

Criticism and analysis of the novel "Love-Killing" with an ontological approach based on McHale's theory

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Abstract

This study examines Mohammad Baharlou's novel «Love-Killing» through Brian McHale's postmodern ontological lens, focusing on its interplay of reality and illusion, nested narratives, and boundary-breaking techniques. The research demonstrates how the novel transcends modernist epistemology to embrace postmodern ontological ambiguity. Key findings reveal that «Love-Killing» constructs "possible worlds" and destabilizes narrative hierarchies, aligning with McHale's theory of ontological dominance. The novel's metafictional strategies—such as intertextuality with «The Blind Owl» and metalepsis—blur the lines between reality and fiction, positioning it as a quintessential postmodern text. This analysis bridges a gap in Persian

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literary criticism by applying McHale's framework to a non-Western context, highlighting its cross-cultural relevance.

Keywords: *Postmodernism and the Contemporary Persian Novel, Ontological Approach in the Contemporary Persian Novel, Mohammad Baharloo, The Novel of Love-Killing, Matching McHale's Theory and the Contemporary Persian Novel.*

1. Introduction

Postmodern literature challenges conventional distinctions between reality and fiction, a theme central to Baharlou's «Love-Killing». Grounded in Brian McHale's (1987) theory, this paper argues that the novel's ontological preoccupations—manifested through embedded narratives and ontological flicker—mark a departure from modernist epistemology. The study addresses two questions:

1. How does «Love-Killing» deploy McHale's concepts of «possible worlds» and «narrative instability»?
2. What implications does this have for understanding postmodern Persian fiction?

By answering these, the paper contributes to underrepresented scholarship on Persian postmodern narratives.

2. Literature Review

McHale's «Postmodernist Fiction» (1987) identifies ontology as postmodernism's defining feature, contrasting modernism's epistemological focus. Prior studies (e.g., Ryan, 1991) on "possible worlds" contextualize narrative multiplicity. While Western texts (e.g., Pynchon's «The Crying of Lot 49») have been extensively analyzed through McHale's lens, Persian counterparts like «Love-Killing» remain underexplored. This study fills this gap, emphasizing McHale's applicability to non-Western literature.

3. Methodology

A qualitative textual analysis of «Love-Killing» is conducted, guided by McHale's ontological markers:

- Intertextuality: Direct citations from «The Blind Owl» and historical figures (e.g., Sadegh Hedayat).
- Metalepsis: Boundary violations (e.g., characters addressing the reader).

- Narrative embedding: Stories-within-stories (e.g., the protagonist's manuscript about Hedayat).
Data is triangulated with McHale's criteria (e.g., «heterarchy», «ontological flicker») to ensure rigor.

4. Results

Three key findings emerge:

1. Intertextual Worlds: The novel's dialogue with «The Blind Owl» creates ontological uncertainty, exemplifying McHale's "Chinese box" model.
2. Metalepsis: Hedayat's intrusion into the narrative destabilizes reality, a hallmark of postmodernism.
3. Ontological Shift: The protagonist's fluid identity (e.g., merging with Hedayat's characters) underscores McHale's "ontological dominant." These results position «Love-Killing» as a deliberate rejection of Persian literary modernism.

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