Far from the "Maddening" Crowd
A Comparative Study of some Persian, English and German Variants of ATU 1450

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Never stay up on the barren heights of cleverness,
but come down into the green valleys of silliness.[1]

Tale types ATU 1450–1474 "Looking for a wife" are clear examples of silliness. This article considers ATU 1450 "Clever Elsie" as the main tale type and studies some folktales from three cultures: Persian "Divānegān" ("The Maddening Crowd"), English "The Three Sillies" and "Jack Hannaford" and German "Die kluge Else" ("Clever Elsie") and "Die klugen Leute" ("Wise Folks"). The tales are studied in terms of the juxtaposition of wisdom/silliness and trickery/silliness as apparent in all versions. However, the Persian folktales, by virtue of their elaborate plot structure and literary devices such as paradox and various kinds of imagery provide a more philosophical portrait of wit/silliness dichotomy. Concepts of centre and periphery and power relations are also considered. References are also made to the techniques of decentration in some tales. Patriarchal authority can be detected in all versions. Furthermore, features of the carnivalesque-grotesque as enumerated by Davidson (2008) appear in different degrees in these tales.

Keywords: Mikhail Bakhtin, brothers Grimm, Joseph Jacobs, Morteza Khosronejad, Sobhi, *Sobhi's Tales*, centration, decentration, silliness, ATU 1450, Clever Elsie, Divānegān, The Maddening Crowd, The Three Sillies

1. Introductory Note

Instances of silliness are frequently represented in folktales particularly in a series of tales that are concerned with the motif "Looking for a wife" (tale types ATU 1450–1474). From this wide range of tales, this article considers ATU 1450 "Clever Elsie"[2] as the main

[1] Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 1980: *Culture and Value*. Ed. G. H. von Wright, in collaboration with Heikki Nyman, trans. Peter Winch. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 76.

[2] "**Clever Elsie.** A (supposed) suitor visits the family of a marriageable young woman. Her parents send her to the cellar to fetch something for the visitor to drink. While drawing the drink, the woman grows despondent over the fate of a child she might have after she is married. She worries about his cradle or his name, or weeps because she fears he will be killed by a tool (hammer, knife, hoe, stone) that may fall down on him, or an illness that may kill him./Her parents come to see what is the matter with their daughter. She tells them her worries and they too begin to weep. Meanwhile all the drink pours out of the cask, and the suitor leaves the house [J2063]. Cf. Types 1384, 1387, 1430A, and 2022B" (Uther 2004, Part II: 225). Ulrich Marzolph refers

tale type. To deal with the idea of silliness, the Persian tale "Divānegān" ("The Maddening Crowd")[3] from *Qeṣṣehā-ye Sobhi* (*Sobhi's Tales*)[4], which is analogous to "The Three Sillies" and "Jack Hannaford" from English tales and "Die kluge Else" (Grimm no. 34) and "Die klugen Leute" (Grimm no. 104) from German tales are comparatively studied with some references to some variants of other related tale types such as ATU 1384[5] and ATU 1540[6].

2. Summary of the "The Maddening Crowd"

In "The Maddening Crowd" the protagonist, Qobād, lives in a family of fools, his parents, his brother and his wife (the new bride). While he declines to marry in the beginning, he finally surrenders to his mother's matchmaking intent. Once after marriage the bride who is sweeping the yard breaks wind (farts) and thinks that the goat has recognized it. She puts earrings in the ears of the goat and bracelets on its legs to persuade the goat not to tell the others about the incident. When her mother-in-law sees the goat she expresses

to this tale type 1450 in *Typologie des persischen Volksmärchens* and writes, "*Dumme Gedanken über das ungeborene Kind* [:] Ein dummes Mädchen soll für einen Gast Wasser holen. Sie bleibt stundenlang weg und macht sich Gedanken darüber, was passieren könnte: Falls sie den Gast heiraten würde, könnte ihr Sohn einmal vom Baum fallen und sich das Genick brechen" (Marzolph 1984: 214).

[3] Since the Persian title, even in transliteration ("Divānegān") cannot be understood by many readers, the English translation of the name ("The Mad", here freely translated as: "The Maddening Crowd") is used in the rest of the article. For the same reason, the English translation of the original Persian quotations are used in the article. Except for the Lorimers' book (*Persian Tales*) which includes some Persian tales in English translation, all other translations from Persian, either from scholarly works or from the tales are done by the author. For Persian Romanization, either for titles or some sentences (except for the names of some writers, editors, or institutions which are used in their own preferred Romanized forms), the Romanization schema of *Encyclopedia Iranica* is used.

[4] Fażl-Allāh Mohtadi (or Fazlollah Mohtadi) known as Sobhi/Ṣobḥi (b. Kashan, 1276 Š/1897; d. Tehran, 17 Ābān 1341 Š/8 November 1962) is most famous for his storytelling on Iran's national radio and his collections of folktales. For more information s.v. ṢOBḤI, FAŻL-ALLĀH MOHTADI in *Encyclopedia Iranica*.

[5] "**The Husband Hunts Three Persons as Stupid as His Wife.** (Including the previous Type 1371.) This is a frame story into which other anecdotes about stupid people are set./A man who is exasperated by the stupidity of his wife (bride, sister, daughter) goes out to find three (more) people who are equally stupid [H1312.1]. He swears that if he cannot do this, he will leave his wife (beat her, kill her). He finds three such people quickly without any trouble. Cf. Types 1332, 1385, and 1450" (Uther 2004, Part II: 191-192). Marzolph refers to this in tale type ATU 1384, "*Der Mann sucht andere Leute, die so dumm wie seine Frau sind*[:] Ein Mann verzweifelt an der Dummheit seiner Frau. Er zieht aus auf der Suche nach anderen Leuten, die ebenso dumm wie seine Frau sind, und findet sie. Halbwegs getröstet mit seinem Schicksal kehrt er nach Hause zurück" (Marzolph 1984: 208).

[6] "**The Student from Paradise (Paris).** A student (beggar, traveler, clergyman) tells a (foolish) woman that he comes from Paris. She understands this to be Paradise. (Or, he sings, "I come from heaven", or says he comes from the beyond or is a messenger from hell). The wife tells him that her husband (son) died shortly before. The student claims to have met him in paradise (hell) and tells her that her husband needs certain things. The wife gives the student money (clothes, food, horse, etc.) to take to her husband [J2326]./The oldest son (brother-in-law, husband) goes after the trickster to retrieve the money. The trickster steals his horse (the son runs his own horse to death) [K341.9,1]. Cf. Type 1540A*". (Uther 2004, Part II: 277) Marzolph refers to this in tale type ATU 1540, *Der Bote aus Hölle*[:] I. Ein Kluger gibt sich einer dummen Frau gegenüber als Bote aus der Hölle aus. Er bekommt von ihr Geld und ein Pferd, um es dem verstorbenen Mann (Vater) zu überbringen. II. Der (zweite) Mann der Frau verfolgt den Betrüger. Dieser bringt mit List einen Müller dazu, mit ihm die Kleider zu tauschen, so daß an seiner Stelle der Müller verprügelt (getötet) wird. Der Schlaue flieht mit dem besseren Pferd des Verfolgers. Zurückgehrt sagt dieser seiner Frau, er habe ihm das Pferd überlassen, damit er schneller vorwärts komme." (Marzolph 1984: 225).

her astonishment and when the bride unfolds the story to her she also puts some of her garments on the goat with the same intention. The father-in-law also puts his shoes on its feet and finally the brother-in-law puts his hat on its head. When Qobād comes and finds out what has happened he is disappointed by their silliness and leaves his family in quest of some wise people and says: "I can't grin and bear it to live among you idiots…. I leave now for other towns and go from one to another. If I find the people there sillier than you, I will return, otherwise I won't" (Sobhi 1387 Š/2008: 204).

In the first episode, as he enters a town and sits on the threshold of a house, someone from the house comes and brings him a big bowl of Āš[7]. He looks at the bowl which is big while there is only a small space left inside. He finds out that from the very first time they have eaten something out of the bowl, they have not washed it till it has been caked with the remnants of the previous meals. He takes the bowl to the river and scrapes it with mud and sand and enlarges it. The one who takes the bowl back is stunned at the clean bowl. He cries out, "The bowl-scraper is here, the house-builder is here."[8] The people assemble and bring their bowls. He enlarges all of them, and takes a lot of money while thinking, "These people are sillier than my relatives." Then he sets off for another town.

In the second episode, Qobād arrives in another town in severe cold weather. The people do not know how to get warm properly. Some have made holes in blankets hanging them around their necks and fastened them with ropes around their waists. Others have stood beside boiling water to get warm by its steam. Some others make the mud warm and apply it on their bodies. Each group tries to get warm in one way or another. Qobād makes charcoal by burning wood, and a brazier by mud and a big *lahaf* (a kind of quilt) made of cotton and cloth. Then he sets up a *korsi* and the members of a family get under the warm *lahaf* and enjoy the warmth. He gets a lot of money from other families and makes korsis for them and leaves the town recognizing that they are also sillier than his family.

The third episode takes place in another town. Qobād is walking through the town where he sees many men and women gathering together and there is a clamour of conversation. Qobād notices a bride standing at the door of the bridegroom's house to get in for the night of the wedding, but she is too tall to pass the doorway. Some, those on the bride's side, say the upper frame of the door should be destroyed so that she can get in. Some others, those on the bridegroom's side, say, "Why damage the door? Behead the bride and let her in!'" Qobād gets near and says, "Give me 100 ashrafis[9] and I'll let the bride in with neither beheading her nor demolishing the upper frame of the door." He goes behind the bride and slaps at the back of her neck. She bends double and gets in. Qobād gets the promised money and leaves.

In the next town, he sees that there is a long line in an alley and one or two are crying. He learns that the governor's daughter has gone to bring some cheese from an earthen jar but her hand has got stuck in the jar. The wisest man in the town has advised them either to break the jar or to cut her hand off. Now they are waiting for someone to bring a knife. Qobād says, "I'll solve the problem and neither break the jar, nor cut the hand off." He

[7] Āš: a meal like soup but thicker.

[8] In Persian transliteration: "kāseh gošād kon āmadeh, khāneh ābād kon āmadeh". House-builder here means somebody who makes people prosperous.

[9] "**AŠRAFI,** term used from the mid-15th century for a gold coin first minted in Mamluk Egypt in 810/1407-08". (*Encyclopedia of Iranica*, s.v. **AŠRAFI**) It was used up to the early 19th century in some Muslim countries.

gets near and sees that the girl is holding a big piece of cheese in her hand and does not let it go. He pinches the back of her hand, she leaves the cheese and her hand comes out of the jar. He gets some money and leaves the town, even though he is asked to remain there and take the position of the wisest man in the town.

In the fifth episode, no sooner does Qobād enter the town than he sees many anxious people gathering around a well whose dug-soil is piled near it. They think that the pile of soil is an abscess of earth, which may not suppurate and break through and it may pain the earth. They say there's no doctor around to treat it. Qobād says, "Pay me something for medication and I'll lance it." He spreads the pile with a shovel and gets 100 ashrafis and leaves there too.

After seven days, he comes to another town and sees the governor, the judge, and other officials of the town gathering and groaning around a cracked tower. They wonder what will happen if the belly of the tower bursts and the people fall down and die. Qobād says, "I will stitch the tear up." He gets 100 ashrafis, prepares some mud and mends the crack. In the end he tells himself, "I find the people in every new town sillier than my fellow citizens. I'll go to another town. If I find them wise, I'll remain, otherwise I'll return."

In his endnote to the tale, Sobhi adds that he believes the last episode is another tale that has been added to "The Maddening Crowd." (Sobhi 1387 Š/2008: 215).

In the seventh episode, before entering the town, Qobād is so tired that he sits near a stream to wash his face. He looks in the water and sees that he is sun-burnt. In the meantime, a maid from a house comes to take some water from the stream. On seeing Qobād she asks, "Where do you come from?" Depressed and tired he answers, "From hell." The maid takes the words literally, and asks, "What did you do there?" Qobād says that he was the doorkeeper of hell. She enquires after the big master of the house (who is dead) and is told that he is miserable since he owes some money to somebody in hell and is tortured by a fiery club every day. Then the maid goes quickly and tells the lady of the house about the big master. The lady gives him a large amount of money (100 toomans) and a horse which Qobād asks for to get to hell quicker to pay the master's debt. As soon as Qobād leaves, the lady's second husband arrives and realizes that she has been cheated. Thereupon, he follows Qobād with his own horse adorned with gilded decoration. While getting to a mill, Qobād sees the man and knows that he is following him. He enters the mill and asks the miller, "Have you recently ground some wheat for the king's palace?" Then he devises another trick and tells the poor man that the stone in the flour has broken the king's tooth and now a horseman is coming and he is going to have him hanged. Qobād asks the miller to exchange clothes with him in order to save him. Qobād (in the miller's clothes) points with his eyes to the back of the mill where the poor miller is hidden to help the rider find him. The horseman takes the miller for Qobād and beats him while Qobād rides away on the adorned horse. When the second husband arrives home, he tells the lady that he has given the better horse to the doorkeeper of hell to get there sooner and the lady tells him, "Now I love you more and if it happens that you die and another man replaces you and the doorkeeper of hell comes again, I'll send you some money as well."

In the end, Qobād who has gathered a lot of money rides to his hometown and says, "Now I love my wife and my relatives. In this mad-house of the world, you can still be considered the wise ones."

3. Analysis of "The Maddening Crowd"

The story is structured on a quest undertaken by the protagonist whose normal state of mind is disrupted by others' stupidity. His journey in search of wise people consists of seven episodes.[10] Qobād's quest is not much of a heroic archetypal journey through the trials which provide the hero with a fulfilled desire or reward but a parody of such a journey. The trigger that sparks off the quest is a foolish incident followed by the ridiculous performances of his family. He does not face the formulaic ordeals and thresholds in his quest and the trials are reduced to scenes of absurd stupidity in which he takes the part of a shrewd visitor who solves the problems that elude the fools he meets. What he finally gains in returning home is an insight into the human condition, realizing that the world is full of fools among whom he can think of his family as wise. Qobād's journey in search of wisdom which concludes with his turning into a trickster in the final stage lessens the effect of the universalized dichotomous pairing of wisdom and folly.

The idea of power and centre/periphery relations also deserve to be attended to in analysing the tale. The reader is not aware of the quality of Qobād's relationship with the members of his family before the story begins, that is, whether he uses his intellect to have the supreme power in his family or not; however, the fact that he lives with them and is influenced by them as he first declines the marriage proposal and then resigns himself to his mother's wishes implies his marginalized position in the family.

Given the multifaceted nature of power, some scholars have distinguished three modes of power in social relations: "power over", "power to", and "power with".[11] "Power over", the most insidious form of power, is related to the unjust and oppressive power relations while "power to" is associated with the productive aspect of power and is defined as the ability to act on one's own by means of knowledge, intelligence, and other resources to accomplish what the others cannot. "Power with" refers to gaining something through cooperation and ability to work with others. Yet, in his confrontation with the other fools during his journey, Qobād turns to hold the centre by means of his intelligence, which equips him with "power to".

The intellect that permits Qobād to exercise "power to" as he helps the fools to come out of their predicament, turns to be a means of abuse that is totally connected with the "power over" paradigm. The shift from the productive side of power to its vicious form, which occurs in the culmination of his quest where the readers expect the protagonist to be developed in personality, serves as a situational irony.

Qobād, who once refuses to stay with idiots to take the position of wise man of the town in the fourth episode, finally returns home and accepts the company of the fool. Thus, he returns to the peripheral position, which implies the marginalized status of wit and therefore, violates the given precedence of wisdom over folly.

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[10] "Seven: the most potent of all symbolic numbers --signifying the union of *three and four*, the completion of a cycle, perfect order" (Guerin et al. 2005: 187).

[11] These three are analogous to Kenneth E. Boulding's study of *Three Faces of Power* (1989); as Chadwick F. Alger writes in his review of the book, "The 'three faces of power' are: (1) threat power – the power to destroy, (2) economic power – the power to produce and exchange, and (3) integrative power – the power to create such relations as love, respect, friendship and legitimacy." (Alger 1991: 220) Pamela Pansardi, however, considers the two concepts "power to" and "power over" as "representing two analytically distinguishable aspects of a single and unified concept of social power" (2012: 73); cf. Karlberg (2005).

The inciting incident of the tale that sets the plot in motion and the fact that such a trivial and still discreditable accident turns to be a great concern for the family is ironic. More significant is the way the family members deal with the situation. They take the goat, an animal character, so seriously that every member of the family speaks to the goat and gives garments and ornaments to it as a bribe to keep it from divulging the incident to the others. What makes the situation rather paradoxical is the bride's reaction; she persuades the goat to keep her secret while she reveals it to the others before everyone else. As she talks to the goat and puts earrings in its ears and bracelets on its legs, the other foolish family members also leave their signs of idiocy on the goat. There happens a continuous chain of foolish acts, firstly initiated by the bride. The recurrent references to a trivial accident and the drama made over it in the beginning provides a blend of absolute absurdity and stagnant state of mind and prepares the stage for a comedy of fools.

As mentioned earlier, the goat is addressed by all the members of the family (except Qobād); his mother even bleats and degrades herself to the animal's level. They give their private properties to it; the objects by which the goat is decorated are associated with both femininity and masculinity, reminding the reader that stupidity is not gender-specific rather it is related to humanity in general. Additionally, the goat with bride's ornaments and groom's outfit seems to have a reference to the new bride and groom; i.e., the goat has been centralized and elevated to the position of the newly married couple in the family.

In the first episode, the bowl symbolizes the bowl of the head or the skull. The idiom "get something through someone's thick skull" is congruous to the minds of these idiots. The fossilized ideas and ossified traditions are decentrated, ridiculed, and criticized in this episode. The man who cries out, "The bowl-scraper is here, the house-builder is here" is the first member of the fool community triggered by Qobād's action and invites the others to bring their bowls to be scraped which is indicative of an invitation to wisdom and expansion of thought. The sediments in the bowls are hard and cannot be easily scraped but with mud and sand. This prompts the readers to think of the long-lasting sediments of minds which are not easy to wipe out.

The severe cold of the second episode, which symbolizes the idea of frozen minds, parallels the sediments of the bowls in the prior episode. The people who feel the cold and try to cope with it seem to differ slightly from those in the first episode, for they try to find a way to alleviate the coldness, which is obviously more irritating than the thick layer of sediments in bowls: "Each group wants to shield itself against the coldness in one way or another" (Sobhi 1387 Š/2008: 206). However, they fail in resolving the problem due to the fact that despite having the necessary tools at hand, they are unable to synthesize the materials and ideas into a proper solution. They make holes in blankets, stand beside boiling water over an open fire, or apply warm mud on their bodies to get warm, but Qobād puts all these together and makes a *korsi* with the blankets, the cooked mud, and firewood. The odd and funny ways through which they try to get warm add to the humorous and satirical effect of the tale, increase the reader's attention, and work toward the main point.

In the wedding episode, the situation reminds us of "Procrustes' Bed". As *Dictionary of Phrase and Fable* defines the term, "[…] Any attempt to reduce men to one standard, one way of thinking, or one way of acting, is called placing them on Procrustes' bed, and the person who makes the attempt is called Procrustes" (Brewer 1898, s.v. "Procrustes' Bed"). Likewise, Procrusteanism can be defined as bringing about conformity by the

application of violence and irrational attitudes.[12] In the third episode, in which the bride waits to enter the groom's house, each one of the opposing groups with uncompromising mindsets tries to make the other group conform to its own mentality regardless of the consequences. Their proposed solutions which would lead either to beheading of the bride or damaging the properties are both repulsive and funny; moreover, each group, inattentive to the other, handles the situation based on its own benefits which is the most hideous way of treating "the other". It is both ironic and paradoxical that they want to behead the bride to help her pass through the doorway. When compared with the simpletons of the earlier episodes, their stupidity seasoned by egotism and violence results in more serious and dreadful outcomes; the foolish people in the previous parts only get themselves into trouble while these fools sacrifice the others to their own absurd and rigid thoughts.

The fourth episode – the girl's hand in the jar – also renders feeble-mindedness where the characters, even the wisest cannot think of any proper solution. When they propose him the position of the wise man of the town, Qobād refuses because he cannot stand being, even in a dominant position, among the fools and says: "It is not reasonable for a wise man to stay in the city of fools" (Sobhi 1387 Š/2008: 208). The solutions considered by the stupid people in both places are both fatal and illogical; more notable is the fact that between the two options they finally choose the more violent one. The ironic and paradoxical situation in this episode closely resembles the bride's condition in the previous one; i.e., the girl's hand is going to be cut off to come out of the jar.

The medical imagery of the fifth and sixth episodes connotes diseased minds that need treatment. What they call the abscess of earth, which is to be lanced to let out the pus seems to suggest the mind that is laden with sick and stupid ideas. Likewise, the cracked tower symbolizes the people's cracked minds, which need to be mended by the renewal of thoughts. Qobād's attitude toward the idiots in these two episodes diverges slightly from his way in the former episodes. He talks to them in their own foolish way; when they tell him about the abscess on the earth, Qobād suggests bringing a doctor and when they say there is no doctor around, he offers to cure it for money. Similarly, when he was told of the crack on the belly of the tower, he uses medical imagery and says, "I will stitch the tear up".

An additional point is that at the beginning of his quest Qobād encounters simple ordinary people, but as he goes on he meets some with higher communal status, such as the wise man of the town, the governor, the lawman, and other officials. Although the people he faces vary in rank, they all suffer from the same sort of stupidity, which is a manifestation of "centration"; yet, they are all willing to be assisted to solve the problems and are even ready to pay for that.

In the last episode Qobād, who appears to share the trickster's role, makes use of doubleness and ambiguity of meaning and deceives others; this is not congruous to previous episodes and that is why Sobhi considers it a separate story and Karimzadeh (1379 Š/2000) also excludes the last episode from his edition in *Čehel Qeṣṣeh* (*Forty Tales*). When the maid asks him where he comes from Qobād responds "From hell" but he does not really mean it; however, the maid and the lady of the house restrict themselves to the literal meaning of the sentence and are easily cheated.[13]

[12] From a social political point of view, the wedding episode satirizes Procrusteanism.

[13] Idiomatically, "az jahannam miyām (miāyam) /I come from hell" or "be jahannam miram (miravam)/ I go to hell" in Persian is sometimes used as a reply when someone who is very tired and angry is asked: "kojā budi? /Where were you?" Or "kojā miri (miravi)?/ Where are you going?"

In the end Qobād sets for his own homeland admitting that there are many more silly people in this world of fools than he thought of and at least he can bear his relatives. The unknown story-tellers of the past diagnosed the social disease of "centration" and narrow-mindedness and have articulated their concern in stories. Despite the apparently implausible incidents that take place, all episodes present a criticism of confined views and centrated way of thinking and illustrate the way "decentration" makes one's mind open to new ideas.

4. Three Other Persian Variants

In "[A]ʿrus va mādar šohar-e k̲ol" ("The Silly Bride and her Silly Mother-in-law") (Sobhi 1387 Š/2008: 215–217) the story is initiated by the foolish act of a bride and her mother-in-law. The bride goes to bring some flour but she breaks a bowl and the goat bleats. They talk to the goat and cry a lot. When the young man comes and learns about the reason he leaves them, goes to another town, and sells a little amount of traditional chewing gum to a lady for a lot of money and says, "This one is sillier than my wife." Then he goes somewhere else and asks for some water. The girl of the house is told to fetch some water from the fountain. She goes there and sits under a mulberry and says, "This fellow is here to marry me. After marriage, my first baby will be a boy. When he grows older I'll send him here and he'll see the mulberries and climb the tree and falls down and dies." Then she begins mourning. After one or two hours her family – mother, father and sisters – come and they all also mourn the loss of the child. The man says, "I'm trapped by fools. Let's go to my wife and mother who are wiser than these." The section of the tale where the girl mourns the death of her would-be child is like the episodes in the English and German variants.

"Do k̲tar-e Qāżi" ("The Judge's Daughter") begins like "The Maddening Crowd" with the girl breaking wind. Her mother goes to his office and tells the judge not to believe the goat's words. Disgraced before people, the judge leaves them. He goes to his mother-in-law to complain to her. She hears the footsteps of somebody and says, "Whoever you are bring the stone-mortar for me." The judge picks the heavy mortar and when his mother-in-law sees the judge, she asks him apologetically to take it back. He leaves there and in a village is told that a dragon baby is lying in a niche and after two or three days it will grow bigger and eat all the people of the village. He goes and finds a pair of big garden scissors wide open in the niche, takes a lot of money, closes the scissors and puts them under his belt. They ask him to stay there for his bravery but he leaves them and finds himself in a town whose people are terribly dirty. When he asks, "Why are you so dirty, don't you have garmābeh [hammām]?" They say, "What is garmābeh?" He gets a lot of money from them and builds a garmābeh for them and repeats the last sentence in other variants and returns (Sobhi 1387 Š/2008: 217–219).

The main characters of these tales who set off in search of wise people turn their wit and ingenuity to profit; having benefited from the fools, they finally condone stupidity and return to their family. The only tale of fools which ends differently is the one edited and translated by the Lorimers in *Persian Tales* entitled "The Story of the Country of Fools" categorized in Kermāni tales. After some incidents which resemble those in "The Maddening Crowd" the traveller returns home and sees that his mother and his wife are

still quarrelling about the goat. A heavy rain has come and the bride has seated herself in a basket which is spinning round and round. When the husband sees all this, he turns away, saying, "The truth of it is, I shall not stay in this country!" and starts off into the desert and goes on his own way. (Lorimers 1919: 154–159). The reaction of the wise character toward silliness in the conclusion of this version is more revolutionary than that of the others. He abides no more stupidity and does not face any opportunity to exercise his power of wit among other fools; there is no money-making, no trickery, no tolerance and return toward the stupid; no central position is taken by the main character while wisdom moves distinctively to the peripheral state of isolation.

5. English Variants

5. 1. "The Three Sillies"

In "The Three Sillies" (Jacobs 2002: 24–27), a girl is courted by a gentleman every evening and is sent down into the cellar to draw the beer. She looks up at the ceiling and sees a mallet stuck in one of the beams. She says to herself, "Suppose him and me was to be married, and we were to have a son, and he was to grow up to be a man, and come down into the cellar to draw the beer, just as I'm doing now, and the mallet was to fall on his head and kill him, what a dreadful thing it would be!" And she put down the candle and the jug, and sat herself down and began a-crying." (Jacobs 2002: 24) Her mother and father go down the cellar and when she unfolds the case they also start crying. Finally, the young man goes down and when they tell him what they think, he bursts out laughing, pulls out the mallet and says, "I've travelled many miles, and I never met three such big sillies as you three before; and now I shall start out on my travels again, and when I can find three bigger sillies than you three, then I'll come back and marry your daughter." (Jacobs 2002: 25) On his way he visits three sillies. The first one is a woman who sends her cow to the roof to eat the grass grown there while she ties a string round the cow's neck, and passes it down the chimney, and fastens it to her own wrist. The man tells her to cut the grass and let the cow eat it but she does not listen. The cow falls down, strangles herself and the woman becomes stuck in the chimney and is smothered in soot. The second silly is a man who tries to jump into his trousers instead of wearing them properly and when the gentleman of the tale shows him how to put them on, he takes the advice and shows his appreciation to him. In the third episode he sees a crowd of people with rakes, and brooms, and pitchforks reaching into a pond. He enquires into the matter.

> "Why," they say, "matter enough! Moon's tumbled into the pond, and we can't rake her out anyhow!" So the gentleman burst out a-laughing, and told them to look up into the sky, and that it was only the shadow in the water. But they wouldn't listen to him, and abused him shamefully, and he got away as quick as he could./So there was a whole lot of sillies bigger than them three sillies at home. So the gentleman turned back home again and married the farmer's daughter, and if they didn't live happy for ever after, that's nothing to do with you or me. (Jacobs 2002: 27)

Of these sillies, only the second one accepts thinking otherwise. The others who are attached to their centrated way of thinking are ignorant of what he says and abandon his wise counsel. The woman dies because of her mistake which signifies the potentially perilous effects of centration. The second episode illustrates the way some people complicate quite simple affairs and cause too much trouble and effort for themselves. The last group misconceives reality and even abuses the wise man shamefully; there resides the difference with what the readers face in the Persian version in which the wise character was appreciated by the fools he met. The silliness of the third group is quite similar to what exists in today's human life. Those who think right and act wisely are sometimes oppressed and mistreated by the ignorant. In the first two episodes the fools appear as individuals while in the last part we encounter a community which tries to rake the fake picture of the moon for reality and resists the truth by the use of violence - by rakes, brooms, and pitchforks - against the one who conceives the reality properly. This is an artful manifestation of opinionated minds that suppress any fresh thought by means of violence.

5. 2. "Jack Hannaford"

"Jack Hannaford" (Jacobs 2002: 41–42) is much similar to the seventh episode of "The Maddening Crowd". A soldier, quite out-at-elbows comes to a farm, from which the man has gone away to market. The farmer's wife is "a very foolish woman who had been a widow when he married her. The farmer was foolish enough, too, and it is hard to say which of the two was the more foolish. When you've heard my tale you may decide" (Jacobs 2002: 41). The farmer gives ten pounds to her and she ties it in a rag and puts the rag up the parlour chimney. Then Jack raps at the door and says that he has come from paradise. The woman asks him about her former dead husband and he says, "But middling; he cobbles old shoes, and he has nothing but cabbage for victuals". When she asks if he has sent a message to her Jack replies, "He said that he was out of leather, and his pockets were empty, so you were to send him a few shillings to buy a fresh stock of leather" (Jacobs 2002: 41).

He swindles some money out of her so that her former husband can cobble the shoes of the saints and angels of heaven. Her husband comes and rides after him. When Jack sees the farmer behind, he lies down on the ground; while shading his eyes with one hand he looks up into the sky and points heavenwards with the other hand. When the farmer asks, "What are you about there?" Jack replies that he sees a rare sight of "A man going straight up into the sky, as if he were walking on a road" (Jacobs 2002: 42). The farmer lies down to see the sight and when he says that he cannot see the sight, Jack replies, "Shade your eyes with your hand, and you'll soon see a man flying away from you" (Jacobs 2002: 42).

Jack Hannaford differs from Qobād or the gentleman in" The Three Sillies" for he is not concerned about idiocy and is not in search of wise people; rather he is a swindler who abuses the simple-minded people and in this regard, he only resembles Qobād in the last stage of his journey. Here the polarity resides distinctively between deceit and folly and it is the fools who are constantly suppressed and driven to the margin by the abusive power exercised over them. The tale which is virtually an account of trickery is short of the thought-provoking scenes that appear in the two other versions and does not apparently leave a deep impression as they do.

6. German Variants

6. 1. "Die kluge Else" ("Clever Elsie"/"Clever Alice")

The tale "Die kluge Else" ("Clever Elsie"/"Clever Alice") recounts the tale of a family whose members are stupid. The introductory incidents of the story resemble those of "The Three Sillies", in which the girl cries because of the imagined death of the would-be child. In a sense, the cognitive error of the girl which is conscious dysfunctional thinking, called catastrophizing[14] in psychoanalysis, contributes to the narrative of the tale. Contrary to other variants, the young man does not leave the family, rather he agrees to marry the girl, "'Nun,' sprach Hans, 'mehr Verstand ist für meinen Haushalt nicht nöthig; weil du so eine kluge Else bist, so will ich dich haben" (Grimm 1857: 175). ["Come," said Hans, "more understanding than that is not needed for my household, as thou art such a clever Elsie, I will have thee" (Grimm 1884: 140).] One day when he asks her to work on the fields she sleeps there and Hans finds her sound asleep in the evening. "Da eilte Hans geschwind heim, und holte ein Vogelgarn mit kleinen Schellen und hängte es um sie herum; und sie schlief noch immer fort" (Grimm 1857: 178). ["Then Hans hastened home and brought a fowler's net with little bells and hung it around about her, and she still went on sleeping" (Grimm 1884: 140).] When she gets up the jingling frightens her and she asks, "bin ichs, oder bin ichs nicht?" (Grimm 1857: 178) ["Is it I, or is it not I" (Grimm 1884: 141)]. Then she goes home to see if she (Elsie) is there and when her husband tells her that Elsie is at home, she becomes insensible,

> Da erschrack sie, und sprach „ach Gott, dann bin ichs nicht," und gieng vor eine andere Thür; als aber die Leute das Klingeln der Schellen hörten, wollten sie nicht aufmachen, und sie konnte nirgend unterkommen. Da lief sie fort zum Dorfe hinaus, und niemand hat sie wieder gesehen. (Grimm 1857: 178) [… Hereupon she was terrified, and said, "Ah, heavens! Then it is not I," and went to another door; but when the people heard the jingling of the bells they would not open it, and she could get in nowhere. Then she ran out of the village, and no one has seen her since. (Grimm 1884: 141).]

This German tale of silliness differs from the other variants in two respects: the husband does not leave the family for wiser people and the silly character who is ironically called "Die kluge Else" ("Clever Elsie") receives punishment rather than being assisted or tolerated. The concept of idiocy here is not much effectively featured as it is in other variants. The wife is the only character who is labelled as stupid. The man, in contrast, does not do anything wise to be distinct from the fools; rather, the way he treats the wife evokes the reader's sympathy towards her. He seems to have tolerance in the beginning but then alters his attitude, and the wife falls victim to his foolish performance. His distasteful attitude

[14] According to *The Encyclopedia of Phobias, Fears, and Anxieties*, "**Catastrophize**. The habit of imagining that the worst will occur. People who frequently catastrophize have little self-confidence, low self-esteem, difficulties making positive and desirable life changes; many have social phobias." (Doctor et al. 2008: 121) Catastrophizing is part of "*cognitive distortions*: Distortions in the way information is processed such as the tendency to exaggerate the aversiveness of unpleasant events (catastrophizing) or the tendency to classify events in black and white categories (e.g., "success" vs. "failure"). Cognitive distortions can arise from dysfunctional beliefs" (Hersen and Sledge 2002: 213).

toward his wife's trivial mistake, if it can be called a mistake, which leads to her identity confusion /amnesia and her being ignored by everyone, distinguishes the story from the other versions. In the sight of a 21st century reader what the girl does in the opening part is more related to psychological disorders than idiocy, and the husband's conduct, however, is not a wise approach, but a violent behavioural reaction.

6. 2. "Die klugen Leute" ("Wise Folks")

A peasant asks his wife Trina to sell three cows in his three-day absence but not for less than two hundred thalers, otherwise her back would be black not with paint, of course. Then a cattle-dealer comes and says that he has forgotten to buckle on his money-belt but he takes two cows and leaves her a cow as a pledge. The peasant who learns what she has done wants to beat her but then determines to go out for three days and if he finds someone still dumber, she will go scot-free. On the road he sees a woman standing upright in the middle of a peasant's wagon because she thinks it makes it lighter for the cattle. There he claims to have fallen from heaven and that her husband has no clothes. She brings him money and then relates the story to her son who goes to find the heavenly messenger to give him his horse so that he can return to heaven more quickly. The lucky peasant rides home satisfied, "'Wenn die Dummheit immer so viel einbrächte, so wollte ich sie gerne in Ehren halten.' So dachte der Bauer, aber dir sind gewiss die Einfältigen lieber" (Grimm 1857: 95). ["'If stupidity always brought in as much as that, I would be quite willing to hold it in honour.' So thought the peasant, but you no doubt prefer the simple folks" (Grimm 1884: 76).]

Apart from the ironic title of the tale, the plot, similar to that of "Jack Hannaford", is structured on the juxtaposition of foolishness and trickery. The peasant, in the vein of "Die kluge Else" ("Clever Elsie"), is enraged at his wife's mistake and promises her a harsh punishment. As he threatens his wife, the man who is very much concerned about money uses monetary imagery; he uses the word "discount" for her punishment: "Glückt mirs, so sollst du frei sein, find ich ihn aber nicht, so sollst du deinen wohlverdienten Lohn ohne Abzug erhalten" (Grimm 1857: 92). ["If I succeed in doing so, you shall go scot-free, but if I do not find him, you shall receive your well-deserved reward without any discount" (Grimm 1884: 74).] Setting off to see if he can find any one dumber, he starts making use of the art of deception as he meets the first fool. Taking advantage of others' stupidity is more efficiently rendered than stupidity itself and the story seems to serve as a warning against deceitful conduct and fraud perpetrators. The peasant who was first infuriated by his wife's foolish deed turns to be honoring silliness which he found beneficial to him. Through the final sentence the narrator expresses his sympathy toward the fools who were abused, and satirizes trickery, reminding that it is better to be an idiot than a fraud.

7. Techniques of Decentration

One of the necessities for human beings is the ability to look at a problem, an idea, etc., from "another" or "the other" point(s) of view and try to vacillate between these views. This is simply one of the things decentration does (Khosronejad 1382 Š/2003). "Centration and decentration, […] are the constructs coined by [Jean] Piaget through which he explains the mechanisms of the child's cognitive development" (Khazaie and Khosronejad

2007: 15). *APA Dictionary of Psychology* (VandenBos 2007) defines Piagetian notions of centration and decentration as follows:

> **Centration** *n*. in Piagetian theory, the tendency of children in the preoperational stage to attend to one aspect of a problem, object, or situation at a time, to the exclusion of others." […] **Decentration** *n*. in Piagetian theory, the gradual progression of a child away from egocentrism toward a reality shared with others. Occurring during the concrete operational stage, decentration includes understanding how others perceive the world, knowing in what ways one's own perceptions differ, and recognizing that people have motivations and feelings different from one's own. It can also be extended to the ability to consider many aspects of a situation, problem, or object, as reflected, for example, in the child's grasp of the concept of conservation. Also called **decentering**. (s.v. centration and decentration).

Morteza Khosronejad developed the concepts of centration and decentration in his influential book *Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Children's Literature* (Khosronejad 1382 Š/2003) and he was the first to use the "concept of decentration or to be more precise, the vacillation between centration and decentration as method in children's literature. [...] This vacillation is the outcome of induction and results from the interpretation of objectivity of children's literature and the concept of childhood" (Khosronejad 1382 Š/2003: 178 and 210). He also discovered and defined the techniques of decentration in one section of the aforementioned work in which he studied *Sobhi's Tales* and enumerated the techniques of decentration. According to his study, these techniques are:

1. "Narrator's intrusion": The narrator shows his direct presence by some sentences so the readers do not fall into the loop of centration. This technique is used to form aesthetic distance between the audience, the narrator, and the text;
2. "Happy Ending", generally agreed to be a characteristic of children's literature, is also treated as a decentrating element.[15] It makes the reader focus on "how it happens" than on "what happens";
3. "Exaggeration" which is mostly tinged with satire, refers to magnifying some mean features of characters such as mind-stagnation and feeble-mindedness;
4. "Inversion" refers to attributing qualities to someone who is naturally and normally devoid of them like making a donkey the wisest character of the tale;
5. "Self-revelation" can be regarded as a branch of narrator's intrusion. It refers to the processes, methods, and purposes of creating tales. This metafictional technique provides the reader with an outlook to comprehend the mechanisms of shaping tales consciously;
6. "Multi-perspectivism" is having the readers in different perspectives/points of view by creating different characters and entering the reader in their real or fantastical world or by putting contradictory behaviors/views against each other;

[15] "What Babbit claims to be the essence of the best children's literature is the 'Happy Ending,' which she sees not as a 'happily ever after' but as a quality 'which turns a story ultimately towards hope rather than resignation.'" (O'Sullivan 2010: 3)

7. "Reversibility" refers to the journey of the main character in an objective or subjective trip to a destination and back;
8. "Distant and near View" is related to seeing things (living and nonliving) from two views, near and distant. It can happen gradually or instantly, and when this change of view happens gradually, it can be considered a form of reversibility;
9. "Blank-writing or blank-reading/blank-speaking" refers to the silent or empty spots in the narrative where the reader can fill;
10. "Play" of the story is the constant possibilities which take form in the mind of the reader/audience and make the vacillation between centration and decentration possible. "In a general sense, we might claim that each story is in essence a form of play, a possibility in parallel with the reality which the creative mind of the writer provides for us. In this sense, each story is the dream of our wakefulness and like a dream, it is born on the slippery borderline between the conscious and unconscious – pleasure and reality – and when we go along with it as a reader and step into the play, slowly and in proportion to our involvement in the play of the text, we find ourselves nearer and nearer to the border – where pleasure and reality, conscious and unconscious are indistinguishable from each other – and that is why in the end of the reading, we are not the same as in the beginning. The play of the text is entirely the continuous play of 'what-would-happen-if' possibilities." Apart from this theoretical playfulness of the story, some stories begin as a story but in the end turn into a play in its usual sense. (Khosronejad 1382 Š/2003: 218-219) (1382 Š/2003: 173–178, 199–201, 210–222); cf. also "Decentration" entry written by Khosronejad in Khazaie et al. forthcoming 1396 Š/2017) and Khazaie and Khosronejad (2007: 15–23).

A quick review of these techniques in this article should be made here: in "The Maddening Crowd" in the middle of the tale the narrator proves his presence by saying, "Anyway, the tale is a long one" (Sobhi 1387 Š/2008: 208) and in "The Three Sillies" the narrator observes, "So the gentleman turned back home again and married the farmer's daughter, and if they didn't live happy for ever after, that's nothing to do with you or me." (Jacobs 2002: 27). Another instance is in the end of "Die klugen Leute" ("Wise Folks") "'If stupidity always brought in as much as that, I would be quite willing to hold it in honor.' So thought the peasant, but you no doubt prefer the simple folks" (Grimm 1884: 76).

In ATU 1450 "Clever Elsie" and other related tale types, Happy Ending is structurally deconstructed, i.e., the reader is suspended in deciding whether the tale ends happily or not since the protagonist's decision in returning among the fools, though among those who are less fool than others, is not necessarily a sign of happiness. This special mode of happiness is deconstructive and is accordingly "decentrating". Apart from this, Happy Ending itself by definition is deconstructive since it is the situation(s) of the protagonist(s) which determine(s) whether the ending is happy or not and usually what happens to others is not critically considered. For instance, in "The Three Sillies" the woman is strangled or the crowd remains in "centrated" mode of thinking or in "Clever Alice", Alice with her identity lost, runs out of the village. These endings do not seem to be happy.

Exaggeration is the obvious feature in these folktales and sometimes is present alongside other techniques like inversion. In a previous study, "A Genetic, Epistemological Reading of the Lambs' Tales from Shakespear and Persian Folktales" apart from referring to some techniques of decentration, we also observed exaggeration,

> In The "Madd[en]ing Crowd" and "Aunt Frog" and some other tales, there are shining examples of this technique [exaggeration] presented very deftly. […] The "black-white" or "either-or" thinking as Khosronejad indicates, finds shape in its lowest and most exaggerated form […] [in the wedding episode of "The Madd[en]ing Crowd" (1382 Š/2003: 176)]. The magnifying of such feeble-mindedness unconsciously works as a powerful shock and will make an enduring effect - possibly for ever - on the child's mind. (Khazaie and Khosronejad 2007: 17–18).

Another example of the technique is recognizable in "The Three Sillies" when the gentleman of the tale tells the crowd to look up into the sky to see the moon "But they wouldn't listen to him, and abused him shamefully, and he got away as quick as he could." (Jacobs 2002: 27) They even do not want to look up into the sky to see that it is only the reflection of the moon in the pond they try to rake out. Exaggeration is also one of the features of caricature which makes it grotesque as well. *American Heritage Dictionary* defines "caricature" as, "A representation, especially pictorial or literary, in which the subject's distinctive features or peculiarities are deliberately exaggerated to produce a comic or grotesque effect" (s.v. caricature). Edith T. A. Davidson quotes this definition and then refers to and briefly explains three types of caricature that Christoph Martin Wieland has distinguished, i.e., "true caricature", "exaggerated caricature" and the "grotesque" or "purely fantastic caricatures". (Davidson 2008: 93)

Another mode of Inversion is seen in these folktales, which is different from what we encounter in some Persian folktales like "The Lion-Hunter" or "The Old Fox" where the donkey acts wisely. In tale type ATU 1450 "Clever Elsie", what is apparent is the presumed superiority of rationality on one side, and its absence on the other which can be put in a binary opposition, wisdom/ignorance. Such a binary opposition is on the first reading hierarchical and seems to be logocentrically fixed. Yet, the protagonist, though wiser than others is influenced by them and in this case he is inferior not superior. In a sense, the tale destabilizes this hierarchy. Simply, the tales represent idiocy as the dominant feature of human community and wisdom is subverted. This form of inversion which can add a new feature to the definition of inversion as a decentrating feature, is apparent in these tales. A wonderful example is in the fourth episode of "The Maddening Crowd" when the wise old man in the town has advised them either to break the jar or to cut the girl's hand off and they choose the second option. In the tale, he is the wise old man but for readers he is the silly old man.

There are various metafictional tools and strategies that can be employed, usually in combination, to amplify the fictional status of a text. One of these devices is a narrator who tries to interact with readers through his deliberate intrusion. Self-revelation is also one of these techniques. The ending formula of some Persian tales is obviously metafictional, such as in the ending of "The Maddening Crowd", "Qeṣeh-ye mā be sar resid, kalāqeh be k̲ānaš naresid" ["Our tale came to an end but the crow did not get home"] (Sobhi 1387 Š/2008, 214). In "Jack Hannaford" the narrator refers to his tale, "[…] the farmer was foolish enough, too, and it is hard to say which of the two was the more foolish. *When you've heard my tale you may decide*" (Jacobs 2002: 41, author's italics).

Multi-perspectivism is also clearly seen in these tales since different characters are created and the reader's perspective constantly shifts from one mode to another. The

binary opposition of wisdom versus ignorance referred to before, puts the two contradictory views against each other. The differing degrees of idiocy and centration create various perspectives. Even the perspectives of the trickster characters are not the same. In other words, the fools have their diverse perspectives and so do the wise. Accordingly, a group of perspectives are created by one narrator.

Reversibility, in the sense of the objective journey of the main character to a destination with some stops in way stations and then returning, passing the same stations, such as in the Persian tale "Be donbāl-e falak" ("In Quest of Destiny")[16] is not seen in the tales studied here, but since in the end we are told by the narrator that the protagonist returns, without mentioning the way stations, still a form of reversibility is recognizable. However, their return is not a usual one, they reverse themselves and refrain from their previous notion of disliking the fools, and yet they are also not completely in tune with them, i.e., the return happens physically but the mental return is not absolute. It seems that here reversibility in action and irreversibility in mind is more plausible. The concepts of reversibility and irreversibility are in a state of suspension and hence, the protagonist's return is deconstructed and it is not important to know his way stations in return. The man in "Die klugen Leute" ("Wise Folks") also first detests the idiocy of his wife but in the end he is quite willing to hold it in honor. This change of perspective which is highly satirical and is a clear instance of in-between either-or thinking is a kind of reversibility. A form of subjective reversibility is also seen in some of these tales. For instance, in the beginning of "The Maddening Crowd", the mother-in-law sees the goat with earrings and bracelets, she is shocked first but after the bride's explanation she also puts some of her garments on the goat. The same thing occurs when the father-in-law and brother-in-law see the goat. In other words, first they can decentrate the situation but then they are caught in the loop of centration. This mental movement is a form of reversibility.

In "Distant and near View" the characters change their view by being in different positions or seeing things from near and distant views and the like. In the tale of "The Fox and The Crane"[17] this change of view happens little by little and the movement of the fox from the earth to the sky and downwards is a form of reversibility. In the tales studied here, this technique does not seem to be present.

As Khosronejd observes, "An instance of blank-writing in folktales – in a general sense – is in little descriptions, or better to say, in non-descriptions found in folktales. We usually have no description of the setting or physical or character features of the heroes or anti-heroes. [...]. Another instance of blank-writing is the silence of the folktales about the behavioral motivations of the heroes or anti-heroes. [...] In some folktales there are ambiguous hints which pave the way for our personal interpretations of character motivations" (1382 Š/2003: 213–214). As an example, the reader cannot understand why Alice's husband treats her so harshly while in the beginning he says, "[…] more understanding than that is not needed for my household […]." (Grimm 1884: 140). Another instance is in the end of "Jack Hannaford" when the woman tells her husband, "'You are a bigger fool than I am,' said the wife; 'for I did only one foolish thing, and you have done two'" (Jacobs 2002: 42). It is left for the reader to decide which two actions are foolish.

[16] For a review and study of the tale, cf. Khazaie and Khosronejad 2007: 20–21.
[17] For a close study of the tale cf. Khosronejd 1382 Š/2003: 200-202.

The "play" of the story with the mind of the audience happens in "all" tales. Naturally, all the tales studied here provide the possibility for this playfulness of the text. Several questions are asked in the mind of the audience like, "What would happen if the protagonist did such and such?" This playfulness provides the possibility for the mind to vacillate between centration and decentration.

Names of characters also should not go unnoticed. Neda Moradpour, in her study of techniques of decentration in Persian folktales edited by Abolqasem Enjavi Shirazi, refers to the decentrating feature of some names, "The names or adjectives of some characters are sometimes very much related to their characters. The names are ambiguous in the beginning but through reading, they become clear for the reader. That is why they are decentrating." (1394 Š/2015-2016: 156). Moradpour calls this technique "Contradictory or congruous labeling" and observes that it is a form of blank-writing which denotes something [in accordance with or] in opposition to the characters' features (ibid. 156–157). This is exactly what we see in the names of Clever Alice and the Wise Folks, who are ironically fools.

Apart from these techniques of decentration, which are related to the essence of folktales, since we have studied these tales comparatively we cannot ignore an intertextual outlook of different variants, that is, when not a single folktale, but some tales of a tale type are studied together or are told/presented to children, the decentrating feature of intertextuality exhibits itself better. Any intertextual reading or recognizable quality of one text in (an)other text(s) takes the reader's mind out of its frame and therefore, activates the process of decentration. In a closer look, we can claim that since any individual text is inherently intertextual, it also possesses a decentrating quality which differs for each reader/audience. This kind of decentration can be called "intertextual decentration" or better to say, "intertextual vacillation between centration and decentration",[18] since centration and decentration work together to form this phenomenon in the act of intertextuality which is related to the essence of intertextuality and can exist in different aspects such as in cultural differences of tales where the reader comes out of its social and cultural shells, or in elements of the tale like in plot, character, etc. For instance, after reading "The Maddening Crowd", "The Three Sillies" and "Die klugen Leute" ("Wise Folks") the reader's mind is familiarized and expects the foolish lady of other tales to be accepted by her husband in tolerance to the end, but in reading "Clever Alice" when she is ruthlessly treated and is left, psychologically disintegrated, to run out of the village the reader is surprised and his mind is decentrated.

8. Bakhtin's Carnivalesque-grotesque

A reference to Mikhail Bakhtin's carnivalesque-grotesque and the distinction between high and low cultures can be made here. "Bakhtin approaches the general division between official and unofficial as a particular distinction between high and low cultures, a distinction that can be chartered in the attitude of each level of culture toward laughter" (Clark and Holquist 1984: 299). It might not be easy to find stories such as the ones

[18] It should be noted that "[…] centration and decentration embrace general forms of thinking and are considered to be the basis of [cognitive] structures" (Khosronejad, 1382 Š/2003: 193) and the "[…] vacillation between centration and decentration is the foundation of cognitive development". (Khazaie and Khosronejad, 2007: 17) Here, I refer to this feature, i.e., vacillation, in intertextuality.

discussed in this article in official literature. By official, I mean canonical literature while folk literature can be considered to be unofficial and therefore, the latter is different from and sometimes stands against the former.

The second chapter of Davidson's monograph *Intricacy, Design, and Cunning in the Book of Judges* (2008) is a close study of manifestations of Bakhtin's carnivalesque-grotesque in the *Book of Judges* in the Bible. What she writes about *Judges* also applies in varying degrees to the tales in this study, "*Judges* is filled with comic situations. Because the book contains horror and humor in about equal parts, the genre may be classified as 'comedy of the absurd,' 'black comedy,' 'noir,' and/or 'grotesque realism.' Being out of touch with the manners of those days, modern readers undoubtedly miss some aspects of the humor of *Judges*, but much of it is obvious and pleasurable" (Davidson 2008: 92). In this chapter Davidson has enumerated and explained 21 features for the carnivalesque-grotesque. Here the features are briefly introduced and then some references are made to the tales studied in this article:

1. Body parts. 2. Dismemberment. 3. Food, wine, and banquets. 4. Degradation. 5. Positive aspect of this degradation. 6. Weddings. 7. Topsy-turvy world. 8. Wrong use of common objects. 9. Suspension of normal rules of behavior. 10. Disguises and masks. 11. Exaggeration of numbers. 12. Heterogeneity. 13. Madness. 14. Parody, travesty, and burlesque. 15. Irony. 16. Satire. 17. Riddles, puzzles, and games. 18. Women as destructive of men or as foils. 19. Focus on the common people. 20. Accurate topography of the world. 21. Nomenclature. (Davidson 2008: 95–103).

All features, except feature 20, are recognizable in the tales studied here.

Different references to bodily parts (either of people, animals or things, real or metaphorical) are found in the Persian variants such as: body, ear, hand, foot, neck, face, belly, tooth, hair. In "The Three Sillies" there are references to head, neck, and wrist; and in "Clever Alice" to head and in the "Die klugen Leute" ("Wise Folks") to back. There are also references to "material bodily lower stratum" in the Persian variant. To be precise, it is the action of lower body which triggers the quest. There are two occasions for dismemberment and mutilation in "The Maddening Crowd" but Qobād prevents the mutilation and takes the role of a healer of the society in return. While banquets and wine are not mentioned, Qobād's eating Āš in the first episode of his journey and the bowls which are cleaned by him clearly show the presence of food in the tale. In terms of degradation, we might assume that the protagonist turns into a trickster or in some variants, like "Jack Hannaford" he is actually only a trickster[19]. The positive point of this degradation in some variants studied here like "The Maddening Crowd" is having more tolerance toward the fools who are considered "the others" by the wise. All the tales, except "Die klugen Leute" ("Wise Folks") also include or conclude with the wedding. The world of the tales is also a "topsy-turvy world" where the wise should leave their home in search of wise people and should return hopelessly to the fools. Common objects are also used incorrectly in this tale type. The best examples are the bracelets, earrings, chador, shirt, hat and shoes given to the goat in "The Maddening Crowd" and hanging the fowler's net with little bells on Alice. We might also assume that the pair of scissors, considered to be a baby dragon, is an object

[19] "The Trickster plot is closely connected with the grotesque: (1) it is comic, (2) it allows the author to play the wonderful game of "one-upmanship" ad infinitum (à la Rabelais), and (3) it is a way for the folk to vent their sheer frustration in trying to get some measure of control, or at least an understanding, of a world which has gone mad. (Davidson 2008: 106)

wrongly used. "Suspension of normal rules of behavior" is also quite apparent in these tales. While "disguises and masks" are not clearly used, except in the last episode in which Qobād wears the miller's clothes, the fact that the protagonists deceive others as tricksters can be considered as a mask covering their intentions. "Exaggeration of numbers" is also seen in these tales when the protagonist encounters large numbers of fools in different places. The concept of foolishness is also exaggerated in a form of caricature. Simply, human wisdom is grotesquely caricatured in these tales. "Madness" in the form of foolishness is also apparent. All these tales are somehow parodies of the hero quest. 'Irony' and "Satire", as explained before, are strategically implemented in these tales. Riddles and puzzles are also used when the main character faces people who try to find a solution to some problems and then he appears as the one who unravels the knot of the puzzle. While women are not considered to be femme fatale, like what we have in the folktale "Von dem Machandelboom" ("The Juniper Tree"), in all variants there are women who drive men mad, and the focus is on the common people. There is no royal figure in the tale types referred to in this article, and the tales are tales of the folk. "Nomenclature" or the system of assigning names is also an important category of the grotesque. "In comedy, nomenclature is a source of amusement" (Davidson 2008: 103). In the words of Harry Levin, "Comedy has habitually set great store by onomastics, the science of naming" (qtd. in Davidson 2008: 103). "Nomenclature" is used properly in these tales. Apart from the name of a character, "Die kluge Else" ("Clever Elsie"), which is also the title of the tale, other titles such as "Divānegān" ("The Maddening Crowd"), "[A]ʿrus va mādar šohar-e k̲ol" ("The Silly Bride and her Silly Mother-in-law"), "The Story of the Country of Fools", "The Three Sillies", and "Die klugen Leute" ("Wise Folks") all add to the humor of the tales, either literally or ironically.

9. Conclusion

This descriptive-interpretive qualitative research attempted to closely analyse some tales of type ATU 1450 "Clever Elsie" from three cultures: Persian, English and German. I benefited from close readings of individual texts with focusing on techniques of decentration and having Bakhtin's features of carnivalesque-grotesque as enumerated by Davidson (2008) in view. It becomes evident that these readings overlap creatively. Out of these readings, deconstruction also unveils itself in some instances.

It became clear that a juxtaposition of wisdom/silliness and trickery/silliness is apparent in all variants. However, the Persian tales of foolishness, by virtue of their elaborate plot structure and such literary devices as paradox and various kinds of imagery provide a more philosophical portrait of wit/silliness dichotomy.

The protagonists set forth on quests in search of wisdom as a precious, unobtainable thing; however, during the quest they grow more tolerant and return to their families while being convinced that contrary to wisdom, stupidity is more dominant and you cannot escape it, as everyone has a varying degree of it. The universalized central and privileged position of wisdom, by rendering it in an uncertain and indefinite state, is questioned in these tales. This tentative position of intellect in terms of priority is also acknowledged through the tales as it sometimes, we may say, overlaps with crafty thoughts and wiles or it can be at the service of trickery and abuse. In all these tales of silliness, the main characters, who are assumed to be representatives of wisdom, are either marginalized or

implicitly reproached, though seeming to occupy the centre, in the course of the narrative. Stupidity, in contrast, despite being portrayed through humorous scenes of folly, is either centralized due to its pervasiveness or sympathized with as it can be subject to abuse.

In most Persian variants, silliness is modified by knowledge as the protagonist rectifies the idiotic conducts of the fool and finds wise solutions to their problems. In the English version "Jack Hannaford", the last episode of "The Maddening Crowd", as well as the German tale "Die klugen Leute" ("Wise Folks"), the central character is either a trickster like Jack Hannaford, or turns to trickery like Qobād or the peasant. This is a move from the sound application of intellect as a means of "power to" which is associated with positive aspects of power, to the usage of knowledge as a medium of exercising abusive power over others.

The varying degrees of patriarchal authority which can be detected in all versions is another noteworthy aspect of these tales. Without exception, the first act of folly in all versions is committed by a woman, the wife, while astuteness is associated with the man. This gender-biased attitude, perhaps, is rooted in the incorrect impression that men are smarter than women.[20] Nevertheless, in the Persian tale, female subordination is not emphatically depicted in comparison. Qobād's mother (who is not any wiser than the other fools) possesses the authority to choose her son's bride[21] while the other male members of the family appear only to follow the females' foolish act of bribing the goat to keep it silent.

The idea of male supremacy is most evident in the German versions in which the so-called wise men show no forbearance in dealing with their wives and treat them violently so that they evoke the reader's sympathy toward the fools and more specifically towards the women. The infliction of coercive power over wives as reflected in "Die kluge Else" ("Clever Elsie"), where the young bride is subjected to the inhuman conduct of her husband, or in "Die klugen Leute" ("Wise Folks") in which the man utters a threat of severe corporal punishment to his wife, does not appear in other versions, as such.

Different techniques of decentration such as "Narrator's intrusion", "Happy Ending", "Exaggeration", "Inversion", "Self-revelation", "Multi-perspectivism", "Reversibility", "Distant and near View", "Blank-writing or blank-reading/blank-speaking", "Play" and "Contradictory or congruous labeling" are exercised in the tales. As Khosronejad writes,

> Decentration is the inherent feature in many of these tales and since children naturally enjoy this ability of the mind, they take pleasure in their interaction with these tales. In his idea, the pleasure of children in reading the story comes from the influence that this reading exerts on inciting the inherent process of vacillation of mind between centration and decentration. (s.v. "Decentration" in Khazaie et al. forthcoming 1396 Š/2017)

In other words, decentration, as the most important feature of children's literature, focuses on cognitive process of mind to unravel the unification process among the writer, the text and the reader in contrast to defamiliarization which focuses on the text and is the feature of adult literature (Khosronejad, ibid.).

[20] In folktales, there is a variety of characters including smart men and women as well as silly men and women.
[21] In Iranian traditional culture it has been customary that the mother-in-law chooses the bride who fits the norms of the family.

While in *Rabelais and His World* Bakhtin applies his theory to adult literature, it seems that since folktales create a social atmosphere, his ideas can shed light on this type of folk literature, i.e., we might claim that Bakhtin's carnivalesque-grotesque displays the social side of decentration. "Carnival, as Bakhtin conceptualizes it, certainly involves having fun, but it is much more than enjoying oneself. It is a way of breaking down barriers, of overcoming power inequities and hierarchies, of reforming and renewing relationships both personal and institutional" (Shields 2007: 97).

In detecting the techniques of decentration, the major feature of deconstruction which is the slipperiness of the dichotomous binary oppositions such as wisdom/silliness is also used by the narrators. "Happy Ending", which is generally agreed to be a feature of children's literature, also proves to be in a state of suspension in this tale type and is not an absolute unchanging concept. In their quest for wise folks, the protagonists who return in despair, to use psychological terms, suffer from "Learned Helplessness"[22]; that is why they return, but their return is not a real one; they physically return but not mentally; they return because they have no other choice than bearing the fools around them. Reversibility is exercised in the tales but their mind, though changed, remain irreversible. Accordingly, here also a vacillation exhibits itself and deconstruction is at work.

In this regard, folktales as suitable materials for children's reading (Nikolajeva 1996: 15) and also as children's literature according to Khosronejad (Š1382/2003) prove to be a fruitful source for the study of human nature. Folktales represent man's endeavors to understand his own nature and the world at large. The art of intertextuality employed in constructing folktales, as well as the creativity of different generations in diverse cultures go hand in hand and shape the tales which convey deep thoughts in the simple language of folks. That is why a comparative analysis of folktales from different cultures proves to be more fruitful than just focusing on one individual culture. While each tale benefits from techniques of decentration, the comparative analysis paves the way for intertextual decentration. In the same vein, benefiting from different approaches is itself a decentrating, and in a Bakhtinian mode, liberating critical activity which opens new spaces for more research.

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Daleč od »Ob pamet spravljajoče množice«.
Primerjalna študija nekaterih perzijskih, angleških in nemških variant pravljic tipa ATU 1450

Davood Khazaie

Avtor raziskuje »neumnost« v pravljičnem tipu ATU 1450 »Pametna Elzi« ob primerjavi perzijskih, angleških in nemških variant tega pravljičnega tipa. Analizirane so predvsem pravljice: »Dīvanegān« (Ob pamet spravljajoča množica) iz »Sobhijevih Pravljic« (Sobhi's Tales), dalje »The Three Sillies« in »Jack Hannaford« iz angleških pravljic (Jacobs 2002: English Fairy Tales and More English Fairy Tales; ur. Donald Haase) ter »Die kluge Else« in »Die klugen Leute« iz pravljic bratov Grimm. V vseh teh variantah neumno dejanje iniciira zgodbo in – razen v primeru pravljice »Die kluge Else« – povzroči odhod glavnega junaka od doma, da bi videl, ali so ljudje drugod pametnejši kot člani njegove družine. Nazadnje junak ugotovi, da so po svetu ljudje še bolj neumni kot doma.

Vsak protagonist se odpravi na samostojno popotovanje, da bi našel pamet, toda na koncu se vsi vrnejo domov, razen v primeru variante Kermāni, ki jo je zapisal Lorimers – v tej zgodbi se protagonist odpravi v puščavo (Lorimers 1919: 159). Pripovedovalec poudarja modrost z decentriranjem dogajanja in satirično predstavitvijo neumnosti. Osrednjim osebam, ki opazujejo svet okoli sebe, se zdi neumnost kriterij za 'normalnost', medtem ko ‚biti pameten' med nespametnimi, nakazuje abnormalnost. Biti pameten v teh pravljicah pomeni isto, kot biti neumen: več kot človek ve, bolj je prizadet in več kot razume, bolj trpi. Te pravljice vzporejajo neumnost in modrost, da bi poudarile pomen modrosti.

Vsi obravnavani primeri se začenjajo s trivialnim dogodkom, ki ima v resničnem življenju stranski pomen, toda v zgodbi prevzame osrednji, obrobni ali ekscentrični center dogajanja. V perzijski varianti »Ob pamet spravljajoče množice« nas zadnji stavek pravljice, v katerem protagonist opozarja na nori svet, in vendarle raje izbere neumne člane svoje družine pred drugimi norci, za hip hipnotizira in nakaže sesutje strukture pravljice.