

Ahmad Karimi-Hakkak

KIRN Radio Iran LA 670AM website (www.670amkirn.com), Simi Valley, California.

August 29, 2015.

Translated by Hooman Rahimi (EN 15038 and ISO 17100 certified translator)

The Scarlet Stone:

From the Heart of Myth and History to the Edge of Tomorrow

“The Scarlet Stone” play which has been in production for a number of years, finally was performed again on Monday, August 15, 2015 in Mandel Weiss Theatre of University of California, San Diego and I was fortunate enough to be among the audience and watch the play.

For a professional student of Persian poetry, this play also has meanings beyond acting and narration, and during the period of an hour and a half that I was gazing at the stage, I was going over these meanings layer by layer. The deepest layer is of course based on the myth of killing Sohrab by Rostam, the unparalleled hero of *Shahnameh*. By reflecting parts of the *Shahnameh*'s text on white curtains hanging from the stage's ceiling to the floor, creators of this drama transferred their deep understanding of this principal relationship to the audience. On the other hand, English translation of what was being said by the narrator or actors appeared on top of the screen that showed the intention of the involved to also render the present content of the story, which has its roots in thousand year olds mythologies of the Iranian culture, accessible to the mind and conscious of 21st century American audiences, who may have no knowledge of Iranian myths and Persian poetry.

The story's narrator, Gordafarid who is the prominent minstrelsy of *Shahnameh*, on the one hand carries the audience from the corridor full of tragic apprehension of killing one's own son in mythologies of the ancient Persia through masterful reciting of passages from the story, and on the other hand by combining Ferdowsi's distinguished language with narration for gatherings in the style of Iran's teahouse storytellers links the story to political events of the contemporary Iran by going over some parts of a long poem titled “The Scarlet Stone”, which is one of the last poems of the late poet Siavash Kasrai. Meanwhile, the communicative sound of a fusion music was being chanted on the background of all these events step by step and note by note, sometimes in the form of a soft whisper and other times in the form of a loud and clear cry. However, more than anything, the viewer's attention was caught by the harmonic and meaningful swings that emerged with bodily movements of actors in the small square of the theater. In that moment, and as I was gazing upon the conversion of the painful story of killing one's own son from a thousand-year-old text and the story of the deception of an experienced idealist in a revolutionary process in contemporary Iran, I realized the astonishing capability of a resourceful director who seemed to eventually state that what finally shapes the world's destiny is only love and nothing else. Surprisingly, this is exactly what Ferdowsi talks about in a part of the story itself, when thinking about the father and the son that have been heedlessly determined

to perform a shameful killing, and writes that: “No benignity came out of the two/Wisdom won’t show its face to the unkind”.

The story of Rostam and Sohrab has been described “full of tears” and provocative of a timely and proper anger in the heart of *Shahnameh*’s reader. From the beginning of the minstrelsy tradition within the past five hundred years, minstrel listeners and *Shahnameh* readers have considered this aspect one of the wonders of *Shahnameh*’s poetic narration but perhaps it can be argued that the role of the scarlet stone in this story, as written by Iran’s contemporary poet, Siavash Kasrai, has not made a mark in the mind and psyche of those familiar with the narrative. Kasrai, whose idealist thoughts also had drawn him to socialism since youth, finally saw the sunset for his ideals with his own eyes and deeply felt it in the form of a political system emerging from the recent revolution in Iran. This is why, in an unexpected turn, he separated his path from his previous friends and fellows and with this poem gave out a necessary warning to Iran’s future idealists so that maybe they can better recognize the right path.

This narrative, brought to life moment by moment before my eyes, was the story of the accumulation of this historical experience in which recalling future generation to wisdom, as attempted by Ferdowsi in *Shahnameh*, or to aphorism, as followed by the tradition of minstrelsy based on *Shahnameh*’s stories, or to contemplation, the very path put forward by Kasrai in front of his contemporary youth, is not or has not been effective, because human nature also includes other desires; young Sohrab’s ambitiousness and Rostam’s blind need to be victorious are among the devastating reflections of desires. Against these unstoppable dysphorias, we have the concept of kindness that is brought on stage in the form of two women – namely Tahmineh and Gordafarid, and each is kind and create love in their own way but are ultimately crushed under the grinding wheel of heroism and mightiness and finally stop trying and history is made by the will of Rostam or Kaykāvus or Khomeini or any other patriarchal warrior.

And it is here, exactly at this point, that the director of “*The Scarlet Stone*” emphasizes subtle human emotions and not epic passions or heroic actions. The play finds its ultimate contemporary meaning in the audience’s eyes of the heart when Tahmineh demonstrates her love for Rostam with a beautiful and seductive dance but Rostam heedlessly goes away the next day without giving a necessary response to this love. And it is here, exactly at this point in a downtrend of folly that Sohrab also shows his masculine desire to make love to Gordafarid but she refuses him just because his fictitious race is unfamiliar. Whenever we think that Rostam could, if he wanted to, see the birth of his son and show him affection, and if he wanted to, he could happily watch his son grow up wonderfully, and if his criterion for friendship and enmity was something other than being an Iranian against being a Turanian, the story would have ended differently. And again whenever we think if Sohrab and Gordafarid had made kindness, and not warfare and confrontation, as their guide for their deeds, the story would have a different ending, then we can grasp the concept of kindness in all its forms and manifestations.

Many things could be said about *The Scarlet Stone* play, the vision of its director, and the performance of its actors. Another thing to mention about this play that caught my attention and eventually made the method of narration important to me is the style of choreography, performance creation and acting. During every moment that I had my eyes on the stage and was

trying to link narration, speech making and choreography in their practical method to their historical backgrounds using a stylistic approach, the question was going on in my mind that whether this work was more fitting as a continuation of traditional and classical dances of Iranian cultures or as a tradition in Western cultures that reaches from opera to ballet and from ballet to various modern dances. Finally, it was at this point that I saw an artistic combination in the work of Shahrokh Moshkin Ghalam, Gordafarid, Ida Saki, Miriam Peretz, and Afshin Mofid that was crossing the borders of ethnic and national boundaries so as to lead the burrowed burden of an old historical experience to a destination that is a kind of a contemporary artistic expression which does not recognize any borders, and does not assess art based on regional or national measures. Shakespeare was right to say that All the world's a stage, And all the men and women merely players.