



Comparative Study of “From 7 O’clock to 9:30” by Na-albandian and “Erostratus” by Sartre by Applying Bakhtinian Dialogism

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Abstract

The present study is conducted to compare ‘From 7 o’clock to 9:30’ by Abbas Na-albandian and ‘Erostratus’ by Jean-Paul Sartre based on Bakhtin’s intertextual approach with an eye on Bakhtin’s notion of dialogic imagination. Bakhtin in his approach focuses on the text, rather than the author, and that is why the approach is so demanding at present time. Also his dialogism refers to the fact that the various languages which stratify any single language are in dialogue with one another. So that a work of art is in relationship with other works of art. The aim here is to see if there is this kind of relationship between the mentioned works which are from two different cultures and languages as the major components of culture, namely Persian and French. The co-relational analysis of the short stories indicates a significant relationship between them in the realms of plot, setting, characteristics, theme, etc. Therefore, the applicability of Bakhtin’s approach is emphasized through the resulted similarities which do exist in the mentioned works.

Keywords: Dialogism, Inter-Textuality, Comparative Literature, Jean-Paul Sartre, Abbas Na-albandian, and Bakhtin

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Introduction

Recent years have seen an enormous growth of interest in doing intertextual analysis throughout the world. Giving reference to other literary works which in this sense is called intertextuality is a galaxy of ways to accommodate a work with multiple works (Abrams & Harpham, 2009, p. 64). When a text has references to other texts, its scene becomes wider and wider because in such a condition readers face not only a single work, but many different works. This makes a literary text so much beautiful and glorious.

The researchers are analyzing various fictional works from different cultures and languages, and also work from the same language. This interest has been motivated to a considerable extent by the fact that similarity and also intertextual relationships between works of art are important aspects of the literary criticism of the 21th century.

One of the great proponents of the intertextual approach in criticism is Bakhtin whose related main theory is called 'dialogism'. Bakhtin in his well-known books, such as *The Dialogic Imagination* and *Problems of Dostoyevsky's Poetics*, has discussed and developed his notions of dialogic imagination. As one reads in these two books, he finds out that the notion of dialogism is a vast and complex undertaking. He believes that every single word that appears on a paper depends on different aspects: historical, social, cultural, political, and so on.

Holquist (1990) in his famous book *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* states that polyphony in the novel which is concerning dialogism in Bakhtin's theory does not just refer to what one realizes from reading his books. Accordingly, it shows that every single word is for itself a world. Every word refers to various things: told and written. So, it is not just telling. When we talk about dialogism we have to find the word's bounding to social, historical, and cultural aspects. Also, Todorov's (1985) book on *Dialogism and Bakhtin* has the same atmosphere. Therefore, these two books are used for discussing Bakhtinian dialogism.

Bakhtin/Voloshinov (1986) also believes that no utterance or work is independent. For this sense, they coined a new word that is 'monumental' (p. 17). For instance, when someone utters a word, it is stated previously and is not his totally.

In this regard the present study by the use of dialogism compares two great short stories from two great writers. The stories are "From 7 O'clock to 9:30" and "Erostratus" by Persian Abbas Na-albandian (2010) and French Jean-Paul Sartre (1969), respectively. It is important to know that Abbas Na-albandian in his short story highly refers to the story of Jean-Paul Sartre. Na-albandian is one of the Persian contemporary authors who is highly ignored. For this reason, speaking about

his biography is too much like hard work, because there is not any special book concerning his biography. Only in a book named *Others of Na-albandian* written and gathered by Javad Atefeh and Atefeh Pakbaznia (2015) one grasps some basic information from the mouth of his friends and fellow workers. In this book, it is stated: “Even his close friends did not know him very well” (p. 13).

Ajand in a part of the book writes:

Abbas Na-albandian (1947–1989, Tehran) passed elementary school in Tehran at Adib Elementary school and got his Diploma from Hakim High-school. When he was a child worked in the newsstand of his father. He did his homework while selling newspaper and in spare time would read newspapers, magazines, and books. He started writing short stories and drama since he was eighteen. He was twenty-one when his first drama was produced to be on stage... In the last months of 1978 he was arrested and after a few months was released. He lost his job in Kargah-e Namayesh, so he became hopeless and isolated. This condition continued for him up to the year 1989, when he committed suicide (Atefeh, pp. 21-22).

His “From 7 O’clock to 9:30” is about a man named Sad Sad Mim who whirls in the streets to find someone to murder. After encountering various people from different social levels he finds no one. Therefore he hangs himself up and ends his life.

The other writer, the so called Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-80), was a French philosopher, novelist, playwright, literary critic, and political activist. He was the principal exponent of existentialism in France, and exercised a considerable influence on French intellectual life in the decades following the second world war.... After the war, he devoted himself exclusively to writing and, with varying degrees of intensity, to the pursuit of socialist political objectives. Through the great range of his creative and critical energies, his personal involvement in many of the important issues of freedom, commitment, and moral responsibility, he appealed to a wide range of audience for his ideas. He made important contributions in many areas.... [In] 1964 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature [but he did not accept it, and claimed that it was because of political issues which this prize is involved in]” (Drabble, 2000, pp.896-897)

“Erostratus” by Jean-Paul Sartre is about a man who decided to kill someone in the street and get back home to commit suicide, but after killing a fat man instead of getting back home he escapes and hides in a restroom and gives up.

The aim of this article is to see if there is a kind relationship between the mentioned works which are from two different cultures and languages as the major components of culture, namely Persian and French. This study examines the co-relation between the short stories to indicate a significant relationship between them

in the realms of plot, setting, characteristics, theme, etc. This study intends to apply Bakhtin's notion of dialogism to these works to emphasize the similarities which do exist in the mentioned works.

Review of Literature

Unfortunately, critical and analytical analysis on Na-albandian's short stories ceases to bear a promising result. Most of them are about his plays as if he had not written any fiction (*A great and Huge and New Research in Fossil is of 25th Era or 14th, 20th and So On Doesn't Matter*, 1969; *If Faust would do a Favor*, 1969; *Heramsa 709, 705*, 1977).

Javad Atefeh and Pakbaznia (2015) decided to work on Na-albandian's works a few years ago. The result of their study has been a book named *Others of Na-albandian* which mostly contains some notes and memories about Na-albandian himself and his plays. Actually, some parts of *Others of Na-albandian* is about Na-albandian's fictions, however, that, all in all, there are about 10 to 15 lines of the book about "From 7 O'clock to 9:30". Biniiaz's note (Atefeh, 2015, p. 103) in this book is completely on *Vesal Dar Vadi Haftom* which is a novella and Nosrati's note (Atefeh, 2015, p. 361) is on this novella, as well. In this book, about 15 lines of Mahzadeh's note (Atefeh, 2015, p. 321) is on the story of "From 7 O'clock to 9:30" which will be discussed in this research.

Also, Hasheminejad (2013) in one of his books allocates a chapter to Na-albandian, but he just talks about the performance of one of his plays which was done in Shiraz years ago. He does not write anything about his stories.

For the story of Jean-Paul Sartre and also his own philosophy and beliefs there are so many works; such as, books, articles, theses and so on. Also, Sartre himself in one of his books named *Words* (1964) discusses his biography and his intentions of writing this story. In his another book entitled *What Is Literature?* (1950), Sartre writes about the responsibility of authors. In other books, such as Christine Daigle's book entitled *Jean-Paul Sartre (2010)*, some of Sartre's ideas and beliefs are discussed.

For Bakhtinian dialogism, there are several books and theses. In these works, its different aspects are analyzed. The most important studies which are much close to this paper's aim are *Mikhail Bakhtin: The Dialogical Principle* (Todorov, 1985) and *Dialogism: Bakhtin and His World* (1990).

Methodology

This research is a comparative study of two short stories from Persian literature and French Literature in which there seems to be overlapping elements. For doing this,

the researcher will use Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of dialogic imagination (1981). The stories are "From 7 O'clock to 9:30" and "Erostratus" by Abbas Na-albandian and Jean-Paul Sartre. In order to do the comparison, Mikhail Bakhtin's notion of 'dialogism' is chosen as the base theory. So first different structural elements of the two stories are analyzed separately, then compared to each other to find out how much they are interrelated and in what ways.

Discussion

According to Habib, dialogism and heteroglossia discuss that into every unitary language, several languages are in dialogue with each other (2005, pp. 611-612). Also, as Bakhtin states no text can be independent (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 1981, p. 274), or what Habib says Minerva-like (2005, p. 612). Therefore, for each text there are backgrounds; in *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin talks of social background highly. That is what one can get from heteroglossia exactly. Also, as mentioned in previous chapter, each word in itself has both meaning and theme, and there is a relationship between these two. Bakhtin contends that theme is a dynamic system of signs, but meaning is the technical apparatus for the theme (*Marxism and the Philosophy*, 1986, p. 100). Therefore, in analyzing a work of art or every text, one must pay attention to both meaning and theme. Now, one knows that theme somehow depends on meaning, because the existence of meaning paves the way for existence of theme (*Marxism and the Philosophy*, 1986, p.100).

Chronotope

The first thing that in this paper will be analyzed, is the chronotope of the stories. Chronotope is the time/space of each work of art. Bakhtin himself states that it is a concept that engages reality. He believed that there is a connectedness between time and space in each work (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 1981, p. 84).

Na-albandian's story "From 7 O'clock to 9:30" happens in two hours and a half. It is one of the biggest significance of the story. This story is segmented into thirteen parts. The narrator of the story which is an omniscient third person knows every things in character's mind: "Other memories also came into the mind of Mr. Sad. Sad. Mim. A woman who by help of her brother had murdered her husband" (p. 2). The narrator tells us the exact time of the happenings. He/she says at seven o'clock he is at home (p. 1). Therefore, here the readers understand that the narrator starts his/her narration from seven o'clock which is a sacred number for both Muslims and Christians.

This telling exact time in the story, as one sees, is totally meaningless to the story. Actually, Na-albandian, by doing this, is portraying the meaninglessness of the character's life. In the first part, which is a sacred time, one reads that he is going home from work. In that time, he desires to kill someone. One can easily realize that

this is his everyday routine to go home at a specific time from work. This everyday routine is what has made his life hollow and meaningless. Therefore, for showing the hollowness or meaninglessness of his life, telling the exact moments is a good tool.

Another important part of the story is its last part: part thirteen which happens at nine thirty. Here in the thirteenth part, the readers realize the beautiful and complex play of numbers three and nine. Three times three equals nine. So, one can understand the repetition of three which is another mysterious number between people. Christians believe in trinity: three powers. And here, again we see a sacred and holy number against a number which in religions and people's beliefs is regarded as a number with bad omen (a number which brings bad luck).

The main actions of the story happens in the streets. That is, it occurs in the streets which he is looking for someone to murder, and he imagines murdering people. Streets are full of people who by each other make the society. Therefore, here the readers discover the essential role of society in the story and decisions of the main character. When he is walking or driving in the streets, he encounters different people from different social groups. A prostitute (p. 11), a religious man (p. 9), some poor vendors (p. 7), and a friend of him Mr. Malek who probably is like him (pp. 7-10).

In Sartre's story, the concept of time/space is different, however, there are similarities between them. For example, "Erostratus" is not segmented into several parts, and it does not happen in a single day. It happens in several days. The narrator extends the period of the story by telling his memories about the dead man (*The Wall*, 1969, p. 41), his girlfriend (*The Wall*, 1969, p. 43), and the prostitute (*The Wall*, 1969, pp. 43-44). Therefore, by not telling even the exact day of beginning, Sartre makes the reader believe that it is not merely for today, it started from days, months, or even years ago; or maybe centuries ago. The day he decides to kill Tsar is a Monday at his work (*The Wall*, 1969, p. 46). His desire to kill Tsar is to become famous for ages like Erostratus. By telling the name of Erostratus, he accepts the idea which in the former line was mentioned. Erostratus lived four centuries before Christ. By doing this, he links to the ancient, a time which is called before date, and today. It is one of the most important significant things of this story. After some weeks and months, he finally does the killing.

In Sartre's story, also there are some meaningless time telling. Especially, at the end of the story the narrator tells us the exact time: for example: "At seven-five, two groups, followed each other closely, came out onto the Boulevard Edgar-Quinet" (*The Wall*, 1969, p. 52). This meaningless action in this story shows the meaninglessness of the life of Paul Hilbert and his action, as well.

The main actions of this story also happens in the streets (*The Wall*, 1969, pp. 52-53) and office (*The Wall*, 1969, pp. 46-47); where people from different social groups are gathered. He sees and encounters different people from various social levels. Exactly, this is strikingly similar to Na-albandian's story.

As one sees, the space/time or what one can say settings of these two stories are similar to each other. Both stories happen in the streets, between people from various social groups. Both have its own time structure which in essence, both of them are alike. In both of them telling exact time is to show the meaninglessness of the actions of the characters. The actions that are the same. And another similarity between the time of the stories is that both of them end at night.

Polyphony

Polyphony means "many-voiced". According to Habib (2005), "in Bakhtin's (1981) terms, any given "language" is actually stratified into several "other languages"" (p. 612). Therefore, in analyzing each literary work one must be aware of this state. Bakhtin argued that novel is not unitary or monologic, but it is polyphonic. Polyphony is a word used in musical studies that means "A style of musical composition employing two or more simultaneous but relatively independent melodic lines" (Merriam-Webster's collegiate dictionary, 2004). Bakhtin adopted the word to show that novel cannot be monologic. Bakhtin wrote that it is "the indispensable prerequisite for the novel as genre" (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 1981, p. 263). Therefore, finding this concept in the stories is essential and required. That is the point, as mentioned before, which Bakhtin did grasp to show the relatedness of each text to other texts, and matters like society and politics.

In Sartre's story as readers may notice that there are several voices: for example, voices of society and religion. It is true that its point of view is first person, but if one reads it closely, one can distinguish these voices which side by side go forward and make a whole.

The role of society in the story as a significant voice is bold. It shows itself and gives its sound to the reader through various situations and cases. In the first paragraph of this story, for the first time one encounters society's voice. The narrator is sitting in his balcony and observing people. He describes them as the representation of society, as hollow men, or as people who cannot think more than what they are. He describes people as, "they were crushed against the sidewalk and two long legs jumped out from under their shoulders" (*The Wall*, 1969, p. 41). That is the voice of society which is describing its people; people who are crushed. Here, people are described as some machines, without any sense and sensibility. It is the state of society and people.

Now, the problem is that, why have people changed into this condition? The one reason which society, from “Erostratus”(*The Wall*, 1969) character’s mouth, is the deadly cycle of every routine: “On a seventh floor balcony: that’s where I should have spent my whole life” (*The Wall*, 1969, p. 41). In the story Hilbert is sitting in his balcony all the time. He clearly reveals that it is the place and the routine that he likes to obtain. “Sometimes I had to go down into the street. To the office, for example. I stifled” (*The Wall*, 1969, p. 41). These sentences which show the repetition of his daily activities, indicate the symbol of that deadly cycle. The people who he observes from his balcony are like himself. They are surrounded by this, as well, and that is why they are considered as hollow men. Here, one can easily hear the voice of society which is describing and revealing itself.

Another case of the society’s existence in the story, is when Hilbert talks about his girlfriend who does not come to their appointment. He says that minutes later, he meets a prostitute: “So when I went up to this woman, fifteen minutes later, my gun was in my pocket and I wasn’t afraid of anything” (*The Wall*, p. 42). He asks her to get naked and walk barefoot on the ground and do some odd actions. The prostitute accepts and follows his orders. Here, again one can easily hear the voice of society which is describing its corruption. It simply tells us that, there are some people who have changed into machines that without any complaint follow others’ orders (*The Wall*, 1969, pp. 52-53).

In the latter parts of the story, when Hilbert leaves his house to kill people, he thinks to himself and says: “I repeated to myself, ‘Why must I kill all these people who are dead already?’ and I wanted to laugh” (*The Wall*, 1969, p. 52). Again, society from Hilbert’s mouth speaks, and says that these people are already dead. That is what at the start of the sentence he tells it, as well. By considering people of the society as hollow men, he means they are dead.

In these instances, the existence of society, as another voice in the story which tells what it wants, becomes clear. In these cases society has described itself and paved the way for other happenings of the story. Actually, one realizes Bakhtinian dialogism in here by this notion in which, society is in dialogue with other voices and languages.

In Na-albandian’s story similarly the society has a very powerful existence. The omniscient third person narrator of the story in different cases, who is in dialogue with this powerful voice, describes the society in which the story is happenings.

Here, at the start of Na-albandian’s story, the reader notices the presence of Sad. Sad. Mim. who is thinking about a memory on the way home from work (“From 7 O’clock to 9:30”, 2010, p. 2). That is where society shows up and tells that

this man is surrounded by the deadly cycle of everyday routine. On the way home, he sees a woman who is escaping from an angry man who is trying to murder her. That is the point in which the society reveals the existing violence in it. At this point, he remembers some other similar murdering cases in which men have murdered women viciously. A man has shot his wife, another has beheaded his wife and so on. And he, by remembering these happenings feels calm and decides to do the same and enjoy it.

In another point, Sad. Sad. Mim. feels paranoid, which is the problem of modern societies. This is seen in other modern and postmodern stories: for example, Randle McMurphy in Ken Kesey's novel *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (1962). Sad. Sad. Mim., as a member of this society, who is the representation of it, is ill; therefore, the reader realizes that this society has this psychological illness ("From 7 O'clock to 9:30", 2010, p.5).

Later on, at seven forty-one Sad. Sad. Mim. goes to a street in which poor vendors are working. By watching them, he quickly finds out that they are very poor. By this part, society again shows up and tells the reader about the poor people of the society and their pitiful life. Then, he finds a young boy who sells books. Nobody buys books, that is because nobody can read or better to say, nobody reads books. Society here, shows itself by people who are poor and do not care about books and knowledge, and it simply tells that these people will not read this story and will understand nothing, as well ("From 7 O'clock to 9:30", p. 8).

After that, Sad. Sad. Mim. sees a man of religion --Akhond--. He is again, a symbol of this level of society; people who by learning religious studies work and gain money.

These were also some instances of powerful existence of the society in the story "From 7 O'clock to 9". Here, one easily hears the voice of society again which step by step, in the heart of the story, is describing itself. It is also, paving the way for Sad. Sad. Mim. to fulfill his purpose, and somehow gives him a right to do it.

Then, he goes to a prostitute and has sex with her. Here, the society speaks; it tells that in this society there are people who for the sake of money become machines and follow other people's silly orders. That is another reason why this society has been corrupted. In this part, that prostitute is shown as a machine which is a product of this corrupted society ("From 7 O'clock to 9:30", 2010, p. 12).

Up to now, some instances of the existence of society's voice in two stories are identified. Now, it is time to find the similarities between these two stories to have a better understanding of the relationship between them.

As one reads, both societies are highly corrupted. This corruption, as is obvious in the stories, has various reasons. The first reason, which in both becomes bold and

is counted as the first reason is the deadly cycle of everyday routine. Both characters are surrounded by it. In the two stories, there are people who have become tired of this repetition, and want to try a new thing. It is possible that the other people of these societies want to do the same.

On ways of addressing the society, both authors try to show the social classes differently. Actually, both show the middle class of their societies, but Na-albandian puts a step forward and beside that, shows the working class, too. He achieves it, by describing the poor vendors of the street market ("From 7 O'clock to 9:30", 2010, p. 7).

Again, both describe prostitutes, and show them as vending machines that work by money, by losing their individuality they become yours. They become other people's slaves, and are the product of the modern societies in which are living. That is another symbol of corruption in societies.

In both stories, readers see violence, but in Na-albandian's it is more strict ("From 7 O'clock to 9:30", 2010, p. 2). In "Erostratus", Hilbert describes that some police officers did beat him viciously (*The Wall*, 1969, p. 42), and he himself at the end of the story, as a representation of his society, does a vicious action, too (*The Wall*, 1969, p. 52). Sad. Sad. Mim. similarly sees and remembers violence, and decides to do the same. The point here is that, in both stories one reads that violence makes them feel calm and relaxed, that it, violence would be enjoyable for them. The only difference between them is that, Sad. Sad. Mim. is braver than Hilbert because he commits suicide, but Hilbert cannot.

Religion also, beside society, has a powerful voice in the two stories, which is in dialogue with other voices. In both stories, religion reveals itself and readers can easily find and grasp it.

In Sartre's story, one reads that his apartment is on the seventh floor. As everyone knows, seven is a sacred number for both Muslims and Christians. In Genesis 2:2 it is said that God created the world in six days, and did rest in the seventh (2001, p.1). And in religious books it is written that there are seven skies and also, heaven and hell have seven levels: for example, as one reads in the second book of Enoch. Maybe his apartment is in the seventh level of hell. But, as he tells us before, he is observing them from top. So, it is better to say that he is living in the seventh level of heaven. As one reads, it is better to know his apartment as heaven. He decides to kill someone on the earth and comes back to his home, which is heaven, to commit suicide, but after killing the fat man, he cannot get back to his apartment, and hides in a toilet, which is the symbol of hell. This shows that he does not achieve salvation by doing this. This incident is much similar to the fall of Adam and Eve from heaven to earth. Hilbert buys a pistol which one can put seven bullets

in it. So, he can kill seven people. Here, seven bullets refer to the seven sins in Christianity.

Similarly, in the Na-albandian's story religion has a powerful role and voice, as well. This story is divided into thirteen parts which is considered as a cursed number. The story starts at seven o'clock. As mentioned before, seven is a sacred number. Here we see the encounter of these two numbers which are against each other. A holy one versus a devil one. And as mentioned earlier, the last part of this story is a battlefield of this play of numbers.

Another case, in which religion shows up, is the time he lets an Akhond get in his car, and thinks about killing him. He does not kill him, as he does not kill the prostitute and the young boy.

As it is clear, numbers as religious symbols in both stories have strong existence. In both, the number seven works as a sacred one. In Sartre's story, it is heaven, and in Na-albandian's it is the same. The existence of other religious figures in these stories also helps it to echo itself much more. In "From 7 O'clock to 9:30" it is the man of religion whom Sad. Sad. Mim cannot kill. It shows that still in his heart there is a liking for religion. In "Erostratus", it is in speaking of some well-known churches like Notre-Dame and Sacre-Coeur, and even his house which is the symbol of heaven (*The Wall*, 1969, p. 41). Hilbert is also like Sad. Sad. Mim. who has a liking for religion in his heart: that is why he assumes his apartment as heaven and states that like those buildings.

There is a difference between their choice of killing instrument. Hilbert buys a pistol, and Sad. Sad. Mim. tries a rope and a knife to use them in different situations, but their aim is the same: murdering.

Plot

As mentioned in the summaries of the stories, the plots of these two bear many commonalities. Both stories are about a man who, because of different reasons, which are related to their societies, decides to murder people. In this way both men contemplate on the matter and find some people, but do not find them appropriate for their aims. Finally, they achieve their goals, but through different ways. Hilbert murders a fat man, and Sad. Sad. Mim. murders himself. In both, they want to do the act of killing which is identical.

Conclusion

As Bakhtin stated, languages are in dialogue with each other (*The Dialogic Imagination*, 1981, p. 279). As an example in these two short stories, one can see this matter. It is obvious that Na-albandian's text is a second-hand sample of Sartre's

story, because of the similarities between them. His story is in direct dialogue with that of Sartre. Actually, it is the feature of language and literature which all texts and statements, as Bakhtin believed, are related to each other. The main distinguishing element of the two stories here is the art of Na-albandian that he has narrated his story in a way much more different from that of Sartre. Sartre's story is narrated like a realist story, but Na-albandian writes his in a way which looks like a postmodern one. He divides his story into thirteen parts. And also, by changing the ending, he makes it hard to compare these two and believes that his text is in relation to Sartre's. In analyzing the works, the researcher has used Bakhtinian dialogism to show similarities and relationships between the stories. These two stories are analyzed against each other in their details and generalities to find their similarities. Both stories are complex and hard to understand, so analyzing them against each other can help readers to come up with their significances. In the research, as is mentioned some similarities are found. Similarity in plot, theme, voices, and setting. Finally, it becomes clear that Na-albandian's work is so close to Sartre's short story, and Bakhtin's notion of dialogism proved to be true.

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