

Let the Two Shahrokh's Fit in the Same Realm

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I wanted *not* to write about *Scarlet Stone*, as I had read an envious and polished review by Firouzeh Khatibi that in my opinion did the trick with a measured and mindful assessment. And, I'd also urged my friends to read her article before they went to the theater to ease their understanding and appreciation. But then I wanted to emphasize two or three points and the two Sharokhs [Shahrokh Yadegari and Shahrokh Moshkin Ghalam], who unlike the two kings who can't exist in the same realm, can both fit at once in the realm of the theater.* And what a wonderful work they have presented.

I feel badly that I wasn't familiar with such great composer, and theater and film professor who teaches in our neighborhood of Los Angelinos at the University of California San Diego and who has a brilliant collection of works and who has collaborated with the many of the big names of his field, including Peter Sellers.. and I didn't know him, how terrible.

Did I know Shahrokh Moshkin Ghalam? It's already been two, three years since he, through his own efforts, has made himself known here. I've gone to see three or four of his good and excellent shows. That lightweight shows and so-called comedies are popular and are staged and fill theaters doesn't mean that in our city of 700-600 thousand there aren't people eager to see good work. Proof of this is the reality that wherever good work is staged the theaters still fill up. It just requires expertise and excellent and a love of theater.

Shahrokh Moshkin Ghalam is a choreographer and dancer. He is a member of the French theater company Comédie Française. Shahrokh Yadegari has, for the most part, has worked with Americans, and that was why theatre was spilling over with large number of American audiences as well who were drawing the show with restless expectation when Homa Sarshar, writer, journalist and eminent radio producer gave a powerful reading of her moving text entitled, "Champions, Heroes: Wisdom and Sentiment" As follows:

If we accept that poets are the greatest historians and where the writers of history stop, the poets commence, we then conclude that Ferdowsi and Siavash Kasrai, were both poets of history and of their own times. Not only of the distant past, but also of the history yet ahead of them.

Perhaps the most frequently asked question of Ferdowsi throughout his eternal epic Shahnameh is about the elegy of Rostam and Sohrab. And, thus, Iran's old sage casts a judgment - in the eyes of Siavash Kasrai, in the eyes of his readers, storytellers and even of Rostam and Sohrab and history. "Why, Old Sage? Why did you do this? Could it be that Rostam had no choice but to kill his son? Why was Sohrab killed and Rostam ruined?" What message did the Sage

have for us? Ferdowsi, when, in his creation, sets up the tragedy of Rostam and Sohrab and sets father against son, is well aware that has located his story's heroes and champions in the realm of Iran and in the inescapable paradigm of Rostam-worship and Sohrab-slaying, and that the epic won't take logical shape without the victory of tradition and ritual and the destruction of innocence and ideals. In all of history, this wouldn't be the first time that man is caught between his offspring on the one hand and nation and social obligations on the other to accept such a painful and insufferable Choice. The conundrum and climax of the tragedy lie in this choice. What sorrow is greater than the choice between one's son and the ordained duties of the hero? In order not to stray from the ordained mores of the hero, in order not to stand weak in the face of guarding and defending these mores, and the suspicion his love for his son incurred in others, had Rostam any other choice?

Siavash Kasrai, the author of his epic verse Arash, The Archer, the narrator's young oeuvre, with much distance published Mohreye Sorkh (Scarlet Stone) in 1996 in which he said: "In Ferdowsi I found a stone overflowing with life's beauty and drenched in all of death's darkness. Arash, The Archer was a narrator's early fruit, and miles apart in distance, Scarlet Stone is my age-worn inheritance. If there is any similarity between the two poems it is in the general way that each in its age is in pursuit of an answer to hopelessness. In this age of unrest when our disaster struck homeland is in the struggle between its existence and nonexistence, name, history and culture, I offer you conscious ones, Scarlet Stone. As I had once 38 years earlier entreated you with Arash, The Archer and you took it in hand and heart and brought it to fruition."

In each of these two tragedies we are dealing with countless kings, champions and heroes. Kings are the possessors of divine light. Heroes who must be the guardians of this divine virtue and territorial integrity, thus distance themselves from selfhood. Champions, who are self-serving, whatever they do is in service of self. Throughout Shahnameh the most important duty of the hero is in the defense of the homeland and in acting as kings' stewards. In Rostam and Sohrab, defense of Iran remains the focus of attention. The enemy is set on bringing Iran under its own rule. Iranians fight against them tooth and nail.

Rostam is Iran's protector and his death is the death of the homeland. Defense of Iran is defense of the self. And if Iran falls, one imagines that goodness falls. Because Rostam is the hero of heroes, he must protect Iran's unity. From the beginning, the hero's most important aim is defense of Iran and its integrity. And for the champion, it is the uniting of the two tribes with the hope of a borderless world. But the hero also falls prey to mistakes, but since these are done in good faith, he maintains the hero's mantle and amulet. His errors are as epic as the hero himself and no one but he can put it right, whereas the champion bitterly pays for his error with blood and his life. But

whenever either one gives way to wisdom, they arrive at the same point: pain and sorrow that fairness and acceptance were not given a chance.

The performance you are about to witness tonight is a combination of Ferdowsi's Rostam and Sohrab and Kasrai's Scarlet Stone. You will observe the heroes and champions. Those who will remain as they are, those who look to the future and advance, and those who trip and lag behind. The essence of these two tragedies is disguise, deceit and greed that blinds. Here, love and sentiment are hard at work, but ultimately it is wisdom that each poet reveres and praises. And the reader is called upon by each to think - this is the challenge put before you, the audience, tonight.

At the opening of the play, we see Siavash Kasrai's "Sohrab" wounded, and in the death throes, watching life, from the day of seeing Tahmineh and Tahamtan until the day of his death, passing before his eyes and running through his mind. First he steps into the world of Ferdowsi's epic and there, with a leap across the centuries to today's Iran from the eyes of Siavash Kasrai. He experiences death twice - first with Ferdowsi's painful permission, and second, with Kasrai's heart wrenching regret. He also draws us along with him, opening a porthole for our consideration.

When the intellectual carries out his charge - of seeing and testifying, feeling and expressing, touching and being touched, even if he only makes one individual aware to open his view of the world around him, it is an admirable effort. The story of Scarlet Stone was written on the foundation of the Rostam and Sohrab epic (a tearful tale) and finds its roots in Iran's long history. It speaks of the fate of a nation that has grown on the tradition of filicide, passion-killing, hero-killing, champion worship. Bolstering Kasrai's message in Scarlet Stone are lost hopes, burnt souls, spilt blood and heroism and championship unfulfilled.

We've all heard and read this epic countless times, but how many of us have been able to see what these two thinkers have seen? The tale of a son's killing at the hands of his father mediated by black-hearted outsiders who view love as an obstacle and hate, murder, killing and war as necessity. These who are at work using the faithful champion, pure thinker and the code-bound hero, to advance their own ideals of power possession, blood spilling, elimination of rivals and other-thinkers and eventually absolutism. Ferdowsi's message delivered through Rostam and Sohrab, Gordafarin and Tahmineh, and Kasrai's message of idealism and tyranny (or selfishness), are the message of Iran's past and present. The land and realm of Iran. But how many times must this story repeat itself for us to recognize the demon that exists in each of us, born alongside the white devil of the Shahnameh? The beast that drives us to kill our sons? How many more poets, thinkers and writers must recite:

O Love, O Love, your blue face isn't visible!

*(to make way for love without disguise, deceit and greed)
How many more times must we hear from Ferdowsi:*

*Look and see, wisdom is the soul's eye
You will not pass the world without the soul's eyes*

Or, from Kasrai,

*Hear me, the light of soul is your elixir
In the rocky spring of knowledge is your place, Sohrab*

So that we may remember:

*That the lovers not go forth in danger
Let them take this scarlet torch*

Which in fact widens the path to contact. In this way the ground is prepared for the show's opening, and the wondrous ancient instrument transports us to ancient time with an image of a strange instrument conjuring a trip to a land like Iran, Egypt, and...other ancient realms.

The dances that are the story of Rostam and Sohrab combined with Scarlet Stone of Siavash Kasrai who I've known since my youth. We both had the same political ideals, our intentions and the voices of thousands of others (certainty) were bestowal of a just society and for freedom and democracy. We believed in the Party, we had tremendous respect for our leaders, but Siavash was much more widely active. After my prison term, in the Ghazal Ghaleh prison I was witness to hapless and naive actions of the imprisoned leaders; after I was freed, I left the Party, but Siavash stayed and when the revolution arrived, he approved and supported it. He was a member of the central committee because the Soviet Union and, as a result, the Party wanted to keep Khomeini in power. Even Dr. Kianouri became a candidate for the Assembly of Experts, as well as other leaders. They had believed in Khomeini. When the war was over, and they suppressed and imprisoned the Tudeh party members, the wondering days of Siavash arrived. He went to Moscow, the Medina of their idealists in the hopes that his "comrades" would welcome him, but sigh ... From this juncture, Siavash - whose heart spilled over with love of country - writes:

"In Ferdowsi's grand vessel I discovered a stone brimming with the beauty of life and drenched in the all the darkness of death," and in my opinion, Shahrokh Moshkin Ghalam, with one word at the end of the performance -- "Siahchal" (dark pit) -- reaches a concise summation.

My good fortune in these years of exile was to have met Shahrokh Moshkin Ghalam and recently Shahrokh Yadegari, and because of this I salute each and

every one involved in the production of *Scarlet Stone*. One has to thank Parvin Javadi for her support of this important undertaking, who as well as the work behind the scenes , also recited the poem with magnificent voice and great understanding. I also salute the daughter of Siavash, Bibi Kasrai, who said that they poured blood, sweat and tears for two years to get this show ready. I also thankful for the poems that Shahrokh Yadegari himself read with such strength and expression similar to his delicate, awesome, moving, enchanting, exciting, and delightful music.

I am proud that KPFK sponsored this production, and I also thank each and every one who play a role in this production, dancers, designers, and voice over artists, specially the brilliant dancer - Dr. Afshin Mofid (son of the great Bijan Mofid) who for years danced with the New York City Ballet and now is a medical doctor.

When I left the theater, this composition by Shamlou was gleaming in my mind:

*Look, this eye, free of sorrow
Whose lantern of his tears of
smiles at the misfortune of a man alone and dark
That's me there wandering
To reach his house
Gone through the hardship.*