yet been taken into account by Western research. On the other hand, popular poetry is characterized more strongly than popular prose genres by a high degree of spontaneity, and hence flexibility, which makes it difficult to document data for research. Probably the largest existing collection, taped from fieldwork in 1969–71 in the province of Fârs, still awaits publication (Neubauer 1983). Given the sparse amount of research available, the following remarks aim at a fairly general outline of this field of popular literature.

J. S. Meisami has pointed out that poetry, the key form of Persian literature until the nineteenth century, has remained “the central genre, to which all others are in some sense poor relations” (Meisami 1997, p. 296). Accordingly, most popular poetry is related to popular versions of elite or “polite” literature. Many passages from classical Persian literature, particularly from Sa’di’s *Golestân* and Rumi’s *Mathnavi*, have become widely known by means of recitation, reading, or inclusion in school-books, and are so generally acknowledged by all sections of society that they can be called “popular.” Some poems, moreover, such as those by Bâbâ Tâher Oryân (fl. eleventh century; see Arberry 1937), are still so widely appreciated today that “the simplest Iranian sings his verses to this very day” (Rypka 1968, p. 234). Since the introduction of printing, the *Robâ’iyât-e Bâbâ Tâher* has been further popularized by the distribution of numerous editions of popular booklets. Similar criteria apply to the *Robâ’iyât-e Fâ’ez-e Dashtestâni* or the anonymous *Ash’âr-e kaffâsh-e Khorâsâni*. Many religious works, particularly those belonging to the genres *rowze-khâni* or *marthiye* which deal with Imam Hoseyn’s martyrdom in Karbalâ, are compiled in verse. Their frequent recitation during the mourning ceremonies in the month of Moharram clearly popularized both their content and form. Established as a genre by Kâshefi’s eponymous *Rowzat al-shohadâ’* (see Chelkowski in this volume), the genre was particularly popular in the Qajar period, when many works were compiled and distributed in (often illustrated) lithographed editions (Marzolph 2001, pp. 25f.). The best known of these works are Mollâ Bemun-Ali’s *Hamle-ye Heydariyye*, Sarbâz Borujerdi’s *Asrâr al-shahâda*, and above all Mirzâ Ebrâhim Jowhari’s *Tufân*

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al-bokâ'. This category further includes works that gained wide appreciation because of their appeal or entertaining character, such as the poems on food and cookery in Jamâl-al-Din Abu Es-hâq (Boshâq) Shirâzi's (d. 1423) *Kanz al-eshtebâ'* or his *Divân-e Boshâq-e at'eme*.

The above examples represent products of elite literature that are "popular" only so far as their reception is concerned. The opposite, the inclusion of popular poetry or "oral poetry" in works of elite literature (de Bruijn 1990, pp. 469–72) is also documented. Persian epics, though predominantly a prose genre, are often interspersed with short fragments of poetry, which may be connected with their "oral background" (Yamamoto 2000; see also Panâhi Semnâni 1997, pp. 37 ff.). Some of the more recent romantic epics, such as *Najmâ-ye Shirâzi* or *Heydar-Beg*, are completely composed in poetry.

Folk quatrains (*robâ'i, dobeyti*), often performed as "local songs" (*tarânehâ-ye mahalli*), are the most frequent form of popular poetry (Ivanow 1925; Weryho 1961–62; Eilers 1969). Both in terms of linguistic and musical quality they share certain characteristics with both elite and popular literature (see Neubauer 1983, pp. xi-iff). Though based on elite standards of literature, folk quatrains often employ colloquial terms, and are popular because of their simple style and content. In terms of formal characteristics, they are composed in the *hazaj* meter in its catalectic form. The rhyme is most often composed as a a b a, with the exceptional forms a a a a or a a b b. Departures from the rules of both meter and rhyme are quite frequent. Folk quatrains used to be sung on many different occasions, at work in the house or in the fields, while traveling, or when herding the cattle. Particularly at weddings or other social meetings performers would alternate, each singer responding to the quatrain performed before him. At times the verbal performance might be accompanied by either the flute (*ney*) or the drum. The melodies to which these quatrains are performed are quite simple. While the oldest specimens of folk quatrains are those of Bâbâ Tâher, mentioned above, their tradition can be traced to the nineteenth century. Early European collectors such as A. Chodzko (1842) and V.A. Zhukovsky (1888–1922, 1902) did not recognize these quatrains as a specific poetic genre. As the quatrains are often

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sung one after the other, they saw the individual poems as stanzas of larger complex songs. The topics treated in folk quatrains comprise all aspects of life, including social and religious themes as well as historical and heroic ones. Love is a particularly prominent theme.

<i>alâ dokhtar to ke az Qâziyâni</i>	O young girl from the tribe of Qâziyân
<i>chenân Torki ke Fârsi hich nadâni</i>	You are so Turkish that you do not understand Persian
<i>barâhat sisad o shas buse dâdam</i>	I gave you three hundred and sixty kisses
<i>miyân-e busehâ jân misetânam</i>	Between the kisses I took your soul.

(Neubauer 1983, p. 69)

<i>agar kh^wâhi man az eshqat nemiram</i>	If you don't want me to die from loving you,
<i>bedeh qowli ke man torâ migiram</i>	Give me your word that I will get you.
<i>biyâ busi bedeh az un labunet</i>	Come, give me a kiss with your lips,
<i>nagu râz-e khodet [râ] bâ kasunet.</i>	And don't tell your secret to your relatives.

(Homâyuni 2000, p. 333)

Lullabies have always been, and remain, extremely popular. In their simplest form they consist of two rhyming lines, or accumulations thereof in the form of a *mathnavi*. They usually begin with the alliterating syllables *lâlâ, lâlâ* or *alâ lâlâ*. This is often followed by the name of a flower or plant (*gol-e ...*), and short narrative passages (Tazhibi and Shojâ'atdust 2000).

<i>lâlâ, lâlâ, gol-e lâle</i>	Hushaby baby, tulip flower,
<i>palang dar kuche minâle</i>	The panther wails in the street
<i>lâlâ, lâlâ, gol-e na'nâ</i>	Hushaby baby, peppermint flower,
<i>bâbât rafte be kuh tanhâ</i>	Your father has gone alone to the mountain.

(Javâd 2001, p. 15)

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Longer lullabies often narrate complex stories, such as the lament of a mother who was brought to India, which is extant in a variety of versions:

<p><i>lâlâ, lâlâ, bouám hassi</i> <i>dârom kerdi kolun bassi</i> <i>talab kerdam be-yak nuni</i> <i>âjor pâre vârom dâdi</i> <i>sabu dâdi be-ow raftam</i> <i>sar-e chashme be-khow raftam</i> <i>do tâ Torki ze-Torkessun</i> <i>mârâ bordan be-Hendossun</i> <i>bozorg karda be-sad nâzi</i> <i>show(h)ar dâdan be-sad jâzi</i> <i>do tâ owlâd Khodâ dâde</i> <i>Malek Ahmad, Malek Jamshid</i> <i>Malek Jamshid ketow rafte</i> <i>Malek Ahmad be-khow rafte ...</i> (Homâyuni 1969, p. 223f.)</p>	<p>Hushaby baby, you are my father You turned me out and closed the bolt When I asked for some bread You gave me a piece of brick You gave me a jug, I went to the water Next to the spring I fell asleep Two Turks from Turkistan Took me to India They brought me up with tenderness And married me with a rich dowry God gave me two sons: Malek Ahmad, Malek Jamshid, Malek Jamshid has gone to school Malek Ahmad has fallen asleep ...</p>
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Riddles encountered in classical literature have given rise to a complex theoretical system (Anwari Alhosseyni 1986). Their popular offspring, the *chistân* (from *chist ân*, 'What is that?'), often occurs in rhyme, sometimes in the traditional form of a *dobeyti*:

<p><i>chist ân ke az har dari dâkbel</i> <i>mishavad</i> <i>az har shekâfi birun miravad</i> <i>gerd mishavad o bâlâ o pâyin</i> <i>miravad</i> <i>jâ-ye pâyash ham nemimânad?</i> (Vakiliyân 1996, p. 11. Answer: <i>bâd</i>, 'the wind')</p>	<p>What is it? It enters through every door It leaves through every crack It becomes round and moves up and down And never stays at rest?</p>
<p><i>bolbol-e in bâgham o in bâgh</i> <i>golzâr-e man ast</i> <i>morgh-e âtesh-bâram o</i> <i>âtesh par o bâl-e man ast</i> <i>ostokbânânam noqre o andar</i> <i>jegaram dâram talâ</i> <i>har ke in ma'ni bedânâd</i> <i>pir-ostâd-e man ast</i> (Vakiliyân 1996, p. 16. Answer: <i>sham'</i>, a candle).</p>	<p>I am this garden's nightingale and this orchard is my garden I am a fire-bearing bird, fire is my feathers and wings My bones are silver, and in my liver I have gold Whoever knows this meaning will be my teacher</p>

8. Outlook

As for future research in Persian popular literature, much remains to be done. First and foremost, documentation of Persian popular literature from an authentic oral context of performance must continue. It is imperative both to collect and document Persian popular literature in forms as close to their original context as possible. Whether or not the published form will have to be edited owing to societal conditions, is not of prime importance as long as extensive and detailed scientific documentation is available to the researcher. In order to arrive at an adequate understanding of the meaning of popular literature for those who perform or read it or listen to it, the earlier emphasis on textual documentation is insufficient. The recorded texts need to be supplemented by as much contextual data as possible. Not much is known, for instance, about storytelling in contemporary Iranian society. Many of the texts recorded during fieldwork were apparently produced in artificially induced settings, and tell us next to nothing about what stories narrators originally tell, and why.

Moreover, in Iran expressions of the popular mind such as folklore and popular literature have often been regarded as threatening to the social and political order, and have frequently been suppressed or restricted. It is hoped that the official attitude will in the future acknowledge folklore and popular literature as essential components of national heritage. If a pessimistic view laments the disappearance of traditional folklore, the optimistic view should counter by having confidence in the people who, if traditional forms disappear, will eventually create and practice new forms of popular expression.

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