Tennessee Williams, Iranian Cinema, and Bakhtinian Dialogism: A Comparative Study of *A Streetcar Named Desire* and *Biganeh* [1]

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Abstract

The history of literary adaptation is as long as the history of cinema itself. Given the undeniable fact that literary classics guaranteed a large number of viewers, it is no surprise that the first filmmakers turned to literature to gain their materials for the screen. Since the development of the field called adaptation studies, the relation between cinema and literature has been analyzed through numerous approaches. One of the most recent theories which can shed light on the unstudied interaction between the two sides from new perspective is dialogism as developed by the Russian

critic Mikhail Bakhtin. The present paper is set to perform a comparative analysis of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and its cinematic adaptation, *Biganeh (Stranger)*, directed by Bahram Tavakoli. The research takes Bakhtin's notions of unfinalizability and chronotope as two key constituents of dialogism to investigate changes the Iranian director has made in his version of the play. The study found that a literary work is open to changes if the adapter seeks to challenge it in an innovative way. It is in this unfinalized, dialogic process that new meanings are created. Thus, Tavakoli's film proves that a classic play is both worthy and capable of being adapted for modern audiences if the filmmaker goes beyond common oversimplifications and represents unresolved tensions which lie beneath the veneer of the play.

Introduction

Adaptation and its related areas of translation and intertextuality continue to have a central place in literary studies as they connect literature with other areas of study. While producing cinematic adaptations out of literary works is an acceptable endeavor today, the relation between cinema and literature has not always been a friendly one. As early as the late 19th century and early 20th century when adaptations from Shakespeare's plays marked the first cinematic adaptations made, many literary figures including Virginia Woolf condemned the move and described it as betraying literature. In her essay, "The Cinema", "she laments how *Anna Karenina* translated to screen is barely recognizable. Indeed film's attempt to 're-create' literature, according to Woolf, not only is a disservice to literature but also to film" (Cartmell, 2012, p. 2). For Woolf, literature is cinema's prey: "The cinema fell upon its prey with immense rapacity, and to this moment largely subsists upon the body of its unfortunate victim. But the results are disastrous to both" (as cited in Cartmell, p. 2). Woolf's remarks on the negative impact of cinema on literary works reflect a number of the concerns her contemporary fellows had about film adaptations of great novel and plays.

This anti-cinema sentiment began to weaken in the course of the 20th century with more and more novels and plays being adapted for the screen. The rise in the number as well as the quality of literary adaptations led to the development of adaptation studies. This field of academic inquiry, which was first restricted to comparative studies concerned with the production's fidelity to the source text, has now turned into a wide-ranging and interdisciplinary endeavor. Most recent adaptation studies have approached adaptation as an autonomous production which establishes a discursive relation with the earlier text. However, few studies have viewed this relation from the perspective of the theory of dialogism which was developed by Mikhail Bakhtin. Informed by such a paucity of academic information, this research sought to apply, in a dialogic analysis, Bakhtin's concepts of unfinalizability and chronotope to a comparative study of

Tennessee William's *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947) and its Iranian adaptation, *Biganeh* (*Stranger*) (2014).

It is noteworthy to mention that *Stranger* and *Here Without Me* (2011), which is an adaptation of Tennessee Williams' *The Glass Menagerie* (1944) by Tavakoli, have been investigated by a number of Iranian academics. Two studies, in particular, have focused on Tavakoli's adapted movies in terms of their unique approaches to Williams' plays. Azra Ghandeharion and Alireza Anooshirvani (2013) have described Tavakoli's *Here Without Me* as a new cultural product which in enriched by the ideological mechanisms and socio-cultural discourses of the Iranian society. Moreover, Zahra Nazemi, Hossein Aliakbari Harehdasht, and Abdolmohammad Movahhed (2018) have studied the representation of women's gender roles in *The Stranger*. The authors argue that the director has domesticized the role of women in his movie to create "a new identity for the female characters" (p. 563).

Bakhtin and Unfinalizability

One of the key concepts in the context of dialogic thought is the idea of unfinalizability. As Morson and Emerson (1990) maintain, "the term appears frequently in his works and in many different contexts. It designates a complex of values central to his thinking: innovation, 'surprisingness', the genuinely new, openness, potentiality, freedom, creativity" (p. 37). It is this open-endedness that encourages the will to establish dialogues. And within the sphere of dialogue, the element of surprise is always present. It nourishes the indeterminacy of life and supports the idea that something remains yet to be said. Returning to adaptation studies, this Bakhtinian concept not only puts an end to rows over the superiority of text to image, but welcomes adaptations for their innovation, surprise, and novelty.

Thus, "the 'unfinalizability' of speech reflects the multi-temporalized texture of social existence, or more specifically how the heteroglot nature of language reflects the heterotemporality of social existence" (Sandywell, 1998, p. 197). In other words, speaking of "'existence' or 'being' (by tie) in this context is to reference a diverse spectrum of temporal relationships between speech, text, ideological milieu, addressees, styles of utterance, and social structures" (Sandywell, p. 197). The idea of unfinalizability, therefore, suggests and celebrates open-endedness in all forms of social life: "Bakhtin's concept of unfinalizability corresponds broadly to a critique of totalizing thinking as incapable of understanding the variety and openness of social life" (Morrow, 1998, p. 149). If a movie, and more generally, art, is a way to understand life, it will be seriously flawed if it fails to figure out the openness and need for change in every aspect of life discourses.

Bakhtin discussed the idea of unfinalizability in his investigation of characters, particularly heroes, in Dostoevsky's fiction. Regarding characters in Dostoevsky's works, Bakhtin (1985) states that "they all acutely sense their own inner unfinalizability, their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to

render untrue any externalizing and finalizing definition of them" (p. 59). What Bakhtin says about Dostoevsky's characters has important implications for adaptations studies. He argues that the characters in Dostoevsky's stories are alive as long as it is accepted – by them and us – that they are not yet finalized. The same can be said about Williams' drama. If we wish to keep Williams alive, we need to uphold that he is unfinalized. In other words, as soon as we agree that Williams, or any other literary figure, is finalized through his own text or any other text, we have announced the death of literature and the end of communication.

An essential element of Bakhtinian dialogism is its emphasis on the presence of the other: "Dialogism is a way of looking at things that always insists on the presence of the other, on the inescapable necessity of outsideness and unfinalizability" (Holquist, 2002, p. 190). In the field of adaptation studies, the present (adaptation) and the past (source text) simultaneously address each other. It is this double-voicedness that characterizes Bakhtinian unfinalizability: "The 'double-voiced' dialectic of simultaneously addressing the past and being addressed by the past provides the leitmotif for Bakhtin's discussion of the 'unfinalizable' presence of traces of the past in the present" (Sandywell, 1998, p. 199).

Bakhtin (1985) contends that "the new artistic position of the author with regard to the hero in Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel is a fully realized and thoroughly consistent dialogic position, one that affirms the independence, internal freedom, unfinalizability, and indeterminacy of the hero" (p. 63). In opposition to closed systems of thought, Bakhtin's dialogism is based on open-ended ties between participants of any discursive event where every voice exerts influence and is influenced by other voices in an unfinalized network of relations. Once applied to the relation between a literary text and its subsequent adaptations, Bakhtin's ideas implicate an unfinalizability which can put an end to long-held discussions about fidelity and the superior position of word over image.

The chapter will continue with an analysis of Tavakoli's version of Williams' play. Our focal point will be the drastic change the Iranian director makes in his reconstructions of the American play in its new context. Then, the article will concentrate on the ending of the movie which is marked by Bakhtin's chronotope, or the intrinsic ties between temporal and spatial elements. The last section of the study draws together the key staples of the article, pointing out how Bakhtinian unfinalizability and chronotope can enrich our understanding of Tennessee Williams on the screen.

Tavakoli and an Unfinalized Quest for Identity

The prominent Protestant theologian Karl Barth refers to Dostoevsky's presentation of "the impenetrable ambiguity of human life" (as cited in Blake & Rosario, 2007, p. 4). The same notion is discussed by Mikhail Bakhtin, who finds the same 'impenetrable ambiguity' within Dostoevsky's universe. Bakhtin (1984) brands this ambiguity as unfinalizability: "What unfolds in his works is

not a multitude of characters and fates in a single objective world, illuminated by a single authorial consciousness; rather a *plurality of consciousnesses, with equal rights and each with its own world,* combine but are not merged in the unity of the event" (p. 6). In Tavakoli's adaptation, we encounter the same four characters that appear in Williams' play. However, we soon realize that the uncertainties surrounding Sepideh, Nasrin, Amir, and Davoud by far surpass the ambiguities in the lives of Blanche, Stella, Stanley, and Mitch. In fact, the only unifying force among Tavakoli's characters is their uncertainties in the relationships they had already established and the ones they want to establish. Given the fact that Tavakoli does not aim to merely reproduce an earlier work, such changes seem not only necessary but vital to our understanding of his adaptation. Since "the morally loaded discourse of fidelity is based on the implied assumption that adapters aim simply to reproduce the adapted text" (Hutcheon, 2013, p. 7), Tavakoli's changes indicate that he views his project not as an imitation of Williams' play, but as its unfinalized recontextualization.

Bakhtin (1985) argues that "as long as a person is alive, he lives by the fact that he is not yet finalized. [M]an is free, and can therefore violate any regulating norms which might be thrust upon him" (p. 59). This idea is quite applicable to the characters in Tavakoli's movie, especially the troubled Nasrin. Nasrin's last attempts to keep on living is depicted in the last scene where regardless of anything and anyone around her, she embarks on a journey to nowhere. She could have had a fulfilling life, had she married Amir's friend, but she sees that incident as an end to his unfinalizability. This fear of marriage as well as reluctance of bondage is related to her first marriage. As Berkman (1967) says of Blanche in *A Streetcar Named Desire*,

> It is not the existence of Allan's homosexuality that signals the failure of Blanche's marriage; it is, rather, that Blanche must uncover this information by accident, that Blanche is incapable of responding compassionately to this information, that in short there never existed a marriage between them in which Allan could come to her in full trust and explicit needs. (p. 2)

Bakhtin's unfinalizability is defined in terms of any character, or indeed any human being. The character in a literary work, to be particular, is never fully revealed or complete and always remains hidden to a specific degree. In other words, Bakhtin renders fallacious the long-established expectation from literary works to present fully revealed characters so that the reader and critic can gain a guaranteed access to the core of every character. This open-endedness adds much to the enlightening aspect of literary works and at the same time creates more questions for the audience. These questions abound in *Biganeh* where the whole narrative is based on major questions about the past, present and, by the end of the movie, future of the characters[1].

For Bakhtin, a comprehensive approach for analyzing characters within a work of literature encompasses a realization of their unfinalizability, that is, their potentiality to exceed the limits of and render untrue any finalizing definition. He argues that a person can be called alive on the basis that "he has not yet

uttered his ultimate word" (Bakhtin, 1984, p. 59). Bakhtin goes on to say that "man is not a final and defined quantity upon which firm calculations can be made" (Bakhtin, p. 60). This Bakhtinian definition is very well applicable to Nasrin. No firm calculations can be made on her. The normal reaction expected from a person like her is to grab the opportunity and start a new life with Amir's friend. However, her final decision violates all expectations and calculations. Such innovations and changes exist in the production history of the play. For instance, "a production of Streetcar in July–October 2009 at the Donmar Theatre in London made Allan Grey a visible ghost, with an actor (Jack Ashton) appearing on stage several times, notably to kiss his older lover in front of Blanche and to simulate the moment of his suicide" (Hooper, 2012, p. 77).

With regard to Tavakoli's *Biganeh*, the characters seek their unfinalized end in their dreams which are meant to drown them in the world of fantasy and close their eyes on the bitter realities of the real world. Nasrin's arrival, however, challenges – but in no way ends – their dreams. If we analyze the interactions among character within the movie through Bakhtinian dialogism, we can conclude that every voice in the work is allowed to be heard. In opposition to closed systems of thought, Bakhtin's dialogism is based on open-ended ties between participants of any discursive event where every voice exerts influence and is influenced by other voices in an unfinalized network of relations.

As the harbinger of change, Nasrin does her best to shatter the dreams which have haunted the occupants of her sister's house. As Blanche says, "I don't want realism! I want magic!" (Williams, 1947, p. 56) Commenting on Dostoevsky's characters, Bakhtin (1984) states that "they all acutely sense their own inner unfinalizability, their capacity to outgrow, as it were, from within and to render *untrue* any externalizing and finalizing definition of them" (p. 59). Although Arthur Miller states that, in *A Streetcar Named Desire* "a Writer's soul, a single voice was almost miraculously enveloping the stage" (as cited in Smith, 2012, p. 86), such a single soul does not exist within the play or at least is not revealed to the spectators. In contrast, characters in the play seem disjointed and alienated to a point where their behaviors toward each other enters the realm of animals. This is best depicted in the character of Stanley whose sexual inclination toward Blanche creates numerous problems for all the characters in the play, especially the troubled Blanche.

In the movie, however, such animalistic behavior is less present (the title of the movie indicates that Tavakoli is less interested in this aspect of the play). When it comes to characters' conflicts, what distinguishes Tavakoli's adaptation from its dramatic source is that his characters are more engaged in internal conflicts, while Williams' characters show their conflicts through their fiery exchange of words or even fists. In other words, Tavaokoli has taken the conflict inside each character to create parallel words which move along each other. The presence of these parallel universes allows the director to add to the conflicts of the play. As the main conflicts in the movie are more internal than external, it has room for more unresolved tensions and more confusion. In oth-

er words, it seems the Iranian director feels the play lacks the sufficient unfinalizability for the new context it has been situated in.

Through the character of Nasrin, Tavakoli reminds his characters that they have the capacity to outgrow and challenge their dreams but they are not willing to give up their unreal world. As Elia Kazan comments on his production of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, "the play's best quality is its authenticity or its fidelity to life. There are no 'good' or 'bad' people. Some are a little better or a little worse but all are activated more by misunderstanding than malice" (as cited in Saddik, 2015, p. 91). The characters prefer to rejoice in their fantasies rather than come out in the real world and show sympathy for each other. They are certain that they will fail to come into terms with the real world and, therefore, prefer to preserve their unfinalized dreams or what Eugene O'Neill's characters in *The Iceman Cometh* (1946) would describe as 'pipe dreams'.

Bakhtin describes the desire for coherent meaning and transcontextual identity as an "orientation toward unity" (1981, pp. 274-5). The protagonist of Tavakoli's *Biganeh*, Nasrin, seeks from the very beginning to find a coherent meaning out of her life and fight for her humiliated identity. Her vague journey toward her end can be called an orientation toward unity. Her quest toward identity does not contradict the ambiguities the movie raises about her. As Gabor Bezeczky (1994) contends, "the characters are unfinalized, and they have unresolved thoughts. They are unfinalized because the thoughts they have are unresolved, which means the conclusions of the thoughts are not drawn, or not seen" (p. 331). Moreover, according to John Michael Roberts (2012), opposed to the Habermasian perspective that the truth of a situation is repeatable and constant in it, "the Bakhtin Circle is more interested in the unfinalizable nature of dialogue, how one's self as both a person and other is dialogically entwined in the other of others and entwined in a series of concrete mediations" (p. 417). Thus, unfinalizability suggests lack of conclusion, not lack of cohesion. In the context of cinema, unfinalized movies, or those with an open but reasonable ending, may lack conclusion but cannot be dismissed as incoherent.

A close study of Tavakoli's *Biganeh* reveals the power of dreams in challenging any pre-destined end for the play's characters. The fact that most of Tavakoli's characters in this movie – and in most of his other movies as well – fail to reach the heights of their potential proves Tavakoli's constant preoccupation with the notion of unfinalizability. Almost in no movie by Tavakoli do spectators come to a firm and established conclusion by the end. As mentioned earlier, this does not suggest that his movies, and in particular adaptations of Williams, fail to present a coherent version of the characters' lives. When it comes to *Biganeh*, we are dealing with a coherent adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* which has no intention to pretend that it is able to draw conclusions out the incidents of the story. In other words, the movie does not impose conclusions on the lives of its characters, hence its adherence to Bakhtin's idea of unfinalizability.

Bakhtin takes language not as "a system of abstract grammatical categories" but rather a live, "ideologically saturated world view" (Bakhtin, 1986, p. 280).

For him, form and content in discourse are one, and they both manifest a certain ideological component. The novelistic discourse is an environment in which mutually alien words and accents harmonize or struggle with one another. He defines the dialogic nature of language as a chess game: "Every word is directed towards an answer and cannot escape the profound influence of the answering word that it anticipates" (Bakhtin, p. 280). This sort of internal stratification reflecting a constant discord and negotiation amongst various sociological components of language is a property of any discourse in general, and it is often mistaken for novelistic dialogism. However, the language in the novel embodies "dialogized heteroglossia" (Bakhtin, p. 280): a deepened form of the dialogic essence of language. Dialogism in the novel penetrates into the smallest "molecular" levels of discourse, and is populated with the author's own socio-ideological intention.

The unfinalizable nature of dialogism is Bakhtin's major reason for advocating dialogic orientation and decrying an orientation toward an artificial and imposed unity. For Bakhtin, the long-held orientation toward unity means ending up in a harmony where silence dominates and all interactions are degraded. That is why, in this movie as well as in another adaptation of Williams by Tavakoli called *Here Without Me* (2011), the spectators feel tinges of hope in a gloomy setting. In both movies, the focal character violates the tendency to move toward unity in the final scene. This is particularly more significant in Nasrin's case.

Ending on the Chronotope of Threshold

As mentioned above, the film adaptation of Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* ends with Nasrin walking away alone. This ending presents the spectators with a new conclusion violating their expectations of final scene of an adaptation from Williams. For his part, the dramatist has sought to put an end to his story by the end of the play:

> The mise-en-scene seems to be providing too much enclosure to provide for closure: there's no place for anyone to go. There is no fire escape, even though in this play someone does yell 'Fire! Fire! Fire!' (sc. 9) -- in fact, heat and fire and escape are prominent verbal and visual themes. And the flat does not, as it seems to in Glass Menagerie, extend to other rooms beyond the wings but ends in a cul-de-sac: a doorway to the bathroom that becomes Blanche's significant place for escape and 'privacy'. Most disturbing, perhaps, is not the increased sense of confinement but this absence of privacy, of analytical, territorial space. (Fleche, 1997, p. 94)

This fixedness of ending is an aspect of the play that Tavakoli challenges. Williams wrote in *Memoirs* that *Streetcar* began with an image of Blanche, "sitting alone in a chair with the moonlight coming through a window on her, waiting for a beau who didn't show up" (as cited in Murphy, 2014, p. 79). In fact, "before settling on the title *A Streetcar Named Desire* for his new work, Williams

had considered other options, such as 'Blanche's Chair in the Moon,' 'The Moth,' 'The Primary Colors,' and 'The Poker Night'" (Heintzelman & Smith-Howard, 2005, p. 10). Ironically, Tavakoli's open ending brings to mind the first picture Tennessee Williams has had when the idea of writing the play struck his mind.

Eran Preis notes in *Problems in Screenwriting* that according to Syd Field, "in good writing for film everything is resolved dramatically, in terms of action and character: all questions raised are answered (1990, p. 19). Viki King writes in her book *How To Write A Screenplay In 21 Days* that "by page 120 the audience is satisfied that you gave them the story you promised them on page 10" (1988, p. 41). Classical Hollywood cinema offers closure on at least four levels: the plot, the story, the emotional state of the viewer, and the ideological assumptions of the film. That said, in the postmodern discourse, such closed, determined endings are no longer acceptable for the spectators. "The open ending by contrast often leaves us with an ambiguous or missing plot resolution. The story may not offer any clues to the whereabouts and future of the main characters. An open ending often fails to fulfill the viewer's emotional expectations by not offering a climax or other emotional relief" (Preis, 1990, p. 20).

Based on the above, a successful use of an open ending requires: (1) A writer with ideological awareness and the ability to penetrate to the true nature of the experience; (2) A historical situation that allows him/her access to such insights; and (3) A viewer willing to replace closure with conflict. All three requirements are met in Tavakoli's case. First, Tavakoli had shown in his movies before *Biganeh* that he favored open endings. In other words, his ideology is based on the formation of the conclusion of the movie by the spectators. Secondly, the historical situation permits the director to choose such open ending for his movie. Finally, the Iranian spectators of the movie are accustomed to such open endings which have been treated by Iranian directors – sometimes with failure – in recent decades. Tennessee Williams shows the downfall of Blanche in his play in a process that ends in her sister's house:

> The long story of Blanche's downfall may be seen as a process of dispossession that begins with her loss of Belle Reve, continues through the period of her abruptly terminated residence at the Flamingo, and, her way to a home of her own with Mitch having been blocked, concludes with her being forced off the premises consequent to the denial by her brother-in-law of further welcome in her sister's house. (Boxill, 1987, p. 85)

To this, Bahram Tavakoli adds another step: her journey to nowhere in a never-ending process of deterioration. In *Biganeh*, Tavakoli endeavors to bring Tennessee Williams' play into contact with the conditions of an Iranian family who, he believes, is on the threshold of collapse. The concept of being on the threshold is preserved up until the end of the movie. Indeed, the ending highlights the uncertainty and insecurity of the world where Nasrin (Blanche) lives. It has a history in Williams' characters, "Blanche is one of William's 'lost souls,' those characters who are caught between an old and a new world" (Heintzelman & Smith-Howard, 2005, p. 275). This sense of being entrapped

between two worlds is artistically depicted in Tavakoli's adaptation. At the final scene of the movie, Nasrin is walking on the edges of a sidewalk which leads to nowhere.

Tavakoli's choice of the threshold concept has made a remarkable change to the ending of Tennessee Williams' play. In the play, Blanche is taken to the hospital in a scene which is not the last scene of the drama. In other words, the ending of Williams' play is closed and clear. Blanche is taken to the hospital to be detained there. In Tavakoli's version, however, the future fate of Nasrin is not specified. She is just walking and moves further and further. This ending is open to the viewer's interpretation. Spectators can have their own understanding of what is to happen to Nasrin. The question here is what lies behind Tavakoli's decision to change Williams' ending and think of a new one for his adaptation of the play?

The above question can be approached in several ways. First, we will consider the question from the narrative perspective. Then, the research will approach the question from the ideological perspective. Finally, the discussion will consider Bakhtin's idea of the intrinsic ties between time and place to provide answer for the above-mentioned question.

Taking narrative into consideration, Tavakoli has no choice but to choose an open ending for his movie. From the very beginning of the movie, we see characters floating between reality and unreality. Nasrin is the main source of illusions in the play. She has a vague history that the movie is not able of demystifying. As we approach the end of the movie, the mysteries and uncertainties of Nasrin's life become bigger and deeper. The more the movie presents this character to us, the less we know about her. This uncertainty on the part of characters and, in particular, about Nasrin is process that must end in unfinalizability. If the Iranian director selected a closed, determined ending for his movie, all the uncertainties and vague aura he had created around the character of Nasrin would be useless. That is why the ending of the movie seems to be a natural and reasonable outcome of the events and not an imposed or reckless decision on the part of Bahram Tavakoli.

Another reason behind the open ending of the movie is the ideology prevailing in it. Within the context of the movie, the domineering discourse is that of dreams and unreality. Every one of the four major characters of the movie is living in the past when they lived in glory and prestige. Amir is now unemployed and his only hope is the house he thinks his wife has inherited. The arrival of Nasrin and her story of losing the house shatter all Amir's hopes. From then on, his behavior changes and becomes more animal-like. Amir's wife is waiting for a child whom the narrative gives little hope of being born. Here again we are encountered with another uncertainty, and threshold. The child is on the threshold of this world but not completely in it. The fact that the child is not born by the end of the movie is another sign for the futility and alienation of the characters.

Therefore, it is obvious that the discourse of the movie can provide no room for a closed, fixed ending. Throughout the movie, nothing is determined and certain so how is it possible for the director to envisage a closed ending for his narrative? The choice of the open ending, thus, is the unavoidable outcome of a narrative whose emphasis is mainly on the open-endedness of all our experiences. At the end, Nasrin is walking on some edges entering some uncharted territories while we, as the spectator, accompany her in her journey to nowhere. As one critic notes, "it seems 'natural' to read A Streetcar Named Desire as an allegorical journey toward Blanche's apocalyptic destruction at the hands of her 'executioner,' Stanley" (Fleche, 1997, p. 93).

An Ending on the Chronotope of Threshold

Ronald Knowles writes in his *Shakespeare and Carnival after Bakhtin* that, in the 1930s, studying Dostoevsky created the third period in Bakhtin's professional life when the result was numerous articles and eventually the book *Dialogic Imagination* (7). The most important concept mentioned in this book, Knowles continues, is chronotope. Although the world of literary criticism became familiar with Bakhtin in the 1970s and 1980s, knowledge of chronotope and its systematic analysis did not occur at least a decade after the name of Bakhtin was popularized. Although Bakhtin considers chronotope as an analytical tool for studying genre division in the history of Western novel, it is now widely applied not only in studies concerning novel, but in narratology, speech-act theory, cognitive approaches to literature, and even in gender studies.

The process of mixing time and place in literature has a long but unorganized history. The chronotope can, very simply, refer to ways in which spatial and temporal elements in a narrative are thematized. More pervasively, the chronotope may be understood as an inclusive term for the intricate temporal relations of story and discourse as they form themselves within the space of a narrative text. But the chronotope is also the dialogic interaction of time and space where human spaces are enriched with layers of historical time which are themselves conceived in dialogic interaction with one another. Finally, there are chronotopic perspectives that emerge from the reflections of one narrative's inevitable associations with the time-spaces formed by other narratives that are contemporary with it. In Tavakoli's adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire*, the matrix of temporal and spatial elements plays a key role in the narrative and in indispensable in our understanding of the movie. In other words, any interpretation of the narrative as well as the actions and reactions of the characters should incorporate all the aspects and features associated with 21st century Iranian society. Tavakoli's narrative choices, especially alterations such as Nasrin's role in the suicide of the young art student, are made based on the chronotopic elements of his adaptation of a 20th century American play.

Bakhtin explains the concept of chronotope in his long and elaborate essay *Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel*. There, the Russian critic opines that "we will give the name chronotope (literally, 'space-time') to the

intrinsic connectedness of temporal and spatial relationships that are artistically expressed in literature." (1981, p. 84). He begins his monograph by assuming that chronotope is employed in mathematics and was introduced as part of Einstein's Theory of Relativity. That is why the concept of chronotope as part of Bakhtin's theory of dialogism still maintains links to its original definition as it expresses the inseparability of space and time (time as the fourth dimension of space).

In literal and artistic chronotope, temporal and spatial indicators are mixed with each other in a very delicate totality. It seems time gets condense and becomes alive and artistically visible. Similarly, place becomes sensitive and reacts to the changes of time, plot, and history. The main feature of artistic chronotope is this intersection of different discourses and joining various indicators. In *Stranger*, Tavakoli's major chronotope is Amir's house as most key incidents of the story occur there. The gloomy atmosphere of the house and its dilapidated and crumbling condition foreshadow the upcoming events of the story. In other words, the house chronotope in influenced by social, economic, and cultural discourses of the narrative, and influences them in a dialogic network of relations. Amir's house is "not a neutral, passive background of action but on the contrary determines its chronotopic form. What a person can do is conditioned by the setting and the locality" (Steinby, 2013, p. 120).

In literature, chronotope has a generic nature. Since the main component of chronotope in literature is time, we can consider chronotope as an exact indicator of literary genres and their generic features. The representation of man in literature is also to a great extent determined with chronotope which is considered as a structural element. The representation of man always has a chronotopic nature.

The attempt to say that Bakhtin's chronotope is nothing but what was traditionally referred to as 'milieu' is doomed to failure, for chronotope is to milieu as the forest floor is to an earth tone carpet. Chronotope is a time-space locus which, by focusing narrative events or materializing time in space, enables the concretization of representation. Bakhtin asserts that chronotope is one of the most crucial parts of the story for it is where the knots of the story are tied and untied.

Dialogism is a key concept for Bakhtin but not his ultimate goal. It seems that Bakhtin is hunting for relations where the concepts of time and place are intermingled and it is exactly in these relations that the main incidents of the narrative occur or the problems the protagonist faces are solved. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly, the behaviors of the characters are largely determined by the chronotope in which they are situated. However, this does not suggest that characters are not ethically free and independent. Liisa Steinby (2013) argues that Bakhtinian chronotope "presents a version of how a work of art brings together two aspects of an individual's existence which are theoretically irreconcilable: his or her being determined by natural and social circumstances and simultaneously free as an ethically acting subject" (p. 121). This function of chronotope is central to our perception of Tavakoli's adaptation.

Tavakoli's recontextualization of Williams' story has led to the emergence of certain actions and reaction in his characters not observed in the characters of *A Streetcar Named Desire*. However, this does not mean that characters in *The Strangers* are deprived of freedom to act on their own. This is to say, Tavakoli's characters act within certain chronotopic elements but are responsible for the consequences of their decisions. Davood, for instance, tries to justify his irritation, greed, and unkind behavior toward Nasrin by blaming his desperate financial straits. Nasrin, in the same manner, struggles to convince other members of her family that her actions – mostly immoral, irrational, and destructive – stem from her financial problems. In the context of Bakhtinian chronotope, their actions are formed by the surrounding temporal and spatial elements but they are ethically responsible for all the ensuing incidents.

This, in turn, suggests that Bakhtin's concept of chronotope is by no means in contrast with his idea of polyphony. Tavakoli's characters behave to a large extent based on the overarching chronotopes of the story. However, they can have their own voice and act and react based on their will and interest. Tavakoli's movie supports the conclusion of Steinby's groundbreaking study on the function of chronotope in the novel:

> In Bakhtin's concept of the chronotope, human action in the novel appears in the frame of temporal-spatially determined possibilities. Chronotopes open up to the characters a certain time-space of possible action, which is conditioned by a locality or a social situation but still leaves the individual the freedom of ethical choice. Thus chronotopes are primarily not categories of cognition but of the possibilities of human action. (2013, p. 122)

One of the key examples of chronotope is the chronotope of threshold "which involves the traversal of critical intersections of time and space" (Olufunwa, 2005, p. 50). Bakhtin argues that "the word 'threshold' itself. . . is connected with the breaking point of a life, the moment of crisis, the decision that changes a life (or the indecisiveness that fails to change a life, the fear to step over a threshold)" (1981, p. 248).

The main feature of artistic chronotope, and in particular the chronotope of threshold which Bakhtin considers as an instance of chronotopic manifestation, is the intersection of different axes and joining various indicators in a bid to reflect an emotional breakdown or a moral crisis. Eduard Vlasov (1995) cites Bakhtin in discussing threshold chronotope which falls upon "on the borderline between existence and nonexistence, reality andphantasmagoria, always on the verge of dissipating like the fog" (p. 47).

As temporal and spatial shifts constitute a crucial part of adapting literary works for screen, our investigation on *Biganeh*'s ending needs to focus on chronotopic transformation. Beyad and Hassanzadeh Javanian (2018) maintain that "Bakhtin's concept of literary chronotope is useful in discerning the temporal-spatial shifts that occur in adaptations" (p. 395). In other words, "a change in the temporal-spatial relationships in the adapted versions of a story can, as

Tara Collington contends, 'reflect different cultural preoccupations'" (Beyad & Hassanzadeh Javanian, p. 395). Thus, from a chronotopic point of view, Tavakoli's open ending suggests that his cultural preoccupations vary considerably from those of Williams. The Iranian director has defined new contexts for his adaptation of the play. Within these contexts, ending the movie in the same manner as the play does seem imposing a veneer of order and conclusion on the disorderly universe where the characters are living.

Tavakoli's use of threshold to end his adaptation of *A Streetcar Named Desire* has been a shrewd decision as the applications and implications of this type of chronotope immaculately matches his plan to show the ongoing crisis which has plagued the life of his characters. As "the threshold and related chronotopes ... are the main places of action in his works, places where crisis events occur, the falls, resurrections, renewals, epiphanies, decisions that determine the whole life of a man" (Kelly, 2013, p. 15-16). The edge of the sidewalk where Nasrin is walking on is a chronotopic reflection of her inward turmoil. This chronotope allows the director to preserve his intended ambiguity by the very end of the movie. We, as the spectators of the film, are not certain whether Nasrin is going through a resurrection and rebirth or is escaping from reality into an unknown world which is free from crisis and conflict. Whatever emotions she has, Nasrin is experiencing a crucial moment at the end of the movie. The movie is one of those narratives in which, as Keith Harrison states, "the protagonist is altered at crucial moments, and the significant moments of change are shown in connection to specific elements of the setting" (2017, p. 28). In other words, chronotope is no longer a background to Nasrin's life, but a significant part of her quest.

The movie's ending comes after a decisive moment in Nasrin's life when she has to decide between ending her quest for identity or leaving Davood and keeping up her journey. She goes for the latter. As a result, the ending does not mark an end to Nasrin's dream for a better and more coherent life; rather, it keeps open the door to her to fight for the better conditions she believes she deserves. This indicates the movie's unfinalized ending is not synonymous with chaos or the director's inability to come up with a determined ending. The unfinalizability of the film's ending is the director's attempt to allow Nasrin and many of those Nasrins living in the real world to keep their dreams alive.

Conclusion

The present article dwelt upon a comparative analysis of Tennessee Williams' *A Streetcar Named Desire* and Bahram Tavakoli's adaptation of the play entitled *Biganeh*. As Tennessee Williams discusses the argument between Blanche and Stanley, "it is impossible to say who won the argument in the play. Neither of them did and both of them did, and that is how it has seemed to me. Perhaps I could have made it clearer. That can be said of almost all my work. But to be clearer is not necessarily to be more truthful. Enveloped as all of us are in the inscrutable" (1947, p.11), Tavakoli's cinematic version of the play invites us to

recognize, celebrate, and ponder upon the unresolved dramatic tensions or, to use Mikhail Bakhtin's term, its unfinalizability.

The paper, then, argued Tavakoli's rationale for reinforcing the play's unfinalizability and his method for fulfilling his objective. Tavakoli's project entails situating the story in a modern Iranian setting. This transformation requires the creation of new contexts for the action. The cultural context, as a key context in the movie, is so replete with anxieties, concerns, and unanswered questions that its open ending seems indispensable. The article maintains that one important part of the director's plan for such an ending is revisiting of the temporal and spatial elements, which Bakhtin describes as chronotope. As a result, both Tavakoli's style and ideology pave the way for an ending that culminates in mystery, illusions, and unfulfilled dreams. Tavakoli situates his characters in a world in which nothing is determined and everything is just a hollow dream. As a result, once the movie is recontextualized, sticking to every single detail of the source text is not only an ideal but an impossibility.

Thus, the paper concludes that Tavakoli's screen version of Williams' play is marked by Bakhtin's unfinalizability. This unfinalizability is manifest in the unresolved tensions between characters, but more importantly, in the unresolved conflict in every character which triggers their journeys to give meaning to their lives in a universe which seems void of any meaning or significance. Much like his adaptation of Williams' *The Glass Menagerie*, Tavakoli once again reminds us here that confusion, ambiguity and poverty cannot rule out the possibility of better conditions. Unlike the existential motto which states that man is condemned to be free, Nasrin's decision at the end of the movie suggests that she is free to condemn any deterrence on the way to her dreams.

To conclude, this study showed that Bakhtin's concept of unfinalizability and chronotope can be effective tools for discussing movie adaptations. It shows, first and foremost, that a literary work is open to changes if the adapter seeks to challenge it in an innovative way. It is in this unfinalized, dialogic process that new meanings are created. Thus, Tavakoli's films proves that a classic play is both worthy and capable of being adapted for the screen if the filmmaker goes beyond common oversimplifications and represents unresolved tensions which lie beneath the determinate surface of Williams' plays.

Notes

1 Among the definitions of unfinalizability by Bakhtin, it is also possible to approach it more generally and in a broader sense. According to Bakhtin, "meaning in language is achieved as a result of words, phrases, and other units of language in dialogue with each other. Each written and spoken word exists for the purpose of working towards meaning in dialogue with other words. Spoken and written language inherently dialogic. The dialogic nature of language creates ongoing possibilities for new meaning. This is known as unfinalizability" (1985, p. 61). Bakhtin's theory of dialogism is much dependent on unfinalizability for it always adopts a position which insists on the presence of the other and on the

vitality of being open-ended. He maintains that there is neither a first word nor a last word. The contexts of dialogue are without limit. They extend into the deepest past and the most distant future. Even meanings born in dialogues of the remotest past will never be finally grasped once and for all, for they will always be renewed in later dialogue. At any present moment of the dialogue there are great masses of forgotten meanings, "but these will be recalled again at a given moment in the dialogue's later course when it will be given new life. For nothing is absolutely dead: every meaning will someday have its homecoming festival" (1984, p. 303).

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