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## **First as Farce, Then as Filmfarsi: Film Adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* in Iran**

**Mostafa Sadeghi Kahmini**

PhD Candidate

Shiraz University, Iran

mostafasadeghikahmini@gmail.com

**Bahee Hadaegh \***

Assistant Professor

Shiraz University, Iran

bhadaegh@rose.shirazu.ac.ir

**Parvin Ghasemi**

Professor

Shiraz University, Iran

pghasemi2000@yahoo.com

### **Abstract**

This article is concerned with William Shakespeare's famous farce play *The Taming of the Shrew* and its Persian adaptation as an Iranian film called *Gorbe ra dame Hejleh Mikoshand (Cat Should Be Killed at the Bridal Chamber's Entrance)* in 1969. The point that informs the inquiry is the way the film departs and differs from the play in relation to the issue of women within the patriarchal society. The play and the film will be examined separately in detail, while their similarities and differences will be also accounted for. By going through the structure of the play, in particular, by showing attention to the importance of the Christopher Sly Induction which frames the narrative of the play, as well as surveying the critical looks on the play throughout the last century, it will be argued that the Bard's work, far from being an anti-feminine play that reflected the male authority of the society of its time, allows for new possibilities for the autonomy of women within the patriarchal system. The Persian adaptation, however, deliberately forecloses the same possibilities

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\* Corresponding Author

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by trying to cater to the taste of its mainstream male, chauvinist audience. The film will be exclusively investigated in the context of filmfarsi (a popular and mainstream cinema in Pre-Revolution Iran) by dissecting the components of the genre to show the deep, irreconcilable dichotomy between men and women in the Pahlavi era.

**Keywords:** Adaptation, Iranian cinema, Filmfarsi, Patriarchy, Femininity

### Introduction

Shakespearean adaptations first appeared in Iran at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. With the establishment of a theater hall in Tehran in 1869 by the decree of Naser al-Din Shah, and as playwriting was fairly a new phenomenon at the time, soon a flurry of Persian translations of famous French and English plays began to be published for performance in Iran. *The Taming of the Shrew*, published in 1900, marks the first completed translation of a Shakespeare's play in Iran, which was translated by Hossein-Qoli Mirza Salur; shortly after, translation of other well-known plays by Shakespeare such as *Othello* and *The Merchant of Venice* were followed (Ganjeh 13-14). Thus, theater began to flourish in Iran during the late Qajar period through translation of Western canonical works. Shakespeare's dramatic works at the time were mainly translated from Arabic or French; even the first documented performance of a Shakespearean play in Iran, *Othello*, was rendered in Turkish rather than Persian in Tabriz which—due to its ties to French, Turkish and Russian cultures—was a pioneering city for Iranian theater. “By the end of the Qajar Dynasty,” however, “Shakespeare was being performed in Tehran: Reza Atashkari directed *The Merchant of Venice* and *Much Ado About Nothing* between 1903 and 1921” (Litvin, Oz and Horvat 100). During the reign of Mohammad Reza Shah who was strongly inclined toward the West and its culture, it reached its “peak of theatrical activities in the Western form” (Bozorgmehr 334) and many more theater halls were built in Tehran and other major Iranian cities such as Rasht, Mashhad and Shiraz to encourage both dramatic translations and theater-going. Strictly in relation to Shakespeare, almost all of his plays, with the exception of his historical plays, had already been translated into Persian from their original

language by such notable literary figures as Ala'udin Pazargady, Reza Barahani, Nima Yushij and Abdolhossein Noushin; while some of these plays, due to the themes of regicide, were banned from being performed, many other were freely enjoyed and attended by the public (Litvin, Oz and Horvat 104).

Whereas Shakespeare has occupied a prominent role within the modern history of Iranian theater since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, his plays have been almost rarely adapted for the cinematic screen, which is the concern of this study. In fact, Varuzh Karim-Masihi's *Doubt* [tardid] (2009) seems to be the only prominent and successful cinematic example as a Shakespearean adaptation in Iran that re-reads and appropriates *Hamlet* in a compelling way. Apropos of such a void in the cinematic climate of Iran, *Gorbe ra dame Hejleh Mikoshand* (*Cat Should Be Killed at the Bridal Chamber's Entrance*) (1969) should be considered as a significant example in Pre-Revolution Iranian cinema for its attempt to put Shakespeare on the screen for the Iranian audience.

In her prominent book, *A Theory of Adaptation*, Lina Hutcheon breaks with previous theorists of adaptation by dismissing "fidelity" or proximity to source text as the barometer against which a film is judged (6). Instead, she offers "a structure of analysis" that she calls "*what, who, why, how, when, and where* of adaptation" (xiv). An adaptation, Hutcheon argues, does not exist in a vacuum. It is always "framed in a context—a time and a place, a society and a culture" (142). One of the important forms of adaption is transcultural adaption which often involves a change in language, time period, and place. Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* has been a favorite for filmmakers for practicing transcultural adaptation throughout the twentieth century from the suffragette years to 1980's feminist backlash (147). Such adaptations, more often than not, "mean changes in racial and gender politics" (147).

*Gorbe ra dame Hejleh Mikoshand*, a local adaptation of *The Taming of the Shrew*, is further a prime example of transcultural adaptation in the filmfarsi

cinema—a mainstream cinema popular between 1940s and 1970s in Iran. As the filmfarsi cinema, largely disregarded from the beginning of its rise by film critics for its imitative and “Westoxified” origin and purely entertaining nature, embodies the paradoxes of modern Iran, a contextual analysis of the film, in conjunction with the history and core themes of its source material, will prove to be a fruitful endeavor, especially with regard to the position of women within a patriarchal system.

Accordingly, this article concerns itself with William Shakespeare’s comedy *The Taming of the Shrew* and its modern, localized and appropriated adaptation in Pahlavi-era Iran, *Gorbe ra Dame Hejleh Mikoshand*. As the story concerns the courtship and marital troubles of an obstinate and headstrong male-female couple, both works are centered around the role and subjugation of women in patriarchal societies—the former in rural Padua of Italy (and by allegorical extension the Elizabethan England of 16<sup>th</sup> century), and the latter in Iran of 1960s under the rule of Mohammad Reza Shah. Despite their many similarities in terms of plot and characterization, and notwithstanding the change of setting and certain themes in the Persian adaptation of the play—constituting minor changes insofar as the essential elements of the original work are concerned—a contextual comparison between the play and the film will reveal deep antagonism between the two works, which therefore stand diametrically opposed insofar as the freedom and agency of women in male-dominated societies is at stake. In what follows, Shakespeare’s play will be examined in detail. By going through the structure of the play, in particular by showing attention to the importance of the Christopher Sly Induction which frames the narrative of the play, as well as surveying the critical looks on the play throughout the last century, it will be argued that the Bard’s work, far from being an anti-feminine play that reflected the male authority of the society of its time, allows for new possibilities for the autonomy of women within the patriarchal system. Further, a brief history of the screen adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* will be evoked which in turn can be helpful in reviewing both some of the major themes of the work as well as the

strategies deployed by various directors and actors throughout the decades for adapting what can be arguably named one of the most troublesome plays of Shakespeare's in modern times due to its controversial depiction of women as subordinated wives. This will in turn set the stage for the full analysis of the Persian adaptation of the play. Finally, it will be argued how the Persian adaptation deliberately forecloses the possibilities for female autonomy by trying to cater to the taste of its mainstream male, chauvinist audience. The film will be more exclusively investigated in the context of filmfarsi by dissecting the components of the genre to show the deep, irreconcilable dichotomy between men and women in the Pahlavi era.

### **Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew***

*The Taming of the Shrew* is considered by many Shakespearean historians to be one of his earliest plays written around 1592 to 1594. While the young Shakespeare was grappling to master the art of comic drama in this early play, many of his favorite themes such as carnivalesque festivity, suspension of social rules and disguised identities are already at work—themes that will later become major components of his more mature comic works.

*The Taming of the Shrew* begins with the arrival of Lucentio, a young student of university, and his manservant Tranio to the rural Padua. There Lucentio falls in love at first sight with the young and fair Bianca who is pursued by many men in Padua, such as Hortensio and Gremio, for her beauty and piety. Upon inquiry, though, Lucentio discovers that Bianca's marriage is contingent upon the earlier marriage of her elder sister Katharina as their father, the rich Signor Baptista, has sworn not to give away Bianca's hand to marriage unless Katharina marries first. However, Katharina's ill temper and malevolence has put a fear in the heart of her suitors who dare not to court her despite the generous dowry that Baptista has promised for his elder daughter. Meanwhile the bawdy Petruchio, a friend of

Hortensio's, hears about Katharina's dowry and decides to try his luck at courting and marrying her. "I've come to Padua to wive it wealthily," he repeatedly says (Act 2, Scene 1). Therefore, he comes to propose to Katharina after settling the amount of dowry with Baptista. Suffering her aggressive and tempestuous behavior in his attempt to court her, Petruchio nonetheless emerges victorious in convincing Baptista and others that he and Kate are very much in love. Thus, he forces Kate to marry him.

Subsequent scenes in the play are concerned with the tug and pull between the newly married couple and Petruchio's attempts to tame the wild Kate. So, he forces Kate during their wedding ceremony to leave her father's house amid the festivities to drag her to the mud and rocky roads to his own castle in Verona. In another instance, he makes her fast after their long journey by throwing away the foods that the servants have prepared for their arrival. Soon after, the couple receive an invitation to Bianca and Lucentio's wedding. Kate, who seems to have learned by now that she should "obey" whatever her husband commands, returns to Padua with Petruchio for the celebration of her sister's marriage. There, Petruchio makes a bet with the two newly married men at the ceremony—Lucentio and Hortensio—to determine whose wife among them is the most obedient. Therefore, each man sends his servant to fetch his wife. Lucentio's and Hortensio's wives refuse to come, while Kate appears immediately after being summoned. Her appearance is followed by a speech that reprimands disobedient wives and reminds their duties to their husbands. Since this final monologue by Kate is central to the denouement of the play and often quoted by critics for its (anti-)feminist implications, a summary of it seems to be necessary:

Fie, fie, unknit that threat'ning unkind brow  
And dart not scornful glances from those eyes  
To wound thy lord, thy king, thy governor...  
Thy husband is thy lord, thy life, thy keeper,  
Thy head, thy sovereign; one that cares for thee  
And for thy maintenance; commits his body

To painful labor both by sea and land,  
To watch the night in storms, the day in cold,  
Whilst thou li'st warm at home, secure and safe...  
But now I see our lances are but straws,  
Our strength as weak, our weakness past compare,  
That seeming to be most which we indeed least are.  
Then vail your stomachs, for it is no boot,  
And place your hands below your husband's foot,  
In token of which duty, if he please,  
My hand is ready, may it do him ease. (Act 5, Scene 2)

As the play ends, the lesson of the story seems to be too apparent: that irrationality and independence of women cannot be integrated into the male economy of the society. Women as such thus should be tamed for a successful relationship between the couples and the insurance of continuity of the familial system. This “morale” has made the Bard’s play a most problematic for the modern audience and interpreters. Although Shakespeare’s position within the world canon of literature is indisputably firm, this particular work has proven to be divisive over the centuries after its original publication and performance. As Dobson and Wells state:

The play has divided interpreters between those who wish to excuse or celebrate Petruchio’s behavior towards Kate and those who wish to condemn it—essentially, between those who regard the “taming” as a benign piece of psychic or social therapy inflicted in the cause of mutual love, and those who see it as simply an expression of the naked power of Elizabethan men over Elizabethan women. (462)

However, here it will be argued that while Shakespeare, much like the other authors of his time, could not possibly go beyond the limits of his contemporary

sociopolitical boundaries in any plausible manner, his comedy nonetheless hints at certain mocking ironies toward patriarchy and latently shows emancipatory concerns for women.

In the first instance, we might pay a closer attention to Shakespeare's frame narrative for the play, or what is known as Christopher Sly Induction. In this introductory opening, Christopher Sly, a drunkard bum, meets a Lord and his companions who, to pass time in leisure, play a game on the poor nobody by convincing him that he is an aristocrat. The Lord also encourages his young page, Bartholomew, to play the role of Sly's wife. The central story of Petruchio and Katharina is then staged and doubled by Sly and Bartholomew for the amusement of the Lord. This introductory framing, which is sometimes excluded from the stage or screen productions of the play, was perhaps intended by Shakespeare as a reminder of reality for the Elizabethan audience and the fake theatricality of the narrative. In this way, it can be considered a strategy by the Bard to disillusion the fantasy of marital unification at the heart of the play. Regarding the importance of the Induction, Smith avers:

What we have in *The Taming of the Shrew* is, arguably, a young playwright looking at the traditions and sources of contemporary comedy and deciding that he can take it further—running a classic farce, where artificial chaos is finally resolved in a simple solution, into something far more unstable that relates in uncomfortable ways to the structures underlying the real life of the Elizabethan audience. (30)

Secondly, Shakespeare's farce should be considered in line with the tradition of Italian *commedia dell'arte*, given that the setting of the play is also the medieval Italy. While the "taming of shrew" is itself a long English tradition in comedy, which was typically accompanied by the use of physical force by male authoritative figure to subdue irrational women, in "*commedia dell'arte* and its ancestor Roman comedy, bolstering authority figures—fathers, husbands, doctors, soldiers—do not always win unequivocally" (Smith 23). The to-and-fro



that goes on between Kate and Petruchio, further, is reminiscent of the classic Italian Judy & Punch Puppet show in which two puppets attack each other with their sticks and kisses and caress each other in between. This pulling and shoving suggests an eternal irreducibility between men and women that goes beyond the patriarchal context of the play. However, if there is conflict between the male/female pair, there is balance between them as well: despite the inevitable conclusion in the play, the emphasis throughout the narrative is on the equal weight of the couple who provoke, confront and nullify each other through a series of different schemes and strategies. This is most strongly evident in the *repartee* between the soon-to-be-married couple in their early meeting. For every verbal attack or sarcasm by Petruchio, there is a comeback by Kate. For instance, in Act 3, Katharina declares: "I see a woman may be made a fool / If she had not a spirit to resist" (Act 3, Scene 2). Even though Petruchio's psychical superiority wins the wooing game for him at the end of the courtship, the couple are evenly matched in any other regard.

In the same vein, Empson questions the very motive of financial gain as the vehicle for Petruchio's proposal of marriage to the shrew: "we are free to think this is a boast, whereas he positively wants to marry a woman of spirit" (122). It is the very hot-tempered and spirited nature of Kate that makes her so attractive to Petruchio and this meeting of unleashed forces is what drives the whole plot forward in the play. Further, despite the ridicule by other characters of the match between Petruchio and Katharina (for example, in Act 3, Bianca comments, "That being mad herself, she's madly mated."), there is a strong accord and suitability in their marriage as they both continue to force their dominance on to each other. The strength of Petruchio in these power games comes not merely from his physical advantage, though, but more from his ability to be just as irrationally stubborn as Kate—a stubbornness which is more generally attributed to women. Therefore, there is a reversal of roles at the heart of the play: Kate

smashes windows and lutes and walks on the roof of the house as if having the physical strength and dare of a man, while Petruchio is never shy with making absurd comments, most notably, his changing of opinion about the sun and moon. West, then, is right to claim that many critics of the play miss the ultimate lesson of the story: “criticism has generally misconstrued the issue of the play as women’s rights, whereas what the audience delightedly responds to are sexual rites” (71).

In general, then, the seeming subordination of Kate should not be read along the lines of her inferiority or secondary position to Petruchio as a man, but as a measure by which the marital balance is restored and by which Petruchio’s manhood becomes complete. Which is to say, it is by appearing to be tamed that Kate validates Petruchio as a man and a husband. Thus, as Kahn avers:

It is Kate’s submission to him which makes Petruchio a man, finally and indisputably. Such voluntary surrender is, paradoxically, part of the myth of female power, which assigns to woman the crucial responsibility for creating a mature and socially respectable man. In *The Taming of the Shrew*, Shakespeare reveals the dependency which underlies mastery, the strength behind submission. Truly, Petruchio is wedded to his Kate. (100)

### ***The Taming of the Shrew on Screen***

As Shakespearean screen adaptations have not been exclusively successful in terms of profit for the money-oriented industry of cinema, the example of *The Taming of the Shrew* presents an exceptional and compelling case in cinematic adaptations of Shakespeare. Between 1908 and 1929 alone, as the cinema industry was booming all across the world and especially in the United States and Europe, there were six separate attempts at putting the play on the silver screen—albeit these films were all silent, short and truncated versions of the play that ran somewhere between 7 to 12 minutes. These early adaptations included D. W. Griffith’s *The Taming of the Shrew* (1908) for the Biograph Company featuring Florence Lawrence (known as the “first movie star” in the history of cinema) as

Katharina. In the same year, the Italian directors Azeglio Pineschi and Lamberto Pineschi directed a 7-minute version of the play under the title *La bisbetica domata* while in England in 1911, F. R. Benson released a filmed theatrical version of the play in the form of a pantomime interspersed with the original text by Shakespeare as intertitles. Three other silent adaptations followed before 1929, all of which are now considered to be lost or destroyed (Ball 62-67).

More importantly in terms of the historical and seminal adaptations of *The Taming of the Shrew* are the two major Hollywood productions of 1929 and 1967. The former, named simply *The Shrew*, was directed by Sam Taylor for United Artists which starred the celebrity couple Mary Pickford and Douglas Fairbanks as the central characters in one of their earliest talkie roles. The 1967 version was directed by the acclaimed Italian director Franco Zeffirelli for Columbia Pictures featuring Elizabeth Taylor as the shrew and Richard Burton as the tamer. While the former film proved to be a box office failure, it can, nonetheless, be surmised that both works were relied, as a guarantee for their financial success, on the off-screen affiliation of their main actors who had a strained relationship as a married couple much like the roles they were assigned to play. Pickford and Fairbanks were on the verge of a divorce at the time of the shooting in 1929 and they separated shortly after the release of the film, while Taylor and Burton, although newly married, were famous even at that time for their boisterous relationship. In the words of Jackson:

The fact that the two feature films of *The Taming of the Shrew* both cast Katharine and Petruchio with major stars... ensured that the emphasis would be on the pair of actors whose mutual involvement stood in a direct relationship with that of the characters. (65)

Essentially, then, both films were more interested in the cat-and-mouse play between husbands and wives and the complex psychological relationship of the

married couples from the original play rather than an emphasis on the subordination of women.

While both films were major Hollywood productions that were made mainly for commercial gains and box office attraction, the context of their adaptation can shed light on the nature of the Bard's play. Moreover, a comparison between these two more well-known adaptations of the play will be much helpful for our own reading of *Gorbe ra Dame Hejleh Mikoshand*, whose release in 1969 was followed closely after the success of Zeffirelli's film. The Persian version in fact bears major superficial resemblances to the 1967 film, most notably the way the main actors Hossein Gil and Katayoon were fashioned in terms of make-up and hairstyle after the Burton/Taylor duo.

In the case of Sam Taylor's *The Shrew*, the wild obstinacy of Katharina's character was heavily employed through the actress, Mary Pickford, to show the emergence of a new type of independent woman in the United States. Throughout her silent career, the curly Pickford had raised into immense popularity among both American and international cinematic audience of 1910s and 1920s as she was mainly cast in the role of innocent girls, effectively earning her the nicknames "Little Mary," "Girl with the Curls" and "America's Sweetheart" (Sonnerborn 166). However, *The Taming of the Shrew* marked a transformative change in Pickford's career and star image, partly due to the recent introduction of sound to the movies and the challenges it presented to the famous silent actors like Pickford for their transition, and partly due to the new type of role she was asked to play, which differed significantly from her earlier typecast ingénue roles. As Buhler writes:

In his reworking of Shakespeare, [Sam Taylor] tried to find every opportunity... to present Pickford, at long last, not as "America's Sweetheart" but as an attractive example of that problematic figure (for American men, anyway), the "New Woman." Shakespeare, then, is deliberately involved in the attempt to transform a star's general image.

(54)

Accordingly, *The Shrew* was shot with major modifications to the play, the most famous of which was the tongue-in-cheek delivery of Katharina's final speech about women's duty to be docile and to respect their husband's wishes: after the speech Katharina winks to her sister Bianca, suggesting to the audience how she had never been tamed. Moreover, all throughout the movie Katharina holds a whip, which lends her an air of authority as the "real" tamer in the story. Although she is forced to marry Petruchio against her will as well as to suffer humiliation and ill-treatment, she expresses her defiance at every occasion with a crack of her whip. Finally, one of the most significant diversions from the play occurs when the film allows Kate to overhear Petruchio's soliloquy after the famous honeymoon scene where Petruchio smashes the table and ruins all the food as one of his many attempts to tame Kate. Unlike the play, Kate sneaks back to the kitchen afterwards to see if any food can be salvaged whereupon she accidentally eavesdrops on Petruchio talking to his dog: Petruchio reveals how he is compelled to maintain a hard and strict behavior towards Kate in order to win her love and obedience. Thus, hearing his secret, Kate decides to play the role of the obedient wife not so much to please Petruchio but to make him appear more ridiculous. As with the famous final wink, this scene, and other scenes that ensue, puts an emphasis on how women cannot be really tamed. Thus, the film is marked by a deep irony at the expense of patriarchy.

Similar to Sam Taylor's 1929 adaptation, Franco Zeffirelli's *The Taming of the Shrew* in 1967 largely capitalized on the stardom of its central actors, Richard Burton and Elizabeth Taylor, and their real, off-screen tempestuous relationship. As with Sam Taylor's use of the play for changing the star images of his central actors, "Zeffirelli connects Shakespeare's characters with his stars' public personae to rewrite the play as Katharine's escape from being tamed" (Buhler 67). While Zeffirelli's version is more faithful to the original play than the

previous adaptation, it nonetheless carves its own idiosyncratic path as an adaptation. As many critics agree, Zeffirelli's film deploys the story of the play about the mulish couple as an excuse for the celebration of misrule in general in the film. This tendency is already discernible in the opening sequence of the film with the arrival of Lucentio and Tranio to Padua and the impromptu celebration that ensues shortly after. The scene is suffused with lute-playing, dancing, drinking and unoccasional carnivalesque festivity. In this context, the havoc and mayhem that Katharina and Petruchio later wreak during their "courtship" in their long first encounter aptly suggests how each pair's rejection of propriety and decorum finds a match in the other. Consequently, the film lays stress on the pair of the couple, rather than on one (tamer) at the expense of the other (shrew), to show a balance between the male and female counterparts. "In Zeffirelli's tirelessly rumbustious film, Petruchio begins as a lout and Katharine as a violent termagant, but they achieve stillness amid the fuss and frantic laughter of Padua" (Jackson, 66).

This emphasis on the pair, and the balance and nullification that it achieves, is employed as a strategy in the film in multiple ways. For instance, all throughout the film the camera repeatedly frames each of the couple in close-ups to capture their gaze at each other, suggesting the ongoing exchange that is going on between them. As Ramona Wray maintains, "the resulting concentration on Petruchio and Katharina is communicated via the camera's cultivation of their 'look'. For Zeffirelli, throughout his *oeuvre*, the look of his actors is arguably of greater import than matters of performance" (152). Another instance that suggests the exclusion of each of the couple within their community and the subsequent solidarity and balance between the pair in the face of the social codes is manifested in the costume style of the couple. The unabashed décolletage of Taylor's Katharina stands in stark contrast to the modest and moderate clothes of her sister Bianca and other female characters in the film, while Burton's Petruchio's unkempt beard and exaggerated manner of dressing—whether unaccountably poor and ragged as in the day of his wedding, or extravagantly

pompous as when the couple return to the Baptista's house for Bianca's wedding—alludes to a certain singularity and frivolousness. Finally, and perhaps more importantly, Zeffirelli draws on a mirroring pattern throughout the film to reflect each action done by one of the couple to the other. That is, every game that each person plays on the other has a foil. In their first meeting, for instance, it is Petruchio who has to chase Katharina around the house and up the roof until he finally captures her. After the wedding, though, the action is reversed when Katharina has to chase after Petruchio on horseback through the mud and the rain. As Wray avers:

Both protagonists are envisioned as participating in similar games, the effect of which is to emphasize the to-and-fro of the relationship, the conflicted rhythm through which they are constituted. But there is also in such patterned reciprocity the sense of a growing accord... (155)

To sum up, then, with regard to these two well-known filmic adaptation of Shakespeare's play, it is obvious that each film uses the story as a vehicle for promoting a certain cultural image of women not as inferior to men but as either shrewd puppeteers who silently accept the game of patriarchy while retaining their distance through ironic subversion (as in the case of the 1929 film) or as necessary counterparts to male aggression (as in the case of the 1967 version). Both films, therefore, manage to circumnavigate what many critics dub a misogynistic attitude in the original play that can hardly be staged or screened in today's modern societies. More importantly, despite severe criticism from many modern feminist critics of the play who accordingly find it one of the most problematic and anti-feminist works in the Bard's *oeuvre*, both films show how there are already nuances and subtleties in Shakespeare's text that lends it to more liberal interpretations. However, these "hints" are completely missed, ignored or foreclosed in the Persian adaptation of the film, as we will see later in more

details. On an elementary level, however, Shakespeare's play is open to many interpretations due to the lack of any detailed stage directions, particularly in relation to Katharina's speeches (whether she has really internalized the patriarchal attitude imposed on her when delivering her last speech or if she is using an ironic tone etc.). This has resulted in the emergence of numerous different adaptations by various local directors and actors throughout the centuries. For instance, in a recent Turkish stage production of the play in Istanbul directed by Yucel Erten, Katharina, after delivering her final speech, pulls her sleeves up to show how before entering the hall she has cut her wrists. She thus falls on the floor, bleeding, as the speech ends (Kar). Although this is considered a radical or free interpretation, the lack of stage directions by Shakespeare, whether intended or otherwise, opens up the way for different staging and understanding of the text.

### ***The Shrew as a Filmfarsi***

*Gorbe ra Dame Hejleh Mikoshand*, on the other hand, falls tightly within the filmfarsi cinema—a mainstream cinema in Iran that was very popular during the decades before the Islamic Revolution of 1979. In the tradition of filmfarsi, masculinity was particularly celebrated in the film plots featuring street knife fights between overtly masculine men and where women especially were used as stock characters as either cabaret dancers or domesticated wives. In basic terms, while the original play and the adapted Persian film follow more or less similar stories, the relationship between men and women in their narratives differs radically. As we shall see, in the play the shrew is portrayed as a necessary counterpart for the completion of manhood, while the film utilizes the reverse situation where men and their brutality are employed as a way to tame the “irrational” women and to teach them the only “true” way of life despite themselves.

The film, made in 1969, was directed by Davood Esmaili and starred two celebrity actors of the time: Hossein Gil (playing the role of the tamer) and



Katayoon (playing the role of the shrew). The plot of the film follows the source material of the original play closely: the young and beautiful Fereshteh [Bianca] is in love with Behrooz [Lucentio] and they wish to marry each other. Yet Fereshteh's father, Mr. Forootan [Signor Baptista], has made a vow that unless her older sister, Hengameh [Katarina], is married, Fereshteh is not allowed to have suitors. The problem is that Hengameh is a physically and verbally abusive girl who does not allow any suitor to come near her room to woo her. In order to reach his desire to marry his beloved, Behrooz comes up with a plan. He asks his clownish friend Masoud [a cross between Grumio and Tranio in the play] to ask Mr. Forootan for Hengameh's hand in marriage. In return he will live like a rich man the rest of his life as Mr. Forootan has promised an extravagant amount of money as his elder daughter's dowry. Accordingly, Masoud comes to court Hengameh in her room only to return defeated to her parents within 15 minutes, scarred and bruised and repentant. While Behrooz and Masoud's plan fails, they presently meet a wild rumbustious man by the name of Mamali Barzakh [Petruchio] in a restaurant. They decide he is an ideal suitor and match for Hengameh and thus strike a deal with him: if he manages to convince Hengameh's parents that he and Hengameh are in love, he can have half of Mr. Forootan's fortune upon marrying the shrew. Barzakh agrees and comes to court Hengameh the next day. He forces himself into her room and seeing that her will to refuse him is not easily bent uses physical force by twisting her arm to make her give in to his request. Thus, they soon marry despite Hengameh's rejection and depart shortly after for Barzakh's home village to pay a visit to his mother. There, Barzakh pulls one trick after another in order to break Hengameh's obstinate spirits. He tells her, for instance, that the room she is given to sleep in is haunted by ghosts and thus lures her into his room in the middle of the night. Soon, they receive an invitation to Fereshteh and Behrooz's wedding and that ends their trip. At the ceremony, Barzakh makes a bet with two newly-married

guests: each man sends for his wife in the other room to show her loyalty and obedience to the other men. Much like the play, the two guests' wives refuse to respond to their husbands' demand while Hengameh promptly shows up, yanking the ears of the other two disobedient wives. Her appearance is followed by a speech about the unconditional love a wife should dutifully bear for her husband as he is the household's breadwinner and works day and night to provide for his family.

As the plot suggests, it is already evident that *Gorbe ra dame Hejleh Mikoshand*, save for minor details, is a rather faithful adaptation of the Bard's farce. To understand how it significantly differs from the original play, and how it ultimately only reflects the patriarchal worldview of the second Pahlavi-era Iran without even slightly attempting to capture the more subtle and delicate aspects of Shakespeare's work with regard to the role of women and their (semi-)autonomy, one has to inevitably explore the film in the context of filmfarsi as a genre that dominated the Iranian cinema industry throughout 1940s to 1970s and the male-dominated society of Pre-Revolution Iran.

Filmfarsi was the mainstream cinema and the dominant form of filmmaking in Iran from late 1940s to late 1970s before the Islamic Revolution. The aesthetics and inner workings of this cinema were emblematic of a society at the cusp of change, perhaps nowhere else within the cultural sphere the Iranian modernization can be more fully discerned and dissected than in the emergence of this new type of cinema. Cinema in Iran, much like every other imported commodities, was deeply considered at the time as a Western phenomenon. It was no wonder, then, that a nation like Iran, whose ruler, Mohammad Reza Shah, was deeply fascinated by the American and European ideals and ways of life, produced a cinema that was essentially imitative of foreign films—particularly American, Indian and Egyptian ones. The film critic and filmmaker, Ehsan Khoshbakht, calls filmfarsi “the cinema of a nation with split personality,” as it oscillated between Western visual appeals and local religious Iranian worldview and taste.

The critical writings on this mainstream cinema, accordingly, were aimed from the very beginning to be derisive. The term *filmfarsi*, coined by the Iranian film critic Amirhooshang Kavooosi, denotes a kind of movie in which the characters merely speak Farsi but which otherwise is a total emulation of foreign films. For this reason, Kavooosi insisted on putting the two words “film” and “farsi” together in order to make a distinction between Iranian films and films that only pretend to be Iranian by using the Farsi language for their dialogues, and to identify this phenomenon as a singular genre despite the variety of plots it employs. Giti summarizes the elements of this Iranian pre-Revolution mainstream cinema as follows:

Haphazard story-telling, making heroes out of marginalized individuals in the society, use of song and dance numbers, lack of a cause and effect relationship in the narrative, irrational happy endings, emphasis on how being poor is a good thing and that one lives happily in destitution, the invincible male hero who wins every fight... (32)

Accordingly, due to its commercial and merely entertaining values, the Iranian film critics of the time condemned this cinema and refused to engage in a serious talk over it since they viewed *filmfarsi* as a purely emulative and popular cinema. At the same time, Khoshbakht points out:

The term “*filmfarsi*” was coined to ridicule the sloppiness of these films. Today, they can be more properly judged in the broader context of Iranian mainstream cinema: genre films with popular stars; village girls lured by the big city but eventually returning to the tranquility of home—as if everybody knew from the start that that the modernization project wouldn’t last. A miniature of Iranian society, foreshadowing things to come.

Azin similarly discusses how from the beginning cinema in Iran was viewed as an imported Western commodity similar to ties, automobiles and telephones. Since cinema did not enjoy any social or historical origin and precedence in Iran when it was first introduced to the people, its reception was already tinged with a deep fascination with the West and its superior compass. As Azin writes: "Filmfarsi, which had gradually entangled with the most superficial layers of the Iranian audience's desires had only in mind to re-tell foreign stories in Persian clothes and appearances" (26). As Hollywood, up until 1960s, was considered the symbol of modernity and contemporaneity, the mainstream Iranian filmmakers were specially influenced by the cultural discourses of their American counterparts. Soon, the cinema industry of Iran turned to the star-making system of Hollywood as well in order to ensure profit for its productions. *Qaroon's Treasure*, in which the superstar, Fardin, starred, and many films that were modelled after it are notable examples of the movies in this era. Writing about the influence of Hollywood on the filmfarsi genre, Rekabtalaei writes:

Hollywood's genres and concern with external appearance and the sensual were easily dissolved and integrated into Iranian generic traditions. In fact, some critics and filmmakers unabashedly encouraged the inclusion of scenes that were compatible with the popular tropes of Hollywood and other international mainstream films, as long as they were appropriately used. (192)

The question of women in Iranian Pre-Revolution cinema in general and in the Persian adaptation of Shakespeare's *The Taming of the Shrew* in particular, therefore, should be addressed from the angle of filmfarsi industry. Most critics believe that the filmfarsi cinema is reflective of the paradoxes that define Iran's modernization project under the Pahlavi rule. For this reason, the problem of femininity and the representation of women presents an interesting instance of these antinomies. As Azin writes, "In filmfarsi, there has to be two types of women; the first is a woman over whom men fight each other and she can be

either a street girl, a cabaret dancer or a crying widow, and the other is somebody who must be unlike the first type, such as the hero's mother or his sister" (27). While Khoshbakht admits to the "stereotypification" of women in filmfarsi, he also comments that filmfarsi also "offered [women] a chance to be seen. It even offered women agency and power". While this might be exceptionally true for some cases, as a matter of fact such privileges for women do not in any manner wash away the commodified look with which they were represented in these films.

Strictly about *Gorbe ra dame Hejleh Mikoshand*, it is interesting to observe how the rather blatant misogynistic aspects of Shakespeare's play find a match in the tropes and themes of filmfarsi. In other words, the format of filmfarsi seems to have been already receptive of such anti-feminine themes in the play, which makes the Persian adaptation an interesting appropriation of Shakespeare in Iran. Starting from the title, and despite acknowledging it to be an adaptation of Shakespeare's "piece" in the opening credits, the film opts for a Persian proverb rather than the original title of the play. The phrase "gorbe ra dame hejleh mikoshand" is rooted in a popular Persian anecdote about a newly-married couple. Upon entering the bridal chamber after consummation of their marriage, the groom sees a cat lurking around the room. He asks the cat to go and fetch him some water. Not understanding what the human has asked, the cat merely stares back dumbfounded. The groom then catches the cat, unsheathes his knife and proceeds to kill the animal for disobeying him. The groom then looks toward his wife and reiterates his demand. Seeing that the groom is intolerant of insubordination, the bride becomes obedient. Thus, this proverb is commonly used to indicate that every man should take the initiative in his own hand when marrying a girl by showing her who is the boss at the first chance and by adopting a patriarchal attitude. Hence the meaning of the phrase: you must kill the cat at the bridal chamber's entrance (before any trouble starts). Thus, while the play's

title suggests measures to be taken for overwhelming a wild-tempered woman, the film's title more points to preemption for stopping women to ever become "wild" in the first place.

Curiously, for a film that is centered on the supposed trouble-making of an unorthodox woman, Hengameh does not have a commanding presence in the film. In fact, she barely speaks a dialogue half way through the film as her introduction to the audience happens mostly behind closed doors. Much like Bertha Mason in the novel *Jane Eyre*, one gets the feeling that she has been deliberately imprisoned because of her nature in order to be kept away from the public gaze. Therefore, Hengameh seems like anything but her literary counterpart Katarina who is loquacious (albeit foul-mouthed) and daring and enjoys freedom in her own house. Further, the film is less interested in Hengameh and any possible tension or objection she might have with her suitor/husband and is in fact more focused on Mamali Barzakh and Masoud's homosocial bond—the marital scores seem to be settled in the first act of the film when Barzakh forces Hengameh to marry him. Hengameh is hardly the central female character in the film, let alone the main character that she is supposed to be. Like many other filmfarsi movies, the film numerously breaks into long song and dance numbers at every unoccasional chance featuring semi-nude bar dancers who both take the center stage and gain the attraction of men in the film and of the audience in the theaters by their erotic dancing. These scenes betray how even a Shakespearean adaptation in Pre-Revolution Iran was done for the male audience's gaze. As Talattof avers:

Filmfarsi filmmakers used bold dance scenes as a cinematic element to communicate simplistic moral conclusions and complex political ideologies... [These] movies of course responded to men's voyeuristic and moralistic needs... These movies tacitly and sometimes boldly rejected the social bravery that is required of men and women to achieve modern life, which also required such activities as dancing. Instead, they asked women

to sacrifice, to safeguard gender boundaries, to uphold tradition in order for men to discover and cherish their masculinity. (96)

Consequently, while Hengameh is introduced as a shrewish and wild woman, it is as if her behavior and mannerism are not even allowed to be directly demonstrated in the film and should be assigned to a secret place behind locked doors. As Moradiyan Rizi maintains, "There was a binary in Iranian cinema at this time regarding the portrayal of women: sexualized representations or oppressed and passive representations" (5). Hamid Naficy reviewing the gender typology in filmfarsi, further comments about "the limited range of the women's representation as primarily sexual and that of the men as primarily muscular. Independent women were portrayed as bad and whorelike; if good and pure, they were dependent on the men" (97). Accordingly, Hengameh is perfect example of such binary representation. She is first shown in a scene when Masoud comes to propose to her in which she is changing from her semi-nude sleeping dress into more appropriate clothes. Later, after Barzakh succeeds in convincing her parents that she is in love with him, Hengameh is next shown naked in a bathtub. Her whole presence in the first half of the film, therefore, is reduced to suggestive images in the film. In the second half of the film, though, Hengameh has already become a passive and docile servant of Barzakh who carry his luggage around and does whatever he bids her to do. The transformation from a wild shrew into an obedient wife is already complete by the time Hengameh marries Barzakh.

In the original play and such adaptations as Zeffirelli's 1967 film, the pivotal contrast in the work is between the normalcy and traditional outlook vs. the "deviancy" of the main characters whose hot temper and irrationality puts them at odds with the society. In *Gorbe ra dame Hejleh Mikoshand*, however, another contrast is at play: one between modernity and tradition which is expressed through the couples Fereshteh/Behrooz and Hengameh/Barzakh respectively.

Again, the song and dance numbers are used to highlight this contrast in the film: the opening scene of the film, which concerns the blossoming love between Fereshteh and Behrooz, starts with rock and roll instrumental music and shows young couples, including Fereshteh and Behrooz, dancing in western style together. Whereas in the introduction scene for Mamali Barzakh, who is creating chaos over his food order by throwing the dishes at the waiters, the film cuts twice to a long, elaborate dance of a cabaret dancer dressed as an Amazonian woman which suggests both the primitive, traditional mindset of Barzakh as well as his raw masculine sexuality.

The contrast is further detailed in the appearances of the couples: Behrooz embodies the young modern man influenced by Western ideas—he wears suits and ties, is clean-shaven, talks eloquently and smokes cigarettes. Barzakh, on the other hand, is the prime example of tough Iranian man (or *luti* in Persian) whose curly hair and frowzy beard and speaking mannerism stands in stark contrast to Behrooz's personality. While Behrooz endeavors to surmount his problem (that of marrying his beloved Fereshteh) by coming up with intricate plans, Barzakh only summons his physical strength to resolve his problems. It is worth noting that in the play, Katarina, time and again, finds herself defeated and her requests denied. This is so because Petruchio is just as every bit stubborn, and perhaps more, as herself. But while in the play Petruchio, by dint of being a man, has always the upper hand when it comes to physical abilities, Katarina is never shown to lack strength herself—hence walking daringly on the rooftop or riding on a horse through the precipitous hillsides on the way to Verona. In the film, by contrast, Barzakh only needs to twist Hengameh's arm for a few seconds to gain her consent for marriage. Clearly, the film makes references as such to mark the macho and masculine quality of Barzakh. In a notable instance, the deliberate delay of Petruchio to attend his own wedding in the play becomes a convenient excuse for the filmmakers to include a fighting scene in the film. Thus, in order to justify the original delay in the play the scene in the film is re-written as an accidental incident. In the scene, which shows the moments before the wedding,



Barzakh and Masoud are sitting in a bar and drinking heavily, Barzakh repeatedly makes fun of Masoud for not being able to keep up with him to swallow the alcohol shots like he does. The scene is punctured by another dance number featuring a woman doing the famous Iranian chapeau dance which was particularly popular with Iranian tough guys at the time. Such dance numbers in the film, in fact, are much effective in attracting the male audience's sympathy for Barzakh as their down-to-earth hero who enjoys the same earthly pleasures as they do: women and alcohol. After leaving the bar to go to the wedding, Barzakh and Masoud, who are very drunk, have to face a gang of street thugs who start making fun of their inebriated behavior. Consequently, Barzakh is forced to violence to give a lesson to the interveners; he punches and kicks four or five thugs in a single action and make his way through. The scene, therefore, shows in parallel how Hengameh is forced to wear makeup and her wedding dress by her parents and servants to get ready for a wedding she is herself opposed to while Barzakh is free to indulge in voyeurism, alcohol and tough guy behavior.

A comparison between the signs, which the film employs for the introduction of its central male/female couple reveals the strong patriarchal gaze around which the film is structured. On the one hand, Hengameh hardly has a presence in the film before her wedding ceremony as she is locked and isolated in her room for the better half of the film. Her dialogues are literally limited to such dismissive phrases as "get lost," "leave me alone," or "stop it". The script shows the least attention to Hengameh for developing her character. She is described through speeches of other characters like Behrooz and Fereshteh, as a bad-tempered and sullen girl. The film also simultaneously lays an emphasis on her beauty, which becomes a frequent conversation topic between the male characters in the film, subsequently leading the filmmakers to frame Hengameh in suggestive shots in which she is semi-nude. Yet Hengameh, despite her description in the film, is ultimately the most passive character in the film who is

merely pursued as an object for her beauty. Barzakh, on the other hand, enjoys more time on the screen; his virility and manhood are constantly referred to and celebrated in the first half of the film through scenes, which show him drinking excessively, fighting thugs, and gazing at cabaret dancers. Unlike the original play, which maintains a balance between the headstrong couple, *Gorbe ra Dame Hejleh Mikoshand* reflects the chauvinistic outlook of the Iranian male audience of its time who wished to saw the subordination of women in order to assert their manhood.

In light of the central binary of tradition/modernity that runs through the entire movie, the ending of the film leads to a radically different interpretation compared to the ending of the play. While both endings feature an argument between the tamer (Petruchio/Barzakh) and two newly-married gentlemen at a wedding ceremony who gamble on their wives' obedience, the lesson the respective audiences are supposed to draw appears to be rooted in different worldviews. It has been already emphasized that the Iranian mainstream cinema during 1940s to 1970s was an emblem of modernization. But this modernization gave way to many inherent conflicts and paradoxes within the film narratives. While the filmfarsi cinema was a copycat version of American movies which particularly used sex, dance and violence in order to attract audiences and sell, it nonetheless could not possibly reunite the so-called modern ideals of Western societies with the local traditionalism of the Iranian society. This in turn resulted in irreconcilable paradoxes within the film stories. *Gorbe ra dame Hejleh Mikoshand*, accordingly, is a typical example within the filmfarsi cinema that confronts such a paradox. Mamali Barzakh represents exactly the archetypal Iranian man whose view of marriage rests upon absolute dominance over his female counterpart. The movie, also, by dint of its narrative structure and themes, puts his outworn outlook in question by drawing a contrast between Barzakh and Behrooz as two opposing forces of tradition and modernity. However, in the final turn, the film remains a celebration of conservative tradition as manifested in the ending. For all their rationality and respectability, the modern Behrooz and his

cohorts are pictured as nothing but “effeminate” men who have to cower and be obedient to their wives after marrying them, while the real winner is Barzakh who has married the most obedient wife. The film, then, restricts modernity to empowerment of women, which is ultimately nightmarish and unacceptable. For that reason, Hengameh is finally given a space to speak. She uses her final speech to harshly censure the modern, disobedient women for not heeding to their husbands’ demand. She also begins to sing the praises of all husbands in the world in the closing dance number in the film: “As long as life goes on / A wife should be subservient to her husband / She should either be willfully a servant to him / Or she should never expect a house or a warm bed.”

### Conclusion

This article was an investigation of the major differences between William Shakespeare’s frequently adapted farce play *The Taming of the Shrew* and the filmfarsi *Gorbe ra dame Hejleh Mikoshand* as its Persian adaptation. While the film is a rather faithful adaptation of Shakespeare’s work as it follows the basic plot of the play in details and appropriates more or less the same characters and key incidents, it offers a radically different interpretation of the misogynistic themes in the original work due to the limitations or views inherent to filmfarsi cinema. As it was argued, *The Shrew* has been one of the most problematic plays in Shakespeare’s *oeuvre* as it grapples with the issue and position of women within the patriarchal society. Many literary critics, particularly feminists, shun the play for its relegation of women to subordinate wives. However, while Shakespeare ultimately has to concede to curb his heroine’s unbridled passions and outbursts by depicting her as a surrendered housewife within the male economy of the narrative, he nonetheless gives space to subtleties and nuances through which the patriarchal dominance can be questioned, if not subverted. By framing the key narrative through the Christopher Sly Induction, enacted by a

drunkard bum for the amusement of a lord, Shakespeare firstly alludes to the fact that the docility of wives is (and perhaps should remain) a fantasy. He then reinforces this idea by giving equal weight to his central characters, Katarina and Petruchio, by creating foils for every action done by one to another. From this angle, Shakespeare masterfully demonstrates the sexual rites and marital conflicts that are part and parcel of every union as such. While Katarina's final speech nakedly appeals to the patriarchal audience of the play's time, *The Shrew* ultimately lays an emphasis on how the completions of manhood and womanhood are relied on the other's confirmation. Katarina becomes a respectable woman upon marrying Petruchio and learning her duties as a wife, while similarly only her acceptance of subordination in public gives the authorial air to Petruchio as a man.

By contrast, *Gorbe ra dame Hejleh Mikoshand* presents an uneven and imbalanced conflict between men and women. Appropriated as a filmfarsi—an essentially imitative and anti-feminist cinema designed for the visual gratification of the most superficial desires of the male audience—the film offers Hengameh as a mad and utterly unreasonable woman who can, and “should”, only be tamed by exertion of physical force. The filmmakers actively refuse to characterize Hengameh who is either locked behind a door alone in her room and pouting (as in the first half of the film) or bidding the commands and praising the capabilities of her husband (as in the second half of the film). Meanwhile, Barzakh and his friend Masoud are given free rein in the film to engage in all types of activities—from singing to drinking to fighting—to emphasize the prevalent homosocial relations that bind and glue the men within the patriarchal society. Further, like many other filmfarsi movies, *Gorbe ra dame Hejleh Mikoshand* is a reflection of the inherent paradoxes of modernity in a deeply conservative society. Whereas the whole structure and “philosophy” of the film is a propagation of modern Western principles (as strictly manifested in the mannerism and speech of Behrooz and Fereshteh as the younger and contemporary couple in the film), the film turns into a critique and parody of such

modernization by celebrating the tough, conservative and male-oriented outlook of Barzakh and his new docile wife.

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