

The Novel in Contemporary Iran: A Sociological Reading of Selected Contemporary Persian Novels

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Abstract

In this article, the status of the Persian novel has been investigated via an interdisciplinary approach during the last hundred years. The research starts with the emergence of the Persian novel and continues up to the 2010s/1390s A.H., and it looks into the selected novels from a sociological outlook, i.e., studying literature within its social, cultural, political and historical context. The introduction of modernism into the Iranian society paved the way for the advent of this newly emerging type of literature in Persian literary tradition. Moreover, changes in the political and social structure of the Iranian society led to the establishment and the formation of various periods in the history of the Persian novel. Besides, communication with the modern world and accordingly familiarity with modern world literature through translation had also a considerable role in this process of transformation. To support the claims made in this research, examples will be presented from different novels written during the aforementioned period.

Keywords: Persian novel, periodization, modernity, socio-political context of Iran, translation.

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Introduction

This study started with this question that what conditions existed in Iranian literary tradition and society which led to the emergence and development of this type of literature. Another important matter is how the development of this type of literature has been related to the social and political conditions in Iran. After a brief review of the historical background of the Persian novel, this article examines the most important components of the emergence and spread of this literary genre in the West, and their role in the emergence and spread of the novel in Iran. Then, focusing more on the situation of the novel in Iran, the writer offers a chronology of the history of the novel in Iran from the beginning to 2010. This periodization has been done through an interdisciplinary approach and is based on the relationship between the genre of the novel and the conditions of Iranian society. Meanwhile, a series of factors such as the effects of modernity, the political conditions of the Iranian society, as well as the effects of translation have been considered in these developments.

Several noteworthy studies have been written so far on the history of the Persian novel. Among these, we should mention the four-volume book *One Hundred Years of Story* (Mirabedini, 2009), *Theory and Critique of Persian Historical Novels* (Parsanasab, 2012), and *Footprints of Uncertainty: The Historical Novel in Iran from 1922 to 1942* (Sepهران, 2003). In each of these works, the history of the novel has been dealt with in a macro or a section-oriented manner. We should also mention the following books: *Introduction and Survey of Persian Fiction and Plays Written during 1871-1921* (Mortezaeian Abkanar, 2019), *Introduction and Survey of Persian Fiction and Plays Written during 1921-1931* (Alipour Gaskari, 2014), *Introduction and Survey of Persian Fiction and Plays Written during 1931-1941* (Alipour Gaskari, 2018), *The Evolution of Persian Fiction and Plays Written from the Beginning to 1951* (Mirabedini, 2008), *The Evolution of Persian Fiction and Plays Written from 1941 to 1943* (Mirabedini, 2012). In all these books, the focus has been on the historiographical

approach, and an interdisciplinary approach has not been applied. However, we should mention the book *La Genese de Roman Persian Modern* (Balai, 1999), which examines the role of French literature as well as the effects of the press on the emergence of the Persian novel.

It should be noted that our approach here is mainly formed by focusing on the concept of periodization. The conceptual framework of this periodization is also linked to one of the major approaches in the sociology of literature, in which the novel is considered a reflection of social construction and its crises. Paradigm shifts are considered in the division of each period; however, the limitations of the concept of periodization in literary history and the heterogeneous nature of discourses in each period and their interaction with each other cannot be ignored.

Discussion

The emergence and spread of the novel in Iran cannot be considered a purely endogenous phenomenon resulting from the usual changes in the economic, political, and social conditions of the country, especially as it happened in the West during the eighteenth century. The development of novels in the West is directly related to the transition from feudalism to capitalism and the emergence of a new middle class. For example, the English novel was developed at the beginning of the eighteenth century, and the most important reason for the development of prose fiction and novels was the growth and development of the middle class, which itself was a result of many issues such as a significant population growth, an improved living condition, the rise of general literacy, an increase in the number of newspapers and magazines, etc. (Sanders, 2000: 303). However, as the study of the economic, social, and political situations in Iran during the last century shows, the simultaneous emergence of the middle class and the novel cannot be easily accepted in relation to the Persian novel. The Qajar period was not a feudal period that would lead to a capitalist era and the emergence of a new middle class with

the Constitutional Revolution. "The tyranny of the leaders, the existence of cities, the meaning and concept of the fief and its granting, the chaos that existed in land tenure, the influence of foreign colonialists, the failure of old industries and local trade against foreign industries, the influence of the Western bourgeoisie, etc., all put Iran in a special situation" (Ashraf, 1969: 73). Poverty and backwardness resulting from such conditions made the Qajar dynasty inefficient. The developments leading to the Constitution have been due to various and complex domestic and foreign economic, social, and political reasons. Qajar kings resorted to two strategies of "defensive accumulation" (granting concessions to colonial countries) and "defensive modernization" (enforcing compulsory reforms) to maintain the existing political structure and to deal with the country's backwardness and the increasing pressure of the capitalist powers (Matin, 2014). Granting various economic concessions to these countries has been in line with this defensive accumulation and the reforms of Abbas Mirza and Amir Kabir can also be seen in the form of the defensive modernization (Matin, 2014). Influenced by the policy of defensive accumulation, the great Iranian merchants made many attempts to lead Iran's semi-feudal society towards capitalism, which led to the temporary victory of the Constitutional Revolution (see Ashraf for the role of merchants in this revolution, 1981).

Modernity created a deep and lasting gap between Iranian political culture and intellectual discourses. Accordingly, the issue of the compatibility of modernity with Iranian culture has been the subject of these intellectual and cultural discourses in the last one hundred and fifty years (Mirsepasi, 2014: 142). The Iranians' encounter with modernity marked the beginning of a profound crisis in Iran's social structure and necessitated serious reforms in the eyes of cultural elites and intellectuals. In fact, it was in the context of these social reforms and political upheavals that new literary forms, primarily the novel, came into focus, and old forms became marginalized. Therefore, the emerging and modern literary genre of the novel was gradually born to represent a world on the verge of collapse and destruction (Balay,

1999: 10). To put it more clearly, the fundamental changes that began in the late Qajar period made Iranians, especially elites and intellectuals, aware of the Western world. Communicating more with the West and getting acquainted with Western culture led to the translation of many works until the literary genre of the novel, which was born with modernity and had no history in Persian literature, gradually expanded and was recognized in the Iranian literary system.

Travelogue: The Years Leading to the Constitutional Revolution

It seems that the literary type of travelogue has been a portal to the writing of the Persian novel. This type of literature has a history in classical Iranian literature, but research shows that it was the dominant type of literature in Persian prose during the Qajar period (Ghanoonparvar, 2014: 38). These travelogues, written under the influence of a growing connection with the West, had major differences from older examples that exemplified modern approaches. A study of the content of these travelogues, of which *The Talebi Route* or *The Travelogue of Mirza Abu Talib Khan* (early 18th century) is one of the first and most important examples, shows that describing the West and comparing its situation with that of Iran has been a means of criticizing the domestic situation, as most intellectuals and elites "saw their knowledge of the West as a criterion for evaluating, and ultimately criticizing, their domestic society and its political, religious, and other institutions" (Ghanoonparvar, 2014: 81-82). Thus, the critique of the situation of the time, which was the result of the elites' familiarity with the modern world, is the main reason for the popularity of travelogues.

Probably the most prominent example of a novel in Persian can be considered *The Travelogue of Ebrahim Beg* written by Zeyn al-Abedin Maraghei, which was published before the Constitutional Revolution. Above all, the critical approach of this work distinguishes it from previous stories and tales. Another feature of this work is its identification and distinction of time and place. The plot of this work,

at least in the first volume, is very interesting (see Balay, 1999: 310-345), yet it has not been very successful in characterization. Although this work contains formal innovations, it is far away from reaching the complete novel form. The content of this work, although critical and reflective of some of the current crises in Iranian society, remains largely conservative. Using a traditional, pre-existing form for critical purposes has clearly kept both form and content in a liminal, in-between condition. That is why one contemporary historian has described this work as "progressive capitalist thinking" and in some cases as a "radical intellectual work" (Adamiyat, quoted in Mirabedini, 2009: 1177) .

Historical Novels: From the Beginning to 1922

A survey of the history of the novel in Iran until 1922 shows that a significant percentage of novels were historical. The dominance and prevalence of this type of novel reached its prime in the first twenty years of the first Pahlavi period. It is clear that one of the most important technical reasons for paying attention to historical novels and popular novels is their simplicity, in relation to narrative structure, language, etc. But the tendency towards such novels is not limited to technical reasons or their popularity. Iranian society, under the influence of encountering the modern western world, is undergoing new identity transformation, and is one of the few societies which have built a modern national identity based on their "existing ethnic and territorial interests, historical memories, and historical events" (Ashraf, 2017: 196). The "reconstruction, dissemination, and expansion" of this modern national identity was also carried out by those who had political, commercial, and cultural contacts with the West (Ashraf, 2017: 197). This point is in fact the main reason why Iranians welcomed historical novels (from the beginning of the familiarity with fiction till 1942). According to Franco Moretti's studies, the emergence of the historical novel has been linked to modern national identity and the formation of the nation-state

(Moretti, 1988). The same is also true about the Persian historical novel.

Social Problem Novels: 1920-1940

Simultaneously with the spread of the historical novel during 1920s to 1940s, which was in connection with official nationalism, the first Persian social novel, *The Terrible Tehran*, was first published in installments as a serial novel in 1922 (Mirabedini, 2009: 57). This novel, as it is the case with all social novels, shows the negative consequences of the changes resulting from the transformation of the social structure of Iran under the influence of the Constitutional Revolution. It is in these social novels that the negative aspects of the society and the problems, including the marginalization of women, poverty, corruption, prostitution, etc., are addressed. The historical novel and the social novel in Iran could be considered the narrator of the process of modernization and a reflection of the results of this modernization (or, in other words, the disruption of the traditional order of society). This was a process that disrupted the traditional structure of society without fully establishing a new social order with the help of modern institutions (Parastesh, 2012: 210).

The Birth of the Modern Persian Novel in 1937

In the midst of the prevalence of historical and social novels in the years 1922 to 1942 and the prevalence of state nationalism, the first modern Persian novel was born in 1937. The confrontation, contradiction, and conflict of the traditional and modern identities of the Iranian subject, which were also expressed to some extent in the above-mentioned novels, were deeply reflected in *The Blind Owl*. This novel can also be considered the narrative of the destruction of the idealized image of pre-Islamic Iran in Hedayat's period (Yavari, 2010: 45-72). The narrator of *The Blind Owl* is also a reflection of the character of modern Iranian subject with a fragmented identity that was, until then, unprecedented in Persian literature (Yavari, 2008).

The artistic quality of this work makes it a leap in Persian novel writing. Accuracy in characterization, plot, mood and the theme of this novel all indicate a new trend in Persian novel writing. The novel's self-centeredness, scarceness of external event, internal monologue, prominence of mind against object, ambiguous plot, narrator's neuroticism and gradual mental decline, metaphorical expression, and fragmentation of the story are amongst Hedayat's new techniques and innovations in *The Blind Owl* and by extension the domain of the Persian novel (Payandeh, 2014: 17-36). These are techniques which artistically represent the image of the Iranian intellectual in the midst of a conflict between imperfect modernity on the one hand and inefficient tradition on the other. After *The Blind Owl*, such an image has been repeated, in various ways, in many other Persian novels.

The Novel and the Leftist Ideology: 1940-1960

Shortly after its publication, *The Blind Owl* was ignored in the chaos resulting from World War II and the occupation of Iran by the Allies and the rise of the Communist Party. Many modern Iranian intellectuals tried to spread a sort of *committed* literature. During these years, the influence of the Communist Party among intellectuals and writers has been on the rise, to the extent that Hedayat also published the short story *Haji Agha* (1946), using critical realism to critique dependent capitalism. As studies show, modern Persian literature from the early years of the twenties until the Revolution of 1979 was influenced by Marxist ideology, or more precisely, by an interpretation of this ideology (Talattof, 2016: 135-204). It is in such circumstances that politics dominates the technical and literary aspects of the Persian novel, and works such as *Fifty-Three People* (1953) and *Her Eyes* (1953) by Bozorg Alavi and *The Peasant's Daughter* (1953) by Mahmoud Etemadadeh (Beh-Azin), all with political themes, become the most popular novels of this period, the last two being successful examples of realistic novels. *The School Principal* written by Jalal al-Ahmad can be considered the best

example of the reaction (such as frustration and despair) of the Marxist writers to the events of 1954. The importance of this work is mostly due to the fact that, compared to the other novels in this field, it remains largely faithful to the formal rules of the genre and also the requirements of the realistic novel in terms of describing the place, developing the theme, language and the style of prose; however, due to the one-dimensionality of the characters, and the narrator's interpretations and interventions, it blurs the line between "social art" and "social manifesto" (Payandeh, 2010: 69-98).

After the 1953 coup d'état, the influence and popularity of the Communist party decreased, and a thought of returning to tradition and, in particular, to religion came into the attention of some social classes and intellectuals. *Yakolia and Her Loneliness* (1956), a novella written by Taghi Modarresi, is one of the successful works related to this field, which followed the metaphorical and symbolic expression of the literature of the period, and received social acclaim by distancing itself from the leftist discourse. It narrates three labyrinthine and related stories with a simple and coherent structure, a poetic prose and a religious atmosphere. The structure of the narrative is also based on the binary oppositions and conflicts between good and evil, love and power, and individual temptations and the public interest (Shiri, 2005: 85). The novella *The Kingdom* (1962) written by Bahram Sadeghi also falls into this category and has received many influences from the holy texts of the Bible and the Quran (Eshaghian, 2009: 29-40). In this work, the kingdom that Satan has intended for human beings, described in grave-like and morbid images, could be an allegory of the contemporary Iranian society from the narrator's point of view. Subjectivism and the frustrating atmosphere of *Yakolia* and *The Kingdom*, like *The Blind Owl*, show the disillusionment and isolation of the Iranian intelligentsia. Such an approach was common among cultural elites in the discourse of the years after the coup d'état of August 1953, and it can be considered one of the most important features in the history of modern Persian novels.

The Prevailing Period of the Novel: The 1960s

According to the National Library, from the early 1960s until the Revolution of 1979, as the country's economic situation developed, 1700 foreign stories were published (quoted from Mirabedini, 2009: 411-412). This amount of published fiction shows the relative prosperity of the story and the novel in this period. One of the most important novels of this period is *Tangsir* (1964) by Sadegh Chubak. The novel is the first Persian naturalistic novel (Payandeh, 2014: 37-64). The social novel *Sang Saboor* (*The Patient Stone* [1967]) by the same author, preserving naturalistic themes, is the first Iranian novel using several narrators to recount events. This novel narrates the life of a disillusioned intellectual in the first Pahlavi period. The omission of the omniscient narrator and its replacement with the voice of five characters is the first attempt in a Persian novel to make multiple voices heard through multiplicity of narrators. Although this technique was not original (it was a western technique), gave the Persian novel a polyphonic character, which until then had been narrated by one narrator and often a first-person one. Much attention was paid by Iranian writers to such a technique in the novels of the 1980s onwards.

The 1960s were also considered a period of the emergence of the Persian historiographical novels. The tendency to "reread the distant past" in the Constitutional Period and the early decades of the present century took the form of historical novels; the short novel *Prince Ehtejab*, (1967) written by Houshang Golshiri is a prominent example in the history of Persian novel in using the most advanced narrative techniques, such as the internal narration and the omniscient narrator limited to the mind of the characters (known as limited omniscient point of view). This novella received many influences from *The Blind Owl* (Samiee, 2002: 83-89); nonetheless, unlike the latter, which looks at history from the perspective of myth, it carefully represents the linear and temporal course of history and, thereby, portrays the formation and dissolution of the Qajar landlord aristocracy. *Savushun*

(1970) marks the beginning of the Persian historiographical novel, since its temporal context is set in the recent past, namely, the first years of the occupation of Iran by the Allied forces (precisely 1944). Some critics have pointed to the novel's prominent features, such as the employment of the limited omniscient point of view (which is limited to Zari's mind, the heroine), the communicative role of language, a prose purged from verbosity, an allegorical form of expression, and a structure based on opposition (man and woman, inside and outside, thought and action, reality and desire) (Golshiri, 1998: 77-155). If we skip the prominent technical aspects of this novel and its alignment with political pragmatism in the 1960s, and turn our attention solely to the objective level and the role of Yusef and his actions in advancing the events of the novel to the level of Zari's mental narrative, it could be maintained that "it is Zari and not Yusuf who is the protagonist and the beholder of external events and the meditator of her internal streams" (Amiri, 2007: 253). In fact, Savushun's most important cultural achievement can be summed up in the fact that it is the first Persian novel in which the feminine point of view, the womanhood of the author, and the centrality of women in the story are combined. Of course, in this novel, Zari's inner contradictions are gradually transferred to the contradiction between the main male character of the story and his enemies, and his personal contradictions become socio-political contradictions. This continues to show the dominance of the political construction over other structures and the neglect of the connection between individual freedoms and social democracy.

The Regional Novel: The Early Years of the Islamic Revolution

Considering the fact that a significant percentage of Iran's population had been rural during these years, the regional or rural novel flourished under the influence of the dominant discourse of committed literature (socialist), specifically from the 1960s onwards and under the influence of the land reform program and its consequences. But

the most prominent examples of this type of novel were published in the early years after the 1979 Revolution. The ten-volume novel *Kelidar*, whose writing had begun in the late 1960s, was published between 1979 and 1986. The events of this work take place from 1946 to 1949 in a region in Khorasan. Some objections have been raised as to the novel's style of narration and its use of language (Barahani, 1995: 355-405; Golshiri, 2000: 307-333), as some critics have considered the employment of language and the narrative style as a reasonable sign of the gradual transformation of *Kelidar* from the genre of the novel to the epic (Yavari, 2002: 151-161). In any case, this novel has been very successful in representing the nomadic and rural life in Iran and its related issues, through an appropriate characterization and the use of the element of adventure. The sacrifice of the hero at the end of the narrative can also be interpreted as an indication of its transition from epic to novel. Yet, the novel *Missing Solouch* (1980) could be regarded as the supreme example of the Persian rural novel. The novel is set in the early 40s, in the years following the Land Reform, and the events are narrated by an omniscient narrator who is sometimes limited to the minds of the characters. This novel depicts the tragic story of a rural family during the absence of the father; an absence that is announced from the opening lines of the novel, first revealed through the mind of the mother of the family, and continues up to the end of the work. Another distinguishing feature of this novel is that its structure is based on "absence" and shows that the creation of a character does not necessarily mean that he has to be present in the work (Payandeh, 2017). Such an absence also reflects the dominance of the patriarchal discourse, especially in rural communities.

War, Politics and the Novel: 1980- 1992

In 1980, the Iran-Iraq War (known in Iran as the Sacred Defense) began. The Iranian society suffered the effects of this event from various cultural, economic and political aspects. Ahmad Mahmoud's

The Burnt Land (1983), which depicts the events of the first three months of the war in Ahvaz, is the first novel to be considered in this field after the beginning of the war. Another thought-provoking novel with the theme of war is *The Winter of 62* (1988) written by Esmail Fassih. The time setting of the novel, as depicted in its title, is the three months of the winter of 1984, while the place is mostly set in Ahvaz. Throughout the narrative, the conditions of the Iranian society at this time and the troubles caused by the conditions after the revolution and during the war are represented. In fact, the Iran-Iraq War was the longest all-out war between two countries in the twentieth century, which left irrevocable effects on the various structures of the Iranian society.

The novels published in the first decade after the Revolution often have the same atmosphere of the works of the 60s and 70s, or try to represent the important issues of the society under the influence of such an atmosphere. Leaving the authors of the committed literature aside, subjectivity comes to the fore in most of the authentic novels after Mordad 1332 (1953), a theme which was also reflected in *The Blind Owl*. This condition seems to recur increasingly in the late 1980s and 1990s. *The Symphony of the Dead* (1990) by Abbas Maroufi, *Touba and the Meaning of Night* (1990) by Shahnosh Parsipour, and *Ahl-e Gharq (The Drowned)* (1990) by Moniro Ravanipour are the prominent examples of subjectivism in the novel writing of this period. The events of all the three novels take place on a mythical basis, while the last two can be considered as experiments in the style of magical realism. *Touba and the Meaning of Night* depicts the story of an Iranian woman between the Constitutional and Islamic revolutions in a surreal style and also under the influence of classical Persian mystical stories (Yavari, 2010: 83-107). In *Ahl-e Gharq*, the arrival of modernization in the south of Iran in the twentieth century is represented in the form of a confrontation between new and old magic (Yavari, 2010: 128). *The Symphony of the Dead* introduces some innovations in the narrative techniques of the Persian novel, and raises issues such as "the circular perception of the passage of time,

the denial of history as a base for change, the transmutation of filicide into fratricide, and of filicide into ethnocide" (Barekat, 2008: 56). The implicit discourse of all the mentioned novels revolves around the failure of the process of modernity in Iran.

Politics, Formalism, and the Novel: 1992-2011

As mentioned earlier, in Iran, the political structure has always had precedence over the other structures. For this reason, almost all the novels written during the 90s and the first decade of the new millennium have political themes. For example, even a work such as *Mirrors with Cover Doors* (1992), a short novel with a romantic theme, is heavily influenced by politics. *The Wandering Island* (1994) and its second volume, *The Wandering Cameleer* (2002) by Simin Daneshvar can be counted amongst the most successful Persian novels in representing the effect of political structure on the fate of fictional characters. With politics and identity as its main themes, this novel represents the socio-political history of Iranian society from the 70s until the Iran-Iraq War. Even the name of the first volume of this novel is in contrast to the term "Island of Stability and Peace" employed by the second Pahlavi government (Daneshvar, 2005: 1042). This two-volume novel is considered a postmodern text due to the dominance of ontology and its employment of the components which reflect and highlight this dominant element (Payandeh, 2005: 535-556). Among these components are: "vicious cycle, metafictional features, uncertainty, imposing confusion upon the reader by (a) wandering through the chronological sequence of events and (b) using multiple voices in narrating the story" (Payandeh, 2005: 535-556).

In the late 90s, several other authentic novels were published. Although they represent various issues and problems of the Iranian society, their most important shared component, with the exception of the successful novel *I Turn Off the Lights*, has been a radical emphasis on form. The predominant component of these novels is subjectivism. Among the multitude of such texts, several novels have been

successful in terms of attracting both audiences and critics. *The Courage of Love* (1999) by Shahriyar Mandanipour depicts a romantic event in the context of "the eight-year war" and the Rudbar earthquake. In this novel, too, the method of narration is significant and the author has tried to employ a free direct style; also, an attempt has been made to present a polyphonic narrative through capitalizing on the different mental narratives of a single event by the characters (Taslimi and Mobaraki, 2015: 27-41). Hossein Sanapour's *The Absent Half* (2000) is also one of the most successful fictional texts which has been able to reflect the urban life of the late 80s and the situation of the young generation after the war. Each of the five parts of this novel is narrated from the viewpoint of a different character. In terms of discourse analysis, this novel has articulated the traditional discourse in such a way that, ignoring all its contradictions, it gets into conflict with the discourse of modernity. The tendency of the young characters, both male and female, towards the discourse of modernity and their success in organizing their identity on this basis also indicates the emergence of a young and educated generation which has been able to force away the hegemonic discourse of tradition (Hosseini Sarvari, 2014). In the novel *The Fig Tree of Temples* (2000), an attempt has been made to depict, in a dreamy atmosphere and a metaphorical language, the changes resulting from incomplete modernization and its failure in favor of tradition in a region of Khuzestan province, and the decline of old aristocracy and its opposite semi-capitalism. The novel has also tried to avoid the usual method of linear narration as much as possible. Zoya Pirzad's *I Turn Off the Lights* (2001) has made use of the modern storytelling techniques in the most artistic way possible, through the employment of a simple language purged from all the common poetic features of the Persian novel language. Although the events of this novel take place in the pre-Revolution Abadan, the concerns of housewives and issues such as tedium and ennui are reflected through a captivating plot (Payandeh, 2014: 185-214).

In the late 2000s, *Ms. Azadeh and Her Author or Dr. Sharifi's Private Auschwitz* by Reza Braheni was published. This novel, as studies show, is clearly a postmodernist novel. In fact, its title, its opening scene, as well as its ending, all reflect its postmodernist style. Metafictionality, prioritization of the *method* of narration over narration itself, use of multiple narrative perspectives with the aim of drawing attention to the narrative technique, disregard of narrative coherence, avoidance of mimesis of reality, plurality of voices, and marginalization of the author are the main postmodernist components and characteristics pointed out by the critics (Payandeh, 2014: 215-238). Reza Ghasemi's *The Nocturnal Harmony of Wood Orchestra* (2001) can also be considered a postmodernist work based on the above-mentioned explanations given about *The Wandering Island* and *The Wandering Cameleer*. This novel is also innovative from a thematic point of view, due to its representation of the issues of exile and migration.

Conclusion

The Novel is the double of modernity. It is a literary genre which is created, grown, and transformed in the context of crisis. The signs of such a crisis emerged from the end of the Qajar period, at the time of the confrontation of the Iranian society with the Western (modern) world. Iranian society and the Iranian subject's identity, which until then had enjoyed a harmonious coexistence of Iranian and Islamic cultures, suddenly came into an inevitable confrontation with western modernity. In other words, the intrusion of modernity and modern culture created a huge gap in the social, economic, political, and cultural structures of the society. As a result of this intrusion, the coherence of Iranian subject's identity was also shattered into pieces. The Persian novel, in all its forms, from the travelogue to the postmodernist novel, is a representation and reflection of this crisis and the way Iranians confronted it. In fact, the history of the Persian novel depicts the history of modernity in Iran. In the first steps of this

confrontation, the Iranian cultural elites tried to acquaint the public through literature with modernity, its manifestations, and examples, and to set the ground for changes in the underdeveloped society of Iran. The first important change in Persian literature was the predominance of the prosaic literary genre of travelogue and its prevalence in the late Qajar period. In these travelogues, the Iranian subject understands and introduces the West and the Western subject as the "Other." Also, it is in this type of literature that we encounter for the first time the critical content and tone in its modern sense, where the various manifestations of the Iranian culture are criticized in comparison with the modern culture. After this stage, Iranians become acquainted with the novel and its popular type, historical novels, through translation. Tendency to this type of literature has also been influenced by modern culture. In the wake of the identity crisis, Iranians achieved a modern national identity with the help of their historical past and the experiences of their ancestors - simultaneously with the formation of the State of the Law as a result of the Constitutional Revolution and the formation of the nation state in the first Pahlavi period. Tendency towards the historical novel during these years, from the beginning of Iranians' acquaintance with it until the end of the second Pahlavi reign, could be analyzed in the same vein. The social novel also reflects the various social, economic, cultural, and political crises arisen from the Iranians' approach to modernity. Towards the end of the first Pahlavi period, the first authentic Persian novel, *The Blind Owl*, was published by Sadegh Hedayat, one of Iran's significant fiction writers. This novel is very important because of its analysis of the cultural situation of Iran and the degree of the adaptation of Iranian society to modernity. Although the narrator of this novel is a completely modern subject, his narration shows the failure of the process of modernity in the country. The modernity pursued in Reza Shah's time was limited to technological and industrial aspects, ignoring "modern universal rationality" and the

consequences of the modern instrumental reason (Jahanbeglou, 2017: 30). From an economic perspective, it can be maintained that the Asian mode of production, the oil-based economy and, consequently, the expansion of state bureaucracy have been the most important obstacles to the growth of the middle class in Iran (Mesbahipoor Iranian, 1980: 233-235). In such a society, the domination of the reigning political structure and governments is a natural phenomenon. Research shows that, in the last century, governments have always ignored the cultural dimension in Iran's economic development (Behnam, 2016: 181). This continued to be the case in the second Pahlavi period, and the process of the cultural adaptation to modernity was limited to its appearances. And with the Islamic Revolution, the religious part of the Iranian identity became recognized and represented.

Iranian society is confronted with a variety of cultural contradictions, one of which is tradition versus modernity. The Persian authentic and elitist novel is also a reflection of such a contradiction, and with all its weaknesses, sides with modernity in this conflict. Persian novel, in its one-hundred-year history, has not achieved such success as the novel has in developed countries. It has not created an all-encompassing movement, nor has it found significant and professional readers. However, successful attempts have been made by few writers. It seems that in order to achieve such success, one still has to wait for the formation of a new middle class and the outcome of the conflict between traditional and modern culture. Nevertheless, the post-revolutionary Persian authentic novel, through a somewhat extreme employment of the combined point of view, multiplicity of narrators, and even subjectivism, has tried to be the representative of the polyphonic culture in Iranian society. It has also tried to represent examples of the Iranian individualized personality and the challenges it might face. Many issues of the modern world are addressed in these novels. The remarkable presence

of women, both in the position of prominent writers and in the position of major fictional characters, and the issues related to them is also one of the most remarkable achievements of the Persian novel. Finally, the pervasiveness of various types of global communication media and social networks, along with the change in the lifestyle of Iranians, can be considered a powerful challenge to the prospect of the novel's prevalence in Iran.

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