

THE FOOTPRINTS OF SHAHNAMEH IN WORLD LITERATURE: A REVIEW OF THE TWO NOVELS "PERSIAN GAMES" AND "THE LAST ILLUSION"

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Abstract: Shahnameh is one of the masterpieces of Persian literature and a document of Iranian identity. Iranians have devoted themselves to reading and rereading Shahnameh for centuries, and have given new and different interpretations of this magnificent work, and sometimes have revived the ancient themes of Shahnameh. This article aims to review the influence of Shahnameh on the novel "Al-A'ab al-Farsiyyah" by the Egyptian writer Ahmed Khaled Tawfik and the novel "The Last Illusion" by the Iranian-American writer Porochista Khakpour. In this regard, the grounds and reasons for the influence of Shahnameh on the two aforementioned works were analyzed and compared based on the approach of Rene Wellek and the French school of comparative literature. A review of the two aforementioned novels showed that despite some similarities between the two works, the major differences between them can be attributed to the different perspectives of their writers. The novel "Persian Games" is written from the perspective of an Egyptian physician who, by resorting to Shahnameh, portrays the past, history, and mythology of another nation (Iran) for the Egyptian people, while the novel "The Last Illusion" is written by an Iranian-born writer who seeks to recover her lost Iranian identity in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and build a bridge between her present and her past. Nevertheless, the influence of Shahnameh myths on two literary works of recent decades in two corners of the world is evidence of the dynamism and vitality of Shahnameh and the existence of universal moral and human values in this noble work that continues to inspire writers around the world.

Keywords: Shahnameh, World literature, "Persian Games", "The Last Illusion".

چکیده: شاهنامه یکی از شاهکارهای ادبیات فارسی و سند هویت ایرانی است. ایرانیان قرن‌ها به خواندن و بازخوانی شاهنامه دل سپرده‌اند و تفسیرهای نو و متفاوتی از این اثر عظیم ارائه داده‌اند و گاه درون‌مایه‌های کهن شاهنامه را احیا کرده‌اند. این مقاله با هدف بررسی تأثیر شاهنامه بر رمان «الألعاب الفارسیه» اثر نویسنده مصری، احمد خالد توفیق و رمان «آخرین فریب» اثر نویسنده ایرانی - آمریکایی، پوروچستا خاکپور نگاشته شده است. در این راستا، زمینه‌ها و دلایل تأثیرگذاری شاهنامه بر دو اثر مذکور بر اساس رویکرد رنه ولک و مکتب فرانسوی ادبیات تطبیقی تحلیل و مقایسه شده است. بررسی دو رمان مذکور نشان داد که علیرغم برخی شباهت‌ها میان دو اثر، تفاوت‌های عمده بین آن‌ها را می‌توان به تفاوت نگاه نویسندگانشان نسبت داد. رمان «بازی‌های فارسی» از منظر یک پزشک مصری نوشته شده که با تمسک به شاهنامه، گذشته و تاریخ و اسطوره‌های ملتی دیگر (ایران) را برای مردم مصر به تصویر می‌کشد، حال آنکه رمان «آخرین فریب» به قلم نویسنده‌ای ایرانی‌تبار است که در شاهنامه فردوسی به دنبال بازیابی هویت ایرانی از دست‌رفته‌اش است و می‌خواهد پلی بین حال و گذشته خود بزند. با این حال، تأثیر اسطوره‌های شاهنامه بر دو اثر ادبی از دو دهه اخیر در دو سوی جهان، گواهی بر پویایی و حیات شاهنامه و وجود ارزش‌های جهانی اخلاقی و انسانی در این اثر گران‌قدر است که همچنان الهام‌بخش نویسندگان سراسر جهان است.

کلیدواژه: شاهنامه، ادبیات جهان، «بازی‌های فارسی»، «آخرین فریب».

I. Introduction

Shahnameh is one of the masterpieces of Persian literature and a document of Iranian identity. Iranians have devoted themselves to reading and rereading Shahnameh for centuries, and have given new and different interpretations of this noble work, and sometimes have revived the ancient themes of Shahnameh. According to Lewis (2015), in every era and period, creative artists reread and recreate the enduring elements of poetry that are imprinted in the collective memory of humans, as well as the cultural and human values hidden in ancient poems. Of course, modern people's reading of a work such as Shahnameh is not the same as the interpretation of people of past centuries, but the literary foundation that Ferdowsi established will continue to inspire poets, writers, critics, politicians, historians, and other thinkers for centuries to come. There is much evidence of the influence of Shahnameh on other works of Persian literature (for

example, Seif, 2005; Ghobadi and Nouri, 2007). Much has also been said about the influence of Shahnameh on Western literature. William Jones was one of those who researched and translated Persian literary works for the East India Company and, by examining the text and vocabulary of the Shahnameh, realized the similarities between Indo-European languages. James Atkinson of Fort William College in Calcutta published his translation of the story of Rostam and Sohrab in 1814. James Russell Lowell (1819-1891) praised Shahnameh but lamented that not everyone paid attention to such works. Jones, Arnold, Jules Mole, Atkinson, Von Schock, and others all translated Persian literary works and adapted them, especially Shahnameh. People like Alexander Rogers played their cultural role in strengthening Western literature through Persian literature (Tamimdari, 2009).

One of the clearest examples of the influence of the Shahnameh on Western literature is the book "Sohrab

and *Rustum: An Episode* (1853) by Matthew Arnold. This work is an adaptation of the epic *Shahnameh* by Abul Qasim Ferdowsi. The story is about Sohrab, a Tartar hero who fights in a battle with Rustam, an Iranian commander, without knowing that he is his father. Rustam, who does not believe that he has a son, injures Sohrab in the battle, and the tragedy ends with Sohrab's death on the shores of the Oxus (Quds Sharifi, 2023).

The purpose of this article is to review the influence of *Shahnameh* on the novel "Al-A'ab al-Farsiyyah" (Persian Games) by the Egyptian writer Ahmed Khaled Tawfik and the novel "The Last Illusion" by the Iranian-American writer Porochista Khakpour. In this regard, the grounds and reasons for the influence of *Shahnameh* on the two mentioned works were analyzed through comparative analysis. This analysis is carried out with the approach of comparative literature and based on the French school of comparative literature. René Wellek, one of the most prominent representatives of the French school, stated in his book "Theory of Literature" that comparative literature in the French sense is not a literary comparison. It does not deal with criticism and analysis of a literary work; rather, it confines itself only to the external issues of the work, which are related to influence, impact, etc. In fact, "comparative literature" is like literature itself, and just as literature is a twin of man, comparative literature is also a twin of human thought and language (Wellek, 1986). In the French school of comparative literature, influences are studied in various aspects, as explained below:

a) Literary and non-literary influences

The notion of 'literary influence' emerged from comparative studies aimed at exploring the interconnections between two or more literary texts. Such analyses serve as a fundamental principle in the field of French comparative literature.

b) Direct and indirect influences

A 'direct influence' between two literary traditions, transcending geographical and linguistic barriers, is evident when there is tangible interaction among authors. In particular, a literary work cannot come into being without the writer's engagement with another author's original text or direct communication with that individual.

c) Positive or passive influences

The utilization of particular foreign literary sources by a national writer in the development of his own successful creations indicates that these sources exert a beneficial influence on him. In essence, the presence of certain elements in a writer's oeuvre is dependent on his engagement with the works of other authors. In this regard, the current analysis also focuses on the influence of *Shahnameh* on the novels under study. To this end,

we will examine to what extent the *Shahnameh* was influenced by literary essence (Wellek, 1986).

II. The Influence of *Shahnameh* on the Novel "Persian Games"

Ahmad Khaled Tawfik is a renowned Egyptian physician and writer, and the creator of more than two hundred literary works in Egyptian Arabic and Classical Arabic. He has been considered one of the pioneers of fictional and mythological novels in Egypt (Greenberg, 2018). The novel "Persian Games" is deeply influenced by the characters and events of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*. In this novel, famous characters of *Shahnameh* such as Rustam, Sohrab, Tahmina, Esfandiar, Zal, Rudابه, Gasham, Gordafriid, Rakhsh, Dive Sefid (white demon), Simorgh, and Qoqnoos are present. Also, in the style of postmodern stories, Ferdowsi and Ghaznavids play roles along with Rustam and Sohrab and take the story in the direction that the writer desires. The presence of various historical figures in different eras in a specific period is another prominent point of this novel. The technique of foreshadowing is also used in this novel, as the writer tells Ferdowsi about future events that are going to happen to him and what Mahmud Ghaznavi has planned for him. Another postmodern feature of the novel is the combination of modern elements, such as cars, trains, electricity, and industry, with traditional elements such as shields, horse fighting, swords, and all the elements present in the *Shahnameh*.

Ahmad Khaled Tawfik's imagination is a very complex and intricate one. Throughout the story, he emphasizes that everything the reader encounters in this novel is the result of imagination mixed with fantasy: "This is a fantasy story in which the rules of the game are irregularity... where the boundaries of imagination are simply its limitlessness" (p. 5).

All the events that are mentioned about Rustam and Sohrab, as well as the story of Ferdowsi and Mahmud Ghaznavi in *Shahnameh* and history, are mentioned in detail in this novel, and of course the writer has changed some parts of it according to his taste and desire to add to the attractiveness of the story. The more important point is that the author (who is an Arabic writer) did not make the changes in the characters and events of the story in order to change the identity and honor of the Iranians; rather, his descriptions of Rustam, Sohrab, and even Ferdowsi are admirable descriptions. In the following, we will examine examples of Ahmad Khaled Tawfik's references and descriptions of the characters of *Shahnameh*. In this novel, Simorgh is a bird that takes Zal under its care, but it is different in shape and structure from the Simorgh of *Shahnameh*: "The Simorgh is a giant bird with wings that resemble a peacock, but its head is a dog and its claws are a lion.

He lives where there is water... He had seen the destruction of the world three times before... And his knowledge spans several centuries... His advice was of particular importance. The Simorgh advised him to make a double-headed arrow to take out Esfandiar's eye, and this was how Rustam was able to defeat the rebel hero, but Rustam returned with so many wounds that he went to Simorgh to heal him and pull out the arrows with his beak... So he wiped his wounds with a feather dipped in milk. (p. 60).

It has also been said about Simorgh that "in this epic, the Phoenixes are very wise and, in addition to caring for children and giving birth, they gain a lot of information. However, bitter moments awaited Rustam. He was not created to enjoy victory at all." (p. 61)

Moreover, Rustam has a prominent presence in the novel of Tawfik. Tahmina tells Rustam about Rustam himself:

Tahmina said while arranging her hair: "I am a descendant of a leopard and a lion... But I know that you are not afraid of a leopard or a lion... In fact, you wrestled with a demon dragon... You are the hero of heroes... The symbol of Iran... The conqueror of the Turks... The son of the great falcon... The adopted son... Qoqnoos!" (p. 69)

Rustam is also mentioned in other parts of the novel:

Rustam, son of Zal, is a descendant of Iranian kings, grandson of "Sam", adopted son of Qoqnoos, and Rudabeh, daughter of the King of Kabul... It should be noted that Zal, the father of Rustam, is among the princes who were unable to ascend the throne, and there are many mentions of them in the Shahnameh. Among them are "Toos", son of "Nawzar", and "Esfandiar", son of "Garshasp" (p. 31).

Rustam was a great man... The hero of heroes, who defeated every dragon and lion. He became a victim of betrayal and jealousy. Poets from all over should sing his heroism, and Zabulistan should tear its clothes in mourning (p. 119).

The descriptions given in Tawfik's novel about Qoqnoos are inspired by the descriptions in Shahnameh:

Abir was panting for fear before he realized it, because the sky was dark. It was dark, and the sun was hidden. The terrifying Qoqnoos came down from above with red feathers and screams that would destroy your nerves before tearing your ears... Suddenly, Abir lost consciousness and had no choice but to do this. Qoqnoos wipes the head of Zal with her lips.. She was the one who raised Zal and her chicks. When Qoqnoos recovered, she returned him to his father.. The feather that Qoqnoos burned is a means of summoning him... Here we encounter a strange phenomenon in the Shahnameh: the phenomenon of Qoqnoos, who has a good labor... She takes action and begins to give birth in a way that the best gynecologist in history has not been

able to do like her.. Finally, the baby cried and screamed, then Qoqnoos dried his sweat and took a breath, and cleared his throat. This is how Qoqnoos raised Zal and saved the life of his son. Do you know who his son is? (p. 30)

In Khaled Tawfik's novel, the story of Rudabeh, the daughter of Mehrab, is also narrated:

"Abir first realized that her name was Rudabeh, a strange name but pleasant to the Iranians... Her father, Mehrab, was the king of Kabul, and her mother was a clever woman named Sindokht. There was a young warrior named Zal who proposed to Rudabeh. Rudabeh agreed, especially since Zal seemed to be a kind young man, but her father did not agree. That boy was a descendant of kings, but he was not a king himself; he was the adopted son of Qoqnoos... Imagine a groom proposing to your daughter, whom Qoqnoos had raised." (p. 29)

Gordafarid is a brave Iranian warrior and a female character from Shahnameh who is mentioned several times in the Egyptian novel:

Abir went to his room and looked for a horseman's uniform... A man's dusty clothes show the power of the sword, then he took an arrow from the box among the arrows. Abir carried a sword and a spear and mounted his horse... She is Gordafarid... the daughter of Hejir... the blood of anger flows in her veins... she feels that she can crush an army of thick-mustached men (p. 80).

Then Abir took out his arrows and fired... He shot one or two arrows at Sohrab's head... It occurred to Abir that the circumstances were strange... Since this lady is Sohrab's mother - according to what has already happened - in this case, she wants Sohrab to live, and since this lady is Gordafarid, in this case, she wants Sohrab to die... The arrows are fired at a speed... as if they were fired from an automatic rifle... (p. 82)

"In the morning, after finding Zanda's body, Sohrab monitored the Iranian camp... Beside Sohrab was his captive Hejir... Gordafarid's father... and he used him as a spy expert (p. 98)

Zal, Rustam's father, is also present in the Egyptian writer's novel:

There is this beautiful maid in Zal's house... Zal married her and had a son with her. She gave birth to the name "Shaqad" for him... This name must be extraordinary in Persian, so we will not comment on this... As soothsayers do in every place and time, their mission is to ruin the happiness of ordinary people, which is why the soothsayers told the great Zal that this Shaqad would be a scourge on his father's house... (p. 107)

Zabulistan, the birthplace of Rustam, is mentioned many times in Ahmad Tawfik's novel, which is inspired by the stories of Shahnameh:

"His voice trembled again, emotions made his voice tremble again, but it trembled at the right time and

place: "If you want war and bloodshed. Thus, you struggle to hang, so I may bring a Zabuli horseman wearing a Kabuli shield." (p. 44)

Esfandiar replied to Rustam: "I do not want a war in Zabulistan, I do not want a war between Iran and Kabul, my morality does not accept what you wish for, and what you said and believe in is not part of my religion." (p. 46)

Now King Keikavus asks Rustam for help... His men told him that only Rustam could protect Iran... So he wrote a letter to Rustam and sent a special messenger, ordering him not to delay, in a harsh tone that advised his son not to play around on the journey. The messenger arrived at Rustam in Zabulistan... The hero welcomed him and invited him to sit down... (p. 87)

That sad procession returned to Zabulistan with two bodies: Rustam's corpse and Rakhsh's body (p. 121)

The interesting point is that Ahmad Tawfik has, in several cases, brought the verses of *Shahnameh* in Persian and within the lines of the Arabic novel without providing the Arabic translation of the verses to the Arabic-speaking reader. It seems that by using this trick of translanguaging (mixing the signs of two languages in one text), he tried to familiarize the reader with the epic atmosphere of the Persian language and encourage them to read, translate, and understand the Persian verses. This claim is in line with the findings of Lee (2015). He examined how translanguaging operates in two visual art installations by the contemporary Chinese artist Xu Bing and reported that translanguaging is a resource for linguistic creativity in communication and for critical engagement with one's sociolinguistic or sociocultural conditions. In this sense, translanguaging is a device used in avant-garde literature. Further, Gupta discussed the linguistic, cultural, and stylistic effects of translanguaging used in Indian literary works, in which Indian writers portray their characters engaging in translanguaging as a way of 'Indianising' the English language. In this way, translanguaging is a path towards multicultural literature.

Regarding Ahmad Khaled Tawfik's background in Persian literature and his familiarity with *Shahnameh*, it can be said that Tawfik's stories occur in a fantasy, adventurous, and mythological atmosphere, among which the novels "Paranormal" and "Utopia" can be mentioned (Mirzaei and Sheikhi, 2023). This issue has led to the presentation of the epic themes of the *Shahnameh* in the novel "Persian Games". He became familiar with *Shahnameh* through one of his friends who was studying Persian literature, and explored this work, and finally made *Shahnameh* the subject of his novel:

"Honesty requires that I thank my dear friend, "Nayrin", the mother of "Omar". The civil registration officials confidently determined that her name was "Narmin"; we will also leave them alone. Nayrin is

currently working on her master's thesis in Persian literature. Two years ago, she presented me with a very short but effective research paper on literature, in which she drew on her studies in this field along with parts of the book "Stories in Persian Literature" written by Dr. Amin Abdul Majid Badavi, a professor of Persian literature at Ain Shams University. After this, I used a collection of sources and websites (about 20 sources) to complete this work (Introduction to the novel "Persian Games", p. 7). By utilizing the themes and characters of Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, Tawfik has been able to create a supernatural and fantasy work with a postmodern approach and has played a role in familiarizing the literary community and Arab-speaking readers with *Shahnameh* and Iranian mythology."

III. The Influence of *Shahnameh* on the Novel "The Last Illusion"

The novel "The Last Illusion" is the second adventurous novel by Poro-chista Khakpour, an Iranian-American novelist, which attracted the admiration of many critics in the United States. The story of this novel takes place in America between 2000 and 2001, and in this novel, the September 11 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Organization Twin Towers in New York are predicted with the trick of foreshadowing.

Foreshadowing is a literary trick that the author uses as a means to hint at or depict events that will happen in the future. If used correctly and at the right time, this trick helps to create a sense of suspense and dramatic tension in the readers. Foreshadowing creates certain expectations in the reader about the actions of the characters in the story or the course of events in the story. These expectations and predictions increase the appeal of reading a literary work for the reader and deepen the themes of the work, and also help readers better understand other literary themes of the story (Martinelli, 2020).

The first case of foreshadowing is narrated from the language of Asiyeh, a young and adventurous photographer who has made dead birds the subjects of her photographs and is convinced that an ominous event is about to occur in New York: So Khanoom did not need this horrible child like it needed her. She began calling it "White Demon," like one of those monsters of the *Shahnameh* myths who stalked the mountains Alborz and Damavand, challenging warriors. She refused to breast-feed and clothe the demon, and eventually she withdrew it from all the concerned eyes and voices who wanted to watch the old lady and her freak spawn endure this life (p. 9)

The second foreshadowing comes from the imagination of Silber, an old and famous New York magician who seeks to create an astonishing magic trick. First, he amazes his viewers with an astonishing flight, and then, with an interesting trick, makes the New York

World Trade Center disappear: He was supposed to be over that. And yet. But Zal had always justified it to Rhodes and others most simply: *who doesn't want to fly? Take the Wrights. Take Bran Silber! It's every man's dream. This isn't the result of me being a—* and he only mouthed the words, other people's words, words he could never get himself to own or even hit the air with in all their outrageously brazen odd audio—*"feral child."* (p. 43)

The imagination of the author of the novel "The Last Illusion" is a far-reaching imagination that is not limited to Silber or Asiyeh. Another manifestation of this imagination is the young man who has captivated them both. This young man, Zal, is the last child of Khanum, a young rural woman in Iran. Khanum is so frightened by her son's pale complexion that she names him "the white demon" and imprisons Zal in her birdcage. Zal grows up in the cage. His food is insects and bird food, and he sings and harmonizes with the birds around him by repeating their voices:

What he did know: the other birds, and maybe some God they believed in. What he could do: chirp, tweet, coo, shriek. He could squat and jump; flap his elbows and fingers in the air like wings; piss and shit, right there in his cage; peck at and bite into foods and water and consume them, but just in bits; sleep in that squat and perhaps even dream, but who could know but the birds (p. 11)

Khakpour herself mentions in the preface to the novel (Khakpour, 2014, Introduction) that her novel is inspired by one of the most famous stories in the Shahnameh, a mythological poem in which Zal's parents are frightened by his pale complexion and decide to abandon him on a mountaintop. A mythological bird takes care of Zal on that mountaintop:

One of the *Shahnameh's* most celebrated stories is the story of Zal. Saam, a great hero of ancient Persia, has a son, Zal, who is born an albino. The whiteness of the infant's skin horrifies his parents, so they abandon him on the highest point in Iran, Mount Damavand. He is discovered by an enormous bird, the mythical Simorgh, whose wingspan turns the entire sky black when she takes to flight (p. 6)

In the novel *The Last Illusion*, the bird that takes Zal under its care is not a mythical bird. He is Anthony Hendricks, an American psychologist and expert in the training of wild children. After learning about Zal's conditions in Iran through a documentary, he flies to Iran and takes him under his care. He takes Zal with him to America and trains him for years:

But the filmmaker did not imagine Hendricks meant he would care for the boy himself. In fact, when the papers reported that this American scientist, Hendricks, was adopting Zal, nobody believed it. They thought the home had simply paid him to take the kid, not the other way around (p. 15)

When Zal reaches a young age, he is still affected by the difficult past he has experienced. He continues to secretly eat bird food like insects. Zal is trying to analyze human relationships and learn the appropriate way to interact with the people around him. One of the strong temptations that has remained in him from the past and that he has not yet been able to overcome is the desire to fly, which is something he and the mythical Simorgh have in common:

Feeding. Zal had to admit that a runner-up to bird dreams was food dreams, but what foods—this he could not discuss. It was true that he had a sensitive digestive system and for years could tolerate only a bland diet of bread and rice and dull fruits and vegetables (bananas, potatoes), with no sauces or spices or sweets (p. 25).

Meanwhile, Zal meets Silber, an old magician, who promises Zal a trick to make him fly. But at the end of the show, Silber makes a young American blonde fly, leaving Zal in despair. This fascination with flying and birds leads Zal to meet Asiyeh, a young photographer who is taking pictures of dead birds on the street. That meeting is the beginning of a romantic relationship between Zal and Asiyeh. But Zal tells Asiyeh that he wants to return to his homeland, Iran, and this statement causes Asiyeh to despair and breaks her heart:

She told him to leave her. That she would go back to Iran, be with her family, get help there. But he did not, and she did not (p. 20)

Porochista Khakpour, the author of the novel, said in her interview (Khakpour, 2014, New Yorker website) that the novel "The Last Illusion" is composed of a combination of two main elements: myth and imagination. Her novel is inspired by one of the famous stories of the 60,000-line epic Shahnameh, in which Zal, due to his white complexion, withdraws from the royal family and grows with the help of a giant mythical bird called Simorgh. Khakpour's novel is, in fact, a modern re-reading of the epic story of Shahnameh:

My second novel, "The Last Illusion," is made up, quite simply, of two basic elements: myth plus imagination. It's based on a short tale within a fifty-thousand-couplet-long medieval Persian epic, "The Shahnameh: The Persian Book of Kings": the chronicle of Zal, a boy who was abandoned by his royal family, owing to his albino looks, and left to be raised by a colossal mythical bird, Simorgh (Khakpour, 2014, New Yorker website).

Khakpour says that she has always wanted to write about Shahnameh and that this interest has been formed in her since she heard the story of Zal from her father as a child. She and her family had recently immigrated to America, and Khakpour was trying to build a cultural bridge between her old world in Iran and their new life in America. When Porochista reads news

reports about wild children in the media, the image of Zal from Iranian mythology comes to her mind:

I had always wanted to write about Zal—since I first heard his story told by my father at bedtime. I was a child of six, a new immigrant to America from Iran, still trying to bridge the old world with the new and latching on to the ultimate outsider parable. But it wasn't until I stumbled on news reports of “real” feral children—which inevitably cause controversy, and which many people believe to be hoaxes—that I found a way to contextualize the Zal of legend, to make him a feral child of our world (Khakpour, 2014, New Yorker website).

Khakpour says that her greatest inspiration in writing and creating this novel is the longing for the homeland she left decades ago, without knowing it as it should be. For her, Zal is the embodiment of a human being who is alien because he is rootless. This sense of alienation has been felt and continues to be felt by many Iranian immigrants. Zal is not just an alien living in a distant land, but is also alien to being human and to his own identity. Immigrants are like that, too. The identity they claim for themselves is artificial:

I had lost a sense of myself, not only as an Iranian girl but as a human of any nationality. I simply could not come to a place of comfort within my own skin in America, and so my interior world became essential. This feeling colored the psyches of all the freaks and outsiders who populate “The Last Illusion”—character and story emerged organically out of an autobiographical anguish (Khakpour, 2014, New Yorker website).

Khakpour says that her parents always spoke of the glory and honor of ancient Iran. When people lose their ethnic and cultural identity, they seek refuge in the distant past and resort to myths such as Shahnameh to recover and search for it again. During all the sleepless nights that he read and reread the Shahnameh, Poro-chista's father always spoke of mythical people and associated his Iranian identity with them (ibid.).

By retelling the myth of the Shahnameh, Poro-chista Khakpour was able to establish a connection between her nostalgic past and the modern world in which she lives, creating a work that, according to Cable's analysis (2022), shows the social divisions in American society in the late 1990s and the dawn of the twentieth century. The influence of Shahnameh on Khakpour's novel reflects the inseparable connection between the identity of immigrant Iranians with their glorious past and the mythology of Shahnameh. In terms of the binaries proposed in the French school of comparative literature, we might postulate that the influence of Shahnameh on both Egyptian and American novels has been a literary influence. The novel “Persian Games” has imitated the characterization in Shahnameh. Many Shahnameh characters are present and play a role in this

novel. The plot of the novel, or the sequence of incidents and events, is also influenced by Shahnameh. The same events of Shahnameh are also narrated in this novel with trivial changes. The same themes and motifs are also apparent in “The Persian Games,” such as bravery, struggle with fate, love of homeland, etc.

The influence of Shahnameh on the novel “The Last Illusion” is both literary and non-literary. The characters of Zal, Khanum, and Anthony Hendricks have been created based on the Shahnameh Characters. The same themes and motifs are seen in the American novel, such as aristocracy, isolation, flight, and nostalgia for the past. The life of Zal in the novel is totally inspired by the life of Zal in Shahnameh. A prominent non-literary influence of Shahnameh is seen in the theme of homesickness and nostalgia for homeland, and also the crisis of identity experienced by Khakpour, which was the driving force of the novel.

The second binary proposed in the French school of comparative literature is direct vs. indirect influence. Both of the novels reviewed in the present study were directly influenced by Shahnameh. Ahmad Khaled Tawfik was himself a novelist and literary researcher and was familiar with Ferdowsi and Shahnameh. Poro-chista Khakpour, as an Iranian-American novelist, grew up with Shahnameh. Her father used to re-narrate the tales of Shahnameh to her at night. This is to say that their implementation of Shahnameh plot and themes in their works was quite conscious, intentional, and purposeful.

The third binary proposed in the French school of comparative literature is positive vs. passive influence. The utilization of particular foreign literary sources by a national writer in the development of his or her own successful creations indicates that these sources exert a beneficial influence on him or her. Ahmad Tawfik received a copy of Shahnameh tales from a friend, and my inspired by the themes of the work so that he decided to recreate these themes in a mythical and adventurous novel. On the other hand, Khakpour received a very positive impression of Shahnameh in the form of the childish tales narrated to her by her father. This good impression convinced her to bring Shahnameh themes into her works.

The above discussion shows that the influence of Shahnameh was mainly literary in that the themes, motifs, and plots of Shahnameh reappear in the Egyptian and American novels. This influence is direct, and the two novelists were directly exposed to Shahnameh, although Khakpour's exposure as an Iranian was much wider. Further, the influence of Shahnameh was active and positive as the two novelists received a positive impression of Shahnameh, and this motivated them to implement its themes and motifs in their mythical works.

In the novel “The Last Illusion”, Shahnameh tales are adapted to react to the sociocultural setting of the

American multicultural society. As Khakpour herself puts it, New York is a city full of tensions, and the magical literature in the United States is always attempting to foresee the upcoming disasters in American society:

I attempted a modern retelling, with my bird boy coming of age in New York in the Y2K to 9/11 era. This was the N.Y.C. of my own coming of age: a setting of gestating danger and unflinching tension, a time when the scope of neurotic magical thinking rivaled the enormity of actual impending disaster (Khakpour, 2014, New Yorker website).

Khakpour has deeply suffered from the negative attitudes of American people toward immigrants, and this xenophobia and the identity crisis caused by it have been effective in implementing the identity-forming elements of Shahnameh: On American playgrounds, one after another, I spent every spare moment hiding from the other children and filling my brain with stories to pass the time, as I had lost a sense of myself not only as an Iranian girl but as a human of any nationality. I simply could not come to a place of comfort within my own skin in America, and so my interior world became essential (Khakpour, 2014, New Yorker website).

Khanam, Rashid, and Ahmad (2022) believe that cultural trauma in American society is not only a Post 9/11 manifestation but even it existed in Pre 9/11 times, as America has been stumbling in chaos and uncertainties for so long. The American world in the novel "The Last Illusion" seems to be scary both in pre- and post 9/11 times. So, it seems that the social crisis in American society has played in role in creating novels like that. The painful life of Zal in this novel is easily comparable to the challenging life of the mythical Zal in Shahnameh.

IV. Conclusion

In this article, the footprints of Ferdowsi's Shahnameh in two modern novels of the last decades of the world were reviewed. These two novels were written in two corners of the world, one in Egypt and the other in the United States. The influence of Shahnameh on these two works is also different. The novel "Persian Games" is a work with a postmodern style that combines the traditional and mythological atmosphere of Shahnameh with the modern atmosphere and the achievements of a new civilization. The story of this novel takes place in a mythological atmosphere, and the characters of the novel travel to the world of myths. In contrast, the novel "The Last Illusion" is a fantasy and adventurous work whose main character is Zal, a representation of Zal from Shahnameh. It is as if Zal has been reborn and has traveled to the modern world and the society of the United States. In the novel "Persian Games", various characters from the Shahnameh are present and play roles in real life, but in

the novel "The Last Illusion", the only familiar name is Zal, whose story is a representation of the life of Zal from the Shahnameh. Of course, in this work, some other characters are also secretly reminiscent of the characters from Shahnameh: the character "Khanum", Zal's mother, is reminiscent of Zal's mother from Shahnameh, and Sam's wife. Anthony Hendricks, an American psychologist, is also reminiscent of Simorgh, who is assigned to raise Zal. Despite some similarities between the two novels in question, the main differences between the two works can be attributed to the different perspectives of their authors. The novel "Persian Games" is written from the perspective of an Egyptian physician, depicting the past, history, and mythology of another nation (Iran) for the Egyptian people, while the novel "The Last Illusion" is written by an Iranian-born writer who seeks to recover her lost Iranian identity in Ferdowsi's Shahnameh and build a bridge between her present and past. The two writers' backgrounds of familiarity with Persian literature and Shahnameh have also been different. Ahmad Khaled Tawfik, due to his literary interest and inclination towards mythological and adventurous themes, became familiar with Shahnameh through his friends and made it the subject of his novel, while Porochista Khakpour, as an Iranian-born writer, considers Shahnameh to be a manifestation of her childhood nostalgia. Nevertheless, the influence of Shahnameh mythology on the two literary works of recent decades in two corners of the world is evidence of the dynamism and vitality of Shahnameh and the existence of universal moral and human values in this noble work, which continues to inspire writers around the world. The novelty of the present study is that it explores the reception of Shahnameh from a new perspective. This influence was previously discussed in terms of the translations of Shahnameh into other languages. In some cases, Shahnameh was imitated and adapted to create mostly classic and epic literary works in western countries. The two novels reviewed in the present study have recreated Shahnameh themes and plots in modern fantasy and mythical novels, which is a quite novel approach and supports the idea that the themes and concerns developed in Shahnameh can surpass national and temporal borders. This study can open a new path in comparative literature studies that goes beyond the connections between classic writers and poets or the connections among modern authors. Comparative literature can trespass temporal and historical barriers, in addition to the geographical ones, and explore the direct and indirect influences of classic works of literature and art on the modern ones. In other words, classical works can be imitated, adapted, and recreated in modern settings to fulfill novel purposes and appeal to contemporary readers. This line of thought can open a new path of enquiry for comparative literature experts.

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