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Shahriyar Mandanipur, In Between Modernism and Post-Modernist Ways of Writing

Abstract

This article aims at showing that Shahriyar Mandanipur employs narrative techniques in his short stories that look like those one finds in post-modernist fiction, but that these narrative techniques are rooted in a modernist world view. There is a truth and a reality in Mandanipur's short stories – contrary to the post-modern belief – but in Mandanipur's short stories this truth and this reality is always defined by a narrative and a narrator. Hence one must talk about different angles on truth and reality as demonstrated by the following analysis of Shahriyar Mandanipur's short story *Shatter the Stone Tooth*.

Keywords: modernism, post-modernism, narrative techniques in Shahriyar Mandanipur's short stories, truth and reality as relative values embedded in narratives

“[P]olarized dual systems no longer function.”¹

Shahriyar Mandanipur (born 1958) is one of the most intriguing and important Iranian prose authors in recent years. His novels and, especially, his short stories are not, admittedly, easily accessible. On the contrary, they are complex and obscure with complicated narrative structures, ambiguity with regard to place and time, containing a multi-layered reality often bordering to fantasies and hallucinations, and with intertextual references to both older and contemporary literature. Such a characterization is not far away from what we usually understand as post-modern literature, and this could lead to the conclusion that with Shahriyar Mandanipur we have the first post-modern prose writer in Iranian literature. I believe, though, that Mandanipur belongs to a general modernist trend in global, contemporary world literature; and in the following analysis of his short story, *Beshkan dandân-e sangi-râ*,

¹ Quoted from M.M. Khorrami, *Modern Reflections of Classical Traditions in Persian*, New York 2003, p. 110, in the chapter in which Khorrami analyses Mandanipur's short stories.

Shatter the Stone Tooth,² it is my aim to show that even though Mandanipur employs new narrative techniques,³ which resemble those used by post-modernist writers, he is ultimately rooted in what I call contemporary, modernist literature.

Shatter the Stone Tooth consists of two narratives, one inside the other. The first one is narrated by a young woman, engaged to be married to the narrator of the second story, a young man who spends his time doing his military service in a remote, destitute village in southern Iran.⁴ The second story, which takes up the major part of *Shatter the Stone Tooth*, is told by the young man, and is a description of the village, its inhabitants, and his experiences in the village. Of these experiences the stories about a stray dog and an ancient old stone carving in a underground cave near the village take center stage. The young man's narrative is formed as a series of letters to his fiancée, which she in her turn reads and interprets to an unknown and nameless interlocutor. The young couple have no names, neither. Later, I will return to the narrative technique which Mandanipur brings in play. Suffice it here to say, that both narratives are about the inbreak of irrationality in the two narrators' worlds.

The village, Gurâb, in which the young man lives, is described like this by himself in one of the letters:

چهل، پنجاه کومه خشتی وسط یک دشت گود و سه طرف دشت کوههای بلند زرنخی با تخته سنگهای چرب. نه دار و درختی و نه آبی. خاک که پوسیده باشد، آب را طوری می مکد که انگار هیچ وقت بارانی نباریده. این پوسیدگی دارد پهن می شود. از گردنه می زند بالا و به دشتهای اطراف سرایت می کند که همه جا را گرفته باشد...

Forty or fifty huts made of sun-dried bricks in the middle of a sunken plain and on three sides of the plain, high mountains of sulfurous sandstone and slaps of slippery rock... No trees and no water. When soil decays, it sucks up the water and it seems as though it has never ever rained. The decay is spreading. It will scale up the pass and infest the surrounding plains and overrun everything.⁵

The young man, who seems to come from a bigger town, suffers in the heat, filth, and destitution of the village. But this is probably not the worst part of his stay. The villagers are so steeped in ignorance and superstition that he cannot come through to them with his advice concerning improvement of their culturing the fields; and he is constantly told by the villagers that they know better than he does how to go about sowing, growing, and harvesting. And the young man has therefore given up on them, almost, as it says in one of his letters:

² *Beshkan dandân-e sangi-râ* [in:] Mumiyâ va 'asal... the first of thirteen short stories in the collection *مومیا و عسل*, Tehran 1996 (initially published in the periodical *ارغوان* 1991), and the short story is translated by Sara Khalili as *Shatter the Stone Tooth*, in *Strange Times, My Dear – The PEN Collection of Contemporary Iranian Literature*, ed. N. Mozaffari, A. Karimi Hakkak, New York 2005, pp. 340–352. I will use Sara Khalili's excellent translation in this article.

³ For these new narrative techniques, see M.M. Khorrami, *op. cit.*, p. 107 ff., and H.M. 'Âbedini, *Sad sâl dâstân-nevisi-ye Irân*, vol. 3–4, Tehran 2004 (1384), pp. 1058–1067.

⁴ In Sara Khalili's words, note p. 342 in *Shatter the Stone Tooth*: "Skilled and literate conscripts [in Iran] are sent to remote villages to promote development and to aid villagers with health, educations, and modern agricultural techniques."

⁵ *Strange Times, My Dear*, p. 343; *مومیا و عسل*, p. 12. Hereafter the first reference will be to Sara Khalili's English translation, and the second reference will be to Persian original.

بی بی گلابتون می گوید پس آمده ای اینجا چکار؟ می گویم نمی دانم. می گوید مردهای ما بهتر از تو می فهمند زمین و بذر و باران را. همین مردها، پشت به پشت همین زمین را کاشته اند. تا قیام قیامت هم همینها هستند، اثری از تو نیست. نمی دانم چه باید بگویم. من آمده بودم اینجا که چند صباح خدمت تمام شود و برگردم.

Bibi Golabatun says, then what did you come here for? I tell her I don't know. She says our own men understand soil, seed, and rain better than you do. These men have planted this land for generations. And they'll be here to the very last day, not you. I don't know what to say. I came here to finish the remainder of my service and then go home.⁶

The villagers' superstition makes them do irrational things that the young men cannot understand. For instance, they think that it is a bad omen if the hens cluck at dawn and therefore they kill them. This superstition or irrationality seems, at least to the young man, to be the general characteristic of the whole village's way of growing the land and staying alive. In fact, it seems to him that irrationality – combined with ignorance – in some odd way is the reason why the village exists at all. If rationality would be introduced to the village and its agriculture, the villagers and even what they grow would wake up to reality and come to nothing:

همین گندمهای تنک هم از عادت هزار سالشان اینجا می رویند، اینها خواب آبادی قرنهای پیش اند و از خواب بیدار شوند دیگر نمی رویند.

The sparse wheat grows here only out of a thousand-year-old habit, it is only a mirage of the fertility of centuries ago; once it becomes aware that it's a mirage, it stops growing.⁷

Another aspect of the villagers' superstition and irrationality is brutality. This is best exemplified in the young man's story about a stray dog, which comes to Gurâb. The dog is not an ordinary village dog but a city dog, and becomes thus a reflection of the young man himself. The villagers consider the dog – and by inclusion the conscript and adviser from the city – a bad omen, and they try to kill it in the most brutal ways. First it is shot at, then they catch it and hang it from a tree (both of which attempts the dog miraculously escapes), and finally they surround it beat it within an inch of its life with clubs, shovels and the like before they pour gasoline on it and set fire to it. The last incident we return to later.

The brutality and the irrationality slowly captures the young man's consciousness, and gradually he becomes like the villagers, giving up on his rational self. He feels the urge himself to kill the city dog, and tries to do so, unsuccessfully, by giving it meat with poison in it.⁸ His giving in to irrationality, superstition, and brutality is a result of his experiences in the village. During his stay there, reflected in the letters, he becomes more and more in doubt of what he sees as truth and reality. The stray dog that miraculously survives several attempts on its life, the fact that crops actually grow in spite of the dry land and wrong agricultural techniques, and the fact that the villagers survive *and* are content with their lives in spite of – or maybe rather because of – ignorance and superstition leading to a life which a city dweller would consider to be a very poor existence, all this challenges his perception of the world and reality. In the middle part of the short story, the young man writes:

من از سر اینها نمی گذرم تا نفهمم کدامان اصلیم. کدامان حقیقت داریم.

⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 345; p. 15.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 346; p. 15.

⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 347; p. 17.

I will not let them be until I find out which of us is genuine. Which one of us is real.⁹

And at the end of the short story, in one of his last letters to his fiancée, he writes:

... و حالا دیگر آسوده ام چونکه می دانم من واقعیت ندارم و آنها هستند که هستند و من فقط می دیدمشان.

... and now I am at peace because I know that I am not real, and they are the ones that exist and I only observed them.¹⁰

This realization comes when the villagers finally kills off the stray dog, and the realization, the real inbreak of irrationality in his world view, occurs with such a strength that he faints. The realization is closely connected to the young man's occasional stay in the before mentioned cave. Here he takes refuge when he wants to escape the burning sun and the suffocating environment in the village. In the cave, he discovers a stone carving, an image of a man facing an animal – a reference to the stone carvings in Persepolis, I believe – the man with a knife in hand and the animal standing erect as if it is on par with the man and ready to attack him. In the cave the young man gradually is absorbed into another world, too. In one of his first letters to the young woman, he has just discovered the special world of the cave, and – probably to provoke his fiancée – he asks her to recreate his own feeling from the cave and “in the middle of the night when it is quiet everywhere, to go and turn on a water faucet so that the water drips from it, and he wants me to listen to the drip, drip sound in the dark. He writes that this sound bears a secret and for those who discover it, all places in the world will be identical.”¹¹ The image, or perhaps rather the sound, of the dripping water faucet conveys a feeling of both timelessness, unity, and emptiness that penetrates all places and all times. Later it is not just the annihilation of time and place and world pervading emptiness that the young man experiences in the cave. His senses also get mixed up and reality takes different forms. He writes:

اینجا هوا از فصلها رهاست و همه خوابهای دنیا رسوب می کنند اینجا. من چشمهایم را می بندم و می بینمشان. باور می کنی که شامه آدم هم رویا داشته باشد؟ دارد، منتها باید بتوانیم همان طور که با بستن پلک، خواب بینایی را آزاد می کنیم، بویایی و شنوایی را هم آزاد کنیم. من و سگ روبروی خطوط دیواره سنگی می نشینیم و بعد شروع می شود. بوی برکه، بوی یزاق زنبور عسل، بوی گوشت لخم، خون رگ شیرین، بوی صاعقه، بوی زلزله، بوی ماده...

Here the weather is free from all seasons and in this place, all the dreams in the world settle like sediment. I close my eyes and I see them. Would you believe that a person's sense of smell can fantasize? It can, but just as we free our visual dreams by closing our eyes, we need to free as well our fantasies of smell and hearing. The [stray] dog and I sit facing the lines on the stone wall and then it begins to happen. The scent of a stream, a whiff of the honeybee's saliva, the fragrance of lean meat, the blood of a sweet vein, the smell of thunder, the odor of an earthquake, the scent of a female...¹²

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 348; p. 18.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 351; p. 21.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p. 344; p. 13:

آخر همین نامه خواسته که نصف شب، وقتی همه جا ساکت است، بروم شیر آب را طوری باز کنم که چکه کند و توی تاریکی به صدای چک چک گوش بدهم. نوشته این صدا رازی دارد که هر کس آن را بفهمد دیگر همه جای دنیا برایش یکسان می شود...

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 347; p. 16.

The supernatural world of the cave, which has close affinity to the life and mindset of the villagers, is brought in direct connection with the brutality of the same villagers. And this pertains especially to the stone carving. When the stray dog is killed in the most brutal way, and the young man passes out, he realizes:

راز نقش سرداب داشت بر ایم فاش می شد و می دیدم که آن دندانهای برهنه روی سنگ نشانه همین دندانهاست و مرد، روح عتیق همین هاری است...

The secret of the carved image in the cavern was being revealed to me and I could see that the bare teeth [of the animal in the carved image] on the stone were a sign of these same frothed teeth [of the dying stray dog], and the man is the ancient spirit of this same rabid fury [of the villagers]...¹³

And a little later, when he again has escaped to the cave looking at the stone carving:

جادوهای نقشها فقط در شکل های آنها نیست، در ماندگاریشان هم هست و مرد خنجرش را طوری در سر حیوان فرو کرده بود که گویی مجبور بوده و چاره ای جز این نداشته و صورتش چرخیده بود طرف من و نگاهم می کرد و از لای دندانهای سنگی اش حرفی را می غرید. چشمهایش هم که بخاطر پریذگی گوشه هایشان حالتی ملتسانه یافته بودند، همین را می گفتند: «بکوب»... و سنگی برداشتم کوفتم به دندانهایش، همان کاری که هزار سال بود می طلبید. «بشکن» و کوفتم و هی کوفتم سنگ به سنگ و سنگ می ترکید و فرو می ریخت و بعد دیگر تاریکی و صدای وحشتناک آب.

The magic of the carving is not in the image alone, it is also in its survival, and the man had plunged his dagger in the animal's head in such a way that it seems he had no other choice and his face was turned toward me and he was looking at me and from between his clenched stone teeth he roared something. His eyes, which were chipped at the corners and had taken on a beseeching look, said the same thing. 'Strike.' And I picked up a stone and struck it against his teeth, just what he had yearned for, for a thousand years. 'Shatter.' And I struck and struck again, stone against stone, and the stone cracked and crumbled and then there was darkness and the terrifying sound of water.¹⁴

The young man realizes the inherent brutality and irrationality in man, through all time and all places, symbolically expressed in the stone carving and played out in real life in the villager's killing of the dog. Stripped of all humanity (see below) and accompanied by the terribly sounding emptiness of water, an echo of the dripping water faucet mentioned above. And the young man surrenders to this brutality and irrationality, seemingly a basic human instinct, hammering a stone against the threatening stone carving, but in vain, as the stone in his hand crumbles against the hard reality of the stone carving

The structure of young man's narration, too, points to the fact that irrationality is victorious. After the stray dog has been beaten almost to its death, gasoline has been poured over it and it has been set afire, it runs into the wheat fields,¹⁵ which burn up. Seemingly a catastrophe for the village, but the last lines of the young man's last letter leaves the possibility open that the incident, by accident, could turn out to the better:

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 351; p. 22.

¹⁴ *Ibidem* pp. 351–352; pp. 22–23.

¹⁵ It should be mentioned that the stone carving in the caverns also has a depiction of a "wheat field – or something similar". *Ibidem*, p. 346; p. 15:

از پنجره که نگاه می‌کنم، توی دشت تاریک خاکه زغالها سوسو می‌زنند. کود خوبی شده برای این خاک و من فکری ام که چطور می‌توانم با این خشکی دهانم، سر پاکت نامه را بچسبانم...

When I look out the window, out in the dark plain ashes still glow. It is good fertilizer for the soil and I am thinking how am I going to seal this envelope, my mouth is so dry...¹⁶

Now let us turn to the other narrative, that of the young woman. She is a traditional, city girl, who had high hopes for a common future life with her fiancée, whom she always had thought would become a good husband, who “would provide a decent life for his wife”.¹⁷ But her narrative is a story of a growing despair because of the way her fiancée’s letters from the village change in style and contents. As mentioned, she tells about this to an unknown interlocutor, which might not be there at all and could be the reader of the short story, and her narration begins like this (the very first lines of *Shatter the Stone Tooth*):

از گرمای زودرس «گوراب» نوشته، از آفتابش که انگار بنفش می‌تابد، از سردابه ای نوشته که چهل و چهار پله می‌خورد و روی دیواره اش نقشی کنده شده و از سنگی نوشته که: «رویاهای شامه و گوشش را همدمش تلقین می‌کند.» که من نمی‌فهمم یعنی چه.

He writes of the untimely heat in Guraab, of its sun that seems to shine in a blinding purple, of a cavern with forty-four stairs and an image carved on its walls, and he writes of dog who ‘transfers his fantasies of smell and sound to his companion.’ All of which I do not understand.¹⁸

Until this point their relationship had been good and warm, even romantic, and his letters had been full of words “that every woman loves to read or hear”,¹⁹ but all of a sudden comes a letter, and later more, that threatens to shatter her world and future married life. This is the irrationality that invades the young woman’s life (“All of which I do not understand.”). At a first stage, she tries to address his problems in Gurâb in a logical way by writing the following to him:

بهتر است حرف گوراب را نرنی، آنجا هر چقدر که نفرین شده باشی، تو هستی، تو که سپاه ترویج و آبادانی هستی، هستی که کمکشان می‌کنی. فکر کن کارت از نظر انسانی چقدر بزرگ است... به هر حال منظرم این بود که برای این خدمتت تحسینت می‌کنم.

[I]t is better if you don’t talk about Guraab. No matter how cursed the place, you are there, you represent the Development Corps, you are there to help them. Think of how important your work is from a *humanitarian* point of view... In any case, I meant I admire you for your service.²⁰

Her admiration of his work and her stress on the “humanitarian” nature of her fiancée’s work, shows that she does not understand his situation, that he cannot help the villagers in any way, and that he lives in a world, where brutality, superstition and ignorance rule, and in which the word “humanitarian” with all its connotation sounds

¹⁶ *Ibidem*, 352; p. 23.

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 345; p. 14:

یک زندگی خانمانه برای زنش فراهم می‌کند.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 341; p. 9.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

²⁰ *Ibidem*, pp. 342–243, my italics; p. 11. See also note 4 above about the Development Corps.

ridiculous and out of place. Although the young woman does not understand what her fiancée writes to her, she is perceptive enough, though, to suspect that her logical and rational response to his first letters makes him develop a grudge against her.²¹

During the rest of the short story, the reader follows the young woman gradually losing hope of seeing her fiancée return home to the city and marry her. She still clings to the hope, however, until the very end where the narrative signals two things: One, that she must give up any hopes she might have had with regard to a future married life with her fiancée, and two, that she, too, at least partly, gives in to the irrationality. The young man has disappeared, maybe forever, has he died in Gurâb? – the short story leaves this question open – and the last lines of *Shatter the Stone Tooth*, expressing the young woman's thoughts, read like this:

صبح شده انگار... دیگر چیزی ننوشته. همین بود، آخر آخرین نامه اش... نمی دانم، هیچ کسی ازش خبر ندارد. خرده ریزش را صبح زود یکی آورده بود گذاشته بود دم در خانه مان... من که دیگر خواب و خوراک درستی ندارم. همین چند شب پیش وقتی که همه خواب بودند، رقتم یک شیر آب را طوری باز کردم که چکه کند، بعد دراز کشیدم. صدای چک چک توی گوشه‌هایم هی بلندتر شد و یواش یواش به نظرم رسید که صداهای دیگری هم می شنوم... گاهی فکر می کنم که نکند آن سگ، یک وقتی توی همان سردابه، دندانهایش را توی گوشت او فرو کرده باشد. بعد می گویم که نه، آن سگ که هار نیوده، مگر می شود جانوری آنطور آرام، بی دلیل هار بشود... آخر خب چرا نخواست بفهمد که اصل من بودم که برایش بودم... حالا تو فکر می کنی با اینهایی که برایت خواندم، منتظرش باشم؟ به نظرت ممکن است روزی بیاید، مثل همان وقتها می آمد، یا نه... رفته که رفته...

It must be morning. He hasn't written anything else. This was it, the end of his last letter.²² I don't know, no one has any news of him. Early one morning someone left his few belongings behind our door... I no longer have much sleep or appetite. Just a few nights ago, when everyone was asleep, I went and turned on a water faucet so that water slowly dripped from it, and then I lay down. The sound of the water got louder and louder, and little by little I thought I was hearing other sounds... Sometimes I think, what if that dog, in the cellar, dug its teeth into his flesh. Then I say no, the dog was not rabid, an animal that docile could not have turned wild without reason... But why did he not understand that I was the one who was really there for him? After all that I have read to you, do you think I should wait for him? Do you think he will come one day, like he used to, or no... he has gone for good...²³

Giving in to her fiancée's way of thinking, turning a water faucet on and *almost* hearing sounds from other places, the young woman cannot stop looking for rational explanations. She asks herself, did he get ill through a bite from the possibly rabid dog? – discarding the thought immediately, again by rational reasoning, and returns to her original mindset: Why did he not stay in my world, I was the only one who was there for him. And, finally, with the last address to her interlocutor – or to us, the readers – she gives up hope.

* * *

Shatter the Stone Tooth is not set in a certain time period. It could belong to both the Pahlavi era and to the period of the Islamic Republic of Iran, as the Development Corps has existed in both periods. Neither is place very clear. The town,

²¹ *Ibidem*, p. 343; p. 11.

²² The quote to note 15 above.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 352; p. 24.

from which the two narrators come, is not named, and Gurâb could be any village in (southern) Iran. Finally, the two protagonists and narrators have no names. All this points to certain characteristics of Mandani's narrative techniques in his stories: the fluidity of time and space,²⁴ as well as a characterization of persons in the stories that are psychologically nuanced and differentiated, "real" individuals, but never the less turn into types who transgress time and place. These characteristics fit nicely into yet another characteristic of Mandanipur's prose, the multi-layered reality, if "reality" is the correct word. The "multi-layeredness" is conjured up through the way in which, for instance, *Shatter the Stone Tooth* is narrated. In this short story there are, obviously, two explicit narrators, a female and a male one. I will argue, however, that there are more narrators orchestrated by an implicit narrator. The stone carving, the nature and the landscape, the village, the villagers, and the stray dog all talk to the male narrator, who narrates his interpretation of it all to his fiancée, who narrates his words and her interpretation to the anonymous interlocutor, who might be the reader. It should be noted, however, that the male and female "primary" narrators are an interpretative filter superimposed on the short story, contributing to a characterization of themselves: she is a commonsensical, traditional, perhaps a bit naïve, timid person, who fits best in a town, in civilization, and whose aspirations are to get married and have children. And the interpretation of the fiancée's letters is filtered through her traditional, almost bourgeois mindset. He is a university graduate, also from the city, but sensitive and open-minded, who realizes that there are realities other than his own: that of the villagers especially ("they are real, I am not"), that of the dog, and that of the image in the cave. In the short story, it is the young man that opens the theme "realities", in the plural, but he is only one voice out of many, and he cannot always be trusted. For instance, he writes about the stray dog that "[t]his animal is not that important to me",²⁵ which is obviously not true, and it seems that he is hallucinating when he reports about how he has been in a fight with one of the villagers, and how he can hear a dog's paws on rocky ground, a metal chisel carving stone, the roar of a fire, etc.²⁶ lying in his hut at night.

To sum up: The young man's narrative in *Shatter the Stone Tooth* opens the theme of the short story, "different realities" with the connected sub-themes "irrationality" and "brutality". His narrative is countered by the young women's "commonsensical reality" belonging to the city, civilization, and "humanitarian" projects. In opposition to the city stands the portrait of a brutally and inhuman, barren nature and landscape surrounding the village. This is the reality of the villagers who live and survive both in spite of and because of an inherited superstition and irrationality governing their lives (this is at least the young man's interpretation of it). To this irrationality is added an inherent brutality in the village society, most clearly expressed in the treatment of the stray dog.²⁷ I call it

²⁴ I owe this expression to Mehdi Khorrami, see note 1.

²⁵ *Ibidem*, p. 347; p. 17.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ There are other indications of this brutality. P. 348 the young man writes about the villagers, if we can trust him, that: "They gnaw on dry bread, they steal if they can, like dogs they hide their

“inherent brutality”, because the image in the cavern shows that already in the ancient world brutality has been a reality, as the image shows a ritualized killing of an animal. Hence, multiple realities coexist in *Shatter the Stone Tooth*.

The critical, rational reader could ask, if we really should believe the young man’s narration about these different realities. We have seen that he at times hallucinates and becomes a not so trustworthy narrator. I think, though, that this would be the wrong question to pose to Mandanipur’s short story. By structuring the text as two sets of narratives, the young man’s letters to his fiancée, and the young woman’s re-telling of them to the anonymous interlocutor/the reader – including the metaphorical significant stories about the stray dog and the stone image in the cavern, which both can be seen as inlaid narratives in the young man’s narration – Mandanipur stresses the fact that truth, or perceived reality, is in narration. And that there are as many realities as there are narratives.

If these many narratives had just co-existed with no relations to each other, *Shatter the Stone Tooth* could be considered a post-modern piece of literature. But they do not. As I hope to have demonstrated above, the different narratives are skillfully orchestrated in such a way that they comment on each other and reflect each other. For instance, the stray dog is a reflection of the young man but also, being an animal with extraordinary senses that human beings do not possess, a reflection of the fact that there are causes and phenomena at work in the cave, in the village, in nature, which escape human beings’ perception, in this case the young man’s perception. But *might* be perceived or sensed by the “irrational, superstitious” villagers. The image in the cavern is a reflection of the villagers’ brutality against the stray dog as well as against all weaker creatures that the (male) villagers meet, but also a reflection of the brutality that all men, including the young man, possess. Even the irrational fear that the villagers have of strangers can be seen reflected in the otherwise very rational young girl, who lives a secure and safe life in the city.²⁸ And there are many more examples. This fact, that all parts of the short story is carefully arranged so that they make up a structural whole, shows in my opinion that Mandanipur’s texts, at least *Shatter the Stone Tooth*, is not a post-modern but a modern short story. Mandanipur has not given up on a coherent world-view, of which his coherently structured short story is a representation. What can be said of *Shatter the Stone Tooth* – and other of Mandanipur’s works, which, together with his complex narrative style, might be confused with post-modernism – is that he has left a bipolar world-view characteristic of earlier

meager trifles from each other in a hundred little holes, they beat their wives at night and tell each other about it. . . .”; p. 18;

نان خشکیده به سق میکشند، دستشان برسد دزدی می کنند، زنهایشان را شبها می زنند و برای همدیگر تعری می کنند...

²⁸ At one point, when she explains why she cannot travel to Gurâb, the young girl tells us: “There are times when I don’t even dare walk alone in the streets of our own town. I dreamed that a few men are chasing me, in the middle of the day, and nobody else pays attention. I run through the crowd screaming. The men catch up with me. . . .” *Ibidem*, p. 343;

من خیلی وقتها، نوبی خیابانهای همین شهر خودمان هم جرئت نمی کنم تنهایی بروم. خواب دیده ام که چند تا مرد دنبالم می کنند، وسط روز، هیچ کس هم اعتناش نمی شود. لابلای آدمها می دوم و جیغ می کشم. مردها می رسند بهم...

modernist works.²⁹ In *Shatter the Stone Tooth*, the world cannot be divided into an “us and them”, “city versus village”, “rationality versus irrationality/superstition” or “the real versus the unreal”, as the young man mistakenly thinks and therefore perishes. There is an element of truth and reality in the young girl’s world – although she fails to recognize truth and realities in other worlds than her own – there is an element of truth and reality in the young man’s world – although he too easily gives in to the “reality” of the village. And, finally, there is also an element of truth and reality in the village life of Gurâb as well as in the stone carving of the cavern. This is, I think, the central message in *Shatter the Stone Tooth*. A message about a world in which truth and reality can be found as scattered bits and pieces, waiting for a narrator to tell them. Or waiting for a writer like Shahriyar Mandanipur to create literary works expressing yet another “truth”, the truth about the existence of a world with many realities.

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²⁹ I realize that my analytical approach to *Shatter the Stone Tooth*, contrasting “rationality” and “irrationality”, at the very outset of this article, is in conflict with the anti-bipolar nature of Mandanipur’s short story. My excuse is that I only use this bipolarity as an analytical tool.