

Self-consciousness in the Novel: A Study of Hegel's and Bakhtin's Views

Maryamsadat Hosseini Sirat¹
Yousef Shaghool^{2*}

Abstract

Hegel, a German philosopher, and Bakhtin, a Russian literary critic, are the two thinkers who have placed the novel within the framework of their contemplation and have focused on the element of self-consciousness in the novel. In Hegel's philosophy, in the course of the Spirit's development towards freedom, the novel is the highest manifestation of the Spirit in artistic form, where the Spirit reaches one of the highest levels of self-consciousness. Moreover, due to its origins in the romantic era of art, the novel has heroes with self-consciousness. Bakhtin views self-consciousness in the novel from two perspectives: one is where he introduces the novel as a kind of self-conscious genre, and the other one is where he speaks about the self-consciousness of the novel's hero. When Bakhtin introduces Dostoevsky as the creator of the polyphonic novel, he says it is the hero's self-consciousness that gives Dostoevsky's novels the quality of polyphony. Yet, the talk of self-consciousness in the novel intertwines with the talk of homelessness in both thinkers' discussions. In this paper, we have tried to show the position of each of the two thinkers with regard to this subject, their similarities and differences, and the dialogue between them.

Keywords: The Novel, Self-consciousness, Homelessness, Epic, Romantic Art

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Bakhtin is mostly regarded as a critic of Hegel. However, he believes that a text is not a separate, detached phenomenon but it rather develops through dialogues and interactions with other texts. The same principle is true about Bakhtin's writings as well. Thus, according to Bakhtin himself, it is not surprising if we try to uncover his hidden dialogues with Hegel. For this

1. PhD Candidate in Philosophy, University of Isfahan, Iran. (mshosseini64@gmail.com)

*2. Associate Professor of Philosophy, University of Isfahan, Iran.

(Corresponding Author: y.shaghool@ltr.ui.ac.ir)

purpose, the concept of self-consciousness, which has been examined by both thinkers, will be studied here in order to understand the ideas they have in common in this regard.

2. Theoretical Framework

Hegel and Bakhtin attached great importance to self-consciousness in the novel. According to Hegel, the spirit can overcome its self-alienation and achieve a degree of freedom through self-consciousness. He believes that in Romantic art, with the novel being one of its types, the protagonist is self-conscious. Bakhtin's theory of the novel, which is a response to Lukács's *The Theory of the Novel*, tries to highlight the points where he distinguishes himself from Hegel. Lukács, as a commentator of Hegel's ideas about the novel, accepts that the novel has replaced the epic in modern times and adds that it is the story of man's homelessness. Bakhtin holds that the novel is the outcome of man's homelessness. While Lukács finds the novel to be the story of man's transcendental homelessness, Bakhtin regards it as the linguistic homelessness of human beings. He is different from Hegel and Lukács in that he welcomes this homelessness and does not, unlike Hegel, try to overcome it.

3. Methodology

The present article has adopted the library-based research method to study self-consciousness in the novel.

4. Discussion and Analysis

Both Hegel and Bakhtin have discussed self-consciousness in the novel; however, whereas Hegel bases his discussion on dialectics, Bakhtin's discussion revolves around dialogue. To Hegel, the novel is the art of struggle and hostility, which should be directed toward peace and unity, but Bakhtin welcomes plurality and polyphony. To Hegel and Lukács the novel is associated with self-alienation and homeless, but to Bakhtin it is the source of creativity and freedom. Hegel finds self-consciousness an attempt to overcome self-alienation and homelessness, but self-consciousness in Bakhtin is the result of man's homelessness as without it freedom and consequently polyphony cannot be achieved.

5. Conclusion

A study of ideas of Hegel and Bakhtin concerning the two concepts of self-consciousness and homelessness in novels reveals that the two thinkers share some ideas in this regard, resulting from a kind of dialogue between them. The differences in their ideas are due to a difference in the bases of their thoughts.

Select Bibliography

- Allen, G. 1392 [2013]. *Baynamatniat*. P. Yazdanjou (trans.). Tehran: Markaz.
- Bakhtin, M. 1391 [2012]. *Takhayol-e Mokaleme'h-i*. R. Pourazar (trans.). Tehran: Ney.
- Bakhtin, M. 1395 [2016]. *Porsesh-ha-ye Boutiqa-ye Dostoevsky*. S. Solhjou. Tehran: Niloufar.
- Gandesha, S. 2014 [2012]. "Hegel's Homecoming of Spirit." *Contours Journal* 4. URL:https://www.sfu.ca/humanities-institute/contours/issue4/issue4_p5.html
- Holquist, M. 1395 [2016]. *Mokalemehgarayi*. M. Amirkhanlou. Tehran: Niloufar.
- Lukács, G. 1392 [2013]. *Nazaryeh-ye Roman*. H. Mortazavi (trans.). Tehran: Ashiyan.
- Lumsden, . 2015. "At Home with Hegel and Heidegger." *Philosophy Today* 59/1: 7-21.
- Neubauer, J. 1996. "Bakhtin versus Lukács: Inscriptions of Homelessness in Theories of the Novel." *Poetics Today* 17/4: 531-546
- Ousheli, M. 1390 [2011]. *Terazhedi dar Falsafeh-ye Hegel*. MA Thesis. University of Isfahan.
- Todorov, T. 1391 [2022]. *Manteq-e Goftegouyi-e Mikhail Bakhtin*. D. Karimi (trans.). Tehran: Nashr-e Markaz.

How to cite:

Hosseini Sirat, M. and Shaghoor, Y. 2021. "Self-consciousness in the Novel: A Study of Hegel's and Bakhtin's Views." *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi* 12(2): 167-188. DOI:10.22124/naqd.2022.16163.1970

Copyright:

Copyright for this article is retained by the author(s), with first publication rights granted to *Naqd va Nazaryeh Adabi (Literary Theory and Criticism)*

This is an open-access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution License (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided that the original work is properly cited.

