Jordan Journal of Modern Languages and Literatures Vol.16, No. 4, 2024, pp1013-1029

JJMLL

Third World National Allegory in Sadeq Chubak's *Tangsir*

Abdullah Rezaee
Department of English Language, Kharazmi University, Iran

Morteza Yazdanjoo *
Department of English Language and Literature, Shahid Beheshti University, Iran

Received on: 4-4-2023 **Accepted on: 23-8-2023**

Abstract

There is a common consensus among critics that Sadeq Chubak shirked quotidian life in his *oeuvre* and wrote "apolitical" works that portrayed an absurd world populated by outcasts, addicts, criminals, beggars, and the like. Rejecting this line of argument, this paper draws on Fredric Jameson's triangular model of examining literary texts to analyse *Tangsir*, the Iranian novelist's debut novel, as a national allegory. Accordingly, it will be first proposed that *Tangsir* (1963) imaginatively resolves the problem of domestic/foreign exploitation by allowing the protagonist to aggressively wipe out the oppressor. Second, it stages the concept of justice and represents two widespread approaches of the society of its time to it, and, by extension, addresses the national problem of Iran's then exploitation by the West. Third, it exemplifies the synchronous development of several modes of production in Iran by inscribing the elements of romance and modernist fiction into an apparently realistic novel.

Keywords: Sadeq Chubak, *Tangsir*, national allegory, symbolic act, generic discontinuity.

Neither am I an oppressor, nor can I tolerate oppression (Chubak, 44).

Introduction

Ever since the publication of *The Puppet Show* (1945), critics have been divided in qualifying the stylistic and generic nuances of Sadeq Chubak (1916–1998), one of the doyens of modern Persian fiction. While Baraheni (1989, 588) appreciated the author's minute representation of the grisly side of the Iranian society and Yarshater (1984, 54) highlighted his "descriptive power and controlled technique", Parham rebuked his ruthless naturalism (Parham 1957, 32). He postulates that Chubak dissects the carcass of society without stopping to think about the state of people who suffer various miseries (Parham 1957, 46-47). Dastgheib (1973, 18) reiterates this allegedly apathetic treatment of characters in the author's *oeuvre*, reasoning that most of Chubak's stories do not depict social realities but reflect instinctual and sensual states and pleasures which imply that they are inherent to human nature. For Dastgheib (1973, 21-22), this tendency in Chubak is a departure from realist fiction and the "reality" of life. By the same token, one of the recurrent objections directed at *Tangsir* is that Chubak has naively let his protagonist defeat his foes unopposed, which is not a historically reliable account (Dastgheib 1973, 24). Another line

* Doi: https://doi.org/ 10.47012/jjmll.16.4.9
* Corresponding Author: **m_yazdanjoo@sbu.ac.ir**

of division concerns the blurry generic category within the author's career as, for example, *Tangsir* has been considered more a romance than a novel proper insofar as it is heavily imbued with mythological references (Shojai 1975, 229).

This study, dispensing with the reductive apolitical and ahistorical aura that critics have foisted upon Chubak's *oeuvre*, contends that subtle political and social agenda permeate the author's first novel (*Tangsir*) and, by extension, his literary output. Basing its theoretical thrust on Fredric Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* (2002) and "Third World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism" (1986), this study examines *Tangsir* in the light of Jameson's three horizons of interpretation, namely "political," "social," and "historical", to pinpoint its textual (stylistic and generic) and contextual versatility. Before investigating Chubak's novel in terms of these horizons, it seems necessary to provide a general explanation about Jameson's analytical model.

The "political," the "social," and the "historical" are the three layers Jameson proposes for examining a literary text. The political denotes a chronicle-like record of consecutive incidents in a fictive context, which is developed as a plot by the author. The social refers to the formation and staging of conflict of "ideologemes" concerning a collective contradiction. In other words, different ways of behaviour and thinking about the world are expressed by the characters from disparate and conflicting classes. Finally, the "historical" horizon of interpretation analyses a work of art (literary text) from the perspective of the succession of modes of production as they transpire in historical time. It should be noted that for Jameson, these three horizons are overlapping vectors of analysis. Paul Fry avers that for Jameson, "the political is contained within the social and the social is contained within the historical" (Open Yale Courses). Therefore, the political is reconsidered when the critic reaches the social, and the social itself is reconsidered when one discusses the historical; hence the recurrence of certain topics throughout the following discussion.

There is a dearth of critical literature on reading Persian literature based on the Jamesonian tripartite model— a gap in knowledge that this study attempts to partially fill. Jonathan Harris, in his chapter on poststructuralist Marxisms, suggests that Jameson's third layer (i.e., historical) of interpretation could be used to unravel the "powerful contradictions" at Shakespeare's age, which in turn could intimate "a utopian alternative to conceptions of unified subjectivity" (2010, 173). Similarly, Adebayo Williams draws on Jameson's "political unconscious" to examine Wole Soyinka's *Death and the King's Horseman*, finding that this work aims to challenge, on a collective scale, the "arrogance and cultural chauvinism of Western imperialism" (1993, 72). Also, Ishay Linda studies J. R. R. Tolkien's tales in the light of Jameson's insistence on diagnosing the real contradiction to which a literary work is a symbolic and imaginary solution. The author argues the contradiction in Talkien's works concerns "the lust for power and domination or the struggle between good and evil which are usually referred to as the symbolic cargo of the Ring" (2002, 116).

First horizon: *Tangsir* as an imaginative solution to the problem of internal and foreign exploitation

Set in Tangestan, a region near Bushehr province renowned for resisting Western (imperialism) encroachment, *Tangsir* recounts an actual event that took place during the author's childhood. Zar-Mohammad, once a militia warrior against the British, used to labour for British settlers and managed to save a considerable sum of money. He entrusts it to four prominent locals so they could use it in trade and pay him part of the profits, but they swindle him out of this hard-earned fortune. Disappointed by social and judicial injustice to gain legal redress (which sets the plot in motion), he embarks on a vengeful quest and murders the four usurpers before fleeing the region with his wife and children. The protagonist's quest for justice, which is depicted as a messianic mission to liberate people from tyranny, earns him the epithet of hero among masses: the villagers idolize him as "lion-hearted Mohammad" (Shir Mohammad in Persian) for eradicating injustice and tyranny as well as escaping the grip of the law.

Chubak's debut novel, which arguably is part of a broader narrative about sociopolitical conditions in Iran during the 1960s, was appropriated to a feature film by Amir Naderi in 1974 and translated into English by F. R. C. Bagley as *One Man and His Gun* in 1978. Zar-Mohammad's cult of personality, which is a mélange of literary traditions and accordingly goes beyond the classic mode of heroism, raises a number of paradoxical questions which are partially addressed in this study: Is he morally uplift and physically strong enough to kill four tyrants? A Robin Hood-like justice-seeking hero or a defeated murderer? A hapless worker whose inferiority complex vis-à-vis Western encroachment reduces him to a chain-killer? A magnanimous southerner or an egoistic avenger? A patriot fashioned after classical Persian epics and legends like Rustam? Or a stereotypical anti-hero based on modern Western models? In order to deal with these questions, this paper capitalizes on the critical insights gleaned from Fredric Jameson's contributions to literary studies.

In *Tangsir*, the reader observes that personal and social contradictions with which most characters struggle are resolved by chaotic and atavistic dispositions, i.e., directly confronting and defeating one's oppressors without resorting to the competent authorities to establish justice. But is this what happened in real life? The answer hardly seems to be in the affirmative. Then, it might be asked, "Why is Chubak presenting us with a far-fetched and implausible plot?" and "Is *Tangsir* only an instance of escape literature?" If one denies *Tangsir* the status of serious literature, then where else could one possibly seek the redemptive power of this novel?

Jameson's *The Political Unconscious* provides an instrumental conduit from which to address this question. For him, a work of art at its first level ("political", by which he means the chronological sequence of events at present) stages a formal contradiction or antinomy, which is to be resolved imaginatively within its formal boundary (Jameson 2002, 60–61). With *Tangsir* in mind, a novel at the outset attempts as if to symbolically settle a real social contradiction or problem by presenting us with an aesthetic or literary contradiction at the level of the plot (Jameson 2002, 66). To be more precise, the social contradiction under consideration is converted into a double bind whose resolution is not dependent on *praxis*, but requires the creativity of the writer to formally and aesthetically bring it to closure (Jameson 2002, 68). Thus, the literary text becomes a "symbolic act". On the one hand, the text is a work

of imagination which does not intervene into the status quo the way, say, a new law passed by the Parliament or a strike might do. On the other hand, it entails its own specific performative dimension in, for example, harnessing the perspective of its audience and subtly instigating them into particular actions or directions. Meanwhile, it is worth recalling that this proposition of Jameson obtains even more foothold in the twentieth century Iran, a time when intellectuals (presuming Chubak to be one) exercised a crucial influence in "guiding" people from different social positions and viewpoints (Ghanoonparvar 1987, 94–95). Jameson's stress on primarily doing a close reading of the text would sound a formalistic, and so non-Marxist, injunction were it not for his insistence that this close attention to the basic elements of the story are meant to discover an aesthetic contradiction that will, in turn in the second horizon, be used to pinpoint an underlaying social contradiction (Dowling 1984, 128). According to Jameson, this diagnosis is what distinguishes such an exploration from those aimed at a sociology of literature, which confine themselves to enumerating class motifs and concerns in the work in order to prove that the text in question mirrors its social conditions (Jameson 2002, 66).

In the early 1920s, Iranians had lost their trust in the ability of Qajar rulers to defend the country against both internal and external forces of exploitation, all of which paved the way for the collapse of the dynasty (Farrokh 2011, 258). The diminishing of the dictatorial government following 1941 (the year when Iran was invaded by the British and Russians) deeply impacted Persian literature, even though this "interregnum" did not last long before people once again preferred "bondage with ease than strenuous liberty" (Milton 2011, 271) due to the regime's persistent repressions. Nonetheless, this transient period allowed the people to experience a relative freedom and motivated writers to hone their pens based on the real conditions of their society. Ebadiyan (1992, 90) notes that after September 1941, fiction writers began exposing artificial traditions and value systems which took away people's individuality and resulted in social passivity and indifference.

Tangsir is set at the end of the Qajar period and the tumults leading to the establishment of the Pahlavi dynasty. More precisely, it is set during the reign of Ahmad Shah—"the period of chaos and disintegration" (Pirzadeh 2016, 190)—or at least in the final years of his monarchy. In support of this suggestion, one may refer to that part in *Tangsir* when the protagonist (Zar-Mohammad) informs readers that he had participated in Rais Ali Delvari's nationalist activities during World War I (Chubak 1963, 18), which lasted for seven years (1908–1915) and ended in Delvari's defeat by the British (Shahibzadeh 2015, 74).

The dominant atmosphere of society favoured an explicitly, even propagandistically, radical style to an extent that the principal yardstick of the so-called committed literature was nothing less than adopting an anti-regime stance (Ghanoonparvar 1987, 101–102). Thus, artistically-crude writers like Samad Behrangi (1939–1968) gained public appreciation mostly thanks to their anti-government works and their association with radical thinkers like Jalal Ale-Ahmad (Ghanoonparvar 1987, 101–102). The naïve literature of upstart writers who tended to defend the regime triggered Chubak's contemporary playwright and novelist Gholam-Hossein Sa'edi to deride such authors, calling them "sheb-he honarmand" (pseudo-artist).[1] Within the over-politicised literature of the period that was often characterised by either a

categorical opposition to everything Western or a passive assimilation of Western forms and themes (Gheissari 1998, 115–117), one sees the enlightened nationalistic perspective of Sadeq Chubak. Shunning any direct confrontation with sociopolitical issues, Chubak did not demonise the Other at the expense of romanticising Iranians and their traditions.

Second horizon: *Tangsir* as a national allegory

The "individual phenomena" within the first interpretive horizon of *Tangsir* (the revenge story of an indignant person who has been rubbed) segue into "social facts and institutions" within Jameson's second horizon (Jameson 2002, 69). In this stage, the work of art is rewritten as an instance of antagonistic class discourse. In other words, the voice of a hegemonic class is expressed and simultaneously the voice to which this voice is primarily opposed—i.e. the stifled and marginalised discourse—is restored and reconstructed (Jameson 2002, 70–71). In this regard, Chubak's work bears an eloquent witness to Jameson's assertion that "the constitutive form of class relationships is always that between a dominant and a laboring class" (Jameson 2002, 69). In this antagonistic climate, a ruling class ideology explores "various strategies of the legitimation of its own power position" while an oppositional culture attempts to "contest and to undermine the dominant "value system"" (Jameson 2002, 69). Thus, in the case of *Tangsir*, the romantic dimension of Zar-Mohammad is not confined to a longing after a lost plenitude and innocence but serves as a gesture intimating political messages. Chubak, perhaps unbeknownst to himself, attempts to settle an issue in his fiction that had not been solved in real life.

One may argue that this problem/contradiction was the domination of Europeans over Iran and its resources, which is the subtext and political unconscious of Chubak's narrative. This assertion makes sense even better when we recall that the novelist's contemporaries tended to view him as an apolitical writer who was immersed in the physiology of his characters and shunned the present state of affairs, preferring instead to reflect on the past in his two novels (Dastgheib 1973, 7). This perspective on Chubak is discredited in the light of Jameson's reading of Third World literature: "*the story of the private individual destiny is always an allegory of the embattled situation of the public third-world culture and society*" (1986, 69 emphasis in the original),[2] which highlights the primacy of the collective in this type of literature.

Regarding the latent content of Chubak's more experimental novel, *The Patient Stone* (1966), it has been observed that while Chubak evaded from explicitly referring to the Pahlavi regime, "the subtext is of a police state in which the righteous and regulative forces are sucking the breathing air of the poor people" (Hendelman-Baavur 2014, 573). This subtext can also be extended to include part of what *Tangsir* invokes, with the proviso that such apparent withdrawal from politics is not meant to escape censorship but is the outcome of Chubak's proactive determination to differentiate his style from the abovementioned propagandistic climate of the literary circles of the time. *Tangsir* is not just about the deception of a hard-working labourer and the loss of his hardly-earned fortune. On a broader scale, it addresses the fleecing of a national property by foreigners. The intolerable contradiction of national robbery is so overwhelming that the novel on the individual level has to impose, what Jameson calls, a "narrative closure" to the plot (1986, 76): The robbers will never give back Zar-Mohammad's money, the

most he can fulfil is to exterminate them. But it is historically clear that such eradication did not materialize, for the West continued to drain Iran's resources. This was not least owing to the support of people of authority, from the state down to some venal men of religion, which is what happens in *Tangsir* in the character of the clergyman who colludes with other rascals to hoodwink the protagonist.

A half-dead cockroach which is pulled here and there by several ants early in the narrative (Chubak 1963, 15) is arguably a symbolic rendition of (foreign) exploitation, and it could be an allegory of what happened to Iran, an ancient country fat in terms of its riches though not agile enough to resist the tide of Western powers. Considering that Zar-Mohammad attempts to rescue the cockroach (Chubak 1963, 16), it is reasonable to argue this gesture could signal an unconscious desire by the author to call for heroic action as one possible strategy to transform the declining situation of Iran at the time.

At the second horizon of interpretation, *Tangsir* is both a reflection "of" and a reflection "on"[3] the chaotic state of late Qajar Iran, internally ruled by inept authorities and externally fleeced by Europeans. According to Farrokh (2011, 250), in this period Iran was besieged by "widespread famine", "mismanagement by an ineffectual central government", "rampant lawlessness", and "the presence of foreign troops" which pushed it to the brink of disintegration. Chubak invites potential readers to think about what is the best course of action in dealing with the West and the unjust ruling body in order to restore the lost rights and properties: Just waiting for the divine to settle everything (as common people in the novel do)? Negotiation (as Zar-Mohammad initially attempts)? Stopping trade with Europeans (as Zar-Mohammad recommends his uncle)? Or being content with the status quo and overlooking long-term consequences (which is what the protagonist's uncle supports)? In short, *Tangsir* dramatizes a paradox Iranians faced vis-à-vis the West and the Establishment. Even though Zar-Mohammad admonishes his uncle for trading with the British residents (Chubak 1963, 21), he himself has laboured for a British man and had made his fortune in that way. It is also contradictory to Zar-Mohammad that his townspeople have untroubled and tolerant relationships with the British even though they have killed a great many of local people (Chubak 1963, 21).

In a nutshell, the unopposed extermination of the oppressor (whether foreigners or compatriots) could only happen within the personal scale between Zar-Mohammad and the four people who had deceived him, because at the national scale the status of Iranian people with regard to their own rulers and the Europeans did not get better. The general indifference of Iran's politicians to people's needs—mentioned above—is alluded to in the novel, when a character, intending to prevent Zar-Mohammad from killing his exploiters, advises him to go to the authorities and solve his problem legally. Here, the protagonist retorts that the state does not even know whether Tangestan region is part of Iran or another country:

> Believe me Ahmad Shah doesn't even know whether Bushehr is part of Iran or Saudi Arabia. […] Of such complaints there are many, but no one has ever listened. […] Every day an agent comes from Tehran, exploits the folk, and leaves and nothing changes[4]. (Chubak 1963, 81)

This was despite the significant efforts of the region to fight off the British. In fact, "the region of *Tangsir* in the south was famous for having caused the British a great deal of trouble during World War I" (Abrahamian 2008, 127), not to mention how local revolts were suppressed and even their leaders were betrayed to the foreigners (Shahibzadeh 2015, 79). It is noteworthy that the year *Tangsir* was written (1963), Iran was witnessing a tumultuous period marked with uprisings in cities like Qom and Tehran (Ghanoonparvar 1987, 85).

The above passage from *Tangsir* is a further allusion to the extremely unstable conditions of Iran, which had been virtually surrendered to Russia through the Russo-Persian Treaty of Friendship in 1921. Article 6 of this agreement stipulated that Russians could march their forces into Iran in case they felt endangered by a third country already placing itself in Iran. Additionally, Russians were allowed to enter Iran's borders for self-defence even if they felt Iran was unable to defend itself and its ally (Farrokh 2011, 250). Pirzadeh's apt expression "deliberate subjectification to Power" (2016, 162), generalised to the history of Iran within the last four centuries, could be applied to the mentality of local people in *Tangsir* and, by extension, the psyche of the common Iranian during the late Qajar dynasty in which the story is set.

Following Jameson's insistence to dispel the illusion of autonomy of a given text (2002, 71), it should be stressed that *Tansgir* is not solely the outcome of Chubak's imagination working in solitude. Rather it is a response to the sociopolitical and economic conditions of the country and the status of Iranians, particularly as far as the presence of Europeans in Iran at the time is concerned. Chubak is remarkably accurate in his treatment of the Anglo-Iranian exchange when he exposes that not all Iranians were bent on expelling the British (and other foreigners). This is borne out in the encounter between Zar-Mohammad and his uncle. In response to Zar-Mohammad's complaint, the uncle states that the British are human beings and that he is a tradesman and would not earn a living were he to cease doing business with them (Chubak 1963, 21). Zar-Mohammad respectfully disagrees that the British do not harm the locals. He reminds his uncle of the fight in which many local residents were killed by the British. Furthermore, sweet water, good houses, and other facilities are exclusively for foreigners, he underscores. The uncle justifies that he carefully washes the dishes used by the British, thus explaining away his nephew's qualms regarding the impurity of trading with non-Muslims. Resented by the attribution of impurity to his job, the uncle retorts that Zar-Mohammad himself had amassed a fortune by working as a goldsmith for the British, hence his unacknowledged dependency on the foreigners. Faced with a conundrum, Zar-Mohammad reasons that he regrets labouring for the British since its impurity touched him too when he lost the money (Chubak 1963, 21–22). Early in the story, Zar-Mohammad bumps into the British and the Persian flags. The writer symbolically conveys how humiliated Iran had become in relation to its virtual coloniser, Britain, by comparing the refined and ever-new flag of England with the dilapidated and nondescript flag of Iran. The protagonist, disgusted at the sight, muses on how the efforts and heroic sacrifices of Rais Ali Dehvari and his companions, including himself, to fight off the British have now been betrayed (Chubak 1963, 17–18).

Could it be assumed that Chubak is intimating the idea that Iran had to renounce any relationship with the West? Or should this suggestion be qualified by positing that what is aimed at by the author is a

cautious relationship which is vigilant of its own limitations and sets limits for the other European party? In other words, not a total indentured servitude but a mutually beneficial exchange? Or perhaps Chubak intended to show how the predicament of Iranians was self-caused inasmuch as it is Zar-Mohammad's fellow citizens who robbed him, and not any unpredictable foreign enemy.

Regarding the above question, a more inclusive preposition could also be advanced, namely that for Chubak, people's miseries originate in several causes: inept government, foreign interventions, and atavistic modes of thinking endorsed by many Iranians. The last one could be exemplified in *Tangsir* when the locals try to console the robbed protagonist by stating that Zar-Mohammad has to leave the issue to God, who will take his revenge and settle the problem (Chubak 1963, 78). The novel exposes another bias among many contemporary Iranians who had been "programmed" not to recognise the real cause of their predicament. Thus, as mentioned above, the protagonists' uncle is content to trade with Iran's virtual masters, i.e., the British, but not with his fellow Muslim countrymen of the Sunni denomination. This is evident when, answering Zar-Mohammad's objection not to trade with the British, the uncle says that their money is not that of "Umar" (Chubak 1963, 21–22), which could be perceived as a strongly sectarian remark.

The fact that *Tangsir* emits different suggestions could be justified by Jameson's idea that in the second horizon, the text becomes a ground whereby multiple perspectives over a pressing social concern, each representing a certain social class, are pitted against one another and are orchestrated by the author to have a dialogue with one another using a "shared code" (2002, 70). The example Jameson provides for this shared code is "religion" in the 1640s England, when "the dominant formulations of a hegemonic theology [were] reappropriated and polemically modified" by different factions aiming to exercise and legitimise their power (2002, 70). In the case of Chubak's novel and his sociopolitical milieu it could be argued that this "shared code" was the desire for national "progress" and "prosperity". As hinted above, some intellectuals like Akhundzadeh in contemporary Iran thought this goal could be achieved by imitating Europeans, even if it entailed losing national resources to them (Kia 1995, 444). *Tangsir* partly addresses this issue, as Chubak draws on the shared code of progress and prosperity to allegorically convey the social contradiction of national exploitation by both self-serving authorities and foreigners, which had been the focus of many intellectuals and writers of the time.

Part of Chubak's nationalism, which constitutes a component of the national allegory in *Tangsir*, has to do with his criticism of conventional and quietist piety of people and their deterministic religious understanding. In *Tangsir*, all characters except Zar-Mohammad believe they should relegate the responsibility to reclaim their rights to God (Chubak 1963, 78). Chubak's intervention is part of a more radical trend among Iranian intellectuals who exalted the pre-Islamic Iran, condemned Islam for Iran's backwardness, and projected the progressive qualities of the modern West on the pre-Islamic past. This nationalism reached its zenith in Sadeq Hedayat and Bozorg Alavi, who disdained Arabs and conventional Islam and maintained xenophobic and chauvinistic attitudes (Hanan 2014, 277). It should be explained that in the case of Chubak, the critique is not levelled against religion per se but on its rigid institutionalisation and on those people who fail to stand true to their beliefs. Significantly one of the four

people whom Zar-Mohammad kills is a clergyman, Sheikh Abutorab, who abused his religious authority and colluded with other rascals of the town so as to fleece the miserable labourer (Chubak 1963, 54). A striking example of religious inadequacy of the time is the behaviour of the Friday-prayer Imam who deceives Zar-Mohammad by taking a large part of his money to "clean" it, because it has been earned by labouring for a non-Muslim master (Chubak 1963, 51–52). Thus, in this society even a dysfunctional religious institution exploits common people.

Chubak's *oeuvre* evades the conventional models of artistic excellence classification. Dovetailing his unique nationalism is his intellectual position in the committed literature of his era. Critics like Baraheni (1989, 495) who define an intellectual as someone who consciously aspires to elevate his readers and whose stories emanate a conspicuous sense of leadership and enlightenment will fail to appreciate the depth of Chubak's style. In fact, Chubak's apparently detached and ruthless treatment of corruption and various social ills appealed to a general readership who was fed up with the moralistic and sentimental outlook of other writers who tended to dissociate themselves from the masses (Hasan 2014, 159). Similar to Baraheni, Michael Hillmann (1976, 71) argues Chubak was disinclined toward any "political or even public literary activity"—as if the novelist were an esoteric and ivory-tower writer. Likewise, Mansour Shaki (1984, 40) posits that Chubak "never ventures to penetrate deeply into the political realities of life" due to his medical frankness in describing the sordid, individual aspects of downtrodden people. The present study, however, proposes that Chubak's grim naturalism serves a committed goal: to make the reader repulse and revolt against the society of which the text is meant to be a mirror. His crisp and non-moralising characterisation notwithstanding, Chubak's characters stir up a deep sympathetic quality that taps into the common humanity of the audience, which enables the writer to "push back narrower limits of naturalism" (Mostaghel 1979, 230).

Observing Zar-Mohammad killing the knaves one after another, the reader might be led into thinking of him as a callous person. This impression is undermined by two early scenes exhibiting his sensitive humanity/compassion: first when he pities the injured cockroach and saves it from the ants (Chubak 1963, 16); second when he determines to tame a wild cow belonging to an old woman. The former has been interpreted with reference to Chubak's early animalistic naturalism to justify the notion of survival of the fittest (Bavil and Ghomlaghi 2017). This line of interpretation is not unlike the common tendency Jameson identifies among readers of Western literature to "psychologize" literature, i.e. to reduce a multifaceted work into a "rigorously private and subjective 'mood'" (1986, 69). In the same passage, Jameson adds, the case becomes worse when this reading strategy spills over into interpreting the literature of Third World countries. As he sees it, the element of collectivity dominates the literature of these countries even when a text purportedly does not deal with its large-scale situation. It would not be outrageous to consider these two scenes not just as adumbrating what is going to happen to the protagonist, but at a larger scale as an allegory for Iranians at the time when the novel is set—i.e., during World War I when Iran was a target for both the Allied and Axis powers.

Third Horizon: generic discontinuities in *Tangsir*

Before reading *Tangsir* in the light of Jameson's third horizon of interpretation, it is illuminating to spell out two points. First, although a number of commentators downgraded *Tangsir* as an overstretched short story (Baraheni 1989, 626), it stands as a novel. Initially published by a leading though low-quality agency (*Majalleh-ye Andish-e va Honar* (Journal of Thought and Art)), *Tangsir* was embellished with stereotypical remarks which made the audience recoil from reading it (Baraheni 1989, 627). Second, amazed by the highly cinematic quality of the novel, some dismissed the author's idiosyncrasy by claiming that Chubak has been heavily under the influence of Western movies in characterizing the protagonist. Baraheni (1989, 632) rejects the author's imitation of the Western hero trope, though he does not repudiate the similarities between Chubak's character and its Western counterpart. Instead, he justifies this resemblance by positing that Chubak is yearning nostalgically for a larger-than-life person who could take the personal, ethnic, or even national revenge from the adversary.

In the third and final phase of interpretation, Jameson treats a literary text in terms of "ideology of form", which he defines as the "symbolic messages" conveyed to the audience by the "coexistence of various sign systems" that are primarily clues or symptoms of "modes of production" (2002, 62). For Jameson, a literary genre is not a neutral juxtaposition of words, images, and other linguistic elements coalesced haphazardly. Instead, the very decision of an author to compose in a specific genre has to do with the political and socioeconomic situation of the time in which he/she writes. In short, one should not make a distinction between the form of a work of art and its content, since the two are inseparable (Jameson 1974, 329). In this section, we consider Jameson's preposition with regard to Chubak's language and the way he plays with the conventions of a realistic protagonist versus a hero of romance narratives. Before that, it seems necessary to briefly review what other scholars have asserted concerning the linguistic/formal dimension of Chubak's works.

For Aryanpur and Azādeh (1972, 203), Chubak "is a consummate artist whose naturalistic approach and attention to details have enabled him to create vivid pictures of life in contemporary Iran". Baraheni (1989), in the chapter on Chubak in *Gesse Nevisi* (Story Writing), appreciated and celebrated Chubak's harsh and uncouth language, believing it to be firmly tied to the subject matter. Another critic, Peter Avery, soon recognised the novelty of Chubak's works and recorded that the common way of approaching this author which exaggerates the influence of Sadeq Hedayat fails to do justice to Chubak. For Avery (1955, 322-323), Chubak is rather characterised by a major Renaissance ideal, namely *sprezzatura*, whereby he skilfully conceals his well-wrought art. Dividing Chubak's literary career in two parts, Babasalar (2006, 146-151) asserts that in *Tangsir* one witnesses the writer's transition from realistic and down-to-earth characters to a legendary and invincible hero with a romantic vision. He follows that strand of commentators who argue for a gradual decline in the literary output of Chubak as the novelist moved away from his short story writing to try his hand at long narratives.

In keeping with Jameson's perspective, it is reasonable to assert that Chubak's aim to call for a reform in the life of different social classes, lower classes in particular, is manifested in the very choice of words he makes throughout most of his works, including *Tangsir*. Thus, in contrast to the polished style

of some authors who distanced themselves from common people, he cherished the vernacular and glorified it in order to show his devotion to ordinary people. Meanwhile, Chubak simultaneously points to the frailties of people who maintain a heavily fatalistic worldview.

An essential component of any narrative is how the protagonist is distinctively characterised. According to Jameson, any departure from or assimilation of some such conventions ought not to be viewed simply as arbitrary or an aesthetic preference on the part of its author. As he remarks, "such a deviation could be understood as a meaningful symbolic act" (2002, 114). In this regard, Chubak's novel jibes well with Jameson's notion of "generic discontinuity" (2002, 130) in the way its protagonist partakes the qualities of both romance and Realistic novel. Following the definition of Northrop Frye for hero (2000, 146–151) in romance as well as "high mimetic" and "low mimetic" modes, we may claim that Zar-Mohammad as portrayed by Chubak fits neither a purely Realistic character nor a hero appropriate for a romance or epic. Thus, he acts and is described mostly in everyday-life terms: a former worker for the British; someone who has fought against the British; a credulous person who is easily deceived by his fellow townspeople; and an indignant and resented individual seeking to mete out justice through direct intervention with no recourse to the incompetent and even indifferent government. In one occasion, he expresses his life-long conviction that:

> All of these people have colluded to fleece me out of my negligible sum of money. But Neither am I an oppressor, nor can I tolerate oppression. […] I will reclaim my right even at the cost of my life. (Chubak 1963, 44)

Meanwhile, Chubak utilizes elements of fantasy in order to showcase common people and their perceptions. Thus, in one episode in the novel we see that the protagonist, while escaping the soldiers, dives into the sea and swims an extraordinary distance to reach his home; in between, he clashes with a shark and defeats it, which is explicitly not in accordance with a Realistic novel and fits more an epic or romance.

Apart from *Tangsir*'s resemblance to romance and its participation in the social realist tradition, Chubak makes use of a salient convention of modernist fiction, namely stream of consciousness. The major example of this technique in *Tangsir* occurs when Zar-Mohammad takes refuge to an Armenian shopkeeper. Fatigued, he sits and drowses in the staircase; the reader is then presented with a set of "conscious and half-conscious thoughts, memories, expectations, feelings, and random associations", which suggest stream of consciousness (Chubak 1963, 345). Zar-Mohammad recollects all incidents which had happened that day and muses over them. He mingles them with fantastic incidents as when he imagines having been alone in a ship which had been deserted and battered with storm yet had continued its path as it had entered and passed the rocks like a phantom. Then, he looked for his gun and could not find it. Coming back to the real, in an eye blink, he finds himself at the door of one of the robbers, who stabs him. Then he returns to his imagination and fancies how he jumped out of the ship and attempted to save his family, who were left unprotected in a raft. This alternating movement is sustained for some time while Zar-Mohammad drowsed until he suddenly comes to full consciousness when the shopkeeper's page arrives (Chubak 1963, 139–141). It is important to mention that in keeping with the conventions of

stream of consciousness, Chubak does not tell the reader, in these incidents in the novel, whether Zar-Mohammad is dreaming or recollecting what has actually taken place.

This plural positionality and generic hybridity in *Tangsir* could best be grasped in terms of the "uneven development" of several modes of production, which is the focus of Jameson's third phase of interpretation. For Jameson, this formal incompatibility and multiplicity is due to "a conflict between the older deep-structural form and the contemporary materials and generic systems in which [the literary work] seeks to inscribe and to reassert itself" (2002, 128). More precisely, the common objection that *Tangsir* suffers from generic promiscuity will be overcome if we draw on Jameson's argument and recall that such linguistic multiplicity is symptomatic of ideological and practical heterogeneity. The generic plurality and multiplicity of contradictory voices in the textuality of the novel can be further elaborated within the gamut of Mikhail Bakhtin's sociological poetics of the novel. In *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, Bakhtin holds that narratives are both polyphonic and dialogic in nature, animated by intersecting ideological perspectives, polemics, intertextual echoes, and discursive relationships which feed "in" and "on" each other. The protagonist of a polyphonic novel, according to Bakhtin, occupies distinct and contradictory roles and positions: "the consciousness of a character is given as someone else's consciousness, another consciousness, yet […] does not become a simple object of the author's consciousness" (1984, 7). The diverse subject-positions of Zar-Mohammad demonstrates *Tangsir*'s discursive polyphony in that the overlays of his contradictory beliefs and actions render the novel to a hybrid space where a polyphony of voices dance together. Perceptive readers may ask who Zar-Mohammad might be: A patriot who genuinely defends his country against foreign exploitation? A humiliated proletariat who embarks on a vengeful quest to satisfy his egoistic temperaments? An opportunist who compromises his identity and country to redress his financial drawback? A Robin Hood-like hero who robs the bourgeoisie in favour of the disadvantaged? Or an amalgamation of all these options in a heteroglossia? As such, to put it in Bakhtin's words, Chubak's voice "is not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, […] rather *a plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world*" (1984, 6 emphasis in the original). As mentioned before, the novel dwells on multiple generic forms which depict a polyphonic literary collage: it imbibes chivalric romance, epic, fiction, and cinema. The diverse subject-positions of Zar-Mohammad and generic fecundity signify a polyphonic and dialogic world in *Tangsir* where no voice is subordinated to the author's voice.

Indeed, this lack of homogeneity characterized Iran when Chubak was writing his novel. In the introduction to *Iran Without Borders*, Dabashi (2016, 3) identifies concurrent development of three ideological discourses in modern Iran: "anticolonial nationalism and Third World socialism"; "militant Islamism"; and "Shi'i pietism". Dabashi also defies the binary opposition between a religious and/or a secular Iran, calling it a "self-fulfilling prophesy" (2016, 5). By the same token, he posits that the Iranian Revolution of 1977–79 was the outcome of the convergence of all the three ideologies, namely "the Third World socialism of the Tudeh Party in the 1940s […], the anticolonial nationalism of Mohammad Mosaddegh in the 1950s, and the Islamist uprising of Ayatollah Khomeini in the 1960s". *Tangsir* is an illustrative example of Jameson's as well as Dabashi's arguments, tellingly exemplified in the paradoxical

beliefs by which Zar-Mohammad lives. While he is convinced that he is responsible for reclaiming his rights and does not just invoke God to accomplish that (which is associated with a progressive and libertarian outlook), he believes in the power of genies and ghosts in influencing people's lives. This is manifested early in the novel when the reader is invited to a world that resembles magic-realistic settings: the reader is told about a ziziphus tree haunted by genies and ghosts, whose wedding ceremonies have been reported by people living in the neighbourhood (Chubak 1963, 9). Later when Zar-Mohammad comes to rest under its shade, the reader understands that he too believes in this superstition as he assumes that perhaps the ants and the cockroach moving around him are metamorphosed genies (Chubak 1963, 16).

Conclusion

Chubak has been conceived as an apolitical writer who avoided a direct confrontation with the state of affairs, preferring instead to reflect on the past in his *oeuvre*. Questioning this defeatist line of scholarly argument, the present study posits that his literary craft is deeply engaged with and addresses the sociopolitical spirit of his time, a tendency that finds its apotheosis in *Tangsir*. Drawing on Fredric Jameson's multilayered model of analysing literary texts, the study pinpoints that *Tangsir* historicises the hegemonic discourses and circumstances that enveloped Iran at the end of the Qajar dynasty, when the country was poised between the unqualified Establishment, which was indifferent to national woes, and foreign exploitation. Likewise, it is tempting to suggest that the protagonist's extermination of exploiters is a symbolic act hinting at the author's unconscious desire for anti-imperial social reform. *Tangsir*'s generic hybridity, which weds romance, Realism, and modernist fiction, is arguably associated with the coexistence of several modes of production in Iran at the dawn of the twentieth century. The application of Jameson's three horizons of interpretation to *Tangsir* allowed delving into the hidden sociopolitical subtext of the novel, which brings the novelist's activism to the fore. To put it succinctly, as a representative of Third World literature, *Tangsir* is an elegy on the captivity of the nation from both within and without.

العالم الثالث رمزيّة وطنيّة في صادق تشوبكم (تنجسير)

عبد الله رضائي
قسم اللغة الإنجليزيّة، جامعة خوارزمي، إيران

مرتضى يزدانجو
اللغة الإنجليزيّة وآدابها، جامعة الشهيد بهشتي، إيران

الملخص

من المقبول عموماً أن صادق تشوبک لم ينخرط في أي نشاط سياسي، وأن أعماله "غير السياسية" تؤكد على منظور قدري وعبثي، وأنه كان يهتم اهتماماً طبيعياً بالمنبوذين الاجتماعيين والمدمنين والمجرمين والمتسولين وما شابه ذلك. وهذا ما يتجلى بقوة أكبر فيما يتعلق بروايته تنجسير. في هذه الورقة، يُقترح أن تعرض رواية تشوباك الفردية ظاهريًا نموذج فريدريك جيمسون الثلاثي لتفسير النصوص الأدبيّة. وفقًا لذلك، سيُقترح أولاً أن يحلّ *Tangsir* بصورة خياليّة مشكلة الاستغلال المحلي / الأجنبي من خلال السماح لبطل الرواية بالقضاء بقوة على الظالم. وثانيًا، أن يضع مفهوم العدالة ويمثل مقاربتين واسعتي الانتشار للمجتمع في عصره، وبالتالي يعالج المشكلة الوطنيّة المتمثلة في استغلال إيران في ذلك الوقت من قبل الغرب. وثالثًا، أن يمثل التطور المتزامن للعديد من أنماط الإنتاج في إيران من خلال إدراج العناصر الرومانسيّة والخيال الحديث في رواية تبدو واقعيّة.

الكلمات المفتاحية: صادق تشوبكم، تنجسير، رمزيّة وطنيّة، عمل رمزي، انقطاع عام.

Endnotes

[1] "In October 1977 the Iranian writers' association held a series of poetry readings and speeches at Tehran's Goethe Institute for ten consecutive evenings. These meetings contained a summarized statement of the political and artistic position of the intellectuals on the eve of the revolution. The proceedings of these nights, with attendance by close to ten thousand people every evening, were recorded on tape and distributed both in Iran and abroad; the tapes were later transcribed and published as a book" (Gheissari 109).

[2] It must be cautioned, however, that Jameson does not use this term in its pejorative sense; rather he simply uses it out of necessity to refer to that part of the world which is economically underdeveloped (Jameson 1986, 67).

[3] The wording for this dual emphasis on the idea that a text both represents its milieu and comments on this milieu is borrowed from Terry Eagleton, when he discusses Bertolt Brecht's epic theatre (2006, 30).

[4] Unless otherwise indicated, translations from Persian are by the authors of the present article.

References

Abrahamian, Ervand. 2008. *A History of Modern Iran*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Aryanpur, Manoocher, and M Azādeh. 1972. Retrospect and Progress: A Short View of Modern Persian Literature. *Books Abroad* 46 (2): 200–210. doi:10.2307/40126072.

Avery, Peter W. 1955. Developments in Modern Persian Prose. *The Muslim World* 45 (4): 313–323. doi:10.1111/j.1478-1913.1955.tb02235.x.

Babasalar, Asghar. 2006. Sadeq Chuback and a Critique of His Works. *Journal of the Faculty of Literature and Humanities (University of Tehran)* 57 (1): 133–151.

Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1984. *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*. Trans. and ed. Caryl Emerson. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.

Baraheni, Reza. 1989. *Story Writing*. Tehran: Alborz Publication.

Bavil, Latifeh Salamat, and Fattaneh Ghomlaghi. 2017. Matching the Components of Naturalism with Works of Sadegh Choubak. *Journal of Literary Criticism Studies* 12 (46): 95–121. http://padab.iauctb.ac.ir/article_538162.html?lang=fa.

Chubak, Sadeq. 1963. *Tangsir*. Tehran: Negah Publications.

Dabashi, Hamid. 2016. *Iran Without Borders: Towards a Critique of the Postcolonial Nation.* London: Verso.

Dastgheib, Abdolali. 1973. *A Critique of Chubak's Works*. Tehran: Pazand.

Dowling, William C. 1984. *Jameson, Althusser, Marx: An Introduction to The Political Unconscious*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Eagleton, Terry. 2006. *Marxism and Literary Criticism*. London: Routledge.

Ebadiyan, Mahmoud. 1992. *An Introduction to Contemporary Persian Literature.* Tehran: Gohar Nashr.

Farrokh, Kaveh. 2011. *Iran at War: 1500-1988*. Oxford: Osprey Publishing.

Frye, Northrop. 2000. *Anatomy of Criticism: Four Essays*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Ghanoonparvar, Mohammad Reza. 1987. *Prophets of Doom: Literature as a Socio-Political Phenomenon in Modern Iran*. London: University Press of America.

Gheissari, Ali. 1998. *Iranian Intellectuals in the Twentieth Century*. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Hanan, Hammad. 2014. Relocating a Common Past and the Making of East-Centric Modernity: Islamic and Secular Nationalism(s) in Egypt and Iran. In *Rethinking Iranian Nationalism and Modernity*, ed. Kamran Scot Aghaie, 275–296. Austin: University of Texas Press.

Harris, Jonathan Gil. 2010. *Shakespeare and Literary Theory*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Hendelman-Baavur, Liora. 2014. Grotesque Corporeality and Literary Aesthetics in Sadeq Chubak's the Patient Stone. *Iranian Studies* 47 (4): 569–593. doi:10.1080/00210862.2014.906735.

Hillmann, Michael C. 1976. "The Sigh of Mankind" and "The Kerosene Man" 1945. *Literature East and West* 20 (1–4): 71-72.

Jameson, Fredric. 1974. *Marxism and Form: Twentieth-Century Dialectical Theories of Literature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Jameson, Fredric. 1986. Third-World Literature in the Era of Multinational Capitalism. *Social Text* 15 (Autumn): 65–88. doi:10.2307/466493.

Jameson, Fredric. 2002. *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act*. London: Routledge Classics.

Kia, Mehrdad. 1995. Mizra Fath Ali Akhundzade and the Call for Modernization of the Islamic World. *Middle Eastern Studies* 31 (3): 422-448.

Landa, Ishay. 2002. Slaves of the ring: Tolkien's political unconscious. *Historical Materialism* 10 (4): 113-133.

Milton, John. 2011. "Samson Agonistes: A Dramatic Poem". In *Milton's Selected Poetry and Prose*, ed. Jason P Rosenblatt, 153-204. New York: W. W. Norton & Company.

Mostaghel, Deborah Miller. 1979. The Second Sadeq: The short stories of Iranian Writer Sadeq Chubak. *World Literature Today* 53 (2): 227–231. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40133577.

Open Yale Courses. Introduction to Theory of Literature. https://oyc.yale.edu/english/engl-300.

Parham, Sirus. 1957. *Realism and Anti-Realism in Literature*. Tehran: Nil Publication.

Pirzadeh, Ali. 2016. *Iran Revisited: Exploring the Historical Roots of Culture, Economics, and Society*. Cham: Springer.

Shahibzadeh, Yadullah. 2015. *The Iranian Political Language: From the Late Nineteenth Century to the Present*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan.

Shaki, Mansour. 1984. "An Introduction to Modern Persian Literature". In *Critical Perspectives on Modern Persian Literature*, ed. Thomas M. Ricks, 26–41. Washington: Three Continents Press.

Shojai, Donald Alireza. 1975. The Fatal Rage: Heroic Anger in Modern Iranian Fiction. *Iranian Studies* 8 (4): 216–233. doi:10.1080/00210867508701500.

Williams, Adebayo. 1993. Ritual and the Political Unconscious: The case of "Death and the King's

Horseman". *Research in African Literatures* 24 (1): 67-79.

Yarshater, Ehsan. 1984. "The Modern Literary Idiom". In *Critical Perspectives on Modern Persian Literature*, ed. Thomas M. Ricks, 42–62. Washington: Three Continents Press.