



**A Comparative Study of
Human Nature**

In

Emile Zola's *Nana* and Sadeq Chubak's *Sang-e-Sabur*:

A Literary Darwinian Reading

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Abstract

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Abstract <p>Literary Darwinism is the application of evolutionary theories particularly Joseph Carroll's human nature model to the works of literature. Carroll examines the thematic and tonal qualities of a literary construct in its formal organization. Thus, this study analyzes the concept of human nature in Émile Zola's <i>Nana</i> and Sadeq Chubak's <i>Sang-e-Sabur</i>. The purpose of the study is to show that Zola and Chubak present a distorted conception of human nature as stated in Joseph Carroll's model of human nature. Carroll defines human nature as "a set of motives and cognitive dispositions that are specifically human and that appear in all cultures." However, the human motives and dispositions reflected in <i>Nana</i> and <i>Sang-e-Sabur</i> are distorted because Zola and Chubak basically depict animal-like characters in order to criticize the fatal flaws of the contemporary societies of France and Iran. These flaws include the destructive force of poverty, sexual repression, and superstition in <i>Sang-e-Sabur</i> and the destructive decadence or degeneration of French society during the Second Empire in <i>Nana</i>. On the other hand, since the plots of both novels fit the pattern of a particular satirical tragedy marked by a naturalistic perspective, both universal and naturalistic themes are analyzed in the total structures of <i>Nana</i> and <i>Sang-e-Sabur</i>. Finally, in the light of Chubak and Zola's worldviews and temperaments, the characters are examined comparatively to show how the authorial perspective culminates in a similar depiction of human nature in <i>Nana</i> and <i>Sang-e-Sabur</i>.</p>	

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To My Loving Family

The inquiry of truth, which is the love-making, or wooing of it,
the knowledge of truth, which is the presence of it, and the belief of truth,
which is the enjoying of it, is the sovereign good of human nature.

Francis Bacon 1561-1626

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Introduction

The purpose of this study is to present a comparative reading of Émile Zola's *Nana* and Sadeq Chubak's *Sang-e-Sabur* to show that both novelists represent a similar conception of human nature, as defined in Joseph Carroll's model of human nature, in their fictional works. Chubak and Zola both depict a distorted human nature, reflected in their animal-like characters, which in turn originates from each author's need to support his underlying perspectives. These perspectives aim at criticizing the flaws of the contemporary societies. These flaws are the destructive force of poverty, sexual repression, and superstition depicted in *Sang-e-Sabur* on the one hand and, on the other hand, the destructive decadence or degeneration of French society during the Second Empire in *Nana*. Moreover, the similarities of both novels expand to the narrative elements of characterization, story, and themes; thus, these resemblances will be studied in the total structures of both novels. The total structure is a collection of tonal and conceptual structures mirrored in formal organization of a literary construct as Carroll maintains. In addition to the above mentioned similarities, the plots of both novels fit the pattern of a particular satirical tragedy marked by a naturalistic perspective because these two novels present an emotional range of tragic anguish culminating in the catastrophic death of their female protagonists, who are ironically reduced to the state of harlotry. Thus, examining naturalistic themes and the way they function in the total structures of *Nana* and *Sang-e-Sabur* may lead to a deeper understanding of these literary works.

General Overview

This study makes an effort to show that *Nana* and *Sang -e-Sabur*'s presented major themes, motifs, and even main characters reflect the characteristics of a distorted human nature according to the model of human nature because both novelists, Zola and Chubak, mark their plots with naturalist values. This animal-like human nature also revolves around basic human urges particularly sexual passions. These excessive passions have gradually affected the characterization, the language, and overall narratives of both novels; and the novelists hook the readers into the novels by means of evoking biological passions in their minds. Besides, the stories contain animal imagery, firstly, to emphasize the bestial nature of human being and, secondly, to criticize the fatal flaws of the contemporary societies of Iran and France.

At the level of thematic analysis, this study primarily investigates different evolutionary themes along with some naturalistic motifs in order to show the similar (yet distorted) depiction of human nature in *Nana* and *Sang-e-Sabur*. Thus, the ongoing study first analyzes how motivational goals of survival are linked in both novels through assigning the role of a prostitute to the female protagonists, and hence how remaining of heroines in sex work supports the underlying authorial perspectives. To do this, a working definition of prostitution is initially provided and, based on this definition and some reasons for people to remain in sex work, both *Nana* and *Sang-e-Sabur* are analyzed to determine how prostitution has been used as a means of exposing the flaws of the Iranian and French societies of that time. Furthermore, in the light of evolutionary theories of mate selection, this study examines long-term matings (marriages) in *Nana* and *Sang-e-Sabur* in order to show that all marriages in both novels are doomed despite the fact that mates generally follow evolutionary patterns to select their mates. Since this study focuses on behavioral directives of human nature, the theme of parenting is analyzed which shows parents in both novels do not assume full responsibility for the care of the children. Since it is also crucial to have a basic evolutionary

understanding of human relations beyond mating coalitions in the context of *Nana* and *Sang-e-Sabur*, it is argued that in the tragic stories of *Nana* and *Sang-e-Sabur* bonds beyond mating coalition are pathological and disintegrated while characters, depicted as human beasts, are mostly different from Darwinian definition of a moral human being.

In addition to the themes of sociobiology, the naturalistic themes of death, environment, and heredity are analyzed because as Joseph Carroll maintains naturalist authors concentrate on man's animal nature including universal themes of living and thriving, surviving or coming to terms with death.¹ Indeed, a close study of Carroll's human nature model reveals that both Zola and Chubak depict their animal-like characters caught in a deterministic universe in which the theme of death turns to be an instrument to criticize the flaws of the writers' contemporary societies, and the prevalence of death simultaneously is the emblem of these societies' ultimate downfall— a social apocalypse.

At the level of tonal analysis, this study also investigates “the total structure of meaning” and “the total meaning of situation,” in the formal organizations of both novels; in other words, the study shows how the novelists' perspectives and temperaments are mediated in their characters and partially in their readers' expectations. Thus, characters are examined comparatively to show their similarities or differences and how the perspectives of novelists culminate in a similar depiction of human nature in *Nana* and *Sang-e-Sabur*; however, the reflected human nature is distorted or animal-like marked by a naturalistic perspective. What follows is also a study of the relation between the represented myths and authorial perspectives in which allusions to some myths in both novels are mainly utilized instrumentally or parodically to satirize the French degeneration under the Second Empire and the prevalent superstitions among Iranian people.

Review of Literature

There is a vast amount of literature available on the theoretical aspect and concepts of Literary Darwinism, evolutionary psychology and Naturalism that concerns the present study. However, it is primarily limited to the model of human nature proposed by Joseph Carroll, ideas of David Baguley and David M. Buss' theories of evolutionary psychology.

Accordingly, this section is dedicated to a short review of the theories and concepts which are explicated in chapter one.

Review of Literature on Literary Darwinian Theory

The primary concern of this study is to present a literary Darwinian analysis of *Nana* and *Sang-e-Sabur*, in which it is substantiated that human nature depicted in *Nana* and *Sang-e-Sabur* is broken in order to support the authorial perspectives. M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Harpham believe that "Literary Darwinism is the application of Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to works of literature that most significant concepts of Darwin's theory are the struggle for existence, and the survival of those individuals and groups best adapted to their environment."² They also state that "many Darwinian Literary studies focus on the analysis of themes in literature, especially those that deal with human reproductive behavior and human nature in sexual competition and the selection of mates, and with the formation of social alliances and of family relationships."³

Joseph Carroll maintains that "contemporary Darwinists also look to adaptationist social science to provide the most thorough and detailed guide to the actual content and structure of human nature, and they use that guide in analyzing the content and form of literary depictions, the perspectives of authors, and the responses of readers."⁴ Thus, from Darwinian viewpoint, human nature is "a set of motives and cognitive dispositions that are specifically human and that appear in all cultures."⁵ The motives and emotions shaped by natural selection include those directed toward survival (obtaining food and shelter, avoiding

predators) and toward reproduction, a term that includes both mating effort and the effort aimed at nurturing offspring and other kin.⁶

The goals of literary Darwinism proposed by Carroll in his book, *Literary Darwinism: Evolution, Human Nature, and Literature*, are to elaborate on Darwin and Wilson's ideas especially those related to the rudimentary human needs. Carroll tries to explain how to use a combination of theories of evolutionary psychology, biology, and sociology to analyze the behaviors of literary characters. This is Carroll's most prominent book, a collection of his previously printed articles and reviews, which divides his book into three distinct sections. The first section revolves around discussions about the relations among different schools or theoretical perspectives and essays in Darwinian literary theory and practical criticism. The first section also contains practical criticism on Victorian novels. In the second section, he aims to trace the development of Literary Darwinism and to distinguish his approach from those of the cognitive rhetoricians, and hence his chief purpose is to integrate evolutionary psychology with literary analysis. Carroll then sets out a model for human nature, identifies the main elements of literary meaning, and offers a commentary on Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* to illustrate the way these ideas enter practical criticism. Consequently, he analyzes three biographies of Darwin to tackle "the problems of point of view and interpretive framework in biographical and historical study".⁷

Carroll also compares literary evolutionary ideas with those of postmodernism. In contrast to poststructuralist epistemology, evolutionary epistemology presupposes that, "All human knowledge derives from a process of interaction between man as a physical entity, an active, perceiving subject, and the realities of an equally physical external world, the object of man's perception."⁸ And, these are ultimately reflected in human nature. Thus, he adds that "in the folk understanding of human nature, the needs for self-preservation and for preserving one's kin have a primal urgency. From Darwinian perspective, those needs are basic. And when we

speak of human nature, we focus first of all on human universals, on cognitive and behavioral features that everyone shares.”⁹

On the domain of Evolutionary Psychology, this study makes use of David M. Buss’ theories of mate selection strategies, and sexual jealousy. To do so, a working definition of ‘mating’ from an evolutionary sociological perspective is initially provided and, based on these definitions and universal standards of mate selection, long-term matings (marriages) in *Nana* and *Sang-e-Sabur* are studied in order to show that all marriages in both novels are doomed despite the fact that mates generally follow evolutionary patterns to select a mate. Furthermore, Buss holds that people have inherited different mating strategies by which they try to solve the adaptive problems of mateships. On the other hand, Buss argues that sexual jealousy is an adaptive passion regarded as an evolved defense system against potential infidelity.¹⁰ Also, Buss in his engrossing book, *the Dangerous Passion: Why Jealousy is as Necessary as Love and Sex*, maintains that jealousy has two sides: the first side is positive, which keeps a couple committed or help them to defend their relationship against potential infidelity; the second side is a monster side, which can drive a man to savagely beat his wife. In plain terms, Jealousy is an adaptation- regarded as an evolved solution to adaptive problems- which helped different generations to enhance their reproductive success.¹¹

Furthermore, since the naturalistic themes and motifs are inseparable from human universals and deterministic perspectives of Zola and Chubak, this thesis makes an effort to study these themes in the context of tonal and thematic analysis of *Nana* and *Sang-e-Sabur*. For this purpose, David Baguley in his *Naturalistic fiction: the entropic vision* provides a consistent frame which sums up “the essential properties of the genre, inspiring transtextual reworkings, establishing a continuity, and forming models.”¹² This frame not only makes it easier to realize definable relations (whether derivative or transgressive) and common characteristics of both novels, but also provides an in-depth analysis of conceptual content

(themes) and characterization of *Nana*. Therefore, this thesis ultimately uses the model of human nature, findings and principles of evolutionary psychology, and universal themes of Naturalism, as Carroll sees them, to analyze the deep structure of human behaviors reflected in *Nana* and *Sang-e-Sabur*.

Review of Literature on *Sang-e-Sabur*

There have been many controversies and critical texts over the analyses of *Sang-e-Sabur* since its publication; however, nearly all of these critical texts are unsystematic and untheoretically penciled; therefore, this study emphasizes two significant sources: *Yade Sadeq Chubak*, which is a collection of essays edited by Ali Dehbashi, and *Naghd va Tahlil va Gozideh Dastanhay Chubak* by Hassan Mahmoudi. Dehbashi's collection revolves around analyses of themes such as poverty, feminism, psychoanalysis of characters, structural and stylistic peculiarities for instance naturalistic narration, characterization, plot construction, analysis of narrators, diction and literary language, and a study of Iranian myths within the novel. For instance, Muhammad Reza Ghanoonparvar discusses the theme of sexual repression in the context of their economic dependency and the role of superstitious beliefs in inferiority of women in contemporary society of Iran. He also believes that women in Chubak's fictions are determined to be passive and ill-fated; women solely struggle to survive because they cannot set themselves free from their wretched environments.¹³

Furthermore, Feridon Farokh analyzes the miserable world of *Sang-e-Sabur*, whose horrible incidents drive Ahmad Aqa to insanity. He also links symptoms of mental illness such as fear, anxiety, and pessimism to the naturalistic determinism of the novel. Farokh also believes that Chubak synchronizes the relationship between the author and his readers by using the interior monologues to narrate his story.¹⁴ There are also some essays in *Yade Sadeq Chubak* which focus on Chubak's temperaments and his perspectives about *Sang-e-Sabur*.¹⁵

Hussein Mir Abedini similarly offers a naturalistic reading of the novel and acclaims Chubak for his stylistic patterns. He argues that what makes Chubak successful in depicting the wretchedness of human life is his naturalistic worldview that makes the characters of *Sang-e-Sabur* enslaved by their biological urges and social determinism.¹⁶

Hassan Muhammadi deals with the psychological aspect of the novel. He regards *Sang-e-Sabur* as a confession of the author. This novel not only shows the nihilistic and Freudian worldviews of Chubak, but also refers to the emotional and psychological abnormalities of the author himself. Muhammadi also believes that in addition to Chubak's mental problems, his pessimistic and passive perspectives originate from a kind of materialistic and atheistic worldview of the modern elites.¹⁷

In his essay, "Tanz dar Asar Chubak", Jahangir Doori studies the use of humor and comical ironies in *Sang-e-Sabur* maintaining that although there are some instances of ironies in *Sang-e-Sabur* (e.g. the humorous conversation of King Anushirvan¹⁸ and a donkey or dialogues of Zarvan and Ahriman), there is also a prevalent hatred in the novel which partly comes from Chubak's naturalistic approach to show the dark sides and the basics of human life.¹⁹

The last important essay of the Dehbashi's collection is the mythological analysis of folktales, and the Zoroastrian myth of the novel in which Kinga Markus attempts to provide a thorough thematic analysis by decrypting the symbolic allusions in *Sang-e-Sabur*. This analysis is ultimately used to identify the underlying satirical perspective of Chubak.²⁰

On the other hand, Hassan Mahmoudi in *Naghd va Tahlil va Gozideh Dastanhay Chubak* adopts a sociological approach in evaluating the themes and characterization of *Sang-e-Sabur*. He attempts to link the social flaws which are depicted in the novel to the economic crisis of Iran after the First World War. He also acclaims Chubak's verbal dexterity in creating different comprehensive languages for different points of view. Besides, there is a

great deal of character analysis in this book that mainly focuses on their temperaments in the layers of total thematic structures.²¹

Although publication of *Sang-e-Sabur* caused both warm receptions and bitter criticisms among Iranian critics, there is no specific book written about *Sang-e-Sabur*. However, there are multiple critical chapters and essays analyzing the novel in order to identify, evaluate, or even repudiate it as a naturalistic work of art. For example, Reza Baraheni in *Ghese Nevisi* focuses on the structural analysis of the story, and story-elements. While this book is a more general study of the nature of story writing and its distinction from other texts, Baraheni applies structural theories to the thematic and psychoanalytic analysis of *Sang-e-Sabur*.²² Furthermore, Abdul Ali Dastgheib in *Naghde Asar Chubak* holds that Chubak pencils a pornographic story in which he acts as a physiologist performing autopsy on its sentient creatures. He also believes that Chubak depicts human- beasts: a bunch of maniac, deformed, erotomaniac and animal-like creatures fighting to survive.²³

Also, Baraheni in three subsequent essays has offered a positive reading of the novel based on Chubak's biography. He attempts to link the theme of illegitimacy of Kakolzari to Chubak and finally gives it a sociological turn. Thus, he ultimately links the miseries of the novel to the crisis of modernity in the context of Chubak's contemporary society.²⁴

At the level of stylistic patterns of *Sang-e-Sabur*, Muhammad Taheri and Masumeh S. Askar agree that Chubak uses the technique of stream of consciousness particularly interior monologue in order to depict the horrible but complicated emotions and perspectives of his characters. They actually analyze the effects of stream of consciousness technique on the language structures, themes, and characterization of *Sang-e-Sabur*.²⁵

Çiğdem Çitakoğlu examines the role of woman in Hedayat's *Buf-e-Kur* and Chubak's *Sang-e-Sabur*. She actually comes to the conclusion that by reflecting on the ugly and

negative side of woman's character, these works intend to show that women have not the desirable and expected place in the society.²⁶

Review of Literature on *Nana*

Except Joseph Carroll's very short paragraph in his *Evolution and Literary Theory* and some essays, there are few critical passages on *Nana* which are mainly related to the Darwinian analysis of the novel. Hence, there has been no thorough reading of the novel based on model of human nature, so far. Carroll in *Evolution and Literary Theory* maintains that "Nana is a part of figurative structure of the novel, thus Zola's Nana is a symbol of sexual identity, of family function, of social forces, and of structure of meaning for the novelist."²⁷

Subsequently, myth narrative in *Nana* is presented through the myth of Venus and "Nana's enigmatic human-animal status as femme fatale resembling some historical figures such as Cleopatra and Messalina known for their powers of seduction, and Helen of Troy, Medusa and Medea."²⁸ Thus, the narrator of *Nana* uses some animal imageries and scenery effects like sexual female scents to characterize Nana as classic Femme Fatale. James L. Roberts in *Cliff Notes on Nana* adopts a naturalist approach relying on classic Darwinian concepts in order to analyze *Nana's* themes and characters. Roberts writes that Nana is the product of her environment which is devoid of any actual values, and "during the course of the novel, Zola leaves no immorality uncommitted by Nana. The interest in her character derives from the fact that she can at times be capricious, generous, hateful, spontaneous, and designing. She appreciates the power of her sexuality and uses it to its full advantage."²⁹

On the contrary, Richard-Laurent Barnett adopts a deconstructive approach to analyze the poetic disembodiment in Zola's *Nana*. He argues that "images of physicality function in the Zolian text, not as centers of lush sensualism, nor as metaphors of erotic plentitude, but rather as tropes of erasure... Within the frame of such a deconstructive network, the corporeal does not breed a poetic of the flesh, but adopts the status of an antipoetic, subsuming the processes

of signification and subsisting ultimately as an empty marker, an inverted ode to nothingness.”³⁰

Jonathan F. Krell has performed a study on *Nana* according to mythological principles of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism*. In this study, he concludes that although Nana is depicted as a demonic creature in the course of the novel, on the basis of naturalistic elements, “she becomes all too human at the end of the novel, and disintegrates: a helpless body, victim of an ancestral flaw, a degraded social body, and above all her author's ironic vision.”³¹

Furthermore, Peter Brooks adopts a narratological approach to explain the major impetus of the novel. Brooks asserts that “a major preoccupation of that novel is the undressing of the courtesan Nana. One could even say that a major dynamic of the novel is stripping Nana, and stripping away at her, making her progressively expose the secrets of this golden body that has Paris in thrall.”³²

Jennifer M. O’Leary studies Nana’s novel with four films- each one interpreting Zola’s *Nana* in a different light- to uncover the benefits and limitations of seeing the main character in a literal sense. Then she concludes that “converging themes found in both the literary and cinematic perspectives indicate that Nana is not “invisible,” as many scholars believe, but rather something larger, more universal and more complex than can be contained in any one, individual work.”³³

Moreover, *Nana* is one of the books that Noémie I. Parrat studies in order to show “how certain female characters in Zola question the received notion about the human-animal border and the related distinction between the male and the female.”³⁴ He also discusses Nana’s images as a femme fatale in a chapter entitled “Nana’s Enigmatic Human-Animal Status as Femme Fatale,” and he concludes that “Nana’s incessant movements across the human and the animal border underscore her ambiguous status as a human being and designate her