

Chahar Sandough by Bahram Beyzai and *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* by Saadallah Wannous: A Comparative Study on the Function of the Protagonist's Character

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ABSTRACT

The protagonists in Bahram Beyzai's *Chahar Sandough* and Saadallah Wannous's *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* play critical roles in the structural framework of their respective dramas. These works vividly reflect the structure of contemporary society, with the external realities influencing the protagonists and thereby enhancing their believability. The emancipatory themes, persistent interaction with individuals and society, demonstrations of power, lack of external control, and eventual triumph are key elements uniting the protagonists in these dramas. Consequently, the study identified significant parallels and shared dimensions between *Baizai's* "Scarecrow" and Wannous's "Abu Izza." This research focuses specifically on analyzing the function of the protagonists in these two works.

Keywords: protagonist, *Chahar Sandough*, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, Scarecrow, Abu Izza

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Introduction

While efforts to uncover the native background of Persian and Arabic theater continue, dramatic literature in these languages largely emerged as a result of translation rather than originating directly from Iranian or Arabic cultural texts. Despite a rich cultural background, the development of theater in these regions was significantly influenced by its introduction from the Western world. It is also noteworthy that the study of performance arts in these linguistic domains has not reached the depth observed in European research. Some scholars have attempted to trace Iran's domain traditions back to pre-Islamic times.¹ However, the systematic and scientific approach to this art form is largely attributed to translation, a phenomenon that began influencing these two linguistic fields approximately a century and a half ago.

Mirza Fath Ali Akhundzadeh (1812–1878), a pioneer of reforms in Iran, was the first to introduce Western-style theater with a distinctly Iranian flavor. Born in the Caucasus to a family originally from Khameneh, Tabriz, Azerbaijan, Akhundzadeh was fluent in Russian, French, German, English, and Norwegian. He earned titles such as “Müller of the East,” “Gogol of the Caucasus,” and “Müller of Azerbaijan.” His notable works include six comedies written in Azeri Turkish between 1849 and 1855 and published in the *Qafqaz* newspaper. Besides being a playwright, Akhundzadeh was also Iran's first theater critic.²

The emergence of Arabic theater occurred concurrently in the 19th century, thanks to the efforts of Maroun bin Elias bin Mikhail al-Naqqash (1817–1855), a Lebanese youth fluent in Turkish, French, and English. During a business trip to Egypt and Italy in 1846, he became acquainted with theater there. Upon returning to Lebanon, he collaborated with young enthusiasts to introduce this art form by establishing a theater in his home.³ A remarkable factor in the emergence of Persian and Arabic theater was the connection to the outside world. Both Akhundzadeh and Maroun encountered theater during travel or migration, and their deep appreciation for the art drove them to bring it to their homelands. This does not suggest an absence of dramatic traditions in these languages but underscores that the scientific and professional form of theater emerged through sustained interactions with the West. The evolution of theater in Iran and the Arab world can be summarized in stages: translation, adaptation, imitation, classical tendencies, social realism, and eventually creativity.

Although Persian and Arabic theaters developed later than their Western counterparts, they soon recognized the importance of engaging the audience through emotions and attitudes. Establishing the connection became a crucial point, mirroring the Western approach. In 1826, Goethe remarked on the need for a naturalistic perspective in English stage design, highlighting advances in technical stagecraft, perspective, and costume design.⁴ Similarly, Persian and Arabic theaters emphasized character development and characterization to create a vivid connection with the audience, making this a central discussion in this article.

This study examines the protagonists in Bahram Beyzai's *Chahar Sandough* and Saadallah Wannous's *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*. It introduces the two dramas and their authors, outlines the role of characterization in dramatic literature, and performs a comparative analysis of the protagonists. The primary question guiding this research is: How do the authors create their characters, and how do these characters relate to social realities? A descriptive-analytical method is employed to explore these questions.

An article titled “Sociological Criticism of the Drama *Chahar Sandough*” by Fereydoun Vahida, Farzaneh Heydari, and Mahbubeh Khorasani (2015) was published in the journal “Literary Criticism and Theory” (Issue 1, pp. 139–161). This study analyzed Baizai's work using a sociological approach. Similarly, another article, “Sociological Examination of the Play *Chahar Sandough* of Bahram Baizai Based on the Opinions of Lucien Goldman,” authored by Faezeh Daemi and Ahmad Kamyabi Mask (2018), appeared in the journal “Fine Arts” (Issue 1, pp. 69–78). Additionally, Shirzad Taifi and Koresh Salmani Nasr (2017) contributed articles titled “Typology of the Dramas *Chahar Sandough*” and “In the Presence of Wind through Mathews Fry's Theory,” published in Tehran University's Persian Literature Journal (Issue 22, pp. 39–58).

Sana Shaolan authored “Saadallah Wannous and the Function of Heritage in *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*,” written in Arabic, which examines the plot and characters of the play, emphasizing the function of tradition within the narrative. Similarly, Hossein Mirzaei and Abdulbasit Arab Yusufabadi (2012) published an article with the same approach and title in the journal “Arabic Language and Literature” (Issues 6). Their work explored the shared features between this play and the story “Sleeping and Waking” from “One Thousand and One Nights.”

¹ Abulqasem Janati Atai, *Karkard-e Namayesh dar Iran* (Safi Alisha, 1977), 5.

² Fatima Parchegani, *Nashato Al-Masrah fi Al-Mashregh, Vol. II* (Bisan, 2016), 83.

³ Hanna Alfakhouri, *Al-Jame fi Tarikh-e ai-Adab al-Arabi* (Dar al-Jeel), 31.

⁴ Bertholt Brecht, *Darbare-ye Theater*, trans: Faramarz Behzad (Khwarazmi, 1978), 121.

Despite these studies, no comparative research employing the approach adopted in this article has been identified within the available literature.

Character

A primary and decisive element in advancing the goals of an artistic text is its characters. A character is defined as “a made-up individual who appears in stories, plays, etc.” In narrative or dramatic work, a character is a person whose psychological and moral qualities are manifested through their actions and dialogue. Characterization refers to the creation of such individuals who seem almost real within the narrative.⁵

In theater, the character establishes a direct connection with the audience, embodying many dimensions of performance art. Therefore, the success of a dramatic text often hinges on its capacity for characterization. Unlike novels, where description and elaboration are abundant, drama relies almost entirely on characters’ dialogues and mise-en-scènes descriptions. This distinct characteristic underscores the importance of characters in this literary genre.⁶

A drama fundamentally represents human action, and its central characters bring this action to life through their individuality, speech, and behavior. Characters in drama are inherently tied to the plot; their actions and dialogues define the structure and substance of the narrative. As drama reveals the potential of human action, it also explores human personality and vice versa.⁷

Personality includes the complexities and traits distinguishing one person from another. It reflects behavioral capacities unique to individuals, transcending general tendencies. While characters in drama share similarities with real-life individuals, significant and vital differences exist. A dramatic character exists within the framework of the narrative, often achieving a heightened sense of realism when embodied by the actor.⁸

Bahram Beyzai and Saadallah Wannous

Bahram Beyzai (1938), an Iranian writer, researcher, translator, and director, was born in Tehran and raised near Kashan in a family with a hereditary tradition of staging passion plays. Although he showed little interest in formal studies and left the Persian literature program at Tehran University unfinished, he excelled in research, performance arts, poetry, and fiction. His brilliant works have attracted both Iranian and international audiences. Beyzai’s repertoire includes remarkable films, theatrical productions, translations of original works, and an in-depth study of “One Thousand and One Nights” (*where are 1000 legends?*). These contributions have established him as a profound thinker and prolific artist.

In 2010, Beyzai, accompanied by his wife, Mojdeh Shamsai, relocated to the United States at Stanford University’s invitation. There, he started teaching and conducting research in his areas of interest and still works there. Baizai’s scholarly and literary works explore hidden aspects of Iranian culture, navigating the rich stream of myths and legends. While maintaining the central motifs of traditional stories, he reimagines them as contemporary drama for modern readers. His innovative use of ancient Persian words and syntax lends an archaic dimension to the language, connecting the past to the present. Additionally, individual and social factors such as gender, geography, and age significantly influence the expression of language in his works, highlighting its role in reflecting societal matters.⁹

Saadallah Wannous (1941–1997), a renowned playwright and journalist in the Arab world, was born in Syria. He studied journalism in Cairo and later returned to Damascus, where he worked in the Ministry of Culture. He served on the editorial boards of *Al-Safir* in Lebanon and *Al-Thawrah* in Syria and directed the General Society of Drama and Music in Syria. His exposure to European drama during a 1996 trip to Paris enriched his artistic perspective. After returning to Syria, he was appointed director of the “Existentialism” Theater¹⁰ and played a key role in establishing the High-Performance Arts Association in Damascus in the late 1970s, where he also taught.

Wannous achieved significant success in cultural activities, especially in drama. Among his accolades is the first *Sultan Al-Owais Prize*. A social writer, his works consistently address human concerns, reflecting the traditions and realities of the Arab world. Simultaneously, the contemporary philosophical currents, especially Jean-Paul Sartre’s existentialism, deeply influenced his artistic works.¹¹ Wannous passed away from cancer in May 1997.

⁵ Jamal Mirsadeghi, *Anaser-e Dastan* (Sokhan, 2011), 84.

⁶ Shiva Pourjahan and Ali Mohammadi, “Seyr-e Tahavvol-e Shakhshiyat dar Asar-e Namayeshi-ye Akbar Radi,” *Research Journal of Literary Criticism and Stylistics* 4 (2016), 49-50-70.

⁷ Sam Smiley, *Namayeshnamehnevisi: sakhtar-e konesh*, trans: Sadegh Rashidi and Parasto Jafar (Afriz, 2013), 135.

⁸ Smiley, *Namayeshnamehnevisi: sakhtar-e konesh*, 140.

⁹ Reza Tarnian and Bahram Beyzai, *Zaban Hoveyyat va Ghodrat* (Rozbehan, 2018), 11.

¹⁰ Mohammad Azzam, “Al-Hadathah fi Al-Muthaghafah,” *Afaq Al-marifa* 495 (2004), 308.

¹¹ Jabour Abdul Noor, *Al-moajam al-arabi* (Dar Al-’elam Lil malayean, 1984), 34.

Chahar Sandough (Four Boxes) and Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek (The King is the King)

Baizai wrote the play *Chahar Sandough* in 1967, and it was published later that year by Daftarhaye Zamaneh. It was republished in 1979 by *Rozebahan*. The play's main character is a scarecrow, with supporting roles identified as Yellow, Green, Red, and Black. The author begins the play with a minimalist stage description: "The stage is empty." Four characters are seated on the ground, deep in thought.¹² They each exclaim in turn, "Danger, danger, again danger, an unknown danger, a known and constant danger,"¹³ ultimately deciding to devise a plan to safeguard their wealth, property, religion, and status. Their solution is the creation of a scarecrow. Yellow declares, "A scarecrow is necessary to both scare the enemy and create security, protecting us from danger."¹⁴ The others agree, envisioning the scarecrow as a guardian, whether at home or in the mosque.¹⁵ They celebrate this innovative idea, making their victory with joyous music. The scarecrow is constructed from a dry piece of wood, adorned with clothes, and armed with a sword and a whip to symbolize strength.

The scarecrow enters the scene with an impressive presence, exuding power and oppression. Gradually, everyone acknowledges its dominance and grandeur, even the very creators who brought it to life. Before long, the scarecrow assumes the role of a dictator, issuing commands and prohibitions without mercy. The dollmakers attempt to overthrow it but fail repeatedly, unable to confront its authority. Their futile efforts lead to imprisonment in *Chahar Sandough*, and ultimately, they lose trust in one another and resign themselves to a confined and degrading existence.

The drama *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* is one of Wannous's most celebrated plays. Written in 1978, it draws inspiration from the story "Sleeping and Waking" found in "One Thousand and One Nights." Wannous's main aim in this work is to critique and portray social and political realities. As many critics assert, it is "the most beautiful work inspired by traditional sources."¹⁶ The main theme revolves around the transformation of one individual into another, particularly the metamorphosis of a king into another king through the mere act of exchanging garments.¹⁷

The play *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* comprises an introduction, five acts, and a conclusion. The introduction categorizes the characters into two groups: the poor, who are dreamers with sweet aspirations, and the wealthy, represented by Shahbandar Tojjar, a figure supported by the ruling powers.

As mentioned earlier, the story originates from "Sleeping and Waking," where the Abbasid caliph Harun al-Rashid and his executioner Masrour, disguised as commoners, visit the home of a bankrupt merchant named Abul Hasan al-Khali. They then take him to the palace for amusement and temporarily place him on the throne. Similarly, in *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, a king named Fakhr al-Din roams the city incognito with his vizier for entertainment. Fakhr al-Din, characterized by narcissism and arrogance, relishes humiliating others. During one such excursion, he visits the home of Abu Izza, a destitute merchant who has lost everything due to the schemes of Shahbandar Tojjar and Sheikh Taha. Harboring dreams of revenge, Abu Izza is mocked by everyone until the king learns of his desires during this clandestine visit.

The king decides to indulge Abu Izza's wish. Using a trick, he renders him unconscious, transports him to the palace, and places him on the throne. Once in power, Abu Izza transforms into an autocrat. He arrests, tortures, and imprisons many, wielding such authority that even the king's relatives regard him as the legitimate ruler. Completely subdued by this new emir, the former king finds himself powerless to remove him. Intoxicated with power, Abu Izza spares no one, not even his wife and daughter, while appointing those he once sought to punish as his advisers and servants.

Characterization in *Chahar Sandough* and *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*

Beizai and Wannous strive to provide a more expressive depiction of the characters in their dramas. Selecting characters from multiple and authentic societal layers, they aim to narrate the internal complexities of their personas, a key concern for both writers. This approach is specifically tied to the social and political transformations in Iranian and Arab societies, making these plays a historical lens on contemporary social and political events and trends.

The authors draw heavily from society in designing their characters. Although some events and dialogues may appear stereotypical, the characters generally symbolize real societal classes. A significant portion of the plays' energy is devoted to critiquing societal norms and traditional beliefs, a critical lens that resonates with the absolutist nature of Persian and Arabic audiences and their tacit acceptance of the dignity associated with the "King's" position.

¹² Bahram Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough* (Rozbehan, 1979), 7.

¹³ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 8.

¹⁴ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 8.

¹⁵ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 8.

¹⁶ Ali Al-Rai, *Theater fi Al-Watan Al-Arabi* (Alam al-Marifa, 1998), 178.

¹⁷ Hossein Mirzaei Nia and Abdulbasit Arab Yusefabadi, "Karkard-e Sonnat dar Namayeshname-ye Al-malek Hova Al-malek," *Journal of Arabic Language and Literature* 6 (2013), 118.

An analysis of the character types in the two plays underscores the crucial role of dialogue in defining character identity, as is common in dramatic works. These characters speak because they exist; their speech validates their presence both on stage and in the broader context of life and society. However, in *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, and more explicitly in *Chahar Sandough*, this dialogue does not express the self but rather a “lack of presence,” a reflection of their limited influence beyond their spheres.

Recognizing this characteristic in the play’s characters offers insight into the structure and identity of contemporary Persian and Arabic societies: stagnant and silent, with little effort to challenge entrenched barriers and restrictions. This critique echoes Priska Degras, a professor at New York University, who in his article “Character for Beckett” discusses how Beckett’s characters, despite their confusion, immobility, and passivity, still speak. Their speech, though labyrinthine, retains potency, creating a sense that it is the final barrier separating the living from the dead.¹⁸

The characters in *Chahar Sandough* and *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* evolve from simplicity to complexity, influenced by social currents. Initially addressing simple and often humorous concerns, they gradually emerge from passivity as societal realities shape their thoughts and language. They strive to challenge the monophonic atmosphere embodied by the protagonists. However, given the authoritarian and conservative underpinnings of Persian and Arab societies, their efforts (apart from those of the heroes) remain futile. As a result, the general characters are simple yet treated stereotypically and monotonously.

Most of the characters in the two plays are central. This concept is more expansively explored in *Chahar Sandough* than in Wannous’s play. Baizai conveys that no one remains on the margins when faced with political and social currents; everyone is somehow implicated in the broader context. This notion also holds true for *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*. However, as is common in narrative traditions, it is the protagonists who shoulder the main burden of the story.

Scarecrow and Abu Izza: Protagonists in Focus

The Scarecrow and Abu Izza are the protagonists and significant characters in the two plays, driving the action, shaping the plot, and influencing other characters. A comparative analysis reveals no significant difference in identity between the Scarecrow and Abu Izza. Before delving into the shared characteristics of the two heroes, it is important to note their centrality to the narrator’s goals. The creation of a strong and armed scarecrow represents a societal response to perceived danger, intended to protect property, caravans, and sanctuaries while intimidating adversaries. Similarly, Abu Izza embodies a statistical critique of leadership. Previously, the proud king viewed himself as the executor of these protective measures. The convergence of the two characters becomes evident in several aspects, as highlighted in the text of the plays.

• Emancipators and Life-Givers

Protagonists are the product of their society, shaping and being shaped by it. When individuals feel oppressed by societal or power structures, they seek to transcend these confines through timeless or supernatural means, striving for liberation. The protagonists in these two dramas exemplify this phenomenon, as both emerge from pressures and attempt to escape the dominance of power structures. For instance, in *Chahar Sandough*, the creation of the scarecrow addresses threats to people and various societal groups, encapsulating its *raison d’être*:

Green: *Gentlemen! As you know, it is our creation. It is the result of our cooperation and consultation, and we are submissive and obedient. It is the protector of all of us in this dangerous world.*

Red: *Viva!*

Zard: *Its existence was necessary, and we recognized it. So, we gave it power.¹⁹*

Therefore, the protagonist in *Chahar Sandough* is a creation of both humanity and society, serving as a mechanism to address external pressures and possible dangers. This concept is also echoed in *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, where the king retreats from confrontation with power, opting instead for disguise as a means to escape the monotony of daily life. In doing so, he encounters a man also burdened by societal pressures, a wealthy businessman who, unlike the king, craves power and seeks a hero to avenge the oppressive forces constraining him. This dynamic is illustrated in Abu Izza’s opening monologue:

¹⁸ Frank Everar, *Dar Entezar-e Godou va payan-e bazi, a collection of essays on contemporary theater*, trans: Vahid Nejad Mohammad (Afraz, 2016), 79.

¹⁹ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 10.

Abu Izza: "To whom should I complain? All the individuals around me are lazy and ignorant. I am surrounded by bastards instead of noble and righteous people. They stole my property and looted all my possessions... I wish I could be received in the audience of the king. Only he can do justice to me and get me out of this pit that I am trapped in."²⁰

Abu Izza rises to power as a hero, tasked with delivering justice. In this role, he parallels Baizai's scarecrow, standing against oppressive structures that hinder societal well-being. This shared proposal arises from the contemporary feeling of individuals being trapped by society and time, compelling them to seek organized solutions.²¹ However, in both plays, this organization leads to tyranny and abnormality. The protagonists are envisioned as agents of peace, intended to restore balance and serve as emancipators and life-givers.

• Individual or Social Constructions

As earlier mentioned, the presence of protagonists in these narratives stems from societal needs. However, the primary purpose of the heroes in *Chahar Sandough* and *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* reflects illusions or even mere amusement. In *Chahar Sandough*, the characters perceive a fabricated danger or simply seek entertainment. Consequently, they decide, after much deliberation, to create a scarecrow to "protect" themselves from these imagined threats:

Yellow: "We need a scarecrow!"

Green: "Scarecrow. That's right, scarecrow."

Yellow: "It scares the enemy..."²²

Ironically, the comedic element emerges when the characters admit that the scarecrow's purpose is, in fact, amusement:

Red: "How do we start it?"

Green: "Very good. It is amusing."²³

A similar motif is evident in *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, emphasized from the beginning. The drama begins with characters (Obeid and Abu Izza) playing with dolls. The king, observing this, remarks: "We are playing."²⁴ The word "doll" recurs repeatedly, highlighting its thematic importance. As the narrative progresses, Abu Izza emerges as a dominant figure, symbolizing the scarecrow of Baizai. He is the king's creation, an instrument of amusement used to consolidate power:

King: "I want to have some fun." An amusement beyond what is usual... I want to joke with people and my country."²⁵

This act of jest results in Abu Izza being anonymously brought to the palace, crowned king, and seated on the throne. The shift is depicted through Maimoun, the king's servant, who massages Abu Izza's feet the following morning. Initially believing he is dreaming, Abu Izza soon realizes his ascension to the throne is real.²⁶ At this juncture, the protagonist enters a new phase, one driven by illusion and the pursuit of amusement.

• Protagonist and Exerting Power

One defining characteristic of the protagonists in both *Chahar Sandough* and *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* is their relationship with power. The protagonists cannot exist without power. While this power does not necessarily involve the use of force or violence, whether seen through the lens of legitimacy or charisma, their very presence in human society signifies power. This principle applies universally to protagonists in both fictional and dramatic works.

In *Chahar Sandough*, the characters come to understand that a protagonist without power cannot protect their interests. As a result, they provide the means to empower the protagonist:

Yellow: "We have to complete it."

Green: "It is impossible to complete an imperfect human being."

Yellow: "We should equip it."

(Red runs and grabs a whip, attaching it to the scarecrow's wooden wrist. Yellow attaches a train of cartridges, while Red adds a second-hand rifle. Black secures a trumpet, and Yellow attaches a tube camera).²⁷

This scene demonstrates how the characters equip the scarecrow with symbols of power, each item representing an aspect of the scarecrow's newfound authority.

²⁰ Saadallah Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* (Dar Ibn al-Rashid, 1980), 3.

²¹ Michel Zarrafa, *Adabiyat-e Dastani*, trans: Nasrin Parvini (Foroughi, 1989), 146.

²² Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 8.

²³ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 9.

²⁴ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 1.

²⁵ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 6.

²⁶ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 21.

²⁷ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 9.

Similarly, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* follows a comparable approach in introducing its protagonist. This is carried out in two ways: first, by the old king, who recognizes that Abu Izza cannot accomplish anything without power. Therefore, he places Abu Izza on the throne as a strategic move, thereby bestowing power upon him. Second, Abu Izza, whether as a bankrupt businessman or a newly crowned king, believes that he cannot fulfill his desires or exert control without power. This belief is especially emphasized in a conversation between Orghoob, the minister, and the new king:

Orghoob: “Now is the time to take revenge on our enemies.”²⁸

Throughout the play, Abu Izza, the new king, takes a series of actions that reinforce his reliance on power to shape his reality. One particularly striking scene highlights the connection between the protagonist and power, as the king interacts with various symbols of authority, such as swords and lances. This interaction emphasizes the protagonist’s inherent need for power:

King (while touching the swords and bayonets with his fingertips, in a moment of pleasure): “I would like to have all these and feel their hardness with my fingers...”²⁹

• Out of Control and Supervision

Protagonists, often depicted as societal elites, act decisively and may at times challenge societal norms. This trait is markedly evident in the characters of Scarecrow and Abu Izza, who are crafted to address individual or collective problems and concerns. Initially serving their creators, the evolution of these characters reveals another dimension, a transformation that, while consistent with their identities, diverges from their creators’ intended goals. Consequently, they act contrary to these goals, escaping control and influence.

Baizai’s scarecrow wields a gun and a whip. Standing defiantly against its creators. When individuals attempt to strip him of his power and remove him from the narration, he resorts:

Scarecrow: *I want to live (raises the gun); there is no choice. You wanted me to be your servant. From now on, you must be my servant.*³⁰

The scarecrow then demands complete subordination, ordering them to bow down before him.³¹ In submission, everyone complies, and he first permits them to remain insignificant beings.³² He assumes control over their entire identity, his oppressive dominance forcing them into submission to the extent that they seek refuge in a confined, restricted box. The scarecrow describes this box as the ideal space for those pursuing enlightenment and liberation, stating:

Scarecrow: *I have heard that scientific men need isolation and absolute silence.*³³

In *Chahar Sandough*, the box symbolizes decline, stagnation, and a clinging dependence on the past.³⁴ Surprisingly, humanity adapts to this confinement, eventually seeking solace within it. As one character, speaking from inside the box, remarks, “All these, of course, show that we are equipped with an electric thermometer, an automatic cryostat, and various curtains to prevent sunlight. Our refrigerators are not colder than the surrounding environment. We own molded ice, molded globes, molded thoughts, and all molded things, demonstrating that no sorrow remains on earth except molded sorrows.”³⁵

Thus, the protagonist not only escapes the control of the individuals who created him but also acts against their desires, wielding his authority to push them further into subjugation and deprive them of their fundamental rights.

Wannous also shows this transformation of the protagonist in his performance. Initially, Abu Izza, representing society, embodies the ideal hero, protecting the oppressed, restoring societal peace, and resisting corruption. He dreams of a hero (himself) who will punish wrongdoers,³⁶ naming the oppressors and mentally judging them. Up to this point, Abu Izza appears to be the voice of the society. However, when his dream materializes (Abu Izza the King), he sheds his role as society’s voice and evolves into a self-serving. These shifts align him with *Baizai*’s scarecrow: a powerful figure indifferent to social demands. The same criminals he once denounced joined his government, earning his favor. When the minister (representing society’s silent voice) urges him to seek justice against the criminals, Abu Izza grows angry, rebuking the minister and defending the oppressors:

²⁸ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 25.

²⁹ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* 29.

³⁰ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 12.

³¹ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 14.

³² Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 22.

³³ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 26.

³⁴ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 70.

³⁵ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 44.

³⁶ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 2.

Abu Izza: “You want to make me an enemy of the government. Are you planning to destroy my throne?”³⁷

As mentioned above, the creators of the hero lose their grip on the situation. Amir Fakhreddin, the former king, can no longer control his scarecrow-like creation, Abu Izza. He and the queen find themselves reduced to mere subjects. The princes and courtiers recognize Abu Izza as a legitimate rally against him. Intoxicated by power, Abu Izza spares even his wife and daughter.

• Protagonist’s Victory

As Aristotle defines, the effective choice of the protagonist in tragedy lies in their ability to evoke both fear and pity in the audience. A protagonist should not be entirely flawless but must possess a weakness, such as pride that leads to their downfall and misfortune.”³⁸ In the dramas of Baizai and Wannous, the protagonists initially appear capable of resolving chaos and addressing shortcomings. However, as the play progresses, they become central agents of disorder. This paradox fuels societal conspiracies to dethrone them, resulting in repeated yet ultimately unsuccessful attempts to remove them from power.

In *Chahar Sandough*, the opposing forces, upon realizing the scarecrow’s despotic nature, initially believe they can strip him of his power. However, they soon discover his formidable strength and resort to appeasement through flattery and proximity.³⁹ When these tactics fail, they recognize the need for broader resistance. The scarecrow, in turn, manipulates the opposition by sowing division, rendering them ineffective.⁴⁰ As the resistance falters, some forces turn to self-delusion, creating a false sense of peace that momentarily reassures them of eventual success:

Red: The guy is afraid.

Black: I am not afraid as you are.

Yellow: But your actions are such that we thought you would be twice as afraid.

Black: You know I’m waiting for someone.

Yellow: No one is coming.

Black: Step by step. First, I have a premonition of his; second, I have dreamed of him, and third, he saves me.⁴¹

Some factions reject this illusory remedy, favoring practical struggle instead, yet they lack both the courage to fight and the trust needed for unity. This conflict is highlighted in a dialogue:

Red: There are unsayable things. Who should have the gun?

Yellow: Gun?

Red: It must be in the hands of one of us. I know this. But in whose hand?

Yellow: We cannot predict it.

Red: That’s the problem. How do you know that the person who had the gun will not take the place of the scarecrow?⁴²

Faced with these dilemmas, they resort to compromise and alliances, allowing opportunities to vanish one by one.⁴³ In the final act, Black alone dares to confront the limitations of their resistance by breaking his box, symbolizing his willingness for a decisive battle. However, his efforts lead nowhere. The closure scenes reveal Yellow, Red, and Green retreating to their respective boxes, leaving empty. Black, now exposed and powerless, hears the scarecrow’s footsteps. The scarecrow triumphantly appears with a gun in hand, making him the ultimate victor.⁴⁴

Similarly, in *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, the character Abu Izza’s power is paralleled by growing resistance. He gradually erodes collective ideals, aligning with criminal forces to consolidate his authority. He fortifies his rule by empowering loyalists while dividing justice and morality. When the minister Orghoob requests punishment for Sheikh Taha, Abu Izza, referred to as “The King” (*Shah*) in this segment, deflects:

King: What is his crime?

Orghoob: His crime is heavy. He plunders the property of the orphans.

King: Doesn’t he praise us in the Friday prayer?

Orghoob: Why?

King: Has he stirred up people against us and caused sedition?

Orghoob: Does he dare? I said he looted the property of the orphans.

(...)

³⁷ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* 26

³⁸ Dad Sima, *Farhang-e Estelihat-e Adabi* (Morwarid, 2017), 382.

³⁹ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 22.

⁴⁰ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 29-30.

⁴¹ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 58.

⁴² Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 70.

⁴³ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 77.

⁴⁴ Beyzai, *Chahar Sandough*, 83.

Orghoob: *Very well, the next person is Shahbandar, the trader.*

King: *Our friend Shahbandar?*

Orghoob: *Your friend? Do you call him a friend? Wasn't he the one who bankrupted us?*

King: *What happened to you today? Do you want to weaken our government?*⁴⁵

By the fifth act, the King strives to dominate all aspects of the society, using appointees and adopting measures against opponents.⁴⁶ His pride blinds him to accountability, even toward his closest allies:

King (still full of pride): *You are here to present your report, not to ask me for an answer.*⁴⁷

Or, he triumphantly declares, emphasizing the importance of his position: “Your Majesty does not like his power to be shaky.”⁴⁸ Thus, he calls his executioner, instructing him to stand ready at his side and await the execution of the command. This symbolizes the use of the ultimate weapon of authority. As he proclaims with unyielding determination in the scenes: “From now on, the king will personally implement the orders he has issued.⁴⁹ Or, ‘Nothing purifies kings like blood.’ Therefore, I will wash myself in blood... From today on, I will perfume myself with blood.”⁵⁰ The King’s last declaration, “Dreaming is forbidden,”⁵¹ underscores his absolute dominion over both individual and societal dimensions of life. No one is permitted to dream without his sanction. Here, the king celebrates his ultimate triumph.

Conclusion

Chahar Sandough and *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek* are profound explorations of the discourse of power in contemporary Iranian and Arab societies. They reflect the anxieties and struggles that have resulted in limitation and confinement for these nations, rather than fostering liberation and progress. The authors connect more deeply with the audience by addressing human and social issues, employing the language of drama, and creating realistic events and characters.

Although the narrative of *Chahar Sandough* unfolds through the protagonist, all characters in this play are distinct and actively contribute to the story. The succinctness of the narrative, while broadening its semantic inclusiveness and visionary scope, positions Baizai’s work as a masterful rhetorical composition. Baizai selects archetypal figures from society’s behavioral extremes, deliberately avoiding the use of generic names. Wannous, while remaining relatively faithful to the structure of “Sleeping and Waking,” diverges by introducing a multitude of characters and events, expanding the work’s complexity. Despite their differing approaches, both works ultimately pursue a common goal.

Baizai and Wannous emphasize that power provides characters with an extensive arena, not only to control others but also to claim boundaries and autonomy for themselves. This characteristic is evident in the thematic core of both texts and their societal and external parallels.

The protagonists of these works occupy the pinnacle of power without having earned it through merit or enduring its challenges. They swiftly abandon oversight and control of the forces that granted them authority, seizing control through coercion over the same entities. Remarkably, the forces resisting this domination are unable to counter the discourse of power. The final hope for their success dissipates as divisions emerge among their ranks. Consequently, these forces resign themselves to their dire circumstances, effectively conceding victory to the discourse of power.

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⁴⁵ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 26.

⁴⁶ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 27.

⁴⁷ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 27.

⁴⁸ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 28.

⁴⁹ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 35.

⁵⁰ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 28.

⁵¹ Wannous, *Al-Malek Hova Al-Malek*, 35.

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