

A Lacanian Critique of Bahram Sadeghi's Novella *Malakout*

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Jac Lacan, through his theory of the multiple realms of personality, made significant contributions to the development of Freudian psychology. By introducing the realms of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real, and the "objet petit a," Lacan deeply explored the stages of psychological development. These stages are somewhat similar to Freud's tripartite model. Lacan's psychoanalytic theories have had a profound impact on social studies, women's studies, and literature, becoming one of the key approaches in literary and psychological criticism. The evolution of character development in literary stories and novels has always been a focal point of researchers. This study, using a descriptive-analytical method, aims to describe the character development process in Bahram Sadeghi's novella *Malakut*. *Malakut* has consistently attracted the attention of literary scholars, as the surrealistic and captivating writing style of the author has made the story suitable for analysis from various perspectives. The novella portrays several characters, with the most prominent being an individual known by the abbreviated name M.L. and a doctor named Hatam. These two characters share many similarities in their lives, particularly their experiences of loss. However, their ways of coping with this loss differ. M.L., through the severing of his body parts, attempts to forget the voids he faces. He ultimately accepts entry into the Symbolic realm after facing numerous challenges by deciding to return to social life. However, the events orchestrated by Dr. Hatam-what Lacan refers to as the Real-prevent this from happening.

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Introduction

Jacques Lacan's psychoanalytic framework significantly expanded Sigmund Freud's theories of personality development by introducing the structural registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, the Real, and the *objet a* (object petit a). Lacan's formulation of these psychic stages offers a profound lens for literary and cultural criticism. In Persian literature, Bahram Sadeghi's modernist surrealist novella *Malakout* (1961) stands out as a text richly laden with psychological trauma, identity crises, and existential dread. The narrative revolves around the interconnected fates of several characters undergoing a simultaneous "resurrection," most notably a wealthy man whose identity is abbreviated as "M.L." and a sinister physician named Dr. Hatam. Both M.L. and Dr. Hatam grapple with profound experiences of loss and lack (*manque*), yet their psychological mechanisms for coping with trauma diverge radically. While M.L. seeks to amputate his limbs to forget his past and attempts to re-enter the Symbolic order, Dr. Hatam nurses a deep-seated grievance, utilizing the disruptive force of the "Real" to inflict vengeance upon humanity. This study investigates the psychological evolution of M.L. and Dr. Hatam through the framework of Lacanian psychoanalysis.

Method

This study adopts a descriptive-analytical methodology rooted in Lacanian psychoanalytic criticism. The primary text analyzed is Bahram Sadeghi's novella *Malakout*. The research systematically maps the psychological trajectories, traumatic regressions, and behavioral patterns of the main characters—specifically M.L. and Dr. Hatam—onto Lacanian psychoanalytic concepts. These include the Imaginary order (mirror stage, maternal fusion, and pre-oedipal innocence), the Symbolic order (paternal law, language, socialization, and alienation), the Real (traumatic ruptures that resist symbolization), the *objet a* (the unattainable object of desire and substitutes for lost attachments), and the linguistic functions of metaphor and metonymy in structuring the unconscious.

Results

The application of Lacanian theory to *Malakout* yielded several critical findings:

١. **The Imaginary Order and Maternal Fusion:** For M.L., the Imaginary order is epitomized by his pre-oedipal, symbiotic attachment to his mother. Sensory images—such as the red garden roses, flowing streams, and the warmth of his mother’s embrace—represent an unblemished state of innocence. The mother’s death shatters this unity, triggering an irreversible psychic fragmentation and an overwhelming sense of orphaned helplessness. For Dr. Hatam, the lost object of the Imaginary is M.L.’s young son, who served as his ultimate companion and emotional anchor.
٢. **The Symbolic Order and Paternal Failure:** Entry into the Symbolic order requires submission to the paternal metaphor, language, and social law. M.L.’s relationship with his father was cold and alienated, leading to a failed or incomplete integration into the Symbolic order. Although M.L. periodically attempts to assimilate into society (symbolized by brushing his teeth, painting his house, and keeping his final hand to write), his adaptation remains deeply conflicted and fragile.
٣. **The Real and Traumatic Rupture:** M.L.’s unresolved trauma erupts as the Lacanian “Real”—an unassimilable kernel that disrupts the symbolic fabric. Tormented by guilt, M.L. commits patricide/filicide by killing his own son (who had grown overly attached to Dr. Hatam) and cuts out the tongue of his servant, Shokou, to silence her. To cope with this unbearable Real, M.L. systematically amputates his own limbs, engaging in a futile physical quest to excise memory and evade subjective guilt.
٤. **The *Objet a* (Object Petit A) and the Drive for Vengeance:** Both characters suffer from a persistent void caused by loss. M.L.’s son and mother represent lost primary objects. Dr. Hatam attempts to substitute this lack through successive surrogate objects, including women named Malakout (evoking *jouissance*, ambiguity, and suffering) and Saghi. Failing to recover the primordial object, Dr. Hatam’s neurosis curdles into a malignant death drive, manifesting

as the creation of toxic elixirs designed to murder unsuspecting patients.

- . **Metaphorical and Symbolic Motifs:** The text is densely populated with psychoanalytic symbols: the Jinni entering Mr. Modabber represents disruptive internal anxiety; the name *Malakout* signifies suspension and liminality; the orange grove evokes primordial guilt; and Shokou's mutilated tongue symbolizes repressed social conscience and collective guilt.

Conclusion

Bahram Sadeghi's *Malakout* serves as a profound literary manifestation of Lacanian psychoanalysis. The novella illustrates how trauma, maternal fixation, and a failed transition into the Symbolic order can fracture the human psyche. M.L. and Dr. Hatam represent two divergent responses to the fundamental human condition of *lack (manque)*: M.L. turns his destructive drive inward through self-mutilation and amputation in a desperate, melancholic quest to return to the Imaginary, whereas Dr. Hatam externalizes his trauma into a murderous vendetta against humanity. Ultimately, Sadeghi's surrealist narrative exposes the agonizing impossibility of fully recovering lost objects of desire within the rigid confines of the Symbolic order.