

## A Study on Power, Identity, and Knowledge in Bahram Beyzai's *Three Recitations*

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### Abstract

Bahram Beyzai is one of the most influential authors in Iranian dramatic literature. His attempts as a writer have been mainly concentrated on myth, epic and history. By combining these elements with drama, he has succeeded in creating a variety of works in contemporary Persian literature. *Three Recitations*, one of his early works, includes three mythological accounts on Arash, Azhedahak, and Jam. Beyzai uses the term 'recitation' in a particular sense. As the author's first experiences in the final years of the 1950's, these works are highly significant in the field of narrative due to their particular use of language for recreating myth. Given the period after the 1953 coup in which the works were written, these three mythological figures' identity and power unconsciously create a discourse for the readers. This paper deals with identity, power and knowledge in *Three Recitations* in order to study the role of the text in social issues, and also to shed new light on the identity of the three mythological figures Arash, Azhedahak and Jam as well as Bondar-e Bidakhsh, Jam's vizier.

**Keywords:** *Three Recitations*, Bahram Beyzai, Power, Identity, Knowledge.

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## Extended abstract

### 1. Introduction

*Three Recitations* consists of three narratives titled *Arash*, *Azhedahak*, and *Bondar-e Bidakhsh's Account*. Each of these narratives deals with a monarchical period in the Iranian mythological-epic age. *Arash* is set during Afrasiab's attack on Iran in the time of King Manouchehr's reign. *Azhedahak* deals with Zahhak's imprisonment on mount Damavand, and *Bondar-e Bidakhsh's Account* is set during King Jamshid's reign. Concentrating on the texts of the plays, this paper aims to study the logical connection between power, identity, and knowledge, which are the three important social components in *Three Recitations*. By analyzing language, sentences and clauses, as well as the paragraphs in the discourse, we can develop the different elements in the text and undertake its linguistic or sociological analysis. Taking these dimensions into account, this paper establishes an interdisciplinary approach between literature, language and social science.

### 2. Theoretical Framework

Theoretically, this paper deals with a number of central elements in the analysis of drama, recitation, and the renewal as well as transposition of myths. Moreover, elements involved in the production of components such as power, identity and knowledge are studied through reliable scientific theories in social sciences.

### 3. Methodology

Considering *Three Recitations* and other sources and articles, the paper has adopted a library-based type of research methodology.

### 4. Findings and Discussion

*Arash*: Beyzai's *Arash* was written almost at the same time as Syavash Kasrai's poem *Arash*. The similarity between this narrative and other texts can be seen in the shooting of the arrow, driving the enemy out of the Iranian land, and the showering of rain over Iranshahr. Beyzai's *Arash* is based on an archaic vocabulary and this vocabulary has created

an archaic tone in the text. The 1953 coup d'état has always had a significant impact on the mind and the structure of Iranian society. Beyzai draws upon mythology to show our own time; he is the creator of a new thought and discourse in Iranian history and mythology. Beyzai maintains the image of Arash, to be found in all accounts from Avesta to Kasrai's verse narrative, which shows him as one sacrificed for the sake of his homeland's integrity; however, he offers a new model in which Arash, instead of being a mythological hero, is only a horse-keeper. Here lies the author's strong point.

*Azhedahak*: The story begins with Azhedahak who, imprisoned on mount Damavand, starts to relate his tragic life-story. In this play, Azhedahak introduces himself as an honest person who, unconcerned with power and war, was working with his father on their farm. Beyzai's *Azhedahak* is an internal dialogue with the monster within. In this narrative Beyzai has made use of archaic and inscriptional language. He has, in particular, used repetition which is an appropriate model in lexical conjunction, and along with the recreation of a narrative, has been able to transform Zahhak's character through the transposition of the myth, thus revealing Azhedahak's untold pain while maintaining the narrative's background and themes. Fatigued and tortured, Beyzai's Azhedahak looks upon a city that after thousands of years witnesses "the cry of all cries" which has started to rise from the dark and night-stricken city.

*Bondar-e Bidakhsh's Account*: This narrative establishes more dialogues among the characters. In all preceding texts, Jam commands all sciences but in this narrative Beyzai questions this mythological mentality by introducing Bondar-e Bidakhsh, Jam's vizier, into the story, and shows the reader that no ruler is the preserver of sciences by himself. In this narrative Jam fears Bondar-e Bidakhsh may reveal the secret of making his Cup of Divination to the dives. Therefore, he has Bondar-e Bidakhsh imprisoned and orders Dabirak, the secret agent, to murder him. The play is a dramatic one and, in comparison with *Arash* and *Azhedahak* enjoys more dramatic aspects because here the characters are more involved in dialogue and the conflicts between them are more conspicuous. In the clash between the discourse of power and knowledge, power always tries to dominate knowledge but

knowledge strengthened by wisdom is not subdued by power because it can itself act as an authority.

### 5. Conclusion

In order to show identity, power and knowledge, the author's outlook in *Three Recitations* is different from the outlook of other researchers and writers as well as the texts left by the ancients. While maintaining the epic and mythological themes, Beyzai shows his own critical view point on the components under study. In *Arash* he clearly indicates that a hero is not necessarily one who has heroism in his blood or inherits it, but a hero from the depths of society can as well fulfil his humanistic responsibility, and ward off the enemy and the monster of drought from the land, and remain in society's archetypal mind forever. In his telling of the myth of Azhedahak, the author again moves contrary to the dominant belief and shows Azhedahak to be the saviour of the people of the city on whose mountain he is imprisoned. By dominating and transposing mythological beliefs, Beyzai shows Azhedahak as an agent of emancipation who stands against an alien king. In the third recitation, Beyzai explores the idea that knowledge, despite its significance, is always eclipsed by power and the ones in power and the rulers recourse to various means to do away with men of knowledge. Bondar is such a figure who is imprisoned, and finally murdered by the ruler (Jam) who fears that knowledge may be disseminated. In *Three Recitations*, Beyzai shows the domain of discursive discussion by putting forward the three models of power, identity and knowledge, and this, due to a careful employment of words and their connotative aspects in myths and epics, takes on a modern form.

**Keywords:** *Three Recitations*, Bahram Beyzai, Power, Identity, Knowledge.

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