

## Original Research Article

## A Study of the Carnival Components of Mikhail Bakhtin in Iranian Delightful Performances\*

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### Abstract

**Problem statement:** Carnivals are popular and folk festivals that are in contrast with formal and dry culture. In the carnival atmosphere, social classes are overthrown. Carnival challenges the laws and values of society by using tools such as criticism, satire, ridicule, and irony. Carnival stands in opposition to formal culture, disrupting the monolithic atmosphere and creating a polyphonic community with diverse conversations. Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975), an important theorist of the twentieth century in the field of literary criticism, with the theory of colloquial logic, created a new atmosphere in various fields, including literature. One of the main branches of this theory is carnival. The components of Bakhtin Carnival can also be examined in the category of drama. In the present study, the author intends to critique the delightful Iranian plays in the late Safavid and Qajar periods, citing evidence and examples, based on the ideas of the Bakhtin Carnival.

**Research objective:** The present study attempts to examine the relationship between this type of play with Bakhtin's views on carnival and the possibility of applying Bakhtin carnival theory in these plays by examining Iranian happy plays and structural and content analysis of these plays.

**Research method:** This study is descriptive-analytical. In this research, valid Iranian and non-Iranian sources (in the form of books, articles, notes, and conversations with experts in two categories of text and performance) were used.

**Conclusion:** Delightful performances in Iran a space as a carnival so that people, regardless of social class, come together and criticize the existing space in the official space of society with fun and happiness together. In freedom and equality, real dialogue is formed and the general public is liberated and calmed in a short period.

**Keywords:** *Carnivalism, Delightful performances, Mikhail Bakhtin, Conversational Logic.*

### Introduction

In medieval Europe, man faced two types of life: one: formal, monotonous, serious and disciplined

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life, full of religious fear and piety, and the other: carnival life, living in public places, free life and abandoned, full of joy, fearless of the law, and

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finally a life of insulting, slandering and polluting all that was called “sanctity” in that period. The first person who systematically used the carnival concept was the Russian scholar Mikhail Bakhtin. Carnival is one of the keywords - along with dialogism and Polyphony - associated with Mikhail Bakhtin. “For Bakhtin, the carnival is more than a protest in the modern sense of the word; carnival is a critical subculture whose rituals and customs question the prevailing morals and norms. Different backgrounds and forms, caricatures and ridicule are displayed and ridiculed” (Goldman et al., 2013, 162). The carnival that Bakhtin presents has components that can be explored in Iranian delightful performances. The cultural history of Iran in different periods has repeatedly witnessed performances that were performed by people in public places such as squares, markets, and even private homes. Due to the interest of the people and their place in popular culture, these plays were able to go through political ups and downs in Iran and reach their peak of prosperity in the late Safavid and Qajar periods. Such plays set man free from the shackles of existence and make his living space more happy and hopeful. In general, in Iran, most research is related to Bakhtin components in the field of novels and literary criticism, and such research in the field of drama is very limited. This study intends to study the Iranian merry plays based on the ideas of Bakhtin Carnival and to offer another reading based on the carnival theory of these plays. For this purpose, after describing Bakhtin’s theory of carnival, the descriptive-analytical method examines and analyzes these components in delightful performances to provide a thought-provoking result for future studies.

### Research methods

This study uses the descriptive-analytical method. In this research, valid Iranian and non-Iranian sources (in the form of books, articles, notes, and conversations with experts in two categories of text and performance) were used. This study draws upon the carnival theory of Bakhtin to examine

the components of this theory in Iranian delightful performances

### Research background

Reviewing the most important books, articles, and dissertations on drama and philosophy shows that no research has examined the components of Bakhtin’s theory of carnival in delightful performances. However, numerous examples can be found in other research areas related to this category. In Namvar Motlagh’s (2008) article “Bakhtin, Dialogue, Polyphony of the Pre-Textual Study of Bakhtinian Texts”, some of Bakhtin’s views about intertextuality are discussed.

### Bakhtin and Carnival

Carnival is a celebration or it can be said that it is a public parade in the street. In the dictionary of Dekhoda, carnival means caravan of happiness. Carnival in the social sciences is a subculture that opposes the official space and the ruling power and destroys it. The term carnival dates back to medieval European literature. The opportunity for a short-term liberation of the people at that time, which has gone away and with the progress of the play, had two meanings: The relationship between the actor and the spectator disappeared” (Ahmadi, 1991, 170).

Clark and Holquist (1984) trace the term carnival throughout history, arguing that it played a very important role in the lives of people in the Middle Ages. He described European life during the carnival as follows: “During the carnival, a uniqueness of time and place makes one feel that he is part of the community. At that time, he stops being himself. At this stage, through clothing and masks, a person changes the body and is renewed” (Clark & Holquist, 1984, 302).

Restrictions and hierarchies were usually temporarily lifted during the carnival. Music, dancing, and street performances were performed at banquets, and all the ordinary people and members of the upper class interacted (and sometimes played). The social class

distance was temporarily removed, and the poor could make fun of the rich, and the rich could dance with the poor. Laughter, sarcasm, and criticism of social laws and barriers were acceptable (Kolodziej-Smith, 2015, 86).

Bakhtin's meaning of carnival clearly reflects his experiences and understanding of Stalinism. Bakhtin first introduced the concept of carnival in Rabelais and his world. With a new reading of François Rabelais novels, he considered them to have the essence of carnival. The concept of carnival that Bakhtin seeks in Rabelais's works is very different from its current meaning. Today's carnivals are incomparable to the increased pleasure and crazy frenzy of past carnivals. Renaissance carnival culture suspends all hierarchical distinctions and prohibitions of people's lives (Ansari, 2005, 206). Those who take part in the carnival immerse themselves in endless ventures and joys. Bakhtin "defined carnival as the unrestrained world of humorous manifestations and forms that speaks against the serious and official tone of the ecclesiastical and feudal culture of the Middle Ages" (Makarik, 2006, 230). Bakhtin's study of the problems of Dostoevsky's art and his 1940 doctoral dissertation on Rabelais and his world contains constant reflections on the meanings of carnival images in literature. He explains the meaning of these carnival images by emphasizing their connection to a way of life. "Carnival belongs to the border between art and life. It is in fact life itself, but it is formed according to a certain pattern of play. In fact, the carnival does not know the lights of the stage. In the sense that it distinguishes between actors and spectators. It destroys the lights of the carnival scene, just as its absence spoils the theater, the carnival is not a show for people to watch; And everyone participates in it because the idea encompasses everyone" (Maccaw, 2016, 50). People's lives are framed by the formal culture, thus destroying the ruling ideology. In the Bakhtin's method and the carnival atmosphere, "laughter crushes the feeling of sanctity and fear of things, respect and humility towards them, and provides

us with the possibility of establishing a familiar relationship with them" (Namaghi & Makvand, 2013, 146) (Fig. 1).

In 'Author and hero in aesthetic activity' Bakhtin argues that a child who plays alone is not a theatrical figure until another person watches him: "A play becomes a performance when there is an audience. Here we are still dealing with the distinction between play and theater, but Bakhtin now insists that they need to be separated because only play brings spectators and actors together, and theater with (lights). Theatrical masters from the 1880s onwards argued in detail that the theater has been destroyed by stage lightening and that it is necessary to remove them" (Maccaw, 2016, 50-51). Throughout his career, Bakhtin used plays and theater as a means of expressing his thoughts on the novel. In his early versions, he compared the method of a writer and an author-actor. This is the only case in which he participates in the creative process of acting, and this interaction is in most parts of a novel device, to explain the creative process of the author. Bakhtin refers more to drama as one of the older genres alongside epic and lyrical, all of which have overtaken a multi-dimensional, open-structure novel. Although these references to the play as a fixed and old art form are very common, Bakhtin urges a theater student, to consider the difference between theater and the novel, and that both create meanings in the reader's or spectator's imagination (ibid., 2016, 27).



Fig. 1. "Carnival", by Lewis Eddie Cowler. Preserved at the Castella Museum, Hamburg. Source: Katritzky, 2006, 412.

The depth and importance of carnival culture were remarkable in the Middle Ages and the Renaissance. The endless world of forms and manifestations of laughter has challenged official culture, a serious religious and feudal tone. These effects, with all their diversity, have a unity of style and form the components and parts of the funny culture of the people, especially the single and indivisible culture of the carnival, which can be divided into three major categories:

- 1- Ritual and dramatic forms
- 2- Funny theological works
- 3- Different forms and types of familiar and rude words

These categories, all of which, despite their heterogeneity, show a single hilarious worldview, are interdependent, and blend in different ways (Goldman et al., 2013, 472).

## The basic components of losing carnival

### • Laugh

Creating laughter and humor against the dry atmosphere of the Middle Ages and its church was one of the main components of Bakhtin's carnival. In his study, Bakhtin found that "laughter in medieval popular culture was a tool for the triumph of ideas, images, and symbols of formal culture. Laughter was an attempt at sexual and physical satisfaction in a society that degraded the body. It was a moment of presence in the middle of nowhere representing a sign of the unofficial truth of the people" (*ibid.*). The truth is revealed by the comic elements and is itself the opposite of the lie. The rulers monopolized seriousness as well as organized violence. Rabelais's book states: "Laughter never entered the world of rulers and always remained a weapon in the hands of the people" (*ibid.*, 106). In fact, the laughter that is talked about has a different meaning from its general meaning. The laughter is not for ridiculing, but a kind of protest, irony, and criticism of the current situation. "Bakhtin usually seeks laughter in the culture of carnival and likes laughter that smells of revolt and chaos. This laughter has

these characteristics: it means abuse, it closes the gap and it is monopolized by the lower classes of society (Dezfulian & Baloo, 2010, 212). Laughter and jokes give freedom, freedom from shackles and what is imposed on a person. In fact, it can be a kind of spiritual discharge for human repression. Freud believes that "the self liberates what has been suppressed in the form of taboos by vulgarizing and slinging it in the form of jokes or other forms of humor and comedy, and in the form of internal tension. It also heals temporarily" (Ansari, 2005, 16).

Bakhtin always reminds us that during the celebration, people laugh at each other and do not take their position seriously. Carnival laughter is destructive, constructive, and critical. In fact, this laughter stands in front of the official culture and creates a space for criticism, so that it can be liberating and constructive. Bakhtin wrote about laughter: "Laughter is not the external form but the internal form of truth. It not only saves us from external censorship but above all from internal censorship. It forbids human from the fear of sanctity. "The past and the power that has been formed within it for thousands of years are removed. Laughter revives and stabilizes the material and physical principles. It opens the eye to everything new and the future" (Ahmadi, 1991, 106) (Fig. 2).

### • Utopian territory

One of the components of Bakhtin's carnival is the utopian realm. At the carnival, people enter the utopian realm of freedom, equality, and abundance. In Rabelais, Bakhtin showed that the ideal world of the common man at the end of the Middle Ages appeared in carnivals, street festivals, and folk songs, and that the material and earthly look that man could have, in contrast to mystical perception and Christian rule. The animal character of the people's culture, which was opposed by the rulers, was the ordinary human perception of freedom (Ahmadi, 1991, 105).

From Bakhtin's point of view, a carnival is a place to laugh and this laugh is full of freedom. Bakhtin

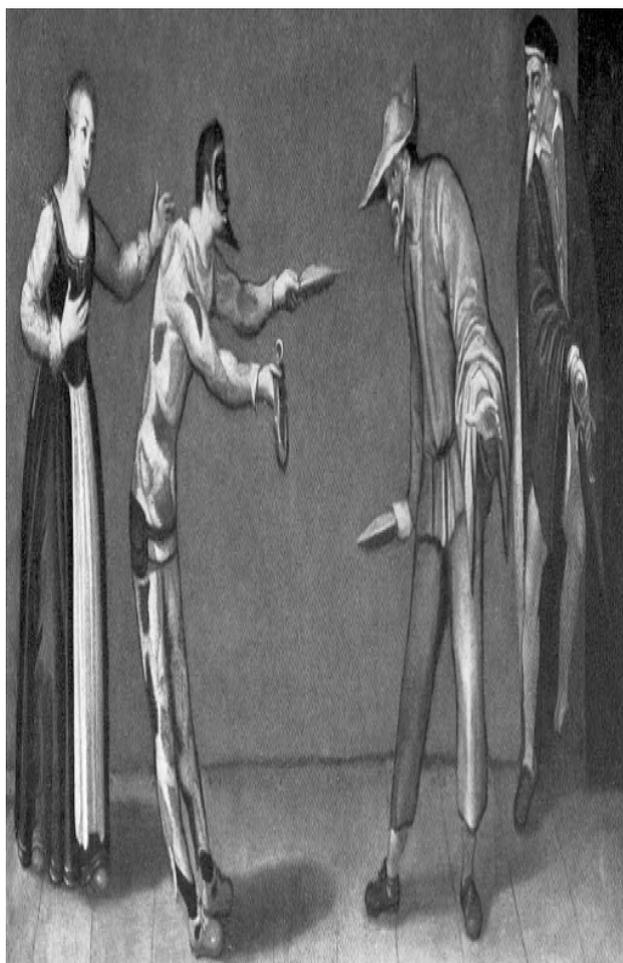


Fig. 2. The hilarious duel, Sebastian Work. Source: Katritzky, 2006, 389.

makes this statement in the Stalinist harsh conditions that prevail throughout the Soviet Union. “Carnival contains freedom and people feel free and liberated by wearing clothes and masks and can criticize all official ideologies” (Ansari, 2005, 218). This is the culmination of carnival freedom, and laughter does it; It liberates man. It can be deduced from these allusions that the people, whenever a dictatorship is in power, create a language for dialogue and liberation and a democratic atmosphere. A completely realistic atmosphere in which the imposed world mocks the ruler. Carnival did the same in the Middle Ages; Standing up to the formal, dry conditions of the church. When there is freedom and people are free from restraint, dialogue takes place. Polyphony versus monophony, a category that Bakhtin refers to in conversational logic. During the carnival, all forms of intimidation,

sanctification, piety, and etiquette associated with that structure are shattered, and everything that stands between people and their relationship to one another is removed. Free and intimate contact is established between people. People who were separated in normal life due to social, political, or religious barriers, establish free and intimate contact in the carnival square (Bakhtin, 2020, 346). This intimate contact leads to intimate communication and open conversations, and people talk and express themselves freely and without fear of the political, social, and religious structure. Equality and participation of all classes of people is another feature of an ideal society (Fig. 3).

• **Grotesque body**

Grotesque literally means ridiculous and it is a term that can be explored under the concept of carnival. From Bakhtin’s point of view, carnival literature is based on inversion ,excellence ,and knowledge, and the presence and influence of popular culture in literature” .This earthly and knowledgeable body has a wide presence in popular literature and plays an essential role .For this reason ,carnival literature is full of earthly symbols related to eating, sleeping, joking, and having fun” (Namvar Motlagh, 2008, 409). The most obvious features of grotesque, which are also considered by Bakhtin, are inconsistency ,exaggeration ,abnormality ,and



Fig. 3. Comedy performance, preserved in the City Museum, Bio, France. Source: <https://www.bayeuxmuseum.com/en>

at the same time creating laughter and fear (Fig. 4). The grotesque emphasizes the physical and material dimension and contrasts with medieval spirituality and asceticism. Bakhtin describes the carnival forms as dimensions of grotesque realism, as they emphasize reconstruction through humiliation and ridicule. In this way, the hierarchy of formal culture is transformed. The principle of grotesque realism from Bakhtin's point of view is contempt, to bring down all that is great and sublime and to turn all of them into a material level. Grotesque realism degrades and falls to the ground and transforms its subjects into bodies. (Ansari, 2005, 212).

Using grotesque ideas, Carnival introduces the human body as a grotesque body that is always growing and fertile. The body is in a state of constant experience of change. The grotesque carnival body is in contrast to the classical evolved body, which is embraced by its comprehensive culture. Formal culture and life are ridiculed at the carnival, and the official language is ridiculed. "The body, emphasized by grotesque realism, reflects a general tendency to blur social distinctions, and thus seeks to eliminate these distinctions not only at the class level but also between the actor and the spectator" (Makarik, 2006, 231). In grotesque realism, the physical material principle is the basis of all-encompassing work. It belongs to the people and opposes any isolation and self-absorption, an abstract character and an ideal that is separate and independent from worldly and material affairs. In fact, the transfer of all sublime things to the physical realm is a prominent feature of grotesque realism.

In carnival performances, the man returns to his existential basis and gets closer to himself. The grotesque body transcends its limitations by absorbing the material world and mingling with other beings. The world is placed inside man and the border between man and it is destroyed. Michael Gardner has an interesting interpretation of this relationship between carnality and carnival: The function of the carnival is to overthrow the alienation of man from nature created by the medieval hierarchical order

and to reconcile people with the world of nature (including human nature) and thereby bring it closer to man. Celebratory popular culture promises a better and happier future, characterized by material abundance, equality, and freedom (Gardiner, 2002, 59; Ansari, 2005, 215). In fact, Bakhtin intends to pull the grotesque out of the carnival and, in the face of the formal system, create a system in which everything is ridiculed and the values in which the system is important are discarded. This is grotesque and is the result of heterogeneous and contradictory feelings. Carnival becomes a place where people express their opposition to their government. It is a place where even their low and physical needs can be seen. The grotesque form of the carnival arouses the arrogance of innovation, enables the accumulation of opposites, and allows us to take a fresh look at the world. In fact, this dual confrontation of concepts also creates a third concept. We find out to what extent all conventional things are relative and another global possibility offers another structure (Baloo, Ahmadi & Khajeh Nokandeh, 2015, 71).

#### • Coronation / ousting of the monarchy

The most basic act of the carnival is the coronation and subsequent overthrow of the mocking king of the carnival. Bakhtin refers to the process of coronation/overthrow as a two-way tradition. "A tradition that describes the inevitability and at the same time the creative power of transformation and renewal, the happy relativity of all structures and systems and

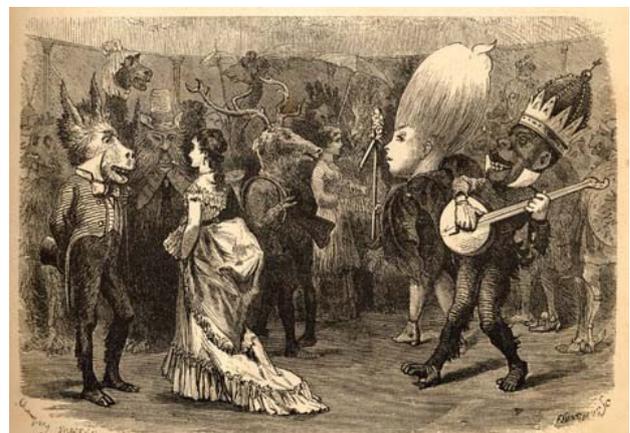


Fig. 4. "Happy and grotesque masks appear in the room", by James Wells Champani. Source: King, 1875, 43.

all powers and hierarchical positions” (Ramezani & Yazdani, 2015, 252). The main component of the carnival lies in this action; displacement and change, death and life. The two processes of coronation and dethronement are inseparable, they are dual and they are in transition to each other, and if they are separated, they lose their carnival meaning. Through the monarchy, a coronation appears and vice versa. Carnival itself celebrates change, not the thing that replaces it. In the act of coronation/dethronement, there are categories of carnival, which are: “free and intimate contact, unequal connections of carnival, desecration and the like” (Bakhtin, 2018, 351). In the carnival, everything that is considered transcendent is brought down and degraded. In the coronation and removal, the crown is removed from the king’s head and mocked, and that crown is placed on the head of a clown. The absolute and one-dimensional non-carnival world becomes a relative and dual carnival world.

#### • Mask/clown

In the Middle Ages, the garbage literature of society depicted three characters: stray, clown, and idiot. Bakhtin introduces these three characters in the carnival. Of course, it can be said that the most complete description of these characters is given by him in the article ‘Time Shapes and Chronotope’ in the novel. This article introduces the concept of chronotope. In fact, the relationship between time and space is called a chronotope. From Bakhtin’s point of view, these three characters can create their world and chronotope. Bakhtin discusses how these characters relate to public space and theater, both of which are carnival venues. With an alien and unfamiliar situation and different from the context of society, they have the privilege of being different (Williams, 2015, 109-110). These characters bring three things into the literature: a vital connection with the costumes and ornaments of the town square performances and with the mask of the popular spectator, the metaphorical nature of their identity, and the display of another kind of existence. These characters are related to the public square of the city,

which is a place where a large number of people travel, and also about the metaphorical identity of this character, it must be said that their existence has a direct meaning. Their actions and behavior must be understood metaphorically. These characters have no real existence outside of their role, and their existence is the same as the role they play. The privilege and right of “being other” in the world and the right not to be united with any of the existing groups of life are the characteristic features of these personalities. They can take advantage of all the desired situations, but only behind the mask (Bakhtin, 2008, 223-224). These masks communicate with people in a variety of ways, a privilege given to idiots so that they can communicate with the masses of people without conflict with life and with a clear accent. “Instead of a heavy and sad deception, the wanderer shows a pleasant and clever joke and seduction. The idiot also shows his selfless naivete and his honorable inability to understand. The clown is a combination of two characters, a stray and a fool. All three characters confront the customs of the traditions and they violate the principles to show their true self and life without limits” (Ramezani & Yazdani, 2015, 268) (Fig. 5).

#### Delightful performances

Performance in any land is rooted in the mirrors, customs, and religious rites of that land. In Iran, too, due to the ancient mirrors and ceremonies that existed, the play has been an integral part of people’s lives, even though it has not been widely possible. In every social and cultural situation, different types of plays have been formed in Iran. One of these genres has been fun shows. In his book “Play in Iran”, Bahram Beyzai portrays laughter and ridicule in Iran as follows: “In a country where the happy moments of most of the life are few, the ridiculous play, if it exists, is complex. The existing ridiculousness compensates for the bitter moments as much as possible, it throws itself into laziness, derision, and unrestrainedness, and this is a way leading to extravagance. He has to talk about his



Fig .5 .Comedy masks by the Tiber River ,private collection. Source: Katritzky.409, 2006 .

environment ,he has to cover his protesting face with a ridiculous face ,so here jokes and ridicule are often not a subtle means to soften life, on the contrary, it is a weapon; it is a means of revenge against what is a fixed, static, stagnant and bitter moment, and a cover for harsh and sometimes obscene criticism and ridicule” (Beyzai, 1965, 166). When it can not grow in a theater, people crystallize their art into other things like dancing and celebrating. Beyzai also acknowledges that, although it was not possible for the play to emerge widely in Iran, people transferred their artistic tastes from dances, ceremonies, and celebrations. In the pre-Islamic period of drama, in the dynasties of the Achaemenids, Parthians, and Sassanids, there were dances, plays, and delightful ceremonies and it was of special importance to the people and the court. The most brilliant period in the history of Iranian art before Islam can be seen in the Sassanid period.

In the Islamic era, as in the past, clowns were present in the king’s court and made the kings happy with their performances. From old times, in the court of some kings, there have been nobles who used to tell delightful tales and sometimes jokes to make the king

happy and talk to him in private. The importance of Nadim in the court has been so great that many of our great writers in the past have set limits and conditions for Nadim and have spoken about it in detail in their works. Khajeh Nizam al-Molk says in the policy letter: “Nadim should be a narrator and storyteller from humor and ancestor and he should remember many hadiths and always be kind and good-natured ... The author of Qaboosnameh while explaining Nadimi’s conditions He says that Nadim must be a joker and he remembers many ridiculous and rare novels, that Nadim was an unfinished rarity without anecdote (Forough, 2003, 149). The king’s nephews were generally revered, but some demeaned them to the clown level. Sometimes things that were not easy to say to the king, Nadiman expressed in a tone of humor and joke, and perhaps by this, they prevented the extremism of tyrannical kings. Mohammad Baqer Ansari, in an interview with Nusrat Karimi, a well-known figure in recent Iranian cinema and theater, has a thought-provoking view of the presence of a clown in the court of kings, in addition to the principle of entertainment. He says: “ Iranian society has been tyrannical for thousands of years; The class system was such that the king was in the first social class and after the aristocracy and ministers, the people were in the last social class. Every class or class position had to satisfy itself in a higher position in order not to endanger its position or to lose its life, so they tried as much as possible to falsely flatter others. On the other hand, the king at the top of the pyramid was aware that if the whole community was dissatisfied, there was a danger that the pyramid would be turned upside down by riots and riots, so he needed to be aware of his community. Normally, there was no party or newspaper at that time to convey the idea of Government and the consent of the people to the parties, so the kings found the antidote to this process, and that was the presence of the clown in the court. As much as he wants to say, this would also create a memory expansion for the king and all the truths would reach him” (Ansari, 2005, 43).

The clowns at the court played an important role in presenting the protests in humorous language. The kings learned about these things through clowns to be informed of the state of society and the feedback of their behavior in society. Some of these personalities have had a great impact on the growth and development of our performing arts, such as Kol Enayat (Safavid period), Karim Shirahaei (Qajar period), Ismail Bazzaz, and Shaghal al-Molk (Qajar period). Kol Enayat was Nadim and an actor in the court of Shah Abbas Kabir, whose name deserves attention in Safavid history. Jamalzadeh writes in *Hezar Bisheh*: “Kachel Enayat was a mockery of Shah Abbas’s court” (Jannati Ataiee, 1954, 54).

In his book, Chardin<sup>1</sup> also mentions the respect of the people of Isfahan and writes: “People consider him an extraordinary figure. He was Nadim Shah Abbas the Great. He was very sensitive, quick-moving, and intelligent. “Whenever he wanted, with a simple gesture of his body, he would make people laugh” (ibid., 54). In the Qajar period, the name of Karim Shirahei, the clown of Naser al-Din Shah, can be seen. With his astonishing tone and astonishing speed of transmission, and his sharp and innovative words, while pleasing the king, he sometimes asserted the right of the oppressed and expressed his objections in his own words. Apart from clowns, there were other ridiculers among the common people called Looti<sup>2</sup>. These people lived among the people and entertained them with their jokes and sometimes jokes, and they also spent their time. The most famous of these looties were Hossein Doodi, Sheikh Korna, Sheikh Shipoor, and Hassan Garbeh. In the late Safavid period, the imitation of the continuation of the ridicule was found among the wandering lotions, and it had longer stories and a more vocal aspect. At the end of the Safavid and Zandi periods, the groups of musicians and imitators remained in cities such as Isfahan and Shiraz and performed (Beyzai, 1965, 169).

Imitation is the most important play of the Qajar period. “Imitation was the result of the evolution of previous centuries, which was transmitted by clowns

(imitators, ridiculers, and ridiculers)” (Azhand, 2016, 198). From imitation, plays such as Baqal Bazi, Shabih-E Mozhek, and Siyah Bazi (Takht Houzi) are created. Of course, as mentioned earlier, imitation emerged from the late Safavid period through ridicule among the traveling Lotians, but in the Qajar period it took on a more independent form. “The term ‘imitation’ was used in the Qajar period against Western comedy, and in fact, it had a delightful and critical nature. Imitation plays were called imitators, and some of society’s idiots were among them, imitating the accent and characteristics of towns and villages, usually making people laugh in the context of a joyous play. And at the same time, they criticized and criticized some social behaviors and behaviors” (ibid., 220). To better understand the types of imitation, Bahram Beyzai has divided them into four categories: historical and mythological imitations, imitations related to daily life, imaginary imitations, quasi-moral imitations (Beyzai, 1965, 198-199).

In the variety of hilarious plays, the three plays are far more popular than the others: Baqal Bazi, Shabih-e Mozhek, and the bedside table. In the meantime, Takht Houzi is more popular than the other plays.

#### • Baqal Bazi

Baqal Bazi is a traditional, popular and Iranian delightful performance with a critical theme. The origin of this type of play dates back to the Safavid era and is similar to comedy in Western civilization. From the stories and games of imitation, “Baqal Bazi” was created, which was given an independent title. Such plays expanded and evolved in the mid-Qajar period. Baqal Bazi is one of the most famous plays of imitation, which has its roots in folk games and clowns of the Sassanid era. Its roots can also be traced to rituals, such as the Bernese shark and Mirnoroz, and dances performed by goat skins in the Safavid era. These plays were performed in this way; “He was a rich and stingy grocer, and perhaps went on Hajj, who usually had a lazy and forgetful servant, and as soon as this servant received and

carried out his master's orders in a different way, he created ridiculous situations. There is a second type of play Baqal Bazi, which has two main actors; He somehow managed to entertain the grocer and steal his yogurt; finally, when the grocer noticed the theft and caught him during a chase, the man in the sky poured the remaining yogurt on his head and face and fled" (*ibid.*, 170). In these plays, there was occasional sharp criticism of the aristocracy, and this aroused the public's interest in such plays. These plays were improvisational, so the government could hardly stop them, as there was no evidence.

#### • **Shabih-e Mozhek**

Shabih-e mozhek origin dates back to the late Qajar period when the presence of comedians in Taziye was exceptional, but in the meantime, the success of a black performer (named Ghanbar paved the way for more performances in this way. Siyah character also appeared in the sub-Taziye) (*ibid.*, 161-162).

Shabih-e mozhek is a Taziye with humorous elements that mocks the enemies of Islam and the Imams. The interference of the enemies of religion in these plays has led to the development of these performances. This both satisfied the people and allowed the religious scholars to perform the play (*ibid.*, 162).

#### • **Takht-Houzi (Siah Bazi)**

In the old days, boards and carpets were thrown on the pools of houses, and actors came on stage to perform the play, which is why this type of play was gradually called Takht Houzi. "The play of Takht Houzi is one of the original Iranian plays that has its roots in the Safavid era. "Insolent jokes made people laugh. It seems that these same idiots later gave way to Siyah" (*Azhand*, 1993, 91).

Flatbed plays also have the general meaning of blackmail. Imitations were performed by imitators at the court for the entertainment of the kings. Imitators, as representatives of the people, were also criticized. The thrones of the pools were also performed at the court at first, but gradually found their way to the houses of the nobility. The spread of the playlist game took place in houses in the

late Qajar period. "Ordinary people invited theater groups to their houses at celebrations and weddings and circumcision ceremonies. They covered the pools with boards and kilims and actors performed on them. This is how Siyah Bazi was also called Takht-Houzi" (*Azhand*, 2016, 271-270).

### **A study of the Carnival components in delightful performances**

#### • **Laughter / delightful performances**

Laughter in Iranian hilarious plays is also collective laughter and is reciprocal because it is critical and protesting at the same time as people laugh with it. "Laughter in delightful performances is the result of the collective harmony of the rituals, which also takes social contradictions as a natural necessity, and despite its bold and fearless embodiment and expression. It does not turn their existence into an unsolvable dilemma and that is why the spectator can laugh in complete peace and security, a laugh from the awareness of the emptiness of the world that guides Eastern thought" (*Haji Molla Ali*, 2018, 124). For example, in Baqal Bazi, it is observed that the lazy servant does not obey the orders of his master or does it wrong, which makes him laugh and happy, and at the same time focuses on the common fights that take place between The master and the servant were formed, the upper class was ridiculed. Baqal Bazi, on the other side of ridicule and laughter, in the heart of its semantic themes, brought a critical view of the people to the ways of ruling the court and the nobility of the Nasserite era In the shabih\_mozhek, mockery of the enemies of religion creates a single discourse between members of society and they become one voice, and public laughter, along with emptying the burden of anger in a ridiculous mockery of the enemies of religion, creates a single discourse between members of society and becomes one voice. Public laughter is formed along with the emptying of the burden of repressed anger.

In Takht Houzi, the black man, in the same irony that he makes, stands before him with sharp words and disobeys the orders of his master, and reflects on the

lives of the people of his time. A class system that people also hate. There are two sides to this laughter; one side of which is destructive and the other is constructive for the audience and the performer. From the point of view of the general structure of the play, Takht Houzi is based on the three axes of speech, movement, and music, and everything that causes laughter in the play relies on these elements. There are also tricks to make the characters laugh.

#### • Utopian realm / delightful performances

Delightful performances were also a place to break free from all the harsh social and political conditions that ruled the lives of ordinary people. Such plays used to be performed among the people and for the people, and the characters of the plays used to criticize the existing conditions. For example, in *Siyah Bazi* (Takht Houzi), we can mention *Siyah* character. “*Siyah* represents people who have a lot to say but have no place to tell them. Even if they find themselves in this situation, they do not know how to tell them. “The result is happiness, liberation, and freedom of the spectator” (Nemat Tavousi, 2015, 105).

Other examples include the famous clown Karim Shiraei Nasser al-Din Shah. He was the only clown who stood with full courage in front of the influential courtiers, and with his nasty words, he both secured the peace of the king and conveyed the injustices that were done to the people at that time (Nourbakhsh, 1968, 30-37).

Freedom of speech and expression in the form of humor and laughter was exercised in this way. This freedom and equality, however brief, provided an opportunity for people to experience together with an ideal society in which there was equality, freedom, and collective participation. In *Shabih-e-Mozhek*, the distance between the spectator and the actor disappeared, and a collective life was created around the Lez class distance. In these plays, the mourners defeated the enemies of religion by mocking them, and in this victory, the spectator was with them and participated. In an atmosphere of freedom and equality, real dialogue takes shape.

In the joyous ceremonies and performances of Iran, a collective atmosphere occurs. The conversation takes place. Exactly the opposite of the monopoly of the government. In the Safavid and Qajar periods, people are faced with this official and monolithic culture. People's voices are released in these plays, such as the bedside table, *Shabih-e Mozhek*, *Baqal*, and so on.

#### • Grotesque body / delightful performances

In the delightful performances, we also see such extremism, exaggeration, and inconsistencies that are also present in the grotesque carnival body. The characters of such plays are exaggerated in the type of behavior and speech, and there is a kind of deliberate extremism in their movements and type of performance. Extremes can be seen even in the kind of rude jokes from the language of these characters. One of the components of such plays, such as *The Throne*, is the satire and contempt of the values of the government system, which at the same time makes the audience laugh, but also expresses the opposition and the people's hatred of the ruling system.

Coronation / dethronement / delightful performances  
In examples of delightful performances such as *groceries* and *Siyah Bazi*, we see such shifts of power from ruler to people, from pilgrim to servant, and from master to servant. An example of a grocer named *Nowruz Ali Shah* can be mentioned that *Majid Rezvani* saw this play in 1923 in *Gorgan* and in his book *Dance and Play in Iran: a grocer and a servant named Nowruz Ali*. “*Nowruz Ali* is asleep and his snoring is loud. Suddenly his master appears and calls him: *Nowruz Ali*. But he is still asleep and snoring. After the grocer calls him many times *Nowruz Ali* finally wakes up. The master instructs him to water the horses. The servant says that you are only worried about your horses and you do not care at all that I drink water with the horses and as a result, my gums catch a cold and die. The servant says if you can stop yourself, I can not and he sleeps again” (Sadeghi, 1995, 390). As a result, the master becomes careless and does the work himself. This

issue is repeatedly formed between the master and the servant, and the master is confronted with insults, insults, and beatings from the servant, and he does things for the servant himself and promises to marry his daughter as well. He brought. In fact, we are facing a reversal and a shift in power here. The servant, like the common people who always submit to the lord and the ruler, revolts in this way and removes the crown from the authoritarian lord and takes back his position. This confrontation, while laughing at the audience, transforms his mind and creates a new and constructive way of thinking along with the destruction of the absolute and formal ideas that have gripped him. These kinds of situations can be seen in abundance by Siyah character, who in this way subdues and mocks the master through actions and words. Siyah represents the people who, under the pressure of the aristocracy and the official government, are unable to protest. He speaks in protest and shows them a new face of the situation behind the joke.

#### • Mask (clown) /delightful performances

In the delightful plays of Iran, one of the examples of the court-to-play confrontation can be found in the play *The Court Clowns*. One of the important functions of court clowns, in addition to laughing and entertaining, was to tell facts and object to the actions of the aristocracy. “ These clowns, as a channel of communication with the king, reported to him the information and actions of the courtiers. These reports included the performance of courtiers, the king’s extravagance, and the cruelty of the king’s relatives to the people in government affairs (Alizadeh Birjandi & Naseri, 2016, 75-76).

The crystallization of all these themes can be seen in the presence of the grocer in the presence of Karim Shiraei. In the book *Karim Shirah* by Hossein Nourbakhsh, it is stated that on the night of Nowruz, at the same time with the birth of Naser al-Din Shah, a *Baqal Bazi* was performed in the presence of Karim Shirah and his comrades in front of the Shah and hundreds of others. Karim Shiraei with a very long felt hat on his head, a torn robe, with a beard

and mustache made of fleece, a face that he bleached with flour and rode on a donkey, and his servants followed him. The show begins with Karim singing and playing. In his role, Karim also takes Khalati from Nasreddin And Naser al-Din Shah gives him the title of Dushab al-Mulk, and then he tells the story of the progress of some of the men of that era in the most explicit and frank words, in a ridiculous and exceptional way. Whoever uttered these words except him, his death was certain (Nourbakhsh, 1968, 41-42).

In *Shabih-E Mozhek*, negative characters with deformed faces and even horned demons are not seen. Their movements are more funny than scary. This contrast between the scary mask and the ridiculous gestures makes you laugh (Fig. 6).



Fig. 6. Four examples of Shabih-E Mozhek faces. Preserved in the Museum of Anthropology. Source: Beyzai, 1965, 164.

The characters in Takht Houzi were pre-arranged stereotypes, and this is an important point. The term “cover” was even used for these characters, meaning that there was a distance between themselves and the role. For example, Shahpoosh, Wazirpoosh, Hajipoosh. Siyah of Takht Houzi, with the black color on his face, could get separated from himself and do whatever he wanted in this role. With freedom and ease, anyone who wanted to mock and criticize him.

abnormality, and at the same time creating laughter and fear (Fig. 2). The grotesque emphasizes the physical and material dimension and contrasts with medieval spirituality and asceticism. Bakhtin describes the carnival forms as dimensions of grotesque realism, as they emphasize reconstruction through humiliation and ridicule. In this way, the hierarchy of formal culture is transformed.

Bakhtin is considered an important theorist of the twentieth century. In his view, the carnival is collective, and people are not just a crowd, They are seen as a whole. This feature is also quite evident in delightful performances, and there is a two-way relationship between the spectator and the performer, which plays a key role in the evolution of the performance. The next issue is the protest against the existing social and political conditions, which is formed in the carnival considered by Bakhtin in such a way as to challenge the economic-political organization. delightful performances, these protests are expressed through the characters. Laughter in the carnival debate is two-sided. This laughter creates fun and joy and mocks the current situation to make people understand that everything that is imposed on them by force must be destroyed through ridicule. This laughter breaks people’s spirits in difficult living conditions. Iranian delightful performances in the late Safavid and Qajar periods as a carnival shattered the official culture of that time and provided a space for people regardless of social class to come together and create an equal and free space, albeit short. The performers of such plays, in addition to creating an entertaining and happy

atmosphere for the spectators, as their representative, could criticize the atmosphere in the society without fear, freely and in a humorous context. It can be said that Iranian delightful plays were joyous carnivals that were performed among the people and for the common people, and along with laughter, satire, and mockery, and they were the language of protest of ordinary people in their time.

## Endnotes

1. Jean Chardin is a French tourist whose 10-volume book entitled Chardin’s Travels in Persia is one of the best Western scholars’ works on Iran and the Middle East. This book was translated by Mohammad Abbasi and published for the first time by Amirkabir Publications in 1976.
2. Looti in Dehkhoda dictionary means someone who makes goats, monkeys ,and bears dance and recites ugly poems .The term refers to dancers and musicians who performed in the Safavid and Qajar periods and made people laugh and rejoice.

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