

Shakespeare's Tragedies Recontextualized as Comedies in Iran's State TV Sitcom, *Kolāh Ghermezī*

Azra Ghandeharion & Behnaz Heydari

Department of English Language and Literature, Ferdowsi University of Mashhad
Ferdowsi University of Mashhad, Azadi Square, Mashhad, Iran

Email: ghandeharion@um.ac.ir

Abstract This article argues that some of the adaptations performed in the most popular Iranian sitcom, *Kolāh Ghermezī*, are Shakespearean tragedies: *Othello* (1603), *Romeo and Juliet* (1591-1595), *Hamlet* (1599-1602) and *Pericles* (1607/1608). It examines the director's recontextualization of Shakespeare. The director changes the plot, adds moral lessons and silences the violence, as do adapters of Shakespeare's dramas for children. Pastiche and the dialogical tradition of the carnivalesque where animals play the role of human and men become women are also present. The choice of puppets who play Shakespearian characters is highly related to their public persona as being introduced cunning, helpful, or simple minded. The results, coming from carefully scrutinizing the performances by the help of adaptation methodologies, can be of significance to those interested in the adaptation of Shakespeare in a different setting with diverse audience.

Keywords Shakespeare; Adaptation; *Kolāh Ghermezī*; Children's program; Iranian sitcom; Intertextuality

Author Azra Ghandeharion has been Assistant Professor of English Literature and Cultural Studies at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad since 2013. Her interest in research includes contemporary Middle Eastern art and culture. Her emphasis is on "Otherness" issues, adaptation, appropriation, body politics, and literature of diaspora. Her critical interests cover the competing discourse of society in popular culture, advertisement, films, and sitcoms. She presented numerous articles in national and international congresses involving social sciences, humanities, and art.

Behnaz Heydari is a MA student of English Literature at Ferdowsi University of Mashhad.

William Shakespeare (1564-1616), the poet and playwright of Renaissance in England has written a panoply of sonnets and plays that have been read and praised all over the world. At least a wide range of people have heard the names of his well-known plays. In Iranian culture, they have been read and adapted. One can note the most recent movie *Tardid* (Dir. Karīm Masīhī 2009), an adaptation of *Hamlet* (1599-1602). Although this movie begins like Shakespeare's *Hamlet*, the ending is different. There is this effort to make the atmosphere more Iranian, as it is expected, not least because it is supposed to attract new audience.

Kolāh Ghermezī (Dir. Tahmāsb 1993-2016), literally meaning the one who wears red hat, has been broadcast for more than 20 years. Since 2009, this sitcom has become an inseparable part of New Year and religious holidays in Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting (IRIB). One of the special characteristics of *Kolāh Ghermezī* is its highly satirical and parodic flavor. It paradoxically both incorporates and challenges what it parodies. This quality is achieved by carnivalesque and pastiche. Carnavalesque is developed in Bakhtin's (1895-1975) theory, in which the noble becomes the poor and the poor becomes the noble in appearance. In other words, the social classifications are deconstructed. In this sitcom, the same idea can be recognized, as animals play the role of human beings or boys play the role of girls. As a result, it seems that no barrier, such as sex, exists in the imaginary world of children. This carnivalesque quality reminds us of the time of Shakespeare himself, the Elizabethan era, when the roles of women in dramas have been played by young boys due to cultural norms (Shapiro 1).

In some of the episodes, Shakespearean adaptations of famous plays have been re-staged by characters of *Kolāh Ghermezī* program, along with myriads of other plays. The aim of this article is to study the significance of the roles played by animal puppets through a detailed analysis, concluding what the perspective of Tahmāsb can be toward these plays and how he makes them appropriate for children and Iranian culture. For instance, Tahmāsb alters the names of the characters for the sake of familiarity for children as well as asserting himself as the director. The methodology used here is analyzing the Shakespearean adaptations in *Kolāh Ghermezī* through comparative cultural studies, since we are scrutinizing the effects of two different cultures on performances. This research project is a qualitative study of Shakespearean adaptations in the Iranian sitcom, *Kolāh Ghermezī*. The main instruments of this research are the performances and adaptations in *Kolāh Ghermezī* videos.

Kolāh Ghermezī also forces a reconsideration of the idea of origin or originality by utilizing various texts created by canonical artists, philosophers, and

scientists. This feature is named intertextuality. The sitcom uses this technique, employing various familiar movies in the course of plot, characterization and music such as *Agatha Christie's Poirot* (Dir. Hettie MacDonald 2014), *Godfather* (Dir. Francis Ford Coppola 1972) or *the Good, the Bad and the Ugly* (Dir. Sergio Leone 1966). Adopting familiar plots and music plays great role in its popularity. Reshaping Shakespeare's dramas in such unusual formulas also reflects Shakespeare's status as a canonical figure (Wang 2). The importance of this program is not only in the national news coverage but also in international realm. When BBC broadcasts the rumor of one of the puppet characters being taken off air, the director and scriptwriter denied the rumor in national newspapers.

Kolāh Ghermezī is a new subject of study, while no academic research is available in terms of Iranian sitcom adaptations of foreign works. As the implications of a popular TV program in society has a pivotal role, these research questions are posed: How does Tahmāsb (1959), the director, recontextualize Shakespeare's dramas in *Kolāh Ghermezī*? How does he make them suitable for children? The hypotheses are that he tries to make the characters appropriate for the holidays' sitcoms. The reasons for recontextualization are the different audience and culture.

The general audience of this sitcom are the large population born in 1980s and 90s, growing up in wartime (1980-1988) and reconstruction era facing the economic limitations. Recently, this sitcom has been on air at about 9 p.m. during Norūz holiday (New Year, according to Persian calendar), the time that mostly people watch TV, as they are back home and probably eat dinner. The other popular programs on other channels are adjusted before and after this sitcom with all their concomitant audience. It is also aired immediately after the widely watched News Broadcast of 20:30, on the same channel, helping *Kolāh Ghermezī* be imbued with even more audience. Moreover, the New Year is a very appropriate time for State TV leisure program for children and adults.

Encompassing the whole two-week holiday, it has been on the air every year at the beginning of each spring. It has also been broadcast in some other religious holidays during the year, like Be'ethat (the day prophet Mohammad was sent to his prophetic mission), Fathers' Day (in which Imam Ali, the first Moslem saint, was born), or the day the Shia's 12th saint was born. It is originally a children program watched by a wide range of members of society and it is not merely addressed to children. Most of the times, it contains humor understood merely by adults.

In the 21st century, media has become a fundamental element in forming people's lives and culture; therefore, the influence of TV on families cannot be

denied (Campbell and Kean 265). In comparison to the other media, TV's effects on developing the society is the most salient (Taylor and Harris 86-104). The reason for such an impact is the ubiquitous presence of TV in houses and addressing cultural norms and other matters related to families through this medium (During 109-110). It is particularly true about *Kolāh Ghermezī*, since it contains didactic tone in order to address the values. It is also watched by all family members, based on what Sayahi (1978), one of the voice actors of this sitcom claims in an online interview.

When someone from the Middle East tries to adapt a European literary work, it must be considered that the core values in these two cultural poles are radically diverse (During 111). This difference leads to distinction in their literary works, TV programs or any other cultural production. This was reflected and dealt with well in the performances of *Kolāh Ghermezī* where instructive tone is added. Sometimes, in the middle of a performance, the puppets stop acting in order to announce moral lessons. This addition can be a part of the aim that an adaptation sets out (McKinnon 55). When the original text and the adaptation belong to two diverse cultures, some adjustments are to be expected (Hutcheon 28). Therefore, the reason behind the modification of tragedy to comedy in Shakespearean adaptations of *Kolāh Ghermezī* can be explained, as they are New Year programs. The cheerful mood of the society at this time is not ready to accept the gloom of tragedies on TV.

Tahmāsb uses popular world dramas to invite diverse audience with dramatic tastes. The way he transforms Shakespeare's tragedies to comedies can be the proof. He chooses Shakespearean dramas, while there are a panoply of Iranian acclaimed classics in books such as *One Thousand and One Night* (*Hezar-o-yek shab*), *The Rose Garden* (*Gulistan*) by Saadi (1210-1291), *Mathnawī Manavi* by Rumi (1207-1273), *Book of Kings* (*Shahnameh*) by Ferdowsi (940-1020) or *Mouse and Cat* (*Moosh-o-gorbeh*) satires by Obeyd Zakani (1300-1371). They are surely closer to Iranian culture than Shakespeare's dramas. Definitely, some of the stories inhabited in these books are more suitable for children or more fun for New Year holidays. Even they have priority for Iranian children and adults according to State TV's ideology. The reason behind choosing Shakespeare's tragedies and making effort to change them to comedies appropriate for children can be owing to the fact that they are always in academic curriculums, since the Western canons are considered universal. However, it is assumed that Iranian stories are not worth being called worldwide literary works. Although Britain has colonized a few of Asian countries, it has influenced many of these countries like Iran. Estok, in his essay on the role of European literary canons in Asia points out that "the enduring legacy of British

Colonial Domination” asserts its power in non-colonized Asian countries “through a valorizing of both English as a language and the West in general as a cultural and economic superpower” (1). The other reason for choosing Shakespeare can be that old well-known literary works can be reevaluated in adaptations in a new context (McFarlane 10).

It is an old practice to study movies that are the adaptations of literary works; this can be conducted by the theory of adaptation. In such studies, the adaptations of literary canons are not mostly valued as much as their sources (Leitch 1-3). In the case of Shakespeare, who is definitely a canonical dramatist, it can be seen how his dramas are valued over their adaptations. Apart from the canonization, generally the value of a work must be considered within itself, as sometimes an adaptation becomes a more acknowledged work. It is worth mentioning that myriads of Shakespeare’s own dramas are adaptations of older stories. However, his works have been appreciated worldwide (Hutcheon 2). Adaptations can be the replica of the source or only partly taken from it (Leitch 26). Sometimes, the source is totally replaced by its adaptation or it is simply questioned (Hutcheon 7).

When the extracts from the source do not seem appropriate for children, they are transformed in order to become suitable (Hutcheon 118). The violence in some of Shakespearean plays is also removed in their adaptations in *Kolāh Ghermezī*. These alterations are interesting for the knowing audience, since detecting the resulted similarities and differences can be of interest to the spectators (Sanders 106). Therefore, influencing the audience is the reason for such changes (Zatlin 79).

Shakespeare is a key figure in the realm of adaptation (Leitch 3). His dramas have been always the source of adaptations all through the history of cinema, even in silent movies, because they are easily assimilated into cinematic form (Camp 107-108). This can also be seen in the myriads of BBC performances of his dramas (Wyver 106). It is justifiable in England, as Shakespeare is fundamental to English literature and language. However, his impact is not limited to his own country. The TVs all over the world produce his adaptations. Iran’s state TV is not an exception. Using dramas, specifically Shakespeare’s plays, seems a good way to enhance children’s knowledge.

Canonical figures like Shakespeare have created works of literature that are famous all over the world; that is why it is hard to please the known and unknown audience varying in age and gender (Camp 109). The purpose to select Shakespearean adaptations instead of other choices for children, while having to alter the original text so that they can be suitable for children, is the pervasive yearning to keep Shakespeare’s works (Gearhart 62).

What Tahmāsb does in *Kolāh Ghermezī* is not to maintain Shakespearean essence and language. With his versatility, he uses a tragic plot, transforms it to comedy in order to rejoice and surprise the knowing audience. He wants to attract those who have read the play or are at least familiar with the story line and also those who are unaware of the this adaptation. While he does not claim some of the performances are adaptations, he leaves signs for the knowing audience to find out the source. What is peculiar about many Shakespeare's adaptations is that they hardly use settings of the stories themselves or the Elizabethan era (Leitch 30). This is not true about *Kolāh Ghermezī*, which utilizes simplified Elizabethan costumes and stage props.

Although some Shakespeare's adaptations like *Kolāh Ghermezī* are produced for children, they also address adults (Leitch 72). Shakespeare's dramas are concerned with violent plots, while they have been constantly employed as subjects for children's stories (Gearhart 44-45). This is because the producers remove some parts, add didactic flavor to the story line, and make it less demanding (Gearhart 52-53). Tahmāsb uses the same technique, as he tries to make the performances proper to the occasion. In the textual adaptations, pictures of children are provided to build the bridge with children's stories (Gearhart 54). In the case of *Kolāh Ghermezī*, the dramas are performed by children puppets to attain the same results.

The dramas in this program are played as games by different characters of *Kolāh Ghermezī*, wearing various disguises to perform a play within a play, or better to say, within a sitcom. Tahmāsb mentions that performing dramas can be a type of appropriate game for children to play at home. There are a wide range of characters in this program, all puppets of children and animals. The most well-known character is Kolāh Ghermezī, the character that the program is named after. He is a typical child in every sense and is present in most of the scenes. He and the other character, Pesar Khāleh, literally meaning aunt's son on mother's side, have been present from the production of the first versions of this program (1990s). Pesar Khāleh is considerate and decent, caring for others. These two characters have been with Iranian audience for more than 20 years. One can wonder how come they do not grow up at last. However, as Coleridge (1772-1834), the English Romantic poet believes, we need to suspend our disbelief and work with our imagination. It can be seen how family core values are advertised in this program since some characters are family members. The only character who is not a puppet and is present in all episodes is the host, Tahmāsb himself. He is known as the leader, as he directs all these children, teaches them, and corrects their behavior. He takes care of all the other characters, who are guests. These guests intend to stay for a short time,

while they never leave. He addresses the children who are watching TV and all the puppets are aware of the presence of the camera.

Shakespeare finds his way to this sitcom gradually. In one of the episodes Pesar Khāleh, who cares for humanity, claims that he has gone to the nursing home of old people, playing the role of Romeo in order to entertain them in New Year holidays. One of the old women volunteers to play Juliet, as she has been called the same name when she was young. Together they play the famous balcony scene of *Romeo and Juliet*. He plays the role of lover so real that the old woman actually falls in love with him. She says that if he does not contest to marry her, like Shakespeare's Juliet, she takes poison. This is how Tahmāsb brings comic visions to Shakespeare's tragedy. Tahmāsb is conscious about asserting that he transforms the story not only to fit the children's need and New Year's spirit but also to demonstrate that the audience is watching 'his' version of Shakespeare. All the instances of deviation are explained in all adaptations below to represent how Tahmāsb is rereading Shakespeare. It is not always a cultural need. His creative interpretation sometimes borders on pastiche.

Othello is adapted in this program and Kolāh Ghermezī as the Chorus introduces the name of the play: *Otherro and the Mashed Meat*. The reason for changing the sound /l/ to /r/ is that Fāmīl-e Dūr is to play the role of Othello and he pronounces all /l/ as /r/. He is one of the major characters, a doorkeeper sensitive to knocking. His sensitivity, sometimes bordering on obsessive-compulsive disorder, adds more to the comic flavor. Fāmīl-e Dūr literally means a distant relative. He is one of the adult characters. Because of his simple and child-like characteristic, he creates many comic situations.

The characters' dialogues are serious and their costumes and stage props represent Elizabethan era. However, it is not as ornate or luxurious as stage props in cinematic Shakespearian adaptations. Pesar Ameh Zā plays the role of Iago that is renamed as Iago Ameh, meaning aunt and at the same time echoing his name, aunt's son on father's side. He is Kolāh Ghermezī's cousin, who comes from the rural district, accordingly, his habits are different from the others. He is a frank boy, speaking with a strong regional accent and sometimes behaving presumptuously. He introduces himself as the villain, when he admits to being miscreant. He repeatedly reveals his character in the asides, like Shakespeare's Iago all throughout Acts 3 and 4. Fāmīl-e Dūr uses his own special catch phrases, while playing his role, such as his manner of greeting and also the line of poetry he always recites from Hafez (1325/26-1389/90), an Iranian famous classic poet whose fame and credibility for Iranians is comparable to Shakespeare for the English. The line has

the word “door,” and Fāmīl-e Dūr’s obsessive-compulsive disorder of doors in general, is due to his being a doorkeeper. That is why he always recites the couplet.

Tahmāsb’s “Iago Ameh-Otherro” pair has many affinities with Shakespeare’s “Iago-Othello.” From the first lines of Act 3 Scene 3, he begins to persuade Othello by language tricks:

IAGO. Cassio, my lord! No, sure, I cannot think it,
That he would steal away so guilty-like,
Seeing you coming.

However, Tahmāsb alters the core theme of betrayal, so as to make it appropriate for children. The betrayal is eating the mashed meat that Otherro has put in the refrigerator, which is an anachronism, and can be part of the carnivalesque. The first dialogues of Iago consist of questioning Otherro about the refrigerator and whether he has eaten his meat or not. He tries to persuade him that his wife Dozdemonā or Dozdemīnā (literally meaning somebody who has stolen Monā or Mīnā, both Persian names for girls), has stolen and eaten the meat. This name is similar to Desdemona, Othello’s wife. Consequently, all characters’ names have been partially changed. What Otherro grieves over is still his loss of power, not over his wife’s marital honesty, but over his food, a more familiar subject matter for young audience. Therefore, the issue of adultery is dropped for its incompatibility and is replaced by stealing food. The idea of food is seen in Shakespeare’s text when Emilia opines in Act 3 Scene 4 that women are simply “food” for their husbands’ “stomachs.” This idea that women do not worth much for their husbands foreshadows the tragic events in which both Othello and Iago intend to kill their wives mercilessly. Iago Ameh uses the metaphoric idiom “gūsht beh rān shodan” twice, literally meaning, “meat you have eaten is placed on thighs.” It can refer to Act 3, Scene 3 in *Othello*, when Iago talks about Cassio’s legs circling Desdemona’s thighs in a dream. From this moment, Otherro suspects Dozdemonā. However, she emblemizes a timid and at the same time honest wife, loyal to his husband, wearing his favorite attire and trying to become slender so as to attract his attention, while he belittles her by accusing her of gluttony. Iago Ameh mentions that someone else may have eaten the meat and that he has seen Otherro’s wife chewing something. Like Shakespeare’s Iago, he wants to make Otherro furious and disappointed. Otherro smells meat in her mouth, since he is totally under the influence of Iago. At last, he suffocates her, while he is crying in despair. Iago tells the audience in an aside that he has taken the meat.

Otherro is pleased with his deed until he realizes that Iago is the one who ate the meat. He wants to kill Iago and then himself, in order to see his wife again, connoting the idea of afterlife, strongly believed in Iranian culture, both in Islamic and other Abrahamic religions in Iran and Zarathustrian core beliefs. However, Kolāh Ghermezī announces the end of the play so as not to let him seek revenge. This upsets Otherro even more. The moral lesson is announced as avoiding gluttony. Thus, we have the synthesis of charming and beneficial components (Zeigler 134). It is a hilarious performance besides moral lessons; however, the morals are sometimes connoting irony mostly if Thamāsb has adult audience in mind.

The characters' roles fit them well according to their personality. The gullibility and innocence of Desdemona is expressed in the puppet chosen for this character, Gābī, which is a childish pronunciation of calf in Farsi. Gābī has a rural accent. He is always hungry, eats dried bread or any cheap food, and simply cares for his mundane activities. Calves are known to be naïve in Iranian culture and are also famous for corpulence. Othello is played by Fāmīl-e Dūr, one of the oldest of the puppets and their leader in many cases. He is also the least handsome, connoting the racist views toward Othello. Pesar Ameh Zā, is not as kind, gentle, and civilized as the other puppets. He hates brushing teeth or taking a bath. He is sometimes considered impolite and his way of laughing can be interpreted as mean. His background reflects he can be the best choice to play the villain.

Among the chief characters, this adaptation does not consider the character of Cassio, Roderigo, and Emilia. The other major difference is that the tragic flaw is not jealousy, but gluttony. Iago's motivation changes in this adaptation from greed for power to gluttony. In this performance, some acts of *Othello* are left out. It does not reveal how Desdemona secretly marries Othello or the reasons behind Iago's animosity against Cassio and Othello. It omits Roderigo and his motivations. The adapted performance is in one act instead of five and does not mirror the events of the first two acts of *Othello*. Othello is not played by a black man here, since children are hardly ready to encounter racism, as it is too controversial to be handled in a conservative media like State TV.

In this adaptation, there is no name of Moor or Venice in order to avoid confusion, since children will be bombarded with a panoply of unfamiliar names. Otherro is named the lord of the world here. Murders are limited to one and the scene of murder is softened. Congratulating Norūz within the play and reciting Hafez's poetry asserts how the adaptation has been Iranicized. In order to be accepted in the new culture, Shakespearean texts have to be altered radically, when

produced as Asian adaptations (Ingham 119).

Although what *Otherro* does is called suffocating, it is restricted to pushing his wife down, so as to be out of sight. It is figuratively called “closing the door of breath” by Fāmīl-e Dūr’s humoristic obsessive-compulsive disorder of closing all doors. He holds a stick in his hand, calling it sword. Comical occasions barely allow the performance to be called tragedy in its strict sense. When something interrupts the play, the characters go on telling each other “they are watching us.” They imagine they have spectators or maybe they mean TV audience. However, sometimes the sound of applause can be heard, while the audience is not visible. These are Tahmāsb’s strategy to make Shakespearean plays appropriate for children. From this performance on, Fāmīl-e Dūr in many occasions introduces himself as *Otherro*. Sometimes Tahmāsb comments on the performances at the end. This commenting is widespread in narration for children, since the narrators’ duty is to interrupt the story and clarify it (Tosi 130).

With the help of Elizabethan costumes, stage props, and Iranian formal language, the general plot of *Romeo and Juliet* is adapted, and renamed as *Romeo and Juliet’s Toothbrush*. The addition of toothbrush is to give children a lesson, which is hygiene. Gābī plays the role of Romeo, reflecting the innocence of a young lover and Jīgar plays Juliet. Jīgar, literally meaning liver, connotes a loved one, doll, or babe which contrasts strikingly with his masculine voice. He is actually a donkey, a dumb and a sensitive character. Since he does not clearly understand what others utter, he repeats himself all the time. He does not want others to think he is stupid and attacks on those who believe so. That is why he wants others to call him Jīgar instead of donkey or ass, which connotes being fool in Iranian culture. This character is concerned with the BBC’s worldwide rumor mentioned before.

The puppets choice for playing Shakespearian characters fits their public personas. Gābī, glutton and stinky, plays the role of Romeo who avoids brushing teeth. Furthermore, he is scarcely aware of what bathing is. The problem is that he repeatedly devours his toothbrush, while brushing teeth. He does not own a toothbrush now and that is why his mouth is imbued with a bad smell. This can be a satire of the fact that sometimes husbands are not as neat as their wives. Jīgar is still sensitive to the word “ass” during the performance and repeats specific catch phrases for the sake of memorability. The reason for choosing this puppet for this role might be the naivety of Juliet. The king is played by Fāmīl-e Dūr, the leader and the senior puppet, as usual. Tahmāsb wants to teach the children that caring for the elderly is of great privilege in Iranian culture. Kolāh Ghermezī is the Chorus and the Secretary of State.

Romeo is sometimes pronounced Romeno and Juliet, Julīnet by the puppets maybe because English names are hard to articulate for children. The idea of love between these two characters remains the central theme in the adaptation. Most acts of Shakespeare's text are absent. However, the lovers' meeting in the middle of the night per se and Juliet's rival suitor, who is her cousin, are the similar elements. The cousin is named Hamlet instead of Paris, going into Shakespearean intertextuality even further. Juliet's father agrees to her marriage to Romeo if certain conditions are met. It is Romeo's promise to brush his teeth and take a bath afterwards.

Through cultural recontextualization, Juliet mentions the Iranian ritual of meetings in New Year holidays, in which relatives and friends go to each other's houses for a short visit. This recontextualization is the method used in Asian Shakespearean adaptations in order to become attuned to the new and diverse cultural norms. It is not practiced at the expense of losing the central theme of the source, but it occasionally leads to paradox (Wang 2). The other element is singing the Iranian popular melody of marriage and the marriage rituals, which are obviously unlike the ceremonies in western cultures. Myriads of comic situations help the tragedy become a comedy. Nobody dies, nobody is murdered, and the lovers are reunited, a congenial plot for holidays.

The zenith of Shakespearean intertextuality in *Kolāh Ghermezī* happens in their performance named, *Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet*, a synthesis that can be called a postmodern pastiche by merging characters and events from various Shakespeare's dramas together within a single show. It begins with Babaī playing the role of Hamlet, reciting in English, "to be or not to be, that is the question" (III 1). Babaī (childish pronunciation of lamb) has learned to speak English and he actually speaks English more fluently than Farsi. It is worth mentioning that this character has been naïve, voiceless and coy, before he has learned to speak English by listening to TV and studying dictionaries. He always sings English songs and is known as an intelligent character. He owns a harsh voice, despite being a delicate lamb. Intertextuality and the interest of Tahmāsb in Shakespeare is visible in various scenes when Babaī adapts Hamlet's popular quotation, "to eat or not to eat, that is the question." *Hamlet* is frequently mentioned in *Kolāh Ghermezī*, which is justified, due to its fame (Rokison 786). Although this drama's plot is difficult for children to figure out, it has been repeatedly adapted in this realm (Tosi 129). Bahrani, the voice actor and creator of Babaī persona, claimed that he liked Hamlet role most and that is why Act III, Scene 1 is variously adapted by Babaī.

The characters wear Elizabethan costumes. Using special stage props also connotes the same era. Babaī is doubtful about eating his lettuce and in Farsi he

says, “khordan yā nakhordan,” which means “to eat or not to eat.” His father’s ghost is played by Fāmīl-e Dūr. He calls himself Otherro and asks Hamlet whether he knows his greedy uncle has put poison in his ear to kill him. Directly mirroring *Hamlet’s* Act 1, Scene 5, he encourages Hamlet to take revenge. The name Claudius is changed to “Dius,” possibly to be short and memorable for children. Since Babaī is known for quoting Hamlet’s famous soliloquy (III 1) in English and Farsi during different episodes, Tahmāsb gives him the role of Hamlet. Fāmīl-e Dūr is the king, a role similar to his other plays not least because he is older than other characters. Formal Iranian language is also present in this performance (Figure 1).



Figure 1. *Kolāh Ghermezī, Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet*, The ghost and Hamlet, Screen shot

Romeo and Juliet play the famous balcony scene. Shakespeare’s Romeo and his eloquent, persuasive language (II 1) is present in Tahmāsb’s version. In Shakespeare’s drama, Juliet is from the aristocrat family. What happens in the adaptation is that Romeo wants to marry Juliet because of her wealth. It underestimates Romeo’s love in Shakespeare’s drama. Plastic container and ice cream are the anachronistic elements of this adaptation to contribute to the carnivalesque aspect of the performance (Figure 2).



Figure 2. *Kolāh Ghermezī, Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet*, Costume, Screen shot

The ghost believes that Romeo is a liar, who wants to abuse Juliet and beguile her into marrying him. He notes that she must save her money, which is the message of this performance. The combination of parody and intertextuality is found in ghost's action. The ghost wishes to kill Romeo exactly in the way that he killed Desdemona, because he had the role of Othello and Romeo acted as Iago in another performance. Only in this new performance, Othello can avenge Iago. In the end, Fāmīl-e Dūr's wife calls him on his cellphone and this sonorous ringtone interruption ends the play. The characters dance and sing with the ringtone and Romeo and Juliet hug each other. Shakespeare encourages the audience to rationality instead of emotions, Tahmāsb, as the author of his own fictional world, provides the same message. He illustrates how reasonableness must also be taken into account in love and relationship. The sitcom is also directed to the unmarried youth, teaching them the balance between emotion and prudence.

This adaptation is also indigenized. Romeo claims that he has been playing the Tombak (an originally Iranian drum) instead of a European musical instrument, near Juliet's balcony. Tahmāsb wants to assert his re-contextualization, which is not always necessarily cultural. Romeo is played by Pesar Ameh Zā and Juliet by Kolāh Ghermezī. The reasons behind choosing these particular puppets for these roles can be that Pesar Ameh Zā is sometimes deceitful, while Kolāh Ghermezī is unsophisticated. Tahmāsb transforms the character of Romeo drastically and

beyond the expectations of knowing audience. He ends it happily with reunion instead of tragic death of the main characters. The innovation embedded in this performance cannot be denied, as in all adaptations (McKinnon 57).

The beginning of one of Shakespeare's histories, *Pericles* is also adapted in this sitcom. *Pericles* is the story of a king who allows her daughter to marry the one who answers a riddle correctly. The adaptation in *Kolāh Ghermezī* is named, *Three Conditions of the Princess*. The characters are in historical costumes surrounded by antique props, employing the style of Iranian formal language (Figure 3). It initiates with "Once Upon a December," a memorable tune in the animated movie *Anastasia* (Dir. Don Bluth and Gary Goldman 1997). Sung in English by Babaī, this lullaby serves as a comforting melody. There lies another evidence manifesting the high intertextual quality of this sitcom.

In this adaptation, the father is replaced by a giant, the daughter is a princess and four princes are added as the savior and suitor of the princess. It begins like a fairy tale. However, as it continues, it becomes more similar to the opening of *Pericles*. The giant is played by Dībī, since he is the only puppet with frightening appearance, though he is a kid. Dībī is a jinn. Nonetheless, he is not as frightening or eccentric as his name suggests. His most salient characteristic is saying everything in reverse, meaning the opposite. For instance, if he calls someone aunt, he means uncle, boy means girl and "do not" means "do." The princess is played by Dokhtar-e Hamsāyeh (daughter of the neighbors), whose characteristics imply girlish innocence. She is one of the rare female personages in this sitcom. Dokhtar-e Hamsāyeh reflects the behavior that satirizes kindergartens and institutional disciplines.

The four princes are: Hamsādūs, played by Aghāyeh Hamsādeh (having the same in Shakespearean adaptation, he played Claudius in *Hamlet and Romeo and Juliet*); Pesar Ameh Zā (apparently coming from India, represented by his attire, he keeps his Iago traits); Fāmīl-e Dūr (since he cannot forget his previous role, he still introduces himself as Otherro); Kolāh Ghermezī (unable to remember the Roman numeral attached to his name, he does not know if he is Henry II or V or VIII). Not only intertextual and carnivalesque, *Kolāh Ghermezī* directly satirizes Shakespeare's history plays. Aghāyeh Hamsādeh is one of the neighbors. His name in Shirazi accent (a Farsi accent) means Mr. Neighbor. The notoriety in telling sad stories of his unbelievable misfortunes turned Aghāyeh Hamsādeh to the most popular butt of satire in Iranian popular culture. His lies are so unbelievable that make everyone laugh. The four suitors are chosen from different types of puppets, two adults and two children, in order to make the competition comical.



Figure 3. *Kolāh Ghermezī, Three Conditions of the Princess*, Screen Shot

Dībī's riddle consists of asking three questions and the one who answers correctly marries the princess, similar to *Pericles*. The first one is about the best thing they have ever done. Hamsādūs claims to be Odysseus and the best thing he has done is making a wooden horse in which he has hidden the soldiers. However, he alters the ending. As he is naturally a misfortunate man, he has not been able to unlock the horse from inside. Hence, all soldiers have been all burnt. Pesar Ameh Zā sings as an answer and the others accompany him by dancing. By the help of Shakespearean plot, Tahmāsb satirizes some Indian movies, which privilege singing and dancing over plot, dialogue and characterization. Fāmīl-e Dūr retells the story of the "Sacrificing Petrus" with some alterations, which used to be in elementary Farsi books since 1970s. This story comes from an American myth, whose name is originally "Little Dutch Boy." Fāmīl-e Dūr claims to be Petrus, the one who saves people. He uses the word 'door' and his favorite line of Hafez in his dialogues. Kolāh Ghermezī is interested in candies. Therefore, his best action is hiding all the trash left of the candies he was forbidden to eat. None of the answers turns out to be right.

The next question is about the best food. Aghāyeh Hamsādeh, the unfortunate man, remembers that he ate his father's slap. Tahmāsb uses a literary technique that was vastly used by Shakespeare: pun. In Farsi "beat" and "eat" are homonym puns. Pesar Ameh Zā sings another Indian song as the answer and everybody dances. Fāmīl-e Dūr names a non-conventional and strange food. For Kolāh Ghermezī, the best food is birthday cake, connoting his childish innocence.

The third question constitutes the best thing they have ever said. Aghāyeh Hamsādeh claims that his father has never let him express himself, even for his decision of marriage and that is why he is still single. As it is expected, Pesar Ameh

Zā sings. Fāmīl-e Dūr recites his favorite line of Hafez as the answer. For Kolāh Ghermezī, the best thing to hear is being offered candies. The princess becomes disappointed, since none of the answers is right.

This is the time that Pesar Khāleh enters the stage unexpectedly and answers that the best thing he has done is collecting trash from the street and putting them in the trash bin. The best thing he has consumed is water and the best remark to make is about love, affection, and kindness. His words represent the moral lessons of this performance. Dībī accepts their marriage, since he gives the right answer. Aghāyeh Hamsādeh sings the Iranian marriage melody and everybody dances at the end. In Shakespeare's text, Pericles finds the answer, which is father-daughter incest. Because of this knowledge, his life is in danger and so he chooses to flee. However, Pesar Khāleh stays and marries the princess.

In the past, adaptations were not mostly considered acclaimed works, but they "were seen to sacrifice the virtues of both film and literature, for the sake of a cheap reproduction" (Cartmell 1154). Tahmāsb adapts canonized literary works, which are admired all over the world. Is what he does "a cheap reproduction," making the original texts insignificant by distorting the plot and making a comedy out of a tragedy or combining diverse plays to create one pastiche? In fact, Tahmāsb creates comic effect by changing familiar tragedies. At the same time, he is encouraging children to play drama as a game at home, introducing them the ABCs of acting in performances and the realm of adaptation in general.

Shakespeare is surely a huge canonical dramatist. His dramas have been adapted over and over again all around the world. Tahmāsb in *Kolāh Ghermezī*, employs the technique of intertextuality. One of the authors he, frequently refers to is Shakespeare. He utilizes the familiar context as the talisman, and magical device in order to make a comedy. There is pleasure in seeing the familiar and this help his sitcom attract a wide range of audience.

This research project has attempted to study these adaptations and fill a large gap in adaptation studies in Iran. To conclude, carnivalesque techniques like using anachronism help Tahmāsb attract a wide range of audience. He also mingles various elements from myriads of literary works or movies, making a postmodern pastiche. In many of the plays, intertextuality is also present. In *Kolāh Ghermezī*'s Shakespeare adaptations, they speak in a formal Iranian language and use Elizabethan stage props and cloths in order to connote the same era. The plots of the original texts are altered so as to adjust to the new context. The puppets chosen for playing special Shakespearean characters are of significance.

Othello, *Romeo and Juliet*, and *Hamlet* are the Shakespearean tragedies

adapted. *Pericles*, one of Shakespeare's history plays can be said to be partially adapted. These adaptations cater to the context Tahmāsb needs to improve his sitcom with transforming the tragedies to comedies. Recontextualization in the adaptations is due to the nature of audience and culture. The cultural differences of these adaptations necessitates using special music, catch phrases, change of names, and specific rituals. Tahmāsb transforms the original texts drastically in order to make comedies appropriate for children. He removes myriads of the murders to soften and romanticize the plots. Since this sitcom is full of intertextuality, this research is limited and cannot exhaust all possibilities, whereas it raises further issues. Intertextuality is the fundamental property of this program and hence there are many intertextual potentials, which can be the subject of further study for researchers. The scarcity of female characters in this sitcom can also be the pivotal point around which a feminist study can revolve.

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