
**Postmodern Ontology in the Novel *Farhad's Body* based on Brian
McHale's Theory**

Sima Pourmoradi ¹, Dr. Reza Sadeghi Shahpar ^{2*}

¹ Ph.D.Candidate in Persian Language and Literature, Faculty of Letters and
Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Hamedan Branch, Hamedan, Iran

² Associate Professor, Department of Persian Language and Literature, Faculty of
Letters and Humanities, Islamic Azad University, Hamedan Branch, Hamedan, Iran

(Received: June 17, 2019 Accepted: December 4, 2019)

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Following the birth and flourishing of modernism and postmodernism in the literature and arts of the West, Iranian fiction writers have variably been affected by these movements and have produced works following their leads. One such work is the novel *Farhad's Body* by the contemporary writer, Abbas Maroufi. As this novel presents some of the postmodern features, it is worth being studied in the light of McHale's (1987) theory of postmodernism. McHale's theory is mostly a philosophical one, yet our approach here is to apply a practical method based on evidence from the text and answer the following questions: is it a modern or postmodern novel? Is the dominant in this novel ontology or epistemology?

2. Review of Literature and Theoretical Framework

Brian McHale is one of the theoreticians who believe that postmodernism is a continuation or a step further than modernism. Three key concepts of his theory are "the dominant", "ontology" and "epistemology". McHale maintains that in modernist literature, the dominant is epistemology, while in postmodernist literature, it is ontology (Payandeh, 2009). Based on this theory, in postmodern novels ontology has a higher position than epistemology does and ontologically, the story creates and describes a world or worlds. In this new world or existence, the text does not care whether its perceptions are correct or not, rather it tends to experience and explain the reality. That epistemological aspect is sent out to the margin in postmodernist novels means that they can also be considered in terms of

* Corresponding Author Email: R.s.shahpar@gmail.com

their modernist qualities, yet they are less important than the ontological aspects. Therefore, based on McHale's theory, a novel can be considered in terms of both its modernist and postmodernist orientations (Payandeh, 2011).

3. Method

The study is descriptive-analytic method that used content analysis and library documents. After carefully studying the novel, and collecting and classifying the necessary data, the postmodernist features and related indices were analyzed based on McHale's theory.

4. Results and Discussion

Holding a sort of epistemology based on the theory of possible worlds (various levels in epistemology) for the different narratological levels of Gérard Genette, McHale makes a new design and maintains that the intersection of narratological levels \ by involvement of those levels, cause ontological considerations (Bameshki, 2014). The novel *Farhad's Body* presents certain ontological questions by applying such techniques as intertextuality, lack of ontological certainty and some meta-fictional features. As such features bring about the ground for the intersection of narratological levels, they intensify this process. These features are studied and the various sorts of narrative intersection and their instances in the text of the novel are shown for justifying the stance that we have taken in analyzing the text. Evidences show the presence of both kinds of intersection in the novel:

1. Movement from meta-fiction to fiction: in the intersection of these two worlds, the presence of real and historical characters in the novel and also the presence of fictional characters from the previous works is an example.
2. Movement from fiction to meta-fiction: examples of intersection at the level of narration are characters addressing the reader, narrator addressing the reader, or the interaction between the narrator and the reader.

Another intersection presented in the novel is the changing of the narrator to a character.

In *Farhad's Body*, existence and being are shown in the form of a multidimensional concept. The writer has tried to personify the real in imagination, and has presented the amalgamation of reality and imagination as a major motif so that the reader may contemplate on their own existence with a new outlook. A major question that is usually posed is how much human being is real and how much it is unreal. This is the major question incorporated in this novel and is explored by three techniques of

“intertextuality”, “lack of ontological certainty” and “meta-fiction”. We are also faced with multiple and overlapping worlds and stories within story whose interaction with each other is evident within the novel and this opens five ontological layers of worlds to us:

- World of reality (the reality that the author and the reader have in it)
- The fictional world of the novel *Farhad's Body* by Abbas Marrofi.
- The fictional world of the novel *The Blind Owl* by Sadegh Hedayat.
- The world of peripheral worlds like *Shirin and Farhad*
- The world of dreams of the painter.

Through creating parallel and intersecting existential beings, Marrofi sets his characters with distinct and even contradictory identities moving and fluctuating in multiple worlds so that the reader would be wandering confusedly among these fake worlds not knowing them from each other. Therefore, the borderline between the world of reality and imagination is destroyed, and this is a method in postmodern fiction which emphasizes the ontological nature of the novel. One can see that the creation of intersected worlds in this novel corresponds to the change in the dominant element. In fact, change is that of epistemology in Modernism to ontological postmodernism which highlights the ontological questions of the story. This is because rather than depicting the intuition of the characters from the world around them, this novel explores the parallel worlds made out of the reality and imagination. In reading this novel, we are to be faced with this fundamental question: which world and with what features is presented in it?

5. Conclusion

Through intersecting ontological levels and challenging our usual perception about the separation of the reality and imagination, the novel *Farhad's Body* implies that this novel can have roles and effects similar to those of reality. Analyzing the novel based on the theory of McHale, we concluded that the dominant element in the novel is ontology because its world is a reflection of multiple and overlapping worlds. These worlds well represent the existence of reality and imagination whose borderline is not always clear. Also, we can see two kinds of intersection in the narrative level of the novel which are from fictional to meta-fictional and vice versa. The instances of such intersections are the presence of real and historical characters in the novel, and the interactions between narrator and the reader, the character that addresses the reader, moving from one milieu and being to another and the restricted movements of fictional characters among the real and imaginative beings in the novel. The text shows that reality and

imagination can have interaction and influence each other. Finally, it can be said that *Farhad's Body* is a modernist novel in certain respects and postmodernist in some others.

Keywords: Postmodernism, Farhad's Body, Ontology, Modernism

References (In Persian)

- Bameshki, S. (2013). تداخل درونی در مثنوی [Internal intersection in *Masnavi*]. *Literary Criticism Journal*, 6 (21), 9-36.
- Bameshki, S. (2014). تداخل سطوح روایی [Intersection of narrative levels]. *Literary Writings Journal*, (184), 1-27.
- Edel, L. (1988). قصه روان‌شناختی نو [Psychological stories]. (N. Sarmad, Trans.). Tehran, Iran: Shabaviz.
- Glenn, W. (2010). پست‌مدرنیسم [Postmodernism] (G. F. Ranjbari, & A. Karami, Trans., 3rd ed.). Tehran, Iran: Mahi.
- Hajari, H. (2002). نمود مدرنیسم در رمان فارسی ۱۳۷۸-۵۸ [Presence of modernism in Persian novel 1979-1999]. *The Journal of Humanities*, 45(185), 143-167.
- Lewis, B. (2004). پسامدرنیسم و ادبیات، مدرنیسم و پسامدرنیسم در رمان [Modernism and postmodernism in novel] (H. Payandeh, Trans.). Tehran, Iran: Rooznegar
- Marrofi, A. (2003). پیکر فرهاد [Farhad's body]. Tehran, Iran: Ghoghnos
- McHale, B. (2013). داستان پسامدرنیستی [Postmodernist fiction] (A. Massomi, Trans.). Tehran, Iran: Ghoghnos
- McHale, B. (2001). سیری در هستی‌شناسی داستان، زنده رود [A survey of the ontology of fiction] (A. Rastgar, Trans.). Tehran, Iran: Ghoghnos
- Mirabedini, Hassan (2001). صد سال داستان‌نویسی ایران [A hundred years of story-writing in Iran], (Vol. 1&2). Tehran, Iran: Cheshmeh
- Payandeh, H. (2012). داستان کوتاه در ایران (داستان‌های مدرن) [Short Story in Iran (Modernist Stories)]. Tehran, Iran: Niloofar.
- Payandeh, H. (2012). داستان کوتاه در ایران (داستان‌های پسامدرن) [Short story in Iran (Postmodernist stories)]. Tehran, Iran: Niloofar.
- Shayganfar, H. (2011). نقد ادبی [Literary criticism]. Tehran, Iran: Dastan.
- Wu, P. (2004). مدرنیسم و پسامدرنیسم: تعریفی جدید از خودآگاهی ادبی، مدرنیسم و پسامدرنیسم در رمان [Modernism and postmodernism; A new conception of literary consciousness] (H. Payandeh Trans.). Tehran, Iran: Rooznegar
- Wu, P. (2011). فراداستان [Meta-fiction] (Sh.Vaqafipoor, Trans.). Tehran, Iran: Cheshmeh.

References (In English)

- Hutcheon, L. (2002). *The politics of postmodernism*. London and New York: Routledge.
- McHale, B. (1987). *Postmodernist fiction*. London, England: Routledge.