

**Iranian 1000-year-old short story**

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**Abstract:** Generally it is said that short story in Iran has begun by Yeki bud, yeki nabud (Once upon a time), penned by Jamalzadeh. Although this opinion seems to be true from the contemporary scholars' point of view, by studying the original story of Afshin and Bodelf in Tarikh-E Beyhaghi it is understood that Beyhaghi has selected the framework of telling stories in stories and has narrated the story in a way that owns all the features and elements of contemporary stories. This paper aims to display the artistic talent and writing capability of Beyhaghi in "Afshin and Bodelf" whose theme is "whilte lie." This story which has a realistic framework was accomplished by Beyhaghi and mediated by "Ismael Ben Shahab" and "Ahmed Ben Abi David" (Hero narrator). The overall story is moving deductively. In this drama-like story, there are two kinds of internal and external descriptions. One of the most important features of Afshin and Bodelf is its dramatic form. In the end, dear readers will find out that writing story in Iran is beyond imitation western contemporary stories and is as old as a millennium.

[Ayyoub Mansouri. **Iranian 1000-year-old short story.** *Life Sci J* 2012;9(4):1188-1193] (ISSN:1097-8135).  
<http://www.lifesciencesite.com>. 176

**Keywords:** short story, episode, theme, plot, angle of view, dramatic, hero, Ahmed, Afshin, Moetasim, scene, description

**1. Introduction**

Tarikh-E Beyhaghi is a unique historical work of Persian literature which is very important in many aspects, but it has not been comprehensively studied. The commitment of Abolfazl Dabir to true research and his detailed and inductive approach have made his work as a literary-historical masterpiece. We think that Tarikh-E Beyhaghi (*Truths and Lies* 1999) is like a novel in which different stories have been beautifully narrated and stories have been expressed within stories and have been displayed like attractive episodes one after the other. One of these episodes is the short story "Afshin and Bodelf." It should be noted that the equivalent term for "short story" in ancient literature is the term "anecdote" (Hekayat) which appears as an episode in the context of a long story and sometimes it is independent." (FAZILAT MAHMOOD, NAROOEI SEDIGHEH. 2012). Edgar Allan Poe who is one of the greatest short stories writers in the world literature and as important as Anton Chekhov, Ernest Hemingway, William A. Henry, Guy de Maupassant and etc., As the father of short story, has counted the following features for this kind of literary genre which he himself called prose tale:

- should be abridged enough to be read in half-to-two hours
- only talks about one issue
- have the same effect on the readers
- without additional terms that have no role in the story's impression or plan

- be perfect and comprehensive from the reader's point of view (Love, quoted from several sources)

Therefore, in this article it is attempted to study one of the factual stories of Tarikh-E Beyhaghi with regard to the features of modern short stories and thus to argue the existence of short stories in Iran in 1000 years ago.

**1.1. Text:**

Tarikh-E Beyhaghi covers certain historical events in detail in a narrative style and the author has applied narrative tool that is dialogue and theoretical and dramatic description. Beyhaghi was a realist historian and a political analyst who used explicit characterization (description by the narrator or one of the characters) and implicit characterization (description by action and behavior in fiction and displaying the habits and states) and also other elements of the story to express an allegorical or real story. Therefore, his work's narrative framework includes several structures or in other words it is a frame story which is a combination of core and long narratives and also short stories and episodes. In fact, these episodes, like the fact that speech brings speech, have been used like an example to analyze or explain a point or to convince the readers and to express historical events and their accuracy and to promote the overall action of a long story. The best example of this kind is the real story of Bubekr Hasiri and his son, and the story of Afshin and Bodelf is mentioned as an evidence to the saying "speech

brings speech,” so that at the end of Hasiri tale it is said: “... I have read a tale about the Caliph Moetasim which is similar to what I have narrated, but a bit more appalling, and I think it is necessary to be mentioned because the special book of history becomes more attractive with such events and the readers would enjoy it, since speech brings speech.” (Truths and Lies 1999). Unlike novels, in short stories it is not possible to describe characters entirely because of time and space limitations. Therefore there are one or at most two main characters in short stories. In short story “Afshin and Bodelf” there are three dynamic characters (Karami Mohammad Hossein 2011).

With regard to related explanations in this part, talent and writing capability of Beyhaghi in describing some elements of episode-like story “Afshin and Bodelf” will be displayed.

### 2.1. Theme:

The main theme of this story is “white lie” which prevents the murder of an innocent person; as mentioned before, this short narration approves of the main story that is the tale of “Abu Bakr Hasiri” and escape of his son and himself from the wrath of minister Ahmed Hassan Meimandi with mediation of “Bunasr Meshkan” chief of Epistle and deals with great leaders and government officials. (Truths and Lies 1999). Beginning of the story has a realistic setting. The main motive of the story is a telepathic feeling of anxiety or fear between two characters who are Moetasim, the round character and Ahmed Ebn ABi David, the protagonist. Although the main character of the story is described at the beginning of the story by Beyhaghi in a one-line statement which includes three sentences, the character of Ahmed, Moetasim and Afshin who are involved the most in the story, is processed inductively through their action and behavior; Antagonist with the help of Moetasim) achieves the ultimate goal (rescuing the innocent person from the hand of Afshin and his soldiers) after handling and fighting opposite forces. Then the story comes to an end with a natural falling and the reader feels relieved at the peak of anxiety. The most dynamic character, who tries to achieve the ultimate goal, is Ahmed Ebn Abi David. To clarify this issue, it’s better to summarize the story first:

Antagonist, a guy named Ahmed Ebn Abi Davis, vizier of Moetasim, Abbasid Caliph has insomnia a night; as he tries he cant go to sleep and he severely feels upset and nostalgic. He calls his servant and orders him to saddle his horse and the servant makes him aware of his inappropriate order; finally after going to the bathroom and washing his face and hands, he rides a donkey which was saddled and goes to the Caliph’s court. Amir who is intelligent asks

him, “Abi Abdellah why are you late? I’ve been waiting for you a long time (Truths and Lies 1999). After investigation, it becomes clear that the Caliph, has handed Abodelf (Arab commander) over to his Iranian commander, Afshin. The reason is Afshin’s demand from Caliph to take an old revenge and the caliph agrees in order to keep his promise related to defeating “Babak Khoramdin” by Afshin. Vizier makes the Caliph aware of the risks of this command. Caliph who finds he can’t do anything to change the situation resorts to his vizier and asks him to take measures to prevent Bodelf’s murdering. He goes to Afshin’s house frantically to beg him not to kill an innocent person. He can’t convince him to stop in spite of all begging, requests, contempt, promises and advice, kissing hands and bowing and planning to kiss his feet. Finally, he prevents Afshin from killing Bodelf by telling a white lie so that, if he kills innocent Bodelf, the Caliph would kill him and then he returns to the Caliph’s court. Then, Afshin goes to the court angrily to know about the reason and the truthfulness of the command quoted on behalf of Moetasim. Caliph, who is confused, approves of his vizier’s lying inevitably (although he was satisfied with the result from the bottom of his heart) and Afshin returns empty-handed. “Afshin left while his demand failed and his limbs dead.” And when Afshin returned, Moetasim asked: “Oh! Abi Abdellah why did you prefer to give an untrue message?” Ahmed Abi David says: “Oh Amir Al-Moemenin (Chief of the righteous), I don’t like to kill a Muslim and I will be rewarded and God will pardon me for telling a lie.” And refers to some verses from Quran and the prophet (peace be upon him) to approve of his own action. Moetasim laughs and says “What you did is quite right (Truths and Lies 1999). This story revolves around themes such as inequality in Arab and Ajam thoughts at the time of this historical event, unjustly bleeding, shaking ideas of Abbasid Caliphs (in the history) and more important, white lie which is a reminder of popular Persian proverb, “white lie is better than seditious truth.”

### 3.1. Point of view:

The story that happened in the past and ended is narrated by Beyhaghi, with two mediators “Ismael Ebn-E Shahab” and “Ahmed Ben Abi David,” a hero. This form of narration is called first person narration, since “in this form, the main character of the story tells his own story himself using “I,” which is not necessarily the author.” That is in this story; Ahmed Ebn-E Abi David who is the main character of the story narrates the story himself as: “One night I Woke up at Moetasim court. As I tried I couldn’t sleep and I felt upset and nostalgic. I called a servant ...” But the point is that Beyhaghi

narrates this story from the language of this hero, where he says at the beginning of the story: "I heard from Ahmed Ben Abi David" and since it is about history he has documented it as: "Ismael Shahab says I heard from Ahmed Ben Abi David \_ and this Ahmed was a man who was more magnificent than the viziers with the judge that he had ..." (Truths and Lies 1999). Therefore, the narrator is first person and at the same time the success of this hero, is the end of the story. The language of the story creates such a feeling that engages the mind very attractively. Physical movements of the narrator (Ahmed Ben Abi David) against the negative force of the story which represents the uncontrollable violence and ambition of antagonist (Afshin), narrator's modest supplication and his extraordinary request, protests and wonderful changes of the heroes' tone of voice keeps the text impenetrable to the end and engages the mind of the audience in this challenge.

In plot of the story, the arrangement of related situations near each other and the concentration of the reader on them is significant, because the lead to the formation of a whole in his mind to be united and form a single action. The first question which arises in early scenes is that "What has happened?" It is the concern of the hero narrator and then passes to another character of the story (Caliph), who is himself one of the causes of crisis and incidents in the story. Of course this crisis-making character becomes aware of his mistake and helps the protagonist to succeed. Since the matter is revealed (handing Bodelf over to Afshin to take a revenge) another important argument is raised which is asking about the "fate" of an important character of this story, Abodelf. This event and frequent actions of the narrator which is together with excitement, fear, and anxiety make the story very dynamic.

In this story, minor characters such as servant, Salam, the narrator accompanying forces, guards of Afshin's court, executioner, Moetasim's doorkeeper, etc. are not directing the audience's attention towards the most important aspects of major characters, each of them belong to their own status which, like the status of three main characters (Narrator, Afshin, and Abodelf), draw our attention to some consecutive questions. The overall movement of the story is from the part to the whole (inductive approach). Heroes are introduced and described mainly through their direct actions, except for some cases in which they are introduced by some people like the Caliph (introducing Afshin and Bodelf in second episode). This dramatic description which is idiomatically called implicit personification by the novelists is one of the strengths of the story.

Using short sentences in the text, especially from the beginning, creates a stressful atmosphere in

this story which is kept to the end of the story which is a natural falling, and the narrator's questions have made this atmosphere more exciting and stronger.

"style of this narrative story, is more similar to one kind of drama in which scenario is set by a speaker or writer based on a pre-determined adventure, and the term drama in Beyhaghi means such kind of narrative story." (Junejo Imran N.et.al.2008). In this drama-like short story, there are two kinds of description:

A. External description of characters and events B. Internal description of the heroes. Narrator-hero narrates most crucial parts of the story with monologue or struggling with himself or his own ideas or mind. The story lacks any introduction or background context and the main cause of the event – Afshin's malice towards Bodelf – is narrated by one of the main characters of the story (Caliph) who is himself a crisis-making character. The reason is that Beyhaghi didn't mean to write just a story, but he planned to extract heart of the matter from outdated tales. What sometimes makes the story similar to a drama is using a special language for the narrator (narrative) and the heroes (dialogue) and setting the scenes and displaying those behaviors in succession. One of the features of Afshin and Bodelf is its dramatic image ; because numerous scenes of this story created by Beyhaghi are ready to be converted to an attractive drama or short movie ; on the whole, there are 14 consecutive single scenes in this drama-like story including:

1. The scene of Ahmed Ben Abi David's discomfort after midnight and his dialogue with a servant named Salam
2. The continuance of his discomfort, his taking a bath and his order to the servants to saddle the horse
3. Going to the Caliph's court with a saddled donkey
4. Attending the court and asking for help from the doorkeeper and their dialogues
5. Ahmed's visiting and talking with Moetasim and planning to rescue Bodelf
6. Riding a horse from the Caliph's court to Afshin's court, asking for permission to enter and facing his doorkeepers
7. Visiting Afshin (the main part of the text) and wonderful dialogue and begging and request and changing the tone of voice from modesty to commanding
8. A short dialogue with Bodelf about his health and his companions' witness
9. Confused and hasty return to Moetasim's court, visiting the Caliph and expressing the events
10. Afshin's entering the court and arguing with Caliph and pretesting to his verdict and then returning

11. Caliph's calling on giving untrue message and Ahmed's response
12. Doorkeeper's going to Afshin's court to return abodelf
13. Returning home with Ahmed while keeping a distance
14. Bodelf's arriving at Ahmed's house and expressing his gratitude to Ahmed (end of the story)

Applying sentences which are suitable in different situations is very significant in this story; Narrator's discomfort and the main first person is expressed from the beginning of the story with very short affirmative sentences and the narrator's internal monologues. "One night at Moetasim era I woke up after midnight. As I tried, I couldn't go to sleep and I felt sad and nostalgic and I didn't understand the reason. I told myself what has happened. I called a servant who was always very close to me. His name is Salam, I ordered him to saddle the horse." (Truths and Lies 1999). Beyhaghi was able to narrate the slow passing of time with few narrative sentences very easily, while he narrates all the time that is needed for Vizier Ahmed (Protagonist) to reach to Caliph's court in detail using very short statements. Mentioning all events in detail in this setting in a short time and its description and explanation help this principle. Displaying these slow stressful moments is the pre-requirement for creating such an atmosphere and the author's favorite sense. Moreover, the scene is described objectively and "displaying" the "objective" and explicit action of the hero is another artistic advantage of this section. He said: "Oh! My Lord, it is midnight and tomorrow is not your turn, since the Caliph has said that you have to do certain task and you won't get any load and if another person is intended, it's not time to sit, I kept quiet and knew that he was right, but I felt discomfort and I was inspired that something had happened, I got up and called the servants loudly to light the candle, the I went to the bathroom and took a bath, I was worried to be on time, I put on clothes, and rode the donkey which was saddled and really I didn't know where I was going..." (Beyhaghi, pp.161,162). Detailed description and explanation of all the hero's actions, while raising expectations, contribute to introducing him and on the other hand express his modes. An important point here is the frequency of the verbs. These verbs, apparently do not answer the question which is raised in the mind of the hero and consequently in the mind of the reader so that they increase his stress; and this is the first writing art of Beyhaghi in this story. The story gradually moves faster since the time Ahmed goes to the Caliph's court. And since their visit it gets faster which is kept until the end of the story and even increases while

Ahmed is visiting Afshin. The talent of the author in this regard is that he has rarely used the conjunctive "and" so that the rhythm of the sentences is kept fast; "He said: welcome, it's open, get in. In I got, I saw Moetasim, hard thinking and doing nothing. I greeted him and he replied. He asked me, "Oh I Aba Abdillah, why are you late? I've been waiting for you a long time ... He said: "Don't you know what has happened?" "No," I said. He said: "We all belong to Him and we surely return to him. Sit down to hear." (Truths and Lies 1999).

In this scene the author expresses the occurred events through the language of one of the characters, Caliph, with a flash back and introduces to main characters, Afshin and Bodelf. Another important point in this story is using short sentences with reference verbs which have reverse effect so that it indicates a long duration of time with anxiety and stress specially when the effort to rescue the innocent accused is useless so that his status does not change at all as if nothing has been done. In this regard, the author describes the behavior of main character, Ahmed, in detail through his internal monologues, and narrates the scene of visiting Ahmed with Afshin so long by using the conjunctive "and" that it seems it lasted much longer time. Only through this way of narration the author can illustrate the real character of Afshin in a miserable scene and emphasize it and can keep it in the mind of the reader. "As Afshin saw me he got angry and his face got yellow and red from wrath and the arteries rose up from his neck. I waited patiently and read a Hadith to amuse him, so that he shouldn't tell the executioner to behead. Of course he didn't look at me, I stood up, I started to speak another way and began to admire Ajam ( Persians) and preferred Persians to Arab. For the sake of Bodelf to rescue him. And I heard nothing. I said: Oh Amir, I have come here to ask you to forgive him to me like a lord. He said angrily: I won't pardon him at all since grat Amir has handed him over to me. I kissed his shoulder again. It wasn't useful, I kissed his hand again he saw I was going to kneel down and kiss ..." (Truths and Lies 1999).

The plan or the arrangement of the events in the story is called plot which shows how and why the events happen in the story. On the other words, plot arranges and combines the events in the story so that it seems quite logical to the reader.... In fact, plot is the way of narrating events with emphasize on cause and effect which shows in every literary work the cause of every event and also the consequences of every event." Therefore the fourteen events are a plot to describe the events; and through direct dialogue between the characters the plot has developed. Regardless of internal monologue of the narrator, these dialogues begin by a character and are

interrupted by another one. This issue has made the atmosphere of the story very similar to drama: "As Afshin heard this matter, he was shocked and shaking and his limbs were dead and he said: Is this message really from our lord? I said: Yes, Have you ever heard that I'd ignore his commands? I called on my relatives to come. Thirty forty men appeared from different classes and ages. I told them: You are witness that I give the message of Amir Moetasim to this Amir Abolhassan Afshin.... Then I said: Oh, Ghasim! He said: yes? I said: Are you all right? He said: yes. I said: Are you Injured? He said: No." (Truths and Lies 1999). Mentioning the adverbs of manner in the dialogues of the characters such as "softly," "modestly," "Kindly," "hardly" helps their mental performance.

#### 4.1. Internal monologues:

Of the hero narrator have been mentioned sever times, which is another important point that offers necessary information about the scenes and characters and their narrative description; it also slows down the movement of the story. (). In the following example, the narrator's belief to Ajam (Persian) is expressed in his own self: "I preferred Ajam (Persian) to Arab although I knew it was a great sin just for the sake of Bodelf in order not to be murdered." (Truths and Lies 1999). Also the prose and diction and the style of these dialogues are remarkable which are appropriate to the heroes' era (their narrators). "Since the aim of dramatic speech is to say to be performed and as the nature of this kind of speech is the language of individuals who speak themselves, therefore it has a feature which is applied in daily life." (Dovsen, p.43). Therefore, the components of these dialogues are like the ordinary speech of the author's era, used by aristocrats. Another point which is related to drama techniques and this story is benefiting it is "suspense" which is created by raising a question in every scene and finding an answer to it in the following scene. (Dawson,S. W.1970). Therefor all scenes of this story have "rising" and "falling." This approach is more similar to a controllable internal voice (Corrigan Timothy. 2011) which is repeated like a motive and increases the emotional sense of the story:

I was thinking that I shouldn't arrive late so that they would bring Bodelf and kill him and everything would have gone (Narrator's internal question). Some questions raised in the mind of the reader with some stress which in fact attracts him to read the rest of the story are as the followings:

The forest herbs, which play important role for rural communities for example, the livestock totally dependent on them for fodder and as traditional medicines, have been hardly studied from

diversity standpoint (Singh and Singh 1987). Quantitative information on the forest floor species of the Central Himalaya region is generally lacking except for studies done by Rawat and Singh (1989), and Singh and Singh (1992). Interestingly, most of the recent major field experiments addressed questions relating to species diversity which has been carried out in grasslands. But forest herbs of the Himalayan region remain poorly studied. In the present study we investigate herb species richness (spermatophyte) in terms of taxonomical diversity and species composition in relation to oak and pine forests in Central Himalayan forests.

- Would the ideas of vizier Ahmed useful after consulting with the Caliph?
- What would be the Caliph's reaction to the lie of vizier Ahmed?
- What would be the Caliph's reaction to Afshin's protest?
- What would be the Caliph's response?
- What factor would inhibit Afshin from killing Bodelf?
- How would vizier Ahmed justify his lie?
- What would finally happen to Bodelf?

Another point is the questions which are raised in every scene of the story which suspends the reader and attracts him to continue reading the story to the end which is more due to the narrator's tone of voice and is called "dramatic irony." (Dawson,S. W.1970) The story of Afshin and Bodelf has the following features of short story apart from its comprehensive book of Tarikh-E Beyhaghi:

1. It has one main character. (Ahmed Ben Abi David)
2. This character is displayed in one main action.
3. It is a short story that according to Allen Poe can be read in one session (including 7 pages).
4. The falling of the story has the most prominent role (rescuing an innocent person from death).

If we compare all these distinctive features of this story, we conclude that: Afshin and Bodelf "is a short story in which the author illustrates a main character in an event through an organized and brief plot and this work on the whole induces a sinfle effect." (John Green. 1989). Since Beyhaghi has written a history not a story, the mentioned factors are not originated from his dreams but are due to the procedures that he has applied to make the story of history more impressive. He has taken advantage of making up and trimming speech which is Beyhaghi's exclusive art and distinguishes him from his era historians and even contemporary historians. Now with regard to these points and with reference to Allen Poe's point of view about short story, this section of Beyhaghi's book can be classified as a

short story and he can be called as one of the first authors of short story of Persian language.

#### **Acknowledgements**

Author is grateful to Farhangian University, for support to carry out this work.

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10/7/2012