

Facing History: A Comparative Study of Howard Barker and Bahram Beyzaie's Selected Plays

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Abstract:

This article attempts to compare Bahram Beyzaie and Howard Barker, two tragedians with a critical-historical approach towards the past, formal history, and canonical texts. The plays by Beyzaie and Barker (*Judith* and *Possibilities* by Barker and *Fath-Nameh-Kalat* by Beyzaie) are studied based on the theories of Hegel, Theodor Adorno, and Hayden White including historicizing and the matter of truth, the process of subjectivity, the moral philosophy of rationality/irrationality, and sacrifice. Rereading and representing historical events through tragedies and via personal ethics, aesthetics, and critical approaches pave the way for the audience and readers' understanding of the past. This offers them the power of imagination and creation and saves them from habitual repetitions as well as the imitation of Grand Narratives. This negation gives self-consciousness to the individual and leads her/him in transforming from a passive and obedient object to an active and rebellious subject in the society. Beyzaie's and Barker's challenging and complex views of the past, historical narrations, and patriotic/patriarchal morality, along with the literary techniques they use which provide a shocking, skeptical, and delusional atmosphere for the audience to encourage it to deny, guess, and create are the notable and radical artistic and philosophical characteristics of these playwrights.

Keywords: historical events, representation, ethics, morality, subjectivity

Historicizing

Looking at the past through historical or canonical texts (stories, narrations, and myths) has a basically dramatic essence through making dialogues with historical figures or asking details about historical events. Dramatists have numerous approaches towards the past. For instance, they retell the past in order to glorify ancient events with nationalistic

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tendencies, create pride in the nation-state, or encourage nationalism in the society. Formal history is also rewritten by filling the gaps and the muted parts of the narration in order to give voice to the suppressed groups of the society such as lower classes, minorities, other religions or races, and women. Another approach is deconstructing the previous approved versions of history in order to display the multiplicity and multi-dimensional essence of narration and to save it from the fallacies of holiness, uniqueness, and originality. As Adorno warns, “the objection of bottomlessness needs to be turned against the intellectual principle which preserves itself as the sphere of absolute origins; there however, where ontology, Heidegger first and foremost, hits bottomlessness, is the place of truth” (1966: 43-45).

Dramatists with creativity may reproduce their own personal history using historical, religious, or mythical figures or events based on their own personal visions, memories, and demands. In facing the past as an innovative subject with respect to historical objects, a dramatist reshapes the structure and setting of the narration or even displaces the historical events and figures to deepen his own perspectives. Making up figures and events and adding them to historical events is another technique which dramatists take advantage of to build and reveal their own private, personal, or ideological copy of the formal written or verbal version of history. There is always some amount of narrativity in every historical report, representation, or story. This is one of the moments when literature and history overlap. Figuring out the aim of the author or dramatist in making use of historical figures, historical events, or historical stories will determine the creative (diegetic) or retelling (mimetic) levels of narration in the texts. According to White, “the amount of narrative in a given history will vary, and its function will change depending on whether it is conceived as an end in itself or only as a means to some other end” (White, 1987: 27). Where dramatists struggle to tell their own story rather than analyzing a historical documentary, they will rely more on their imagination than their information. Dramatists actively employ their subjectivity in order to relate to the past. Their critical perception and artistic-aesthetic imagination are the bases of their literary/historical products. Insisting on the fictional characteristics of historical texts rather than their supposedly factual characteristics enables authors and dramatists to employ history or previous reports as their basic mosaic material to build their own aesthetic and defamiliarized versions. Where the historian strives to offer a description, interpretation, or causation of events and hides or denies his/her subjective role, the artist may overtly guess, imagine, or create new historical events by using the formal and accepted Grand Narrative. Whereas historians scientifically investigate the ‘true’ story, dramatists

consider different possibilities to answer the question “What Happened?”. In this process, ambiguity replaces clarity and ‘probability’ would take the place of ‘certainty’ which is the foundation of democratic methods of thinking about the past. Thinking of and talking with the past is making a discourse with the absence. The absence donates an amount of freedom to readers in order to use their cognition and imagination while they are aware of the hermeneutic essence of the subject’s perceptions and the relativity of truth. Hence, according to White, the content of a historical text matters not the form. This leads one to pay more attention to the content rather than the structure in evaluating and comparing the literariness and factuality of historical texts. Hayden White attempts to:

characterize the discussions of narrative in historical theory that have taken place in the West over the last two or three decades. First group represented by certain Anglo-American analytical philosophers (Waldh, Gardiner, Dray, Gallie, Morton White, Danto, Mink), who have sought to establish the epistemic status narrativity, considered as a kind of explanation especially appropriate to the explication of historical, as against natural, events and processes. Second that of certain social-scientifically oriented historians, of whom the members of the French *Annales* group may be considered exemplary. This group (Braudel, Furet, Le Goff, Le Roy-Ladurie, and so on) regarded narrative historiography as a nonscientific, even ideological representational strategy, the extirpation of which was necessary for the transformation of historical studies into a genuine science. Third that of certain semiologically oriented literary theorists and philosophers (Barthes, Foucault, Derrida, Todorov, Julia Kristeva, Benveniste, Genette, Eco), who have studied narrative in all of its manifestations and viewed it as simply one discursive “code” among others, which might or might not be appropriate for the representation of reality. And finally that of certain hermeneutically oriented philosophers, such as Gadamer and Ricoeur, who have viewed narrative as the manifestation in discourse of a specific kind of time-consciousness or structure of time (1987: 31).

There is not any kind of guarantee about reality and documentary for the audience and there is not a direct short path towards the facts in Barker and Beyzaie’s historical plays. Their approach to history and telling history is not ontological and knowledge-based. Knowledge, ideology, and documentary are the power’s devices to rule, lead, and influence the audience. Hence, for them, imagining and representing history is aesthetical and subversive in different ways. Their historical theater avoids the manner of mass media (the authority’s voice) in offering the one and only ‘truth’ to their readers or audience. Being free from the responsibility of declaring the truth or facts as well as being clear through their artistic communications, Barker and Beyzaie provide empty spaces, fragments, and other dimensions for the audience to observe the events. The realm of history for Barker and Beyzaie remains the realm of skeptical, critical, and imaginative writing back. Forcing an ideology, dictating any kind of truth, or simplifying understanding with

direct messages for the audience are absent in their plays. As Adorno says:

The form of thinking as an intra-temporal, motivated, progressive movement resembles in advance, microcosmically, the macrocosmic, historical one, which was internalized in the structure of thought. Among the highest achievements of the Kantian deduction was that he preserved the memory, the trace of what was historical in the pure form of cognition, in the unity of the thinking I, at the stage of the reproduction of the power of imagination (1966: 63-65).

Barker and Beyzaie both create their own new narration of historical, canonical, or mythical texts and through this new narration or, in other words, their representation of the older texts, they intentionally make an aesthetic or critical relation to previous texts such as formal history or mythical stories. Via their imagination, they confirm, rewrite, or deny historical narrations. By manipulating the forms and contents of ancient or historical texts or memories or by using the literal technique of defamiliarization of canons, myths, or historical events (sometimes by displacing the figures or events), they compose a new symphony of multiple voices from history instead of the unity of the Grand Narratives. Far from taking anthological or scientific approaches towards the past and historical texts, Beyzaie and Barker create a dialectic with history which enables them to question the hegemonic nature of history or to accuse it for not being multidimensional towards what has happened.

With the passage of time, artistic evaluation is no more looking for the best imitation of nature, the real, or the Grand Narrative. The dramatist overtly displays all the elements of adaptation or intertextuality. Herein lies the importance of appropriation and de-contextualization which are under the influence of the author's skills of deconstructing, creating, and revising the previous texts. The kind of relationship which Beyzaie and Barker make through their tragedies with the past reveals their philosophical standpoints to history, reality, and truth. Dramatizing a historical narrative and observing the past via their present lens prepares the audience or readers to understand newly born stories which are closer to the context and spirit of the present time. This is in fact the present-past time dramatized by the active reading of the dramatist in order to gain his/her aesthetic, philosophical, and critical viewpoints towards the past, history, and functions and structures of canons. Beyzaie and Barker challenge their audience with three times in their plays: the present, the present-past, and the duration of the play. In this way, they activate the consciousness of their audience with respect to parallel times.

The first step for nonconformist authors such as Beyzaie and Barker is to present a boundary-breaking investigation towards the fallacies of

holiness, uniqueness, originality, truthfulness, and objectivity of the text. The second step in facing a Grand Narrative for a post-structuralist critic is to be skeptical about the social interests, ideological aims, political orientations of the narrators, and the hegemonic supervising and soft patronizing as two cutting edges of the censoring/imposing scissors. The third step for these authors is to read historical narrations and mythical stories not to obtain historical knowledge but to use them as the initial material for their own literary (poetic and dramatic) creations. They have to avoid any binary superior-inferior classification between the factual and fictional characteristics of the text and consider nothing as a guaranteed phenomenal object while reading the past. They also have to refrain from description, interpretation, faithful translation, and searching for logical or causal explanations. Rather, they should appropriate adaptation and transform the story.

These authors also take the general idea of a historical event and revise it through details and multi-dimensional perspectives. Considering the form as a method of representation and the content as an imaginative free adaptation of the formal historical texts of past events, Barker and Beyzaie choose a dramatic form based on hyper- or meta-history for their artistic creations. One may study the historical, anti-historical, or writing back to history by Beyzaie and Barker in their specific forms of tragedy through numerous lenses such as power discourse relation, feminism, new historicism, and so on and so forth. This article is a reading of the subjects' position in extreme situations and their becoming through making decisions in relation to imposed heroic morality or anti-heroic ethics along with the economy of exchange value in selected Barker and Beyzaie's tragedies.

Historicizing the present with respect to the past or recreating history according to the present logic and present consciousness of the time is what Barker and Beyzaie do via their historical tragedies. They practically present what Barthes has said about the linguistic essence of facts by fading the borders between facts and fictions through narrating history. They employ historical narrations in order to deny or break their certainty. They have no tendency to present a sense of nostalgia or to glorify the past. Their historical tragedies are almost free of any formal historical texts. Their tragedies have a consciousness of the present times and spirit as well as critical and skeptical viewpoints to previous narrations. By using their creative imagination, employing a poetic language, and striving to fight hegemonic suppression and patronizing censorship in the realm of their aesthetic representation and self-referential ethics, they give a space to the subject (heroic or anti-heroic) to live the extreme moments of historical crises (such as wars and struggling between life and death). This prepares the protagonist to

become more of herself or, according to Hegel in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, to “spread out” (6) and to constantly lose her previous past for the sake of gaining a new progressed version of herself and her identity. Along with this journey of becoming, the subject would rebel against the power relations or resist and oppose social norms and moral values or would struggle with herself in relation to her internalized ideological codes such as nationalism or the nation’s interests.

As Barker says in an interview with Tony Dunn, “my history plays are imagined history. I don’t do research ... the absence or misuse of facts does not make them any less historical ... Research cramps the imagination ... An artist should have the sensibility to make leaps which don’t depend on evidence” (Cited in Imran, 47).

In an interview with Nushabeh Amiri (25), Beyzaie says,

I have no interest towards history, I think we should investigate the roots and causes of our present problems and behaviors in the past in order to gain a better knowledge about ourselves and to get out of the illusions and make some changes (in the society and ourselves). I have written some works in relation to history which are practically not much related to historical figures.

Barker in *Judith and Possibilities* and Beyzaie in *The Death of The King (Death of Yazdgerd)* adapted a very general frame of one historical narration or, more precisely, they quoted one or two phrases from historical texts. For instance, Beyzaie repeated a well-known statement in the history written by Tabari. In the first page of the play, Beyzaie quotes: “Hence, Yazdgerd escaped to Marve and went to a wind mill. The miller killed him for the temptation of gold and money while he was asleep ... History!”.

The interjection sign (!) right next to the word of History reveals the skeptical and uncertainty of Beyzaie’s approach towards history. The skeptical investigation of the event and the existence of co-text at the same time comprise Beyzaie’s deconstructive literary approach towards formal history and canonical texts in his *Death of Yazdgerd*. *Death of Yazdgerd* whose narration is transformed into the present and is retold with a new form and new content is critically Beyzaie’s closest play to the cultural materialist viewpoint to the past. Giving voice to the margins of the society such as women and lower-class people before the voice of the clergy men and commanders of the king, Beyzaie created an imaginative discourse between peasants and governors, males and females, and certainty and uncertainty (plural possibilities).

The concept of narration or narrating (Naqali) has mythical roots in Persian literature. Beyzaie hands this effective artistic job to women in many of his plays. Narrating or creative verbal (hi)story telling has different surviving, lifesaving, didactic, and entertaining functions which

are used by wise women in order to reach their goals in opposing demons, kings, and other rigid-minded male characters. For instance, in opposing Zahhak (a human-monster monarch who is the symbol of violence and demon empowerment), Jamshid's daughters Shahrnaz and Arnavaz succeed in saving their own lives and those of many other youth whom Zahhak plans to kill and feed their brains to pacify the monstrous snakes (as a sign of his animalistic and violent nature) grown on his shoulders with the help of narrating skill and performance. In the famous *One Thousand and One Night*, Shahrzad does the same by saving her own life and the lives of numerous virgin girls from the king's obsession to avenge his first wife's betrayal by killing virgin girls every morning after spending one night with them) via telling labyrinthine and serial stories. *Death of Yazdgerd* inherits the lifesaving characteristic of narrating in the character of the miller's wife. Nevertheless, narrating loses its didactic and entertaining attributes in this play which are replaced by uncertainty and the multiplicity of possibilities regarding the events.

The commander martyred in the war in Barker's *I Saw Myself* and the fugitive dead king in Beyzaie's *Death of Yazdgerd* are both mysterious and silenced bodies and bear their own story of life and death. In the same way, encountering history is like facing a corpse. The first person who encounters this corpse presents the first speculation about it. Comparing Barker and Bayzaie in relation to their narrations of the shame and glory of corpses, their act of telling history and dealing with it, and their personification of the historical text as a dead man during the crisis is one of the aims of the present article. Barker and Beyzaie present their own manner of facing formal or verbal history through their invented protagonists (Sleev and the miller's wife) who are responsible for narrating or inventing a believable story in relation to the dead men in order to save their lives and their honor and to fulfill their socio-moral duties as subjects (citizen, wife, mother). Their roles as women with special physical, mental, and private demands will be sacrificed or denied while they are narrating a suitable and approved version of the history of men.

In revising and rewriting a historical narration in *Death of Yazdgerd* and *Judith and Possibilities*, Beyzaie and Barker use an existing narration and recompose it in their own way. Studying Judith, Aybanoo, Sleev, and the miller's wife in the plays of Beyzaie and Barker in three parts is one of the aims of this article. First, their situations in the crisis moment of history or the eventual setting and extremity of their positions and decisions as heroin or anti-heroin are investigated. Second, the subject of responsibility towards self or society in relation to self-interest

or social values is studied. Third, the process of becoming a subject through the proceeding story is studied.

Beyzaie and Barker's cultural materialist approach towards history and their critical and subversive viewpoints reveal themselves in not being faithful to the Grand Narratives and canons by rewriting them according to their own personal taste and self-referential morality. They both deconstruct the previous versions of historical or canonical texts through their ideological analyses and creating their own poetic languages and representations.

In his *Negative Dialectics, Tradition and Cognition*, Adorno says "the transition from philosophy to interpretation, which enshrines neither what is interpreted nor raises the symbol to the absolute, but seeks what might be really true there, where thought secularizes the irretrievable Ur-model of holy texts" (63-65). *Judith and Possibilities* is Barker's deconstructive revision and rewriting of a canonical/religious/historical version of Judith from the Bible. In encountering holiness, originality, and 'factuality', Barker creates an imaginative story in the crisis moment of a German commander committing genocide in a Jewish community instead of searching for causes or clarities or a scientific or religious truth. The Biblical story of Judith has been transformed from an ancient time to sometime in the Second World War. Barker keeps the names of Judith for the savior (heroic widow) and Holofernes for the enemy's (German) commander who is going to slaughter the Jews. *Judith* has three characters: Judith, a widow of Israel, Holofernes, a general of Assyria, the servant, an ideologist. The servant is wholly created by Barker as the personification of the power relations and national values. The servant is the one who manages the situation at the beginning and encourages Judith to seduce and kill Holofernes and save the endangered society of Jews. In the Biblical version which Barker appropriated (diegetically) and did not just adopt (mimetically) it, Judith enters Holofernes' place, seduces him, cuts his head and becomes the savior of her race and nation. In Barker's narration, Judith kills Holofernes, cuts his head, and becomes a national heroine, persuaded and forced by the servant. However, she soon regrets and confesses that she was in love with Holofernes and carries his child. In Barker's version, Holofernes is the seducer rather than Judith. In *Possibilities*, Barker displays Judith's disgust of national approval when she cuts the hand of the woman who has come to appreciate Judith's service and ask her to be and behave as the heroine and savior of the nation. What Barker narrates in his play is from Judith's viewpoint. Barker gives her the voice and ability to deny her destiny and rebel against the social demands. Another characteristic of Barker's Judith is her irrationality and her evasion from fame, popularity, and appreciation of others. She would prefer to live with her

child she shares with her national-historical enemy rather than being praised by her own people and government. By emphasizing her wrongness rather than rightness (including social, religious, and national values), Barker's Judith chooses to feel regret rather than be proud of killing the enemy. Her tendency and openness towards the other even though he is her enemy and falling in love with him, isolating herself later, and finally cutting the reconciling hand of the social agent show the process of becoming in her subjectivity from the slave or national heroin of the ideology to the free, mad, and suffering lover who has killed her own beloved. Eventually, plays like *Judith* prepare the setting in a way that enables the protagonist to meet her own potentiality and fears so that a higher level of her being can emerge. The interesting switch which Barker technically and creatively applies to his story is substituting the roles of the seducer and the seduced. Through this play, Barker deconstructs the ancient role of seductive women in historical/canonical texts and grants the seductive ability to Holofernes, a cruel, sensitive, intelligent, monstrous, and poetic man. In fact, Barker seems to deconstruct the Biblical stereotype of Eve as the seducer of Adam. Holofernes' poetic and elevated language when he discusses his philosophy of life and death and when he reveals his hidden fears and weaknesses makes his character more attractive and harder to judge based on collective morality. The nonrealistic actions and passions and their extremity keep the play away from casual and sensible truth and clarity. All of these characteristics which make up his Theater of Catastrophe have been stated by Barker in his manifesto.

In *Fath-Nameh-Kalat*, Beyzaie creates a story about a village and the destiny of its people after the Mongol's invasion of Iran. The only historical (documentary) fact that exists in this drama is the Mongol's invasion of Iran. Beyzaie gives an un-lived life to Aybanoo and presents an imaginative village which according to formal historical texts has been ruined after invasion and nothing has been left of it after all. Aybanoo is the daughter of Kalat's governor who decides to save the village by offering her daughter to the winner of a competition between Mongol generals. As a minor, Aybanoo falls in love with one of the competitors but he does not win the competition. Eventually she is forced to marry the winner according to his father's decision. At this part of the drama, Aybanoo is treated as a captivated object who brings reconciliation, bears fertility, and owns sexual values. According to the exchange value theory, Aybanoo could be considered a sacrificial object in a ritual ceremony with the function of calming and placating the anger of God and preventing Him from taking revenge from people for their sinful behavior. Aybanoo is a possessable object due to her youth, beauty, and blood relation to the head of the village. Marrying her and

possessing her is the sign of having authority over the whole village. The crisis moment which enables Aybanoo to make decisions and transform from a passive object into an active subject is the report of her husband's death by his old competitor whom Aybanoo was in love with. At this moment, Aybanoo begins to take advantage of her youth and beauty in order to seduce all her dead husband's generals and persuade them to help her attack Kalat apparently to revenge her husband's death and dignity but actually in order to free her people and her village. First, through this plan, she reveals her subjectivity and its borders. Deciding to save the village and the people of Kalat from invaders is exactly what her father asks her to do and she continues her father's path which could be understood as a sign of internalized patriarchy. The most radical element of this play is Aybanoo's falling in love with the other/enemy which could be seen as a sign that she is not racist. Beyzaie decides to sacrifice this personal interest for the higher aim of social responsibility or collective interest. Aybanoo has to persuade all ten commanders to help her fight Touqai so that she can be successful in her responsibility before the society. As is clear in Montesquieu's distinction between political virtues and private interests, love of country can be interpreted as enlightened or rational self-love. The sacrifice of women's physical and sexual demands for the sake of social interests is what exactly happens in this drama. Aybanoo identifies herself as an agent of the society at the end of the play. Seduction is not considered an acceptable behavior whether in religious morality, social norms, or common sense unless it could be considered as a social, national, or ideological policy to lead to a greater benefit for the collective needs and elevated values. The same theory is applicable to suicide-killing behaviors. Suicide-killing is generally considered a sin, a crime, and an immoral action. However, if it is committed with the intention of gaining victory or honor for the nation or society, the sin and crime would transform into a 'heroic' and 'moral' behavior. Aybanoo begins to promise herself as a reward to each commander if he helps her retake Kalat. In a symbolic act, she gives some of her own properties to the generals in exchange for the different parts of her dead husband's war armor which they carry as a keepsake. The value of this exchange for Aybanoo is to save Kalat and for the commanders it is to have Aybanoo as their wife. Aybanoo knows that she is not going to fulfill their desire and she can justify her actions (seducing, lying, and betraying) by the greatness of her social duty similar to Judith who is encouraged to seduce, lie to, and kill Holofernes.

Both Aybanoo and Judith offer their body to the enemy. Aybanoo's father is the symbol of the nation and patriarchy pushing her towards choosing the collective interest over her personal interest. Similarly, the servant is introduced by Barker as an ideologist who is the agent of state

power and her mission is to encourage and even force Judith to do her duty and kill the enemy, ignore her love for Holofernes, and strive to be a proud member of the society rather than an independent individual with personal interests. Aybanoo and Judith both dare to fall in love with a monstrous enemy/other in a transracial act. The difference between Beyzaie and Barker is in their last decision for the protagonists (both of whom are far from eager to be a social hero) in their preference of the society or the self. Both of them lose their 'beloved' enemies. Judith takes revenge from the government agent and Aybanoo is not proud of all the slaughters and orders women to teach their children to hate war. In fact, the internalized social values defeat the rebellion of the subject against the demands of the society.

The image of heroin (such as Aybanoo and Judith) leads one to observe and study her process of subjectivation (subject in process) in two different realms of her mentality and playing her transformed role in the society. This can be interpreted according to Kristeva and Lacan's theories about the different stages an individual has to pass to gain an independent identity (internally) and to act as a unique subject (externally).

As a "reality check" experience does not simply mirror the impulses and wishes of the individual, but also negates them, so that it would survive. That which is general in the subject is simply not to be grasped any other way than in the movement of particular human consciousness. If the individuated were simply abolished by fiat, no higher subject purified of the dross of contingency would emerge, but solely one which unconsciously follows orders. In the East the theoretical short-circuit in the view of the individuated has served as the pretext for collective repression. (Adorno, 1966: 54-57)

Heroism is supposedly the highest level of objectivity for a person in some plays. Denying and not accepting to be a hero shows the subject's struggle to grow his/her individual personality and his/her free will against the machinery of social sameness and power which dictate the definition of success and happiness to the individuals as tiny parts of a huge whole and eventually reduce their personal identities to similar and equal parts of the more elevated unity. It seems that killing individuality is one of the political devices of the power to rule people more easily. Standing against the machinery of social sameness and the reductive manner of power in dealing with subjects, artists such as Barker and Beyzaie dare to criticize heroism which is a policy of rewarding the most sacrificial soldier or agent. They represent different levels of resistance against this homogenizing process, mind washing, and imposing nationalism and heroism in their plays and strive to celebrate the subjectivity of the protagonist. Judith and Aybanoo are both unsatisfied with abandoning their love and sacrificing their personal

desire for the collective desire of the society and do not accept to be heroines or praised as good agents who have internalized the collective values of the society through their socialization or individualization process.

Subject in process

According to Hegel in *Phenomenology of Spirit*, “the power of Spirit is only as great as its expression, its depth only as deep as it dares to spread out and lose itself in its exposition” (6). The becoming of the subject or as Hegel calls it “self-movement” is a progressive movement towards transforming potentiality to actuality and this process happens through the negation of the previous self in order to reach the other (glorified) self. This denial or negativity which leads to positivity reveals the path that an individual passes and is called individuation or subjectivation. This transformation does not always happen for everyone. However, in the case of Aybanoo and Judith, this psychological and social change is pursued by Beyzaie and Barker. According to Lacan, every subject passes three levels of identification psychologically (the Real stage, the mirror stage, and the symbolic stage). The motivation for this process depends on the concept of lack and experiencing the Real stage and unity with the mother for the second time is impossible. The symbolic stage appears in language, law, and social morality and norms. This concept is close to the Freudian superego which the subject internalizes through socialization as a collection of allowed/forbidden codes and rules in order to survive in a society. This maturity and socialization process has the function of preparing a controllable member or citizen for the nation-state. Rebelling against the formal language and transforming it into a poetic one as well as deconstructing the social norms, morality, and laws, some characters in Barker and Beyzaie experience the highest transforming level of subjectivity and the elevated stage of being. As Adorno says:

The totality is to be opposed by convicting it of the non-identity with itself, which it denies according to its own concept. Negative dialectics is thereby tied, at its starting-point, to the highest categories of identity-philosophy... The will to identity labors in every synthesis; as an a priori task of thinking, immanent to it, it appears positive and desirable... Identity is the Ur-form of ideology. It is consumed as the adequacy to the thing suppressed thereby; adequacy was always also subjugation under dominating ends, to this extent its own contradiction... Identity becomes the authority of a doctrine of adjustment, wherein the object, according to which the subject would be directed, pays back to the latter what the subject inflicted on it. It is supposed to accept reason against its reason. That is why the critique of ideology is not something peripheral and intra-scientific, something limited to the objective Spirit and the products of the subjective one, but philosophically central: the critique of the constitutive consciousness itself (1966: 149-151).

Aybanoo and Judith's struggle towards uniqueness and their escape from the observing and approving system of internal and external authority makes heroism disgusting to them. A hero is a selected, praised, and objectified individual who mostly pursues national goals and is eventually transformed into a symbol of victory or honor for nationalistic propaganda and the power's purposes. Barker overtly reveals his opposite standpoint toward heroism and heroic actions and blames the role of the Servant as an ideologist and nationalist who encourages Judith to kill her love interest for the benefit of the society. Beyzaie does not praise or blame Aybanoo for abandoning her love life and preferring the village and people. Nonetheless, at the end of the play, Beyzaie gives her the spirit of the Motherland which is tired of bloodshed and preaches to other women to teach their children to hate war and killing. Beyzaie has a kind of self-referential morality with an extreme tendency towards the ancient and archetypical role of women as the soul of the Land and Earth. Saving humanity, offering reconciliation, and loving others (even enemies) are what a woman (motherland) does to rescue the world from war and to grow humanity. Beyzaie is influenced by ancient Persian goddesses such as Anahita and Chista and one could find their traces in his female-centered plays such as *Fath-Naame-Kalat* with protagonists such as Aybanoo. Barker's struggle with nationalism and morality is not covert in his plays. He uses an extremely poetic and aesthetic version of ethics to counter social norms and morality. He expresses his tendency to break the machinery of social sameness and nationalistic ideologies by creating rebellious characters (mostly artists) who constantly strive to change the rules of social life. Wrongness, eroticism, and cruelty are three noticeable and repeated aspects of his plays. Whereas offering love to the enemy and seducing the enemy's commanders seem highly radical in Beyzaie's play according to his context, it is unconditional immorality and explicit eroticism that seem radical in Barker's plays in his context as the British National Theatre did not allow his plays to be performed there.

Insanity, irrationality, and resistance to defy being typical

Every revolutionary perspective today stands or falls on its ability to re-interrogate radically the repressive, reductive, rationalizing metaphysics of utility. (Cited in Lamb, 1997: 20)

Extreme eventual settings provide circumstances which enable the subject to act in an unpredictably incredible manner. In contrast, the power discourse imperatively induces a sensible, logical, and typical behavior in the subjects via the media (TV, the Radio, etc.) in order to control the mass. In contrast, the radical theater creates and introduces

uniqueness as well as a deconstructive behavior in order to bring back individuality and self-consciousness to the subjects. Denying the use value and the economy of exchange value and refusing to peruse the constructed interests of the society lead the subject towards breaking the borders and act according to his or her instincts which seem irrational and aggressive in many contexts. Barker endows this sort of irrational bravery or deconstructing insanity to his women or artist characters and gives credit to a kind of a non-approved ethics which is based on breaking orders, eroticism, lack of clarity, wrongness, and pain to awake people out of their sleep induced by the mass media's hypnotizing spells.

Beyzaie both borrows from and criticizes ancient Persian archetypes and rituals simultaneously. The kind of morality that he presents is not religious (Islamic morality) or traditionally patriarchic. He attempts to create a modern version of a strong woman who like the Mother Nature cares for human beings and is sacrificial and loving. Beyzaie's women characters empowered by the memory of generous Anahita, made complicated by the policies of Chista, and at the same time being creative narrators such as Shahrzad eventually can save the nation and even humanity like the Mother Nature.

Brave actions in the crisis moment and making unusual decisions in extremity, standing against the authority of the Grand Narrative, and resistance to be solved in the community are different aspects of irrationality. Barker and Beyzaie both invent characters and situations that lead to the denial of self-interest and reveal the subject's sublimity of being. The highest interest in Beyzaie's tragedies originates from his repeated placing of his protagonists in dangerous situations which leads to their sacrificial actions (*Pardeh-Khaneh*, *The One Thousand and One Night*, and *Fath-Nameh-Kalat*) and these seemingly irrational actions eventually seem to support a kind of idealistic and utopian rationality. For instance, there are numerous women characters who sacrifice their lives and demands so that the others can survive or put themselves in danger for the peace of others. In Barker's plays, women risk their reputation as faithful wives (*I Saw Myself*) or kind mothers (*Gertrude the Cry*) and their actions are instances of pure irrationality and negating utility and the stereotypes. In the vital turning points of their lives, they immediately choose to lose honor as well as social approval and morality. They gain their subjective consciousness by breaking social order and taboos and not being regretful about that.

Beyzaie remarks and expresses the socio-political (realistic) aspects of individual behavior and pays less attention to the individual's psychological (naturalistic) circumstances. The issue of giving hope to the audience based on the movement of his characters is recognizable in his effort to represent the savior role of women (Mother Nature) in many

of his plays. In introducing his characters, Barker provides more complexity as well as more unexpected and unpredictable reactions to the events compared with Beyzaie. Barker and Beyzaie both resist simplification in their aesthetic communications with the audience. Beyzaie creates a poetic and rhythmic language which is a combination of ancient and colloquial languages. Although this language seems old, it is understandable but not as simple as street talk. Barker invents poetic situations and shocking behaviors. His characters are irrational and act in a contradictory manner, making them poetic. Barker applies an elevated language but not the old version. He sometimes uses a complicated structure for writing dialogs or monologs which is far from the clarity of street talk which is based on signifying literal meanings rather than metaphorical ones.

Seduction

In his *Being and Time*, Martin Heidegger states:

If one then says that with the word 'appearance' we allude to something wherein something appears without being itself an appearance, one has not thereby defined the concept of phenomenon: one has rather presupposed it. This presupposition, however, remains concealed; for when one says this sort of thing about 'appearance', the expression 'appear' gets used in two ways. "That wherein something 'appears'" means that wherein something announces itself, and therefore does not show itself; and in the words [Rede] without being itself an "appearance", "appearance" signifies the showing-itself. But this showing-itself belongs essentially to the 'wherein' in which something announces itself (1962: 53).

According to Heidegger, in their doubled roles as social, national, and ideological agents and as free-willed subjects, Judith and Aybanoo reveal only a little of their intentions and desires and hide most of them before the others.

Holofernes's plan to slaughter the Jews and the Mongol's invasion of Kalat (a symbol of the whole country) are considered as dramatic events. Judith and Aybanoo act subjectively during these events and the inventive 'truth' of the plays has been constructed in order to challenge the desires of the subjects as well as social restrictions and commands. Sacrifice has different destinies in each play. In Barker's catastrophic version of sacrifice and the struggle between personal and social desires, the audience realizes that Judith has lost her ability to talk after killing Holofernes in *Possibilities*. Judith's lost power of speech could be a sign that she has lost her faith in the Lacanian symbolic order. It seems that she feels anger, regret, and guilt. She believes that she has committed a crime by killing Holofernes while she was in love with him. After seducing the Mongol commanders and saving the Kalat, Aybanoo seems to feel melancholic and does not pay any attention to the man who loved

her from the beginning and the man she fell in love with. She seems to have lost the ability to love men and to have replaced it with her love for the future generation as a mother. Studying the actions of these two protagonists through historical events leads us to conclude the honesty of their intentions and the reality of their criminal actions in the process of subjective becoming and transforming the consequences of events for others.

In Aybanoo's case, by promising the commanders (through exchanging her clothes and jewels with war armor parts) that she will be their wife if they assist her in attacking the Kalat, she is actually deceiving them in order to convince them to help her. It seems that she does not need any attempt to seduce them because she is already an object of desire for each of them. Although she appears to be intentionally acting as a sacrificial heroin and a mature subject, her act of promising herself as a reward and exchange value is in line with her father's patriarchal, traditional, and ritualistic view of her as an object. Seduction here is limited to the possibility of possessing Aybanoo as an exchange value since she does not need to arouse the desires of others with respect to herself as her desirability has already been proved to herself and the Mongol commanders. From Aybanoo's standpoint, seduction is less sexual and more political in a way that she strives to keep her exact intentions hidden and to lead others to physical desires so that she can achieve her goals. While Penelope in Homer's *Odyssey* delays announcing her choice from her suitors by repeatedly weaving and tearing the shroud, Aybanoo lies to and uses these men as her instrumental soldiers. According to ancient Persian archetypes, this characteristic of Aybanoo refers to Chista the goddess of wisdom and policy.

Aybanoo seduces the Mongol commanders and convinces them to be her army, Judith tries to seduce Holofernes by getting closer to him, and Holofernes seduces Judith by pretending to be unaware of Judith and the Servant's real intentions.

Considering Judith and Aybanoo as suppressed and suffering marginal characters in the patriarchal society both as women and as instrumental agents/objects with nationalistic goals, Barker and Beyzaie give voices to antagonistic/anti-heroine protagonists who complete their identity-searching journey from use-value objects towards willing subjects. As Adorno says:

The power of the existent constructs the facades into which the consciousness crashes. It must try to break through them. This alone would snatch away the postulate from the profundity of ideology. The speculative moment survives in such resistance: what does not allow itself to be governed by the given facts, transcends them even in the closest contact with objects and in the renunciation of sacrosanct

transcendence. What in thought goes beyond that to which it is bound in its resistance is its freedom. It follows the expressive urge of the subject. The need to give voice to suffering is the condition of all truth. For suffering is the objectivity which weighs on the subject; what it experiences as most subjective, its expression, is objectively mediated (1966: 27-29).

Conclusion

To sum up, this article was a comparative study of two historical tragedians: the Iranian playwright Bahram Beyzaie and the British dramatist Howards Barker. Reading *Fath-Nameh-Kalat*, *Judith*, and *Possibilities* comparatively, one would recognize the decontextualized version of historical narrations. The subversive approaches towards the patriotic and patriarchal tendencies of individual interests are opposed to social-collective interests. Along with the creative representation of historical events, Beyzaie and Barker choose women as their protagonists in order to give them voice and to reveal the other dimensions of heroism and individual sacrifice in the society. The idea of the originality and certainty of formal history and Grand Narratives is denied by Barker and Beyzaie based on the philosophical theories of Hegel, White, and Adorno. The other title which is considerably noticed in Beyzaie and Barker's selected plays is the relative concept of morality which both Barker and Beyzaie aesthetically introduce as their own self-referential versions of personal ethics opposed to social morality. Studying the process of the protagonists' subjectivity in their eventual journey towards anti-heroism, this article investigated the concepts of sacrifice and seduction. It would be valuable for future studies to investigate the concept of inherited national/individual shame and anger which historically affected Beyzaie and Barker's represented characters and reshaped historical figures.

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