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The Concept of Literary Genres in Mikhail Bakhtin's Theoretical Framework

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Abstract

The “genre” of literary works is one of the important issues in the field of literary criticism. In every period, different criteria have been employed as the grounds for similarity and distinction, and thus as the bases for the classification of literary works into genres. These criteria have encompassed both the formal aspects of works, such as modes of expression, stylistic factors, rhetorical devices, and the like, and their internal dimensions, such as mood, plot, character, and so forth. The present study, conducted through a descriptive-analytical method and with the aim of elucidating Bakhtin's approach to the problem of genre, so that other researchers can adopt a more precise approach to the classification of Persian literary genres, in light of Bakhtin's views, seeks to answer the question of what criteria, from Bakhtin's point of view, should be used in classifying literary works, and what exact definition and characteristics pertain to the term chronotope, which he employs. From Bakhtin's perspective, whatever is represented or negotiated discursively in a literary work constitutes the world and reality that the author and his society have accepted within their consciousness. Hence, literature is a reflection of consciousness, and the history of literature, and consequently the history of genres, is equivalent to and commensurate with the course of the history of consciousness. From this point of view, the criteria that should be taken into consideration in determining genre must be epistemological; that is, they must concern the way in which consciousness knows reality and the external world. Since time and space are the essential dimensions of human consciousness, Bakhtin introduces the ‘chronotope’ not merely as a classification tool, but as the fundamental principle that governs narrative structure and drives the evolution of literary genres, or the time-space continuum. This means that the cognition of reality in each historical period, and its representation in the literary works of that period, possesses its own particular temporal-spatial characteristics. It is on the basis of this very criterion that Bakhtin explains, defines, periodizes, and traces the genealogy of literary genres.

Keywords: Genre, Bakhtin, Chronotope, Time-Space Continuum, Historical Literary Genres, Literary Criticism.

1. Introduction

One of the most important branches within the field of literary criticism is the issue of the “genre” of literary works. Indeed, ‘genre’ is a term employed in both biology and literature; in literary criticism, it signifies a ‘type’ or ‘kind’ and is generally used to delineate the shared structural and formal characteristics within a given category of works. The purpose of this term is the classification of literary works on the basis of their internal and external, or formal, characteristics (Dād, 2006, p. 58). The aim of such classification, as in any scientific discipline, is to achieve a better understanding of literary works and to analyze how these internal and external characteristics change over the course of literary history.

The problem of confronting the classification of literary works, from the time of Plato and Aristotle up to the present age, has always been a significant and highly disputed issue, and in every period and for every thinker, different criteria have been proposed for the categorization of works. In particular, various philosophical, literary, and artistic schools have raised extensive

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debates in this regard. With the emergence and spread of scientific methods in the humanities, especially in art and literature, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and with the rise of disciplines such as mythology, psychology, linguistics, hermeneutics, structuralism, and others, a new perspective on the subject of genre emerged. Consequently, the question was raised as to which criterion should serve as the basis for the division or classification of literary works, and whether such classification should be predicated solely on internal structure or external formal attributes; however, modern scholarship increasingly recognizes that these taxonomies must also account for the complex interplay of historical, socio-cultural, and functional factors.

In every period of philosophical thought, in every historical literary era, and with the emergence of new styles, Classicism, Romanticism, Realism, and so on, new criteria have been taken into consideration for the creation and analysis of literary works. However, the most important and fundamental point in determining genre is attention to the “similarities” among those artistic works that are placed within one genre, and to their differences from those grouped under another genre. In any case, “studies in the field of genre have become one of the principal areas of literary research in the world” (Zarghani, 2020, p. 1). Another point is that all researchers in this field agree that genre is an abstract, not a concrete, concept; it is not, for example, like the classification of books according to their subject matter or number of pages. Therefore, the foundation of the discussion of genre rests upon theoretical and conceptual principles. Among the various approaches to genre theory, Bakhtin’s perspective occupies a unique position. This is due to the way his framework synthesizes sociological, philosophical, and linguistic dimensions, while also reflecting his profound awareness of, and adept engagement with, formalist thought. Such comprehensiveness, coupled with the consensus among scholars that Bakhtin remains one of the preeminent philosophers of the twentieth century—particularly in the field of literary criticism—justifies the special attention accorded to his approach to the problem of genre.

2. Statement of the Problem and Research Questions

The primary objective of this research is to synthesize Bakhtin’s theory of genre—a perspective dispersed across his various works—and to define the core constitutive components of this framework. Indeed, these components re-articulate the facets previously explored by predecessor philosophers and literary critics, synthesizing them through Bakhtin’s profound interdisciplinary erudition in the humanities. Furthermore, Bakhtin’s linguistic approach imbues these facets with new vigor, reframing them in a distinctly innovative manner. Concepts such as ‘space,’ ‘time,’ and ‘consciousness,’ which were already present in earlier philosophical discourse, acquire entirely new dimensions within Bakhtin’s theory; this distinctiveness is precisely why this research focuses on his thought. Ultimately, the present study aims to reconstruct the fragmented insights of Bakhtin’s genre theory by collating the ideas dispersed throughout his corpus.

Each thinker in the field of literary criticism, as well as each artistic school or movement, adopts different criteria for the classification of literary works. These criteria may range from formal aspects, such as the form, style, and rhetorical devices of a work, to internal aspects such as tone, structure, plot, and the like. In the *Poetics*, one of the oldest and most systematic works in the field of genre and literary types, Aristotle attends both to formal features—such as the dramatic nature of a work and the poetic forms within which it is composed—and to internal aspects such as character and *mythos*, or plot. An important point in Aristotle’s classification is that he is principally concerned with dramatic works—tragedy and comedy—and pays little attention to the narrative mode, as well as to lyric works and folk literature; indeed, he may not have regarded them as belonging to literature proper (Honarmand, 2021, p. 32). Aristotle also pays attention to the issue of the “function” of literary works and, for example, considers tragic literature to produce feelings of “fear and pity” in the reader and thus to possess a purgative or cathartic function (Honarmand, 2021, p. 39).

Another important concept in Aristotelian poetics is the term *mythos* or *plot*, for which Persian equivalents such as *pirang* and *pey-sakht* have been coined. By this is meant the mode that “gives shape to the ordering and combination of events and to the hero’s action in the story” (Honarmand, 2021, p. 153). During the Hellenistic and Roman periods, when greater attention was devoted to the effect of literary works on human emotions, literary critics placed more emphasis on matters of style, rhetoric, and verbal grandeur; rhetorical devices and the magnificence of expression came to be regarded as criteria for the classification of works. Subsequently, sociological criticism, psychological criticism, structuralism, and other approaches each proposed further criteria for the categorization of literary works.

Bakhtin was trained in linguistics; therefore, the principal basis of his literary ideas might be expected to be linguistic, with an emphasis on linguistic structures. However, his profound knowledge of and interest in philosophy caused his perspective to be philosophical as well as linguistic. On the other hand, the historical circumstances of Bakhtin’s life, especially the Bolshevik Revolution and the heightened attention to social and material issues, led him to incorporate into his criticism the ideological dimensions of materialist criticism, which were largely derived from the philosophy of Hegel and Marx. As noted by Todorov, the Marxist dimension of this perspective originates from the initial thesis on literary history proposed by Voloshinov and Bakhtin, which categorized the history of literature into four stages: authoritarian dogmatism, rationalistic dogmatism, realistic individualism, and relativistic individualism. The Hegelian dimension of this perspective, in turn, traces back to Hegel’s theory concerning the movement of the Spirit and its reflection in the evolution of literary genres (Todorov 1998, p. 147). It is precisely this combination that makes Bakhtin’s approach to the issue of literary genres, and to the process of the evolution and formation of genres across literary periods, highly distinctive and worthy of sustained discussion. Bakhtin’s deep research into popular culture, folk literature, and vernacular cultural forms also exerted a profound influence on his theoretical views, so much so that some of his most important works on literature—especially his study of Rabelais’ *Gargantua*—deal with texts shaped by the objectivist and concrete dimensions of popular culture. Thus, Bakhtin’s theoretical views in the field of literary criticism, and especially on the issue of genre and the classification of literary works, are of great significance because of the multiple

intellectual sources on which he draws and because of his complex and multidimensional view of literature. This study seeks to answer the following three research questions:

1. What is the principal theoretical premise of Bakhtin's theory of genre?
2. Through which philosophical, sociological, and historicist frameworks did Bakhtin approach the problem of genre?
3. With what elements is the term *chronotope* associated in Bakhtin's thought?

2.1. Objectives and Significance of the Study

Given the vast scope and variety of Persian literary genres, their classification requires a comprehensive perspective, familiarity with diverse approaches, and the application of those approaches. Bakhtin is among those thinkers who offer a distinctive view of literary genres, one that is at once linguistic and philosophical. Acquaintance with and application of this theory to Persian literary forms can bring to light many neglected points. This research seeks to offer a systematic, philosopher-centered perspective on the classification of Persian literary genres, grounded in Bakhtinian thought. For this reason, an effort has been made to provide a comprehensive examination of the principal components of his theory of genre, with particular reliance on Bakhtin's own works and on the most important interpreters of his thought.

2.2. Research Background

A number of studies have been conducted on Bakhtin's theory of the chronotope and its applications in literary analysis. Among the more recent and substantial contributions is the volume *Bakhtin's Theory of the Literary Chronotope: Reflections, Applications, Perspectives*, which is the first scholarly collection devoted exclusively to Bakhtin's concept of the literary chronotope. This work not only clarifies the theoretical foundations of the concept but also shows its relevance for literary history and literary theory. In particular, it emphasizes that the chronotope is not merely a descriptive category for time-space patterns in texts, but a structural principle that can illuminate literary form and development.

Cambridge scholarship has also highlighted the close relationship between chronotope and genre in Bakhtin's thought. In *Bakhtin's Concept of the Chronotope: The Viewpoint of an Acting Subject*, it is argued that chronotopes function as the basis of the historical development of the genres of the novel. This point is especially important because it confirms that, in Bakhtin's framework, genre cannot be separated from the specific configurations of time and space through which reality is represented in literary works. The chronotope therefore serves not only as an analytical tool for textual interpretation, but also as a principle for understanding the historical evolution of genres.

Other studies have approached the chronotope from related theoretical angles. For example, *Bakhtin's Chronotope and Routine Dynamics* (2020) employs the chronotope as a methodological lens for understanding how different configurations of time and space shape repetitive social practices. Although this study is not primarily focused on literary genre, it demonstrates the continuing theoretical vitality of Bakhtin's concept and its applicability across disciplines. Such interdisciplinary extensions are significant because they confirm that the chronotope remains a productive analytical category in contemporary scholarship.

In the field of Persian literary studies, a limited number of articles have examined Bakhtin's chronotope in relation to modern Persian fiction. These studies include an analysis of the chronotope of the house in *I'll Turn Off the Lights*, an examination of the chronotope in three works by Shahrnush Parsipur, and a classification of chronotopes in *The Mourners of Bayal*. While these studies have contributed to the application of Bakhtin's theory in Persian narrative analysis, most of them focus on the textual manifestations of chronotope without first providing a sufficiently precise explanation of Bakhtin's underlying theory of genre. The study on the chronotope in Parsipur's works notably neglects Bakhtin's primary corpus and overlooks essential secondary scholarship, resulting in a superficial account of the chronotope rather than a rigorous theoretical analysis. As a result, some interpretive inaccuracies may arise when chronotopes are discussed without a clear grounding in Bakhtin's broader conception of genre and literary history.

Accordingly, the present study seeks to address this gap by offering a more exact account of Bakhtin's theory of genre and by clarifying the theoretical relation between genre, historical consciousness, and the chronotope. In this way, the study aims to provide a more reliable foundation for future analyses of Persian literary genres within Bakhtin's theoretical framework.

3. Research Methods

This research employs a qualitative, hermeneutic-analytical framework to investigate Bakhtin's theory of genre. The selection of Bakhtin's primary works, specifically those where the concept of genre serves as an architectonic principle, such as *Speech Genres and Other Late Essays* and *The Dialogic Imagination*, is purposive, designed to capture the developmental trajectory of his thought. Secondary sources were selected based on their canonical status and interpretive authority, with a prioritized focus on scholars like Holquist and Todorov, who provide foundational frameworks for Bakhtinian studies. The analytical procedure involves a rigorous conceptual synthesis: identifying key terminological shifts in Bakhtin's work, cross-referencing these against his late-career refinements, and tracing the discursive interplay between his philosophical underpinnings and their literary applications.

4. Discussion

4.1. Life and the Development of Bakhtin's Thought

Mikhail Mikhailovich Bakhtin was born in 1895—twenty years before the Bolshevik Revolution—in the Oryol region, into a middle-class and relatively affluent family of aristocratic descent. He spent his childhood in Oryol; however, owing to his father's occupation, which required travel and residence in different regions, his adolescence and youth were spent in Vilnius and Odessa. Bakhtin studied linguistics at Odessa University and subsequently at the highly important University of St.

Petersburg, from which he graduated in 1918, coinciding with the victory of the Revolution. He then began working as a teacher in Vitebsk in 1920, where he and a group of philosophers formed an intellectual circle. The research and discussions taking place within this group, which revolved primarily around Kantian philosophy, Marxism, and literary criticism, constituted the theoretical foundation of Bakhtin's later ideas (Bakhtin, 2008, p. 32).

In 1924, Bakhtin returned to Petrograd, which after the Revolution had been renamed Leningrad. In this city, he became acquainted with the circle of thinkers associated with the Formalist literary movement, nearly all of whom had studied linguistics. It was also here that he wrote the important work *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, which offered an entirely innovative analysis of a literary text. The most consequential event of his life also occurred in this city: his arrest in 1929 on charges of participating in the secret circle of the Russian Orthodox Church, his conviction, and his sentence of six years' exile in Soviet Kazakhstan, marking the beginning of a long period of hardship, instability, and poverty (Gholamhoseinzade, 2008, p. 16).

Most biographers divide Bakhtin's intellectual life into two periods, the second of which begins with this very exile. In the first period, "we encounter a Bakhtin who is a neo-Kantian philosopher, a Husserlian phenomenologist, and a Bergsonian vitalist. In the second period, we are confronted with a literary critic endowed with literary and social theories, approaches, and methods" (Gholamhoseinzade, 2008, p. 32).

In fact, in the first period we are dealing with a philosopher, and in the second with a literary theorist. Throughout the long second phase of his life, extending from 1929 until his death, Bakhtin gradually elaborated and completed the scattered fragments of his most important literary theories. During this period, he lived in fear of political purges and the pressures of Stalinist cultural policy. Most of his major literary ideas—such as the chronotope, polyphony, the problem of time, carnival laughter, and others—took shape during these years. Stalin's death in 1953 ushered in a period of relative openness in Bakhtin's life; his reputation was rehabilitated, and he himself became a highly prominent figure in Russian and European intellectual circles.

His most important essays and works, especially those concerning genre and literary poetics, were written in this period, and ideas that had appeared briefly, tentatively, and in scattered form in his earlier writings were, during these years, fully matured and reformulated. Perhaps his most important work of this period is *Rabelais and His World*, whose central idea is the eternal struggle between the life-affirming and joy-seeking culture of the people and the death-oriented, authoritarian, and official culture of domination. Bakhtin's death in 1975 brought to an end the life of an outstanding thinker, a profound theorist, and a linguist of exceptional genius. An important point regarding Bakhtin is that throughout all his works he consistently grounded his views in linguistics, which had been the principal field of his university education.

4.2. The Work and the Addressee

One of the most fundamental components of Bakhtin's theory of genre, and indeed of his literary criticism as a whole, is his attention to the issue of the "importance of the addressee" in the understanding and analysis of literary works. From Bakhtin's perspective, as a linguist, language is a collective phenomenon; that is, language always has two sides: the speaker and the addressee. Thus, the creation of "meaning" requires understanding and collective interaction. The reader of a literary work participates in the production of meaning no less than its author; meaning, therefore, is not born in a vacuum. The audience of literary works does not play a passive role; rather, it is the audience that gives direction and orientation to the meaning of a work. There are many literary works that, in their own time, carried a political charge or embodied resistance to government or church authority, but in later periods no longer possessed such a dimension. This itself indicates the important role of the addressee in the formation of meaning. Hence, in Bakhtin's words, "the utterance is the product of the interaction between speaker and listener and, in a broader sense, the product of the entire complex social situation in which it has appeared" (Bakhtin, 2016, p. 70).

The importance of this statement lies in the fact that Bakhtin regards "meaning" not as something fixed, absolute, and closed, but as the product of situation, relation, and interaction between the mental horizon of the addressee and that of the speaker. Or, more precisely, "the artistic work is oriented toward listeners and receivers and toward specific conditions of performance and reception" (Todorov, 1998, p. 159). If meaning is not fixed and dictionary-like in nature, then it is dependent upon temporal and spatial conditions; therefore, meaning is historical in its very essence. It is also dependent on circumstances, that is, on performance and expression. Bakhtin's theory of genre takes shape from a more fundamental assumption: meaning does not arise in isolation, but within the dynamic relation between speaker and addressee. For this reason, Bakhtin's theory is formulated on the basis of a "poetics of utterance," since every utterance is shaped not only by the speaker's intention but also by the anticipated response, social position, and interpretive horizon of the listener. In other words, "every utterance follows a particular linguistic pattern in accordance with the situation and purpose pursued by the speaker, as well as the listener's understanding of the context." This perspective later provided a foundation for theories such as Speech Act theory (Honarmand, 2022, p. 225). From this point, genre becomes intelligible as the relatively stable form through which utterances are organized under specific social, cultural, and historical conditions; thus, genres are intrinsically related to expression, performance, and the changing relations between speakers and addressees. In this sense, as Lucien Goldmann puts it, from Bakhtin's perspective "what lies in the depths of the human being is not the Id (the sum of unconscious motivations), but the other" (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 76).

Accordingly, a work of art is to be analyzed less in terms of the writer's individual genius and biographical circumstances than in terms of its social foundations, its mode of expression, and the horizon of understanding shared by speaker and addressee. From this point of view, one may say that types of discourse, and in a broader sense "literary kinds" themselves—that is, speech genres and literary genres—constitute another aspect of the social and cultural conditions of historical periods.

Bakhtin's critique was directed specifically at the tendency of certain monologic paradigms—which he frequently classified under 'abstract objectivism'—to treat language and meaning as fixed, static entities isolated from the communicative act. He argued that these approaches, by focusing exclusively on the internal structure of the work or the author's psyche, failed to account for the dynamic, dialogic nature of the utterance. In contrast to this abstraction, Bakhtin insisted that the center of gravity in literary analysis must reside in the 'utterance' itself; he rejected the strict Saussurean dichotomy between the synchronic system and historical change, proposing instead that language functions as an active event—a continuous, dialogic communication between speaker and listener that is simultaneously historical and contextual. For this reason, "the path that connects inner experience (the inexpressible factor) and its external objectification (the utterance) lies entirely within the social sphere" (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 77). It is from this point that Bakhtin separates his path from that of the Formalists, for they too had placed the starting point of their analysis in the work of art itself, in its form and material. Such an approach, in Bakhtin's view, "ultimately leads to the preservation of nothing but empty and dead forms, and to the separation of form from content" (Bakhtin, 2008, p. 28).

4.3. Poetics and Literary Genres

It is at this point that Bakhtin formulates his well-known general proposition: "Poetics must begin with the study of genre" (Bakhtin, 2008, p. 155). In other words, any form of literary analysis and criticism must take as its point of departure the examination of speech genres and literary genres. For this reason, the question of genre remained a constant concern throughout Bakhtin's intellectual life, since it ultimately led him to the idea of the "generation of meaning," a fundamentally linguistic concern. This principle also determined his methodological orientation, which was based on two main premises: (1) the inseparability of form and content, and (2) the primacy of the social over the individual.

As Bakhtin states:

"The separation of style and language from literary genre results in the elevation of merely individual stylistic nuances or the particular traits of literary movements as privileged objects of study, while the social tone and intonation that constitute the foundation of the work are forgotten. For this reason, stylistics has been deprived of an authentic philosophical and social approach" (Bakhtin, 2008, p. 156).

Accordingly, even the "stylistics" of literary works becomes a form of social stylistics—that is, a study of genre—which connects the problem of style to historical sociology and to the social conditions and collective modes of understanding characteristic of different historical periods. In Bakhtin's words, "only a sociology of literary genres can be called a genuine poetics of genres" (Bakhtin, 2002, p. 156).

4.4. Genre and Discourse

From Bakhtin's perspective, every everyday utterance acquires meaning in accordance with social and cultural conditions and with its mode of expression or performance. For example, in a simple exchange of greetings, the phrase "How are you?" and responses such as "I'm exhausted today" or "Not too bad" each generate distinct semantic spaces, in which the role of the addressee is crucial. As Bakhtin himself notes, "in every utterance—from a single-word everyday reply to complex scientific or literary works—we can perceive and sense the speaker's speech plan or speech will." This plan determines the overall structure of the utterance, including its length and boundaries; it determines the choice of subject (within specific circumstances of verbal communication and in necessary relation to prior utterances), as well as the semantic scope of the utterance. Moreover, this speech plan also determines the generic form within which the utterance is shaped (Qasemipour, 2022, p. 178).

Bakhtin divides discourse into two categories: "primary speech genres" (simple everyday communication) and "secondary speech genres" (such as articles, literary works, and scholarly treatises). He considers his theory of genre applicable to both. From Bakhtin's perspective, every utterance—from a simple sentence to a literary work—is in fact a form of "dialogue," that is, an utterance produced in the relation between speaker and reader. In this sense, Bakhtin, like Saussure, regards language, and consequently literary works, as social and communicative activities; genres are likewise "linguistic patterns employed for specific social and cultural purposes" (Honarmand, 2022, p. 227). Even a simple conversation, such as greeting someone, is therefore conditioned by the situations in which it is produced. For this reason, the "sentence" is, for Bakhtin, the smallest unit of discourse. He then divides genres into two fundamental groups: primary genres, which are the sentences and expressions we use in everyday language and which change in each act of utterance, and secondary genres, which "operate with specialized language and in connection with legal, religious, and cultural institutions" (Honarmand, 2022, p. 231). Bakhtin also views literature as an "institution" that functions in a manner similar to other institutions, with the difference that "literature, because of its direct relationship to language, also plays an active role in other institutions, such as political or judicial ones" (Honarmand, 2022, p. 231). He writes: "All speech genres in every sphere of verbal communication presuppose a typical conception of their addressees"; it is precisely this presupposition that gives discourse its generic form. When speaking, I always take into account the addressee's background of understanding: the extent of their familiarity with the communicative situation, whether they possess specialized knowledge of the relevant cultural sphere, their attitudes and beliefs, their prejudices (from my perspective), their sympathies and antipathies, and so forth, all of which determine their responsive understanding of my utterance (Qasemipour, 2022, p. 186).

This position follows from the idea that every utterance—every book, treatise, or text—is in fact a channel of communication, and that shared understanding between speaker and listener is indispensable. In other words, every utterance takes shape within a communicative horizon, and to speak is to cast one's discourse into generic forms. Likewise, when we hear

another's speech, we recognize its genre from the very first words (Holquist, 2016, p. 110). Literary texts, therefore, are also subject to the laws governing utterances; each discourse is formed through the interaction between speaker and addressee within a specific social and cultural context. The meaning of a literary work can only be understood in relation to its authors, its audiences, and the socio-historical conditions of signification at the time of its production. As Holquist observes, "the space of a text emerges only at the level where a given discourse assumes a recognizable generic form, because genres are collective phenomena, whereas style may be conceived as individual" (Holquist, 2016, p. 117). No single writer can create a genre; genre is a collective phenomenon among writers of a given period, shaped by predecessors and influencing successors.

According to Bakhtin, "content, linguistic style, and compositional structure are inseparably linked to the whole of the utterance, and the nature of this linkage is determined by the specific sphere of language use" (Zarghani, 2020, p. 310). Thus, Bakhtin does not focus solely on literary genres; rather, he considers literary works as continuations of various types of speech genres, each of which follows particular linguistic patterns depending on the speaker's purpose and communicative situation (Honarmand, 2022, p. 225).

The crucial difference between Bakhtin's approach and traditional literary, especially those approaches that take the rhetorical aspects and general thematic content of works as the basis for genre classification, tend to seek fixed criteria for categorization; as a result, such standards possess less flexibility and a more limited range, lies in the fact that classical criticism tended to study genres primarily as classificatory categories, seeking fixed criteria as the critic's principal task. In Bakhtin's view, however, the dynamism of meaning forms the central axis of the discussion of literary genre. The main objective is to uncover the "laws of change" governing the foundations of meaning-making. For this reason, Bakhtin seeks the threads that connect literary works to society, history, horizons of understanding, and the function of genre within each community. As Honarmand aptly notes, from this perspective genres "carry a portion of the broader cultural metatext" (Honarmand, 2022, p. 228).

4.5. Genre as the Belt of History

We may now better understand Bakhtin's famous assertion that genres are the threads—or, metaphorically, the belts— that bind language to history. In his essay "The Problem of Speech Genres," referring to primary and secondary forms of speech (everyday discourse and literary or scientific works), Bakhtin writes:

Utterances and their types, that is, speech genres, are the conveyor belts of the history of society into the history of language. No isolated new phonetic, lexical, or grammatical phenomenon can enter the language system without traversing the long and complex path of generic and stylistic testing and modification (Qasemipour, 2022, p. 175). Here, the term "belt" is used in the sense of a "conveyor belt," that is, a belt that transmits the force of history to literature and sets it in motion, carrying it along in circulation and movement. This metaphor can help guide us toward the conception Bakhtin has in mind: the movement of history and the movement of language as an object of consciousness, reflecting an aspect of Hegel's philosophy of Spirit or Idea.

The significance of Bakhtin's claim lies in his recognition that genre is not an individual or instantaneous phenomenon. Rather, a genre emerges through a prolonged historical and social process of repetition, circulation, and transformation. What has not yet undergone such collective stabilization should not necessarily be reduced to mere "individual style"; rather, it may be understood as a still-unsettled or not yet socially consolidated form of utterance, whose relation to style and genre remains historically open. The critic's fundamental task, therefore, is to examine which historical and social conditions, upon what prior foundations, give rise to genres, and under what circumstances these genres are employed and what additional meanings, concepts, or discourses they are intended to convey (Honarmand, 2022, p. 230).

At the same time, genres embody the dominant "discourses" of a society, both in linguistic terms and in relation to broader social and cultural conditions. In essence, every genre responds to the expectations of society—that is, to the expectations of the audience—since, as noted earlier, the addressees of a work play a fundamental role in the production of meaning. In this sense, genres function as a kind of metalanguage: they express the author's intentions while simultaneously reflecting the expectations of the audience (Honarmand, 2022, p. 235). Genres are thus mirrors of the inner life of society, of the author's consciousness, and of the broader epistemological foundations of human communities within specific historical and geographical contexts.

It is on this very foundation that the two concepts of "time" and "space" enter into Bakhtin's theory of genre. If every utterance and the genres of utterance are functions of "situations," then the temporal and spatial conditions in which discourse takes shape and acquires meaning become significant. Every particular situation is formed on the basis of a shared and specific understanding that the two sides of the utterance have of time and place. Genre, as an abstract basis for the classification of literary works, and of discourse more generally, can only be analyzed through the history of its emergence and through the temporal and spatial conditions within which it was produced. For this reason, Bakhtin defines the principal component of genre, that is, the criterion for the classification of literary works, through a category that unites these two elements of time and space: the *chronotope*, understood as the time-space continuum.

4.6. The Historical Development of Genres

If genres are historical categories that reflect the social conditions and worldviews of particular periods and societies, then their genealogy may be traced throughout history, and they may be regarded as corresponding to successive stages of "human consciousness." Bakhtin derived the idea of the relationship between genre and the history of consciousness from Hegel. Within

Hegel's philosophical system, it is the historical movement of the Idea that links literary genres to the evolution of human consciousness. For example, Hegel associated the epic genre with the infancy of humanity and with the earliest stages of human history, when consciousness perceived itself as bound to cosmic forces. In the epic age, "human beings were aware of themselves only as indistinguishable parts of an all-encompassing environment" (Holquist, 2016, p. 123).

Thus, each period of human history—or, in Hegelian terms, each stage in the history of consciousness—is associated with a genre or group of genres, culminating in the novel, in which consciousness attains autonomy. A similar idea appears in Lukács, who likewise regarded the novel as the ultimate transcendental form in the development of consciousness and as the expression of humanity's rupture from transcendence or from God. His well-known formulation—"the novel is the epic of a world abandoned by God", emerges from this very conception (Holquist, 2016, p. 123).

Bakhtin also considered the novel the most advanced stage in the evolution of human mentality; however, his analysis differs significantly from that of Hegel and Lukács. In Bakhtin's framework, the history and genealogy of genres are likewise connected to the history of consciousness, yet this development does not move toward unity or totality, as Hegel and Lukács believed, but toward multiplicity and diversity. In Bakhtin's dialogism, history is perceived as a perpetual struggle between monologism and dialogism, without excluding the possibility of reversal or regression. Unlike Hegel and Lukács, for Bakhtin history is a process that "has no necessary teleological end inscribed within it" and may at any moment turn back upon itself (Holquist, 2016, p. 125).

In Bakhtin's conception:

Instead of a teleological trajectory moving from one unified state to another, his grand narrative of history begins with an illusory sense of unity and advances toward an ever-increasing awareness of difference and diversity—an expansion that no synthesizing unity can finally overcome (Holquist, 2016, p. 125).

From this perspective, the concept of the chronotope in Bakhtin's system differs fundamentally from what sociologists of literature typically propose regarding the relationship between literature and society. For many sociological approaches, the social, political, and cultural conditions of each era, along with its artistic movements, generate specific genres. For Bakhtin, however, the chronotope or time-space continuum is directly and intrinsically linked to historical consciousness and worldview itself.

The term chronotope, derived from the Greek words *chronos* (time) and *topos* (space), does not refer merely to the human perception of time and space. In Bakhtin's theory, it designates the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relations as they are artistically organized and represented in literature. The chronotope is therefore not simply a cognitive category, but a narrative and formal principle through which events, characters, and plot become intelligible within a particular literary work. Although Bakhtin's formulation of the concept may be understood as developing in dialogue with broader philosophical reflections on time and space, including Kantian thought, he reworks these concerns within his own literary and dialogic framework. In this sense, literary works do not merely reflect a general conception of time and space; rather, they embody historically specific ways of configuring temporal and spatial relations within narrative form. As Miyami (Miyahi, 2024, p. 99) notes, "Bakhtin situates the chronotope within the Kantian idea that time and space are the necessary forms of all cognition."

Accordingly, the chronotope represents the specific configuration of time and space as understood by a given society:

Bakhtin emphasizes that different manifestations of time and space in literature are not merely artistic conventions; rather, they function as generic techniques for reflecting and artistically processing reality within time and space. These categories are aspects of reality subject to artistic transformation. Moreover, time and space shape the very gateways of human cognition. Bakhtin stresses the chronotopic nature of human existence itself: "the image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic," meaning that human existence and essence are defined within concrete time and space; without situating the human being within a specific temporal and spatial context, one cannot define humanity at all (Miyahi, 2024, p. 106).

This understanding of the human being, or, more precisely, of the author as situated within the social and historical horizon of his or her contemporaries, is reflected in literary works and may be seen as one of the factors shaping literary genres. From this perspective, genres can be understood in relation to their chronotopic structures, since different configurations of time and space disclose different ways of imagining human experience. In this sense, the genealogy of genres in Bakhtin's thought may be read as closely related to a history of human consciousness, rather than as being fully equivalent to it.

In literary works, the chronotope becomes discernible through the manner in which "reality" and "the world" are represented. As Todorov observes:

The domain of representing reality differs among various literary genres and across different stages of literary development; it is organized differently from one genre to another and from one historical period to the next. Each genre offers a distinct image of reality in terms of time and space (Todorov, 1998, p. 161).

If Aristotle, in his analysis of genres, focused on plot and action as structural foundations, Bakhtin, by contrast, emphasized the chronotope—that is, the image of reality as shaped by a specific conception of time and space within the literary work. For Bakhtin, time and space are inseparably interconnected, and reality is constituted in consciousness through their interaction.

For example, in the epic of Rostam in the *Shahnameh*, the field of action unfolds across vast spatial expanses—from Turan to mythic territories—and within an absolute, unbounded past. In contrast, the field of action in the lyric genre is entirely different. Bakhtin writes that epic poetry "transfers a fully finished form to its contemporaries, that is, it transfers to them the time-space form of the past, relocating them to the world of ancestors, origins, and turning points" (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 251). The epic genre recognizes and represents only the absolute past; the present is not permitted to enter its domain.

Because the interdependence of time and space in the cognition of reality is intrinsic, Bakhtin writes:

We shall give the name chronotope (literally, “time–space”) to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature. This term expresses the inseparability of time and space. We designate the chronotope as formally constitutive of literary works (Bakhtin, 2016, p. 137).

Bakhtin further explains that in the chronotope “spatial and temporal indicators are fused into one carefully thought-out, concrete whole. Time becomes, as it were, thickened, takes on flesh, becomes artistically visible; likewise, space becomes responsive to the movements of time, plot, and history. The artistic chronotope is characterized precisely by this intersection of axes and fusion of indicators” (Bakhtin, 2016, p. 138).

René Wellek makes an important observation: despite Bakhtin’s insistence on the intrinsic unity of time and space, his analyses appear to subordinate space to time, placing greater emphasis on temporality and its variations across genres than on spatial categories (Velek, 2009, p. 524).

4.7. The Two Principal Lineages: Epic and Menippean Satire

A close study of Bakhtin’s reflections on the history of genres suggests one possible reading of his theory: that the evolution and transformation of literary genres may, in part, be interpreted through the tension between two major lines of development, the epic and the Menippean (or Menippean satire). This does not mean that all literary genres can be reduced to these two lineages alone; rather, they may be seen as two especially significant tendencies that illuminate Bakhtin’s account of genre formation in a number of historical and literary contexts. From this perspective, some genres—from ancient epic to Dostoevsky’s works—can be understood as engaging, reworking, or contesting elements associated with these broader traditions in different ways. Each genre, in every period, becomes a battleground in which these two foundational modes contend with one another, two competing forms of perceiving and representing reality. Thus, the study of their distinctive chronotopic features is crucial.

Bakhtin also considers each of these lineages to be rooted in two essential forces within social life: the official, dominant culture of the upper classes, which generates the epic tradition, characterized by absolutism; and, on the other hand, the popular and subaltern culture of the lower classes, which opposes this absolutism through ridicule, laughter, and the Menippean tradition. Menippean satire, with its pluralism and commitment to concrete reality, has throughout history contested the terrifying and admonitory tendencies of official culture by laughing at them. For Bakhtin, carnivals and carnivalized literature—embodied in *carnival laughter*—were attempts to dismantle authority and invert the hierarchical structures of official, epic-generating culture. While official literature (epic in particular) seeks seriousness, abstraction, and admonition, Menippean satire seeks to mock this seriousness and return to concreteness and the embodied world. Of course, this does not mean that every epic is simply a product of official culture, nor that Bakhtin ignores popular epics; rather, what is primarily at stake here is the concept of the “epic” as Hegel formulates it in his account of literary genres and the emergence of epic. What concerns Bakhtin, rather, is the opposition between two contrasting forms of worldview—official and popular—and their respective literary and artistic productions. Perhaps for this reason Bakhtin “places the genre of the novel in opposition to the genre of the epic” (Bakhtin, 2008, p. 33).

4.7.1. The Development of Epic and Menippean Satire

Bakhtin’s view of the epic and its historical development is philosophical and ideological. He understands the epic as a closed narrative form, hostile to openness and freedom, rooted in an absolute and authoritative past. It is marked by “authoritative dogmatism with a linear and impersonal style” (Todorov, 1998, p. 146). The epic is the narrative of the ruling class, an official discourse that invites its audience to obedience and acceptance. In his essay “Epic and Novel,” Bakhtin offers a detailed exposition of the nature of the epic. The first point he emphasizes, based on the literary chronotope, is that the epic always takes place in the past:

The epic is never presented poetically in the temporal context of the present or contemporary times. The epic is reserved only for the past and offered poetically to future generations. The existence of the narrator, indispensable to the epic, is the existence of a man who always appeals to an unattainable past (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 250).

The phrase “unattainable past” is key. The epic is not accessible to ordinary experience; it cannot be questioned, doubted, or critically engaged. It unfolds within its own self-enclosed world of belief. The epic narrative is inseparably tied to myth; the existence of a complete and absolute past is essential to it. As Bakhtin notes, “epic discourse is discourse founded on myth. The epic world of absolute past, by its very nature, lies beyond the reach of individual experience and does not admit personal opinion or evaluation” (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 253).

Thus, the epic world is not experiential; it cannot be lived or reenacted by the reader. Unlike the novel, the epic does not allow identification; “the epic world appears only as a sacred and incontestable tradition, demanding universal respect and evaluation” (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 253).

The epic world belongs to an absolute past. The forces active in its narrative—gods, monsters, fate, and fortune—lie beyond human reach and communication; they belong solely to the epic hero. Epic narrative “distances itself from its own time and from everything unformed, unresolved, open to reinterpretation or reevaluation” (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 255). Hence, the epic and its world become, in Bakhtin’s words, “a kind of mausoleum.” The “epic past becomes a special form of literary vision of humanity and of events; the epic past more or less replaces all ordinary literary representations” (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 256).

In contrast to the epic, Bakhtin places the Menippean (or Menippean satire) as a narrative form that critically interrogates everything, laughs at dogma, and opens the space for renewal and creation. This recalls Socrates’ metaphor of the philosopher as a midwife, who helps bring forth the inner truth of the embodied, earthly human being. Bakhtin locates deep folkloric and

carnavalesque roots—indeed, an entire worldview—in the Menippean tradition, tracing it from ancient Socratic dialogues to modern literature, and ultimately identifying the novel as the consummate form of the Menippean lineage.

Whereas the epic is monologic, Menippean satire is dialogic. Dialogue is its defining feature. Thus, in contrast to the epic's absolutism and authority, the Menippean mode is pluralistic and anti-authoritarian. Bakhtin includes within this lineage an array of works spanning from Socratic dialogues to satire, parody, the work of Rabelais, and the novels of Dostoevsky. One may even speak of two traditions: the **epic tradition** and the **Menippean tradition**. Bakhtin believed that Dostoevsky revived Menippean satire, which had declined since the seventeenth century, and that this Menippean tradition forms the tonal foundation of all his works. For Bakhtin, the defining axes of the Menippean tradition are "dialogue" and "skepticism." Unlike the epic, the Menippean mode resists authoritative absolutism and instead interrogates, doubts, and tests every value and belief. It laughs at dogma, challenges hierarchy, mocks authority—kings and popes alike—and in carnival fashion inverts every structure of power.

The Menippean tradition concerns itself with the present and is always oriented toward the future; it invites others into its feast, encouraging participation in the search for truth. Thus, it is collective in nature:

"The Menippea continues its life in dialogized or carnivalized literary forms such as the Socratic dialogues, morality plays, religious rites, and later in performances such as the stories of the Middle Ages" (Velek, 2009, p. 518).

The tradition takes its name from Menippus, the third-century BCE philosopher and satirist, and later became associated with satiric literary forms (Bakhtin, 2016, p. 253). In the Roman period, Apuleius' *The Golden Ass*—in which an aristocrat is transformed into a donkey and, entering noble households, observes their moral corruption because they perceive him as an animal free of consequence—represents an advanced form of Menippean satire. Bakhtin notes that "Menippean satire strongly influenced early Christian literature, Byzantine literature, and through it the older Russian texts, continuing its development in post-classical periods as well" (Bakhtin, 2016, p. 256).

Bakhtin writes:

The most important feature of the Menippean genre is the fact that its bold and unrestricted use of fantasy and adventure is motivated and justified by a wholly idealistic and philosophical intention—its sole aim: to create extraordinary situations for provoking and testing a philosophical idea, a statement, a truth, embodied in the image of the wise man, the seeker after truth. Here fantasy becomes a method for seeking truth, for provoking and, above all, for testing it (Bakhtin, 2016, p. 257).

Although Bakhtin refers to the Menippea as a genre, it is clear that, for him, it is also a mode of thinking and perceiving the world: a tradition that laughs at particulars, mistrusts them, challenges official and authoritative culture, mocks hierarchy, inverts structures of power, and arises from the concrete, earthly world. It accepts human frailty, imperfection, guilt, and impurity as intrinsic elements of existence, rejecting the ideal of the "perfect man." It is anti-despotic, anti-authoritarian, anti-dogmatic, anti-transcendental, and opposed to asceticism and moral absolutism. This tradition served as the prelude to the emergence of the novel:

"All the Menippean varieties may be regarded as the precursors of the novel... the fundamental basis of the novel, as a form destined to become a genre, is far more clearly observable in these examples than in what is ordinarily called the Greek novel" (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 259).

4.8. Historical Periods of Literary Types and Genres

Bakhtin thus understands genres as inseparably linked to the traditions of human thought—or, more precisely, to the course of human development and transformation within specific historical periods. It follows, therefore, that each age produces its own characteristic genres. Bakhtin summarizes these periods of thought and philosophy as follows:

One may distinguish the following periods in literary history: "authoritative dogmatism," marked by an impersonal and overt style in the transmission of another's discourse; "rationalistic dogmatism," with an even more explicitly linear style (the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries); "realistic and critical individualism," characterized by a pictorial style and by a tendency to insert the author's own explanations and responses into another's discourse (the late eighteenth century and the whole of the nineteenth century); and finally "relativistic individualism," marked by the erosion and disintegration of the author's own discursive ground (the contemporary period) (Todorov, 1998, p. 147).

To this list one must also add the genres of ancient Greece and the Hellenistic period, which Bakhtin discusses in his highly important work *The Dialogic Imagination* on the basis of the concept of the chronotope. At the beginning of his important essay on the chronotope, Bakhtin explains that, over the course of its historical development, literature has incorporated the two categories of "time" and "space" in different ways, and that in each genre these two concepts bear a particular relation to real time and space. He writes: "The process of assimilating real historical time and space in literature, and of incorporating actual historical persons into such time and space, has been a complicated and erratic one" (Bakhtin, 2008, p. 137). In fact, in every historical period, a particular way of understanding time and space has gained entry into the realm of literature, that is, into an aesthetic and elevated apprehension of the world. These specific aspects of time and space, in Bakhtin's words, entered literature together with "the appropriate generic means for reflecting and artistically processing these aspects." The question of which artistic mode of representation, and which particular understanding of real time and space, has enabled these two concepts to enter literature in each historical period becomes the basis for recognizing genre. For this reason, Bakhtin writes: "We will give the name chronotope (literally, 'time space') to the intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature" (ibid.). Thus, the basis for classifying historical periods and the genres associated with each of them lies in the way the relation, interconnectedness, and continuum of time and space are aestheticized in the literary works of that period. In that work, Bakhtin offers a classification of genres. Although he also acknowledges the existence of subgenres,

his principal instrument for classifying literary works is the time-space continuum. Bakhtin's discussions of genre do not all belong to a single level of analysis. On the one hand, he traces a historical series of literary forms through which different chronotopic structures become visible in the development of the novel. In this context, one may identify a number of genres and subgenres that recur in his work, including minor forms of antiquity culminating in the *Satyricon* and *The Golden Ass*, the Sophistic novel, chivalric romance, the Baroque novel, the pastoral novel, the novel of ordeal, the didactic and *Bildungsroman* traditions, the autobiographical novel, the Gothic novel, the sentimental novel, lesser medieval forms such as moral allegories, the picaresque novel, the parodic novel, and the composite novel of the nineteenth century. These forms are best understood as part of Bakhtin's account of the historical development of genres and their chronotopic organization.

However, Bakhtin's broader theory of literature also moves beyond the historical classification of genres in a narrow sense. In another, related line of inquiry, he turns to popular culture, carnival, and folk laughter as forces that shape literary form from outside official literary systems. For this reason, it is methodologically clearer to distinguish between two separate but connected domains in his thought: first, the historical development and chronotopic organization of genres; and second, popular culture, carnival, and folk literature as cultural energies that transform literary discourse. Such a distinction helps preserve the structural coherence of the argument and clarifies the shift in focus within Bakhtin's theory.

In *The Dialogic Imagination*, Bakhtin explains the chronotopes of the most important of these genres and traces the ways in which they developed and changed over the course of history. In effect, his analysis of genres centers on a crucial issue: how "reality" is represented in the world of each genre, and in what forms of time and space the hero's actions unfold. These elements reveal the particular "world" and "reality" represented and cognized by a genre, as well as the historical period in which that genre comes into being.

In the genre of the Iranian heroic romance—which Bakhtin classifies under the heading of the "adventure novel of ordeal"—the central focus is on the events and trials confronting the hero. In this genre, "the sequence of plot events unfolds against a highly varied and expansive geographical background (usually across three to five countries or regions separated by seas), and the point of departure is typically the sudden ignition of love between the hero and a woman at first sight" (Bakhtin, 2008, p. 142). Time in this heroic romance is open, but the passage of time exerts no effect on the hero; indeed, both the hero and the world remain untouched by the traces of real temporality. In fact, there is virtually no sign of historical time in these works, and even place and space remain abstract and schematic: countries and regions do not differ significantly from one another. Instead of temporal development, what we encounter is a succession of short temporal segments, that is, a chain of adventures (Gholamhoseinzadeh, 2008, p. 157). As Wellek observes, "each story begins with the hero's falling in love, and after passing through a series of difficulties and adventures, ends with his union with the beloved; throughout the course of the story, the hero of the novel undergoes absolutely no change" (Velek, 2009, p. 520).

In the genre of the "adventure novel," a certain development occurs in the relation between time and space. Here, particular moments of time affect the life of the individual in a way that leaves a lasting imprint on his or her existence. Yet this transformation in time does not extend to the surrounding world. In this genre, space also becomes more concrete and realistic. Even so, we are still not confronted with a biographical progression; rather, the narrative remains composed of disconnected fragments of adventure. In this genre, "space becomes more concrete, and a more real time embraces it: the genuine sense of the dynamism of space fills it and establishes a vital connection with the hero and his destiny" (Miyahi, 2024, p. 126).

In the genre of the "biographical novel," time and space become still more concrete. Yet even here, the element of time remains dispersed, fragmented, and deprived of a necessary continuity. "The hero may change, but not because of the passage of time; rather, as a result of the impact of events" (Gholamhoseinzadeh, 2008, p. 158). In this form, the hero moves from reassuring ignorance to self-consciousness through doubt and uncertainty, and thus the character is represented in a kind of exposed visibility before the reader. In Bakhtin's words, "there is nothing in the hero that must be excavated or guessed at; one cannot remove a mask from his face or entice him into revelation. Everything is laid bare, and nothing remains hidden from view: there is no covering and no inner kernel" (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 274).

A highly significant point Bakhtin makes in his analysis of biography is that "the ancient Greeks could see and hear every aspect of life. Antiquity never knew an invisible or silent reality, and this was true of being as a whole" (Bakhtin, 2016, p. 195). This remark makes clear that Bakhtin's understanding of the chronotope is fundamentally epistemological. Plutarch's *Lives of the Noble Greeks and Romans* is an illuminating example of this genre. In Plutarch's works, time is "the time of the revelation of character, but in no way the moments of becoming or growth of human personality" (Bakhtin, 2016, p. 203).

One of the most important fields of Bakhtin's research was his sustained attention to popular culture and folklore, a concern that ultimately led him to the idea of *carnival laughter*. His major work, *Rabelais and His World* remains one of his most influential books for contemporary thinkers.

From Bakhtin's point of view, "popular literature" has always stood in opposition to "official literature"—that is, literature produced and promoted by the ruling groups and presented as "serious" and "elevated" literature. The more official literature is dry, solemn, admonitory, totalizing, fear-producing, and severe, the more popular literature becomes promising, joyous, interactive, and dialogic.

Official literature is monologic; popular literature is polyphonic and open to dialogue. As Rabelais writes, "in the Renaissance and the Middle Ages, the vast world of the forms and manifestations of laughter rose up in struggle against the official and serious tone of ecclesiastical and feudal culture" (Todorov, 1998, p. 152). In this sense, popular culture is a culture of laughter, joking, and ridicule; it subjects everything to mockery and playful derision, even the most sacred concepts. A colloquial proverb that crudely juxtaposes death with bodily functions, or popular euphemisms for dying that reduce the gravest

existential event to everyday vulgarity, exemplify this tendency. What such expressions reveal is that the most serious event of human existence—death—which official literature has surrounded with innumerable treatises and elaborate rituals, is brought into relation with the lowest bodily realities and thereby mocked. In this way, popular literature—literature of laughter and satire—constantly places the material and bodily principle against abstract and sacred concepts. Bakhtin writes:

Laughter destroys epic distance; it investigates man freely and familiarly in his totality, turns him inside out, exposing the disparity between outer appearance and inner reality, between potentiality and realization (Bakhtin, 2020, p. 275).

From this perspective, popular satire ridicules everything that presents itself as serious and, against the fears propagated by official literature, introduces the possibility of laughter and hope. Popular satire inverts everything, and the clearest manifestation of this inversion may be found in the carnivals of the Middle Ages, during which prevailing rules and regulations were largely suspended, and the lowest members of society could temporarily be elected as mock kings and popes.

Another striking instance of this opposition and inversion may be seen in vernacular language and in works of popular literature, which oppose the elevated and ceremonial language of official Persian literature by employing colloquial, marketplace speech—that is, a language that “weaves indecorous expressions into the very fabric of literary art” (Bakhtin, 2025, p. 261). Within Persian literature, the treatises of ‘Obayd Zākānī provide a compelling example of carnival laughter. If we turn to Obayd Zakani's (1973) *Fālnāmeḥ*, we can see how the two concepts of the authority of heavenly decrees and the movement of celestial bodies—central to older official books of divination—are, in Obayd's parodic work, linked to the earthly immoralities of the period in which he lived. In effect, the very idea that had originally given rise to the traditional *fālnāmeḥ* is reversed. From the very beginning of the treatise, Obayd overturns all the titles and concepts found in conventional divinatory texts and mocks terms such as “sages,” “truth,” and “rectitude.” For instance, in the horoscope for Aries he writes that the good fortune lies in this: “to live expansively on a prostitute's earnings”. Thus, auspicious fate and happy fortune are redefined in terms of the very immoralities that had gripped Obayd's society. In this way, Obayd represents a distinctive conception of calendrical time and the earthly world that stands in complete opposition to the official and traditional view. In Bakhtin's terms, popular literature creates “festival-folk forms,” whose principal components are feasting, eating, joy, song, buffoonery, clowning, and the inversion of hierarchical order. Through such forms, through what Bakhtin calls the “image of the feast”, this literature generates liberation: “these images create an appropriate space and atmosphere for joyful interaction” (Bakhtin, 2025, p. 470). Medieval religious parodies, such as the satirical treatises of ‘Obayd, offer an exemplary instance of this festive inversion. One need only consider ‘Obayd's *Fālnāmeḥ-ye Borūj* to see how it mocks some of the most serious concepts of Persian learned culture, such as astrology, fortune-telling, and the categories of auspiciousness and inauspiciousness.

From this perspective, the world of the popular classes also possesses its own distinctive “reality” and its own chronotope. Its temporality is always oriented toward the future while taking the present seriously. If the temporality of serious literature assumes a vertical form, descending from above, then time in this popular mode possesses a horizontal character. And if those vertical structures are otherworldly, ideal, eternal, and non-temporal—as in official literature—popular culture overturns precisely this timeless and eternal quality by bringing it into relation with a specific moment of the contemporary present and by privileging the future over the past (Bakhtin, 2016, p. 218). It was this world that left its imprint on the Menippean tradition and, subsequently, on the novel.

5. Conclusion

This study has argued that Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of genre, when read through the epistemological significance of the chronotope, provides a particularly fruitful framework for interpreting literary forms within their historical and cultural conditions of possibility. Rather than presenting genre as a fixed classificatory grid, Bakhtin approaches it as a historically situated mode of organizing experience, representing reality, and shaping the forms through which cultures articulate meaning. In this sense, genre appears not simply as a formal label applied from outside the text, but as a dynamic principle through which literary discourse gives structure to human relations, value systems, and historically mediated perceptions of the world.

The analysis has also shown that Bakhtin's broad intellectual horizon—drawing on linguistics, philosophy, sociology, cultural history, and reflections on discourse—makes it possible to understand genre as more than a literary taxonomy. Within this perspective, the chronotope can be understood as a particularly important analytical category, since it indicates the way temporal and spatial relations are configured, artistically mediated, and rendered meaningful within literary form. Through such configurations, literary works disclose not only how events unfold or how characters move within narrative worlds, but also how particular historical communities imagine reality, organize experience, and negotiate the relation between the individual and the social world. Each genre, therefore, may be read as embodying a distinctive mode of temporal experience and a corresponding conception of space, both of which are historically variable rather than universally fixed.

From this perspective, the article's first research question, concerning the basis of genre in Bakhtin's thought, may be answered by emphasizing that genre is grounded neither in purely formal classification nor in purely thematic grouping, but in the socially and historically mediated organization of utterance. Bakhtin's theory suggests that genres emerge through repeated communicative practices, cultural circulation, and relative stabilization across time. The second research question, regarding the role of the chronotope in this theory, finds its answer in the fact that the chronotope does not function merely as a secondary descriptive feature, but as a constitutive narrative principle through which the relation of time and space becomes artistically intelligible. It is through this organization of temporality and spatiality that genres acquire their internal coherence and their historical specificity. The third research question, concerning the relation between genre, literary history, and forms of consciousness, may be addressed by suggesting that Bakhtin's reflections allow genre history to be read in close relation to

changing modes of human awareness, even if such a relation should be formulated cautiously and not as a complete equivalence.

Accordingly, this study has proposed that Bakhtin's account of genre is closely connected to broader transformations in historical consciousness, while remaining irreducible to any simple philosophical genealogy. His work may be placed in dialogue with larger traditions of thought about history, form, and consciousness, but it rearticulates these concerns within a specifically literary and dialogic framework. What emerges from this rearticulation is a way of reading literary history not as a neutral sequence of external classifications, but as a field in which forms of life, modes of perception, and structures of representation are continually reshaped. The chronotope is therefore best understood not as the single foundation of all genre theory, but as one of the central concepts through which Bakhtin explains how literary forms mediate between lived experience and artistic construction.

For this reason, the significance of Bakhtin's contribution lies less in the introduction of a new technical term than in the development of a theoretical vocabulary capable of linking literary form to historically situated meaning. His theory makes it possible to examine how literature participates in the shaping of cultural self-understanding, and how genres register shifts in values, social relations, and worldviews. Such an approach moves literary criticism beyond purely descriptive taxonomies toward a more historically attentive account of how time, space, and human action are configured in narrative discourse. At the same time, this study does not claim that Bakhtin offers the only or definitively most comprehensive model of genre; rather, it suggests that his work remains especially productive for inquiries that seek to relate poetics to history, discourse to social life, and literary form to changing structures of experience.

Finally, the study also has certain limitations. Its primary aim has been theoretical reconstruction and conceptual clarification, not a systematic comparison between Bakhtin and other major genre theorists, nor an extensive application of the model to a large corpus of literary texts from different traditions. For this reason, future research could extend the present argument in at least two directions: first, by comparing Bakhtin's understanding of genre and chronotope with alternative modern theories of genre; and second, by testing the explanatory power of his concepts in detailed readings of specific literary traditions, including Persian literary forms and their transformations across different historical periods. Such inquiries would help clarify both the reach and the limits of Bakhtin's theory, while also showing more concretely how chronotopic analysis can illuminate the historical development of genre.

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