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**Rapithwin, the Demon of winter and Baba Barfi
An Archetypal Battle of Survival and Transformation
In Iranian Children's Literature of the Twentieth
Century**

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Abstract

Mythological and folkloric heritages of nations have often been credited with exclusively distinct identities within the realms of literary criticism. Arguing that in a nation like Iran, the firmly visible borders that have conventionally defined mythology in disparity from folklore have been disturbed, this paper considers these two entities as intertwined and their accentuated differentiating thresholds as elapsed. This synergy can be proven as most visibly traceable in the country's literary creations produced for children in the mid and late twentieth century. The presence of this blend, at the core of this study, will be examined in one fading mythological meta-narrative which is demonstrated to be preserved in the cocoon of a common Iranian folktale. The archetypal cycle of death and rebirth, enacted through the characters of Rapithwin (the Zoroastrian god of the ideal season) and its opponent, the Demon of Winter, provides an accessible example in tracing these mythic figures within the Iranian New Year's ritualistic folktale. The following thematic and semiotic analysis, thus, exemplifies how these characters survive within a folkloric context and the process through which they transform into newer and more creative versions in the twentieth century's productions for children. This is clarified on a continuum with the folktale of *Uncle Norouz (New Year)* in Farideh Farjam, M. Azad and Farshid Mesghali's (1972) picture book, used as the pre-text, at one end and Jabbar Baghcheban and Allan Bayash's (1973) picture book *Baba Barfi (Snow Papa)* as the most creative version on the other. In order to reveal a transformative trend, two other retellings in the same context are also analysed in the middle of the continuum. The paper finally concludes that the articulated transformation in one narrative continuum can potentially represent one

of the first evolutionary trends in Iranian Children's Literature of the twentieth century.

Keywords: Iranian Children's Literature, Mythological Meta-narratives, Folktales, Archetypal Cycle of Death and Rebirth

Introduction

Mythology, on the one hand, can be defined as the product of human beings' attempts to interpret the realities of their surroundings; a platform upon which the underlying reasons as well as the ongoing processes behind these realities' existence, creation and survival can be explored, decoded and chronicled (Leeming xi). It is, hence, not difficult to assume that mythological insights can develop over time as societies change and the human race ages. It is, also, unsurprising to think that they can ultimately transform just enough to embody creative opportunities for an artistic contemporary mind through which the inherited variable knowledge of the unknowable can be communicated in a symbolic way for the newer generations. Folklore, as a broad category, on the other hand, revolves around a society's ordinary concerns. It records the longings of a generation of people who desire to defy the force of time, the decay of their ritual expressions and enables them to handle their everyday issues of life and survival concerns in creative and transferrable ways. These concerns, despite their mythological counterparts, are not so much interested in speculating the creation of the universe or the forces of nature as they are rather keen to discover social long lasting patterns on how to live with them (Abrahams 17). Due to this inherent difference, these two entities have rarely been envisaged as blended, especially in semiotic literary studies. Nevertheless, it can be argued that there still exists an intrinsic bond or an invisible binding thread that ties these two apparently distinct categories together. A thread that can weave mythology with folklore within the garment of a nation's literary productions throughout the progression of eras. A survival mechanism, an acquired shape-shifting capacity, to keep up with change and the forgetfulness it can bring about as time answers the questions that our ancestors originally created mythology or narrated folktales to answer or record them with.

If it is agreed that folktales are the most authentic spirits of a nation's collective body of oral history, traditions and common cultural beliefs

inserted into a narrative corpse; then, can they, potentially, serve as the basis of a country's literary productions which suit its young readers' national, cultural and environmental enquiry quests as they embark on their childhood journeys? Can the simple structure and the accessibly colloquial voice of these narratives, either expressed in prose or poetic forms, evoke an internal conversation, a zest for questioning or even a tool to facilitate collective national remembrance for children who are beginning to face the challenge of defining their cultural identities? If a folktale can be imagined as a so called literary possibility, then it is not improbable to claim that the basic construction of most nations' Children's Literature is settled on the basis of its folkloric heritages that are narrated, retold or even revised through the course of time.

Iranian Children's Literature serves as an exemplary case study for this theoretical framework. Morteza Khosronejad (2004), in his essay on the history of Iranian children's literature, discerns that apart from "the earliest written children's tale in Iran, dating back to some three thousand years ago..., 'The Asooric Tree'...", the very first attempts in the construction of this field in Iran includes the mere publication of collective anthologies of Iranian folktales for children; among which one is even directly addressing the child readers (1095). In Iran, therefore, Children's Literature originates prior to the twentieth century with retellings of Iranian folktales adapted for children in a range of different narrative genres, which are all faithful to the originally recorded tale and target children explicitly; often serving a clear didactic theme. Establishing this folkloric heritage, the main question that this paper aims to pose still remains unanswered. How can a possible link between the inherited mythological past of a nation and its contemporary folkloric presence be explained within the context of Iranian Children's Literature?

The answer will become emergent through a historical gaze. Mythology, with its purely Persian origins, is extremely intertwined with the dominant religion of ancient Persia, Zoroastrianism, which was succeeded by the Islamic faith through the Arab conquest of Iran (AD 633-651) converting a majority of Iranians to the new religion. As expected, with any religious revolutionary trend comes the suppression of the old beliefs. Likewise, any

explicit approval or faithful expression of a belief in mythological Zoroastrian origins of the country, in this case, reflected in literature was subverted in favour of the vastly spreading religion of Islam. Consequently, through years of Islamic influence, Persian mythology started to begin a fading out journey in mainstream cultural and literary forms of expression and, as this paper will argue, found a new survival ground in the conveniently preserving shell of contemporary Iranian folktales. Folktales, which were almost equally tolerating a significant shifting pressure as the new religion began opposing the older archetypal rituals, assisted the existing body of Zoroastrian myths to remain invincible by embracing them at their core. Hence, an invisible mythological spirit began its battle of survival within folktales through narrative disguise.

This study attempts to exemplify this claim by excavating one of these mythological bases, the archetypal cycle of death and rebirth, reflected through a seasonal interchange between winter and spring, from its contemporary narrative host, the Persian New Year's folktale. This folktale, as adapted for children, is most faithfully presented in, *Uncle Norouz (New Year)*, a picture book co-authored by Farideh Farjam and M. Azad and illustrated by Farshid Mesghali (1972). This folkloric pre-text is ultimately demonstrated to be transforming into newer versions of the same seasonal schema upon a continuum. This continuum is respectively tracked by the distance the following narratives take from the original folktale and the semiotic and thematic alterations they acquire along the way. The transformation begins from the first retelling, represented in Neyestani's (1971) picture book, *Here Comes Flower, Here Comes Spring*, illustrated by Parviz Kalantari and follows through to Shokoufeh Taghi's (1985) *The Most Beautiful Song* with Nayereh Taghavi's illustrations. In conclusion, with the analytical continuum's end point, comes the inversion of this paper's meta-narrative hierarchies in the last retelling, Jabar Baghchehban and Allan Bayash's (1973) picture book, *Baba Barfi (Snow Papa)*, which reveals the ultimate form of transformation by reversing the oppositional connotations of spring and winter through an innovative thematic aim; thus, deconstructing the original dichotomy's hierarchy.

It is important to note here that these selected narratives, laid out on the following analytical continuum, are not necessarily based or organised in a chronological format. In other words, this selection, for the sake of this paper's argument, is not interested in ordering the continuum based on the narratives' year of publication and does not aim at tracing the claimed transformation through the scale of time. All of these retellings belong to a close period between the mid and late twentieth century in Iran and are, therefore, influenced by the same socio-political atmosphere and literary characteristics of the Modernism era. Further, the study is reluctant to suggest that these authors were intentionally achieving the following transformative trend over time for their child readers based on their predecessor's works. Rather than attempting to actively transcend the scope of one another's retellings of a folktale chronologically, this paper claims that these authors' picture books best display the process through which a folktale can pack up an archetypal essence in its sack and embark on a transformative journey in the minds of the young readers. Ultimately, as a result, this particular study is neither conducted to favour any retelling's achievements in the continuum nor to lament the fading out journey of the ancient archetypal cycles in Iranian Children's Literature. It, however, merely seeks to highlight the creative writing, discursive and thematic, potentials of children's authors in this era in order to reflect and unfold one of the first evolutionary trends of the field.

Mythological and Ritualistic Basis of the Folkloric Pre-text

Rapithwin, Lord of the Noon-Day Heat who is active "year by year", is "the lord of the ideal world", the noon-day heat and the summer months under whose presence the sun used to stand still before evil has appeared in the perfect state of the original universe. The annual operation of this significant deity is proven more beneficial each time it is contrasted by the world's invasion of "the demon of winter" when he "retreats beneath the earth and keeps the subterranean waters warm so that the plants and trees do not die" (Hinnells 30). It is in the spring season that he annually returns to earth in order to defeat evil forces embodied by the death of earth in winter. This endless cyclic battle, therefore, echoes the archetypal cycle of death and

rebirth in human beings' lives along with nature and highlights the final triumph of good over evil and the time for *Ahura Mazda's* resurrection of the dead spirits in the ultimate state of the world's history.

By celebrating Norouz Festival which represents "both the new day of the actual forthcoming new year and of the future ideal time", Iran's folkloric custom, therefore, is rather subconsciously reemphasising the mythic significance of *Rapithwin's* victory whose "coming to earth is a time of joy and eschatological hope, a symbol of the final abiding triumph of the Good Creation" (30). Interestingly, however, as Pirayeh Yaghmaie (2007) also mentions in her article about the Norouz Festival, it is not the underlying mythic story behind this popular feast which has remained of the greatest importance among the Iranians but the ritual practices they perform in it; which also contain the most fascinatingly mysterious elements of all Persian rites. As a result, while the mythic deities find their way into the folkloric layers in order to preserve their existence among the contemporary heirs of the ancient worshippers, they undergo a series of characteristic adaptations behind the veil of the popular-culture's famous symbolic characters. *Rapithwin*, unexceptionally, is also eventually transformed into the culturally coined figure of *Haji Firouz (Uncle Norouz)* who gains more concrete details in the context of the folkloric feasts as opposed to its abstractly unperceivable original shape as a deity. The symbolic celestial realisation of the mythic battle between *Rapithwin* and the *Demon of Winter* is also concretely enacted by Iranians during the special ceremonies they perform in preparation for welcoming the victorious spring.

Aligned with Yaghmaie's (2007) argument, the fact that these ceremonies have always and everywhere begun with perplexity, disorder and excessive agitation, is not astonishing at all, as the disruption of order is one of their basic characteristics. Iranians, she adds, have always considered tranquillity to come along as a result of distress and regarded disorder as the basis of welfare and calmness. Furthermore, she maintains that these restless situations, as the outward articulation of the underlying mythic battle between death and rebirth, were intentionally caused by contemporary societies in order to regain and even appreciate the final state of stability that was deemed

to arrive by the advance of the spring. In the course of this allegorical performance, *The Return of the Death Spirits*, from the final days of the last month of winter until the New Year's Eve, men start wearing black masks walking around in crowded places on the streets or Bazaars (market places). This parade is performed in an attempt to disrupt the annual order of public places and the firm boundaries of social laws. These male characters, that almost recently also wear a total red costume and sing in the streets by the name of *Uncle Norouz*, aim to stir the distance between 'death' and 'life' as well as playing with the ambiguous borders of existence and nonexistence. Acknowledging this ritualistic origin, this paper intends to apply a new reading to this folktale that further proves the basis of the presented argument in revealing a Persian mythic god surviving under the mask of a folkloric character.

The linearly simple plot of this folktale, *Uncle Norouz*, introduces two originally archetypal characters as the protagonists of a folkloric narrative. The first one is the culturally familiar character of a naïve old woman who annually awaits the arrival of the other, a sage male figure called "Uncle Norouz". The symbolic cycle of death and rebirth in this story, hence, is not achieved through the established mythological battle between two opposing characters, as the story reveals no antagonist. This opposition is, however, merely gained through the manifestation of aspirational thresholds symbolized through the interactions of these two characters. Uncle Norouz can be regarded as a folkloric version of Rapithwin, the archetypal god of heat and spring and, thus, the sign of rebirth. The old woman, on the other hand, would become the folkloric representative of the Iranian ancestor-worshippers on earth who await and welcome the annual occurrence of a symbolic rebirth in their lives through a range of ritualistic practices they perform in order to gain the deities' or the dead spirits' attention and be blessed with a long lasting life each year.

In Farideh Farjam and M. Azad's (1972) *Uncle Norouz*, illustrated by Farshid Mesghali, the underlying mythological representation of Uncle Norouz portrays a major contrast with the visualised folkloric image of the old woman. This effect is easily achieved through an omniscient narrator who

respectively utilises de-familiarising and conventional characterising techniques for Uncle Norouz and the old woman. The story begins with the narrator focalising Uncle Norouz's appearance while only describing the old woman's love for him and her ritualistic actions. The old woman's schematically familiar inner character is not unfolded for the young readers while, in comparison, Uncle Norouz's mysterious figure is excessively elaborated. As the narrator comments, this confident lordly figure arrives exactly on the "first day of spring" into the city from an unstated and, therefore, obscure or preferably celestial source. This narrative technique further reveals the symbolised character as a deity. His sage stance and agential subjectivity is re-emphasized through his confident manner of approaching the city while "hitting his cane on the ground". This description also poses a visible contrast to the child-readers' expectations of an old wise man, as Uncle Norouz does carry a cane like a grandfather figure but is not old in any way. Through a de-familiarising technique, he is described as appearing young since his hair and beard is not white but "brownish like the colour of Hana (a famous plant used for colouring in ancient times)". Therefore, Uncle Norouz is textually portrayed to contain a unique supernatural quality even though he is clearly personified as a humanised character. The rest of the plot merely entails the detailed description of the ceremonial doctrines that are performed by the old woman whose identifiable generalised character seems needless of a distinct name contrary to Uncle Norouz whose name is positioned as the title of this picture book.

The visual discursive strategies of the illustrator Farshid Mesghali also confirm the child-readers' de-familiarised versus schematic invited readings about the contrasting characters that were implied by the narrator's omniscient voice. These visual codes also play an effective gender-based role in establishing Uncle Norouz's god-like authoritative presence and the folkloric ordinariness of the old woman. The portrait images of these two characters, as apparent in figures no.1 and 2 evoke two different layers of visual responses from the child-readers especially since these images continue to take turns in occupying the focus of the following pages and will hence be even unintentionally compared with one another. The geometrically

rectangular shapes of the male figure's body in figure no.1, which construct a more vertically ascending position to his figure, intensify his agential significance. The image abstractly magnifies the sizes of his body parts with one of his enormous hands resting on the oriental patterns of his cane and the other one fisted, adding empowering visual layers to his portrayal. Moreover, the collage texture of his clothes and its bright green colour attaches him to the natural context of his figure's empty background with several vertical lines of tree shapes in order to not only highlight this character's inaccessibility, strength and determination for the child reader but to suggest him as the sole power of rebirth in nature.

These isomorphic visual codes that are paralleled with the Persian mythological contexts also reaffirm the deistical personification of the spring forces reflected through the body of this folkloric character and redefine his arrival from un-contextualized and, thus, unperceivable realms for children. Finally, it is the concentration on his point of view in this image, which heightens Uncle Norouz's celestial focus and power. His portrait picture in which he faces the child readers while not making eye contact with them constitutes a rather proud 'offer' point of view that neither shows his majestic figure as requiring to be identified with nor interested in mundane elements while fixating his perspective on a farther but consciously chosen distance. Furthermore, his indifferent and serious look can be interpreted as the look of a contented but not easily impressed hero who is standing to be praised by the applauding and fascinated crowd of followers or worshippers.



Figure No.1 *Uncle Norouz*

On the other hand, the maternally curved lines that compose the appearance of the old woman attach a more horizontal vector to her portrait image and therefore reveal her ordinariness and earthly position. Her character's illustration is heavily gender specific and custom-based since she is wearing a scarf and exaggerated make-up, sitting in a culturally specific manner on the ground, and quite traditionally also on a Persian carpet. Moreover, since this old woman's background image only encompasses a framed mirror, which is deliberately situated parallel to her figure facing the front, and due to her point of view's 'demand' nature making eye contact with the readers, sympathetic feelings of the viewers are effectively raised. Being placed in front of the old woman's mirror, as if looking at themselves, the child-readers are implicitly expected to be staring at the ancient representation of their inherited culture or potentially at their own future's probable ritualistic roles.

Figure No.2 *Old Woman*

This potential reading of the folktale as presented in this picture book, therefore, aims to derive a solely cultural significance from the surface construction of the text to nationalistically preserve Iran's ritual heritages for the child readers or even also to internationally transmit a traditional custom to those readers who reside beyond the country's borders. Identifying with the old woman, the readers accompany her in ritual performances and habitually admire the higher stance of the folkloric Uncle Norouz that is paralleled with the mythological character of the Zoroastrian god. The child readers, can hence, internalise a recurrent ritualistic feeling to await the presence of Uncle Norouz, positioned just like the character of the old woman. Without being explicitly informed about his mythic name (Rapithwin) or his victory in a mythic battle with the Demon of Winter, the readers can infer Uncle Norouz's dominance contrasted to the old woman's very ordinary passive function. The mythological meta-narrative, hence, is implicitly preserved.

The Process of Discursive Transformation in the Pre-text's Meta-narrative

Manouchehr Neyestani's (1971) long narrative verse, *Here Comes Flower, Here Comes Spring*, serves as the primary selected picture-book retelling of the above pre-text operating under the control of the same core mythological meta-narrative. The discursive strategies embedded within this story entitle it more as a parody-based version rather than a faithful retelling

of the folktale. Through the choice of narrating the adventures of a lonely nomad, a girl protagonist called Little Pea who fights against a black demon to win the spring back, Nesyestani achieves an invited reading that is not offered in the original pre-text. This recognizable transformation in characterising strategies initially breaks the stereotypical folkloric character-type of the naïve old woman who waits for spring and adapts it into a tiny but courageous girl. This technique frees the main goal of the text from structuring around the arrival and presence of Uncle Norouz whose name no longer occupies the title position of the story. His character is added to the story in the final scene as a ritually significant but passive role when the conflict of the story is already resolved by the protagonist who is agent and successful in defeating the demon herself. Moreover, not only the character roles and values are reversed by the narrative structure but also the insertion of an antagonist, the giant cruel demon, the mythic embodiment of winter to the original plotline becomes significant to note.

The author allocates more space and time to the characterisation of his heroine, contradictory to the pre-text's heroic representation of Uncle Norouz and generalised representation of the old woman. The omniscient narrator here not only starts describing the female character directly as being "smart and pretty" but also focalises her inner emotions by stating that she feels sorrowful inside for being lonely and lacking a friend. Although she spends her days lonely in a bare field, the already conscious state of her subjectivity is revealed in the course of several monologues during which she warns herself not to run away from loneliness that surrounds her or to yield to sadness and despair. As a stereotypical gender-based characterisation would impose descriptions on a female role, her instant solution to relieve her depression also lies in a range of actions that are agential but merely household duties that stand parallel to and reinforce those performed by the passive character of the old woman in the pre-text. She starts "making herself up", "cleaning the house", "washing the clothes" and "making tea" to finally set herself in front of the mirror and to express: "it's a pity no one is here to admire my beauty". Identical to the old woman, she then starts waiting for someone while "the earth stays dark and bare although it has been a month

that winter and snow has been finished” clarifying that both female characters are represented as unable to tolerate life without the presence of a male hero.

However, the strategy through which the author distances himself again from the gender-based definitions of the pre-text that he follows initially, rests in portraying his heroine as a more thoughtfully agent character who *voluntarily* performs a series of actions as a solution to resolve her sadness. In contrast to the character of the old woman, Little Pea does not perform these household chores *unconsciously* or through surrendering to *an annual ritualistic habit*. Furthermore, the author adds a turning point to the story of Little Pea to save her from yielding to a gender-based role, which is surprisingly not by the advance of the awaited Uncle Norouz but through the arrival of an old gypsy fortune-teller. Utilising this minor character, the vigilant potential of the heroine’s agency is triggered when she is informed of the reason behind the story’s conflict which is the black demon’s magic spell that blocks the arrival of spring and, therefore, the advance of Uncle Norouz. This minor folkloric character equips the author with a strategic deviance from the source pre-text to highlight a change in the developing character of her protagonist. Little Pea attains a significant distance from the character of the old woman as she laughs confidently to the gypsy’s news and asserts in another long monologue that she has no belief in evil magical forces: “magic is only for the idle people and if I’m *smart* and *clever* I would go to *fight* with this demon”.

The parody develops at this point of the story when a genre shift merges with the dominant demotic register of the folkloric narration by alluding to the famous epic heritage of Iranian classic literature. Out of the consistently preserved household setting of the original plot, Little Pea suddenly appears to wear an armour while riding on a white horse and holding onto her sword, all intertextual elements to allude to *Rostam’s Epic Battle* in Ferdowsi’s *Shahnameh*¹. Furthermore, her ironical dialogic interaction with the demon in front of his cave is achieved in the epic convention of heroes addressing their

¹ Rostam is the most eminent mythic hero of Ancient Persia whose heroic deeds are represented in the national epic, *Shahnameh* (Epic Book of Kings), written around 1000 AD by Ferdowsi. It encompasses a historical account of Persia’s mythical past from the creation of world to the 7th century’s Islamic conquest of Persia.

enemies before fighting with them to further prove their power and confidence, here, conversely revealing a heroine's agency:

*Aha-ay Demon come on out,
See me here, hear my shout.
Dare you call me 'tiny-height'?
Once you peek, I'll kill your sight.
Hey, hey, Demon where are you?
Come and fight with me ... will you?*

This parallelising scenic strategy is more explicitly demonstrated in the accompanying visual discourse, which reinforces the textual clues. As presented in figures no.4 and 5, Parviz Kalantari's illustration is imbued with symbolic visual codes that more than anything positions the readers to recall Rostam's familiar appearance and his white horse. This impact simultaneously parodies the epic convention by transforming the conventional male hero into a little girl's character battling a very humorous demon figure, which does not look dangerous at all, is smiling and seems visually infantilised.



Figure No. 4 **Little Pea**



Figure No. 5 **Demon of winter**

Ironically, moreover, neither an epic battle nor a fighting scene is narrated in the story while the ultimate aim of defeating the demon is *magically* achieved through the mere confident power of Little Pea in facing him. Being frightened by hearing the mysterious laughter of the demon and his giant appearance out of his cave, Little Pea reminds herself that if she

becomes afraid she cannot defeat the demon and by this mere agential thought she abruptly breaks his spell and he turns into a black smoke. The parody achieves its peak after Little Pea conquers the land for the free arrival of the spring when “one hundred male (riding) figures start marching in the field in front of her window playing musical instruments and singing”. Figures who ironically carry enchanting and entertaining musical tools instead of swords or battle gear that are more relevant to their conventionally established gender roles and epic origins. “Uncle Norouz” who is “an old man with white beard” leads the parade and sings merrily like a nomadic clown: “Hey, I’ve got flower, I’ve got spring. I’ve got tulips ... in the fields I sing...” This representation further highlights the significance of the folkloric New Year Festival within an Iranian contemporary folkloric context that masks the mythological underlying meta-narrative due to its performative and ritualistic pre-occupation.

The mythological figure of Uncle Norouz, consequently, is immersed more deeply within the folkloric setting in this retelling and has totally distanced from its original form. Firstly, he is accompanied by a group of other male characters and is riding on a “galloping white horse” which makes his arrival more tangible and reduces his former singularly authoritative, static and mysterious advance in the pre-text. Secondly, he is carrying a sack on his back and is more described as a funny and “fattish old man with white beard and red cheeks” who “sings loudly” in contrast to his former speechlessly symbolic presence that emphasised his celestial stance. The usage of framing techniques in figure no.6 depicts the trivialised figure of Uncle Norouz whose image is even roughly cut by the paper frame. While smiling, he still tries to keep his head back to establish eye contact with the readers, and holds onto his sack with both hands although he is riding on a horse. It is true that in this picture he is the leading figure of the celebrative parade whose progression is illustrated; however, his fading out figure in the double-spread page implies that he is only an entertaining figure whose influences on the surroundings and his group’s festive function is ironically attracting more attention than his actual presence. His ‘demand’ point of view in this illustration is also of a different kind compared to the same character’s

confident ‘offer’ perspective in the pre-text (figure no.1). Here, more dependently, he draws attention not to himself to be identified with, as the old woman’s ‘demand’ gaze did, but to the landscape scene that is visualised behind him which defines the traces of his impacts.



Figure No. 6 *Uncle Norouz's Parade*

This impact is repeated in figure no. 7 as well, in which, he, once again, is not presented singularly and occupies a small portion of the double-sized picture with the rest of the space being shared by the excited children who are staring not at him but at his sack. His look is more of an advertising ‘focus’ gaze expected from a model who is accentuating not his own character but the effect he is bearing or producing to which he is dependant. The very slight turn of his head signifies that he was not facing the readers like a portrait picture but he is merely an element in the scene whose action is captured by a potential imagined photographer aiming to reveals his trivial duty of distributing gifts to the children for the advance of New Year. While Uncle Norouz’s arrival in the pre-text implied the end of his own battle with the

demon of winter about which the readers, like the people of the city, did not need to worry having had performed their rites appropriately; Neyestani's Uncle Norouz, can solely enter after Little Pea has restored the spring and defeated the demon. Furthermore, he only arrives to spread the merry news to everyone and to decoratively "fill the fields and gardens with flowers and blossoms". Finally, Little Pea not only gets the chance to meet him face to face and hear his voice but also starts talking with him. However, in the pre-text, Uncle Norouz refuses to wake the old woman and leaves her with his original symbolic traces of nature every year.



Figure No.7 *Uncle Norouz in the City*

Following through this continuum, the divine stance of Uncle Norouz that has lost its super-naturalistic elements in the previous story, by yielding to a mere ironic representation as a culturally symbolic sign of spring, totally disappears in Shokoufeh Taghi's (1985) *The Most Beautiful Song*. Revealing the transformation of a culturally relativist approach to a liberal humanistic narrative structure, this story is merely about one protagonist, a little boy, who is, in comparison with the two other narratives, not only not waiting for the arrival of Uncle Norouz or the spring but is looking for the answer of an inherently different question in nature. This mental quest occurs not in winter but shortly after the arrival of the spring and is evoked by a vague merry voice that awakens the boy one morning, which he follows into nature to discover its source. When every personified figure in nature denies owning that voice, the boy gets more serious and reshapes his question to a universal existentialist version: "Who has the prettiest voice in the world?" His quest, therefore, takes the form of a dialogically intersubjective interaction first with the animal inhabitants of nature (the birds) broadening up to the naturally concrete elements like flowers, the sun, the river and the earth and then to the abstract absent figure of the present season, spring. Effectively, therefore, the boy's initial solipsistic character that is significantly woken up from sleep in the beginning of the story is designed to evolve towards the end by being redirected to a deeper sense of self. As a result, Rapithwin, the god of spring's personified character, or Uncle Norouz's folkloric appearance proves unnecessary to Taghi's thematic aim, since her child-hero's agency is not achieved through his courageous acts in defeating a demon but is described in becoming enabled to hear the voices of nature and the environment. This is also important to the author in order to initiate the enquiry process of an individual's existential value in the whole universe for the child reader rather than sustaining the ultimate appreciation of spring's arrival.

The child-hero's evolving power of mind is highlighted through the strategy of situating him in a quest pattern in which none of the personified characters of nature, knows the true answer to his question and sends him to the other. The protagonist adapts a more confident tone as the story

progresses. Even though initially the childish voice of the first questioned character, a bird, only guesses that the song of the flowers might be the most beautiful voice in the world (“I think they are singing...”); the last character, the earth, advises the boy to ask the same question from spring in a commanding adult manner:

The boy asked with excitement:

‘O, Earth, O, kind Earth, is this you who sings the prettiest songs of the world?’

The earth kissed the boy’s cheek that lay on its surface and replied:

‘No, no, good boy. Go, go and ask from spring.’

By the time the readers infer the abstract voice of Spring from a scenic transformation in the visual landscape, they get positioned to perceive the boy’s fulfilled agency which is apparent in the capacity he gains to broaden his originally narrow perspective. He learns, implicitly through this quest, that focusing on separate elements of nature would limit his understanding of his surroundings. This notion leads him and the readers to contextualise the question within a holistic natural scene as the embodied environmental rebirth is only brought by the change in the season:

Right then, suddenly, all the plants came out of the soil, the trees worn thousands of blossoms and the little birds hatched their eggs and came out. The boy jumped up and shouted: ‘spring, O, kind spring, O pretty spring, is this you, is this you who sings the most beautiful songs of all?’

The protagonist, the little boy who is not given a name to be easily identified with by every child reader, is eventually guided to join this natural rebirth and grow in his understanding of the world as the quest supports him in establishing intersubjective interactions with natural elements.

Even though the thematic significance of the story is expressed through the symbolic voice of Spring, the author’s reluctance in creating an outward humanised character for the spring, as the pervious other narratives have done in the character of Uncle Norouz, attaches a more authoritative power to her narrator’s omniscient point of view. This allows the narrator’s perspective to

serve as a platform for the voice of the author herself. It is, therefore, probable that the high-modality informative tone of Spring's voice is only utilised to echo the author's conclusive adult-tone and to effectively empower the narrative to convey an advice to the implied child readers:

Spring sang softly: 'O, good boy! The birds, flowers, sun, river and earth all have beautiful voices and sing sweetly. The most beautiful song of the world is the song they all sing together. And it is only you who hears this most beautiful song of the world.'

This philosophically pedagogical message along with the universally humanistic emphasis of this narrative, firstly, emphasises the power of individuals in perceiving the concept of rebirth throughout nature independent of any deities or spiritual figures. The reward the protagonist receives by the end of this story is neither a symbolic sign proving the god's acceptance of his ritual performances nor the gifts of Uncle Norouz. The prize is simply an "enormous, indescribable amount of happiness" that the little boy feels after having figured out his existence's dominance in the cycle of universe and the perception of the fact that his own character solves the quest. Secondly, it defies any specific culturally driven reading compared to the previous texts that quite explicitly reveal their Iranian context. This narrative's universally identifiable framework, that has brought Taghi a number of national as well as international Children's Literature awards, gets more apparent by the closing illustration of the picture book and the accompanying comment of the narrator.

In this landscape scene, the boy's abstract feeling of happiness becomes concrete visually as a bundle of "white pigeons start flying from the boy's chest" to the heart of nature and the whole universe. As figure no.8 illustrates, a double-spread page with one being solely allocated to the boy's close-up dominant image and the other to a very abstract scene of nature is set in a distancing wide angle. Nayereh Taghavi in her abstract style of illustration schematically makes implications of faraway lands in the minds of the readers as the rising sun above mountains depicts horizons and implies the existence of invisible lands behind the visible scenery. Therefore, the boy whose 'offer'

gaze faces the readers without making eye contact, attempts to convey and share his happiness with the readers and merge his portrait picture with the following landscape one. This blend is portrayed through a curved vector produced by a range of flying pigeons that are crossing over the gutter (page border) that separates the boy and his viewers from nature. Furthermore, these symbolic birds conventionally play a significant role in spreading messages to faraway lands and are useful for the distribution of the boy's news about the answer he has found to his question that can be generalised as a possible solution to the mental quest of every child. Moreover, the sense of the universe being summed up in a nature scene reinforces a very Romanticist approach underlying the thematic focus of classic children's narratives, which emphasise on the innate and necessary connection between the innocence of children and peace in nature.



در همین موقع شادی بزرگی مانند دانه ای گلوله شادی از سینه پسرک برکشید و
به سوی پرده‌ها، گل‌ها، خورشید، رودخانه، و زمین پرواز کرد.



Figure No. 8, The Little Boy

The Deconstructive Transformation of the Cycle of Death and Rebirth

This paper's literary analysis promises to unfold the degree of the authors' creative deviation from their folkloric pre-text; therefore, semiotic codes that disrupt reader expectations and deconstruct the dual hierarchies of the cycle of death and rebirth will conclude the presented analytical spectrum. Baghchehban's (1971) de-familiarising technique in his *Baba Barfi (Snow Papa)* displays the realistic transformation of an Uncle Norouz figure with his accompanying supernatural powers into a real old grandfather figure whose character is paralleled with the winter-based temporary life of a snowman. This snowman, lovingly built by a group of children in the yard of their school, copies the features of their most beloved wise grandfather who lives in their school to take care of it, knows many things and is able to accomplish many tasks. The winter setting of the story, contrastingly, becomes most appealing and practical for these children compared to the previously analysed protagonists (the Old Woman, Little Pea and the Little Boy) who were only active in longing, awaiting, winning, seeking or questioning spring. Unlike those previous texts, here, the advance of spring is not only not blocked by the demon of winter but is not even initially desired since any rebirth in nature brings an inherent death with itself, a concept which is the mere mental conflict of the children in this story.

Seeing their grandfather as a parallel figure to their built snowman in the schoolyard, the children of this story find out that they not only love winter but also even want to preserve it from its inevitable death, which is contextually a pre-requisite to the arrival of springtime's rebirth. As visible in figure no. 9, the Grandpa figure that implicitly embodies winter is not portrayed as a demonic or appalling character who aims to cruelly prevent Uncle Norouz's approach. He, on the other hand, portrays a sagacious and admired presence that most significantly symbolises death in an appealing way with his all white outfit, hair and beard peacefully replacing the dominance of the mythological-folkloric Uncle Norouz. Allan Bayash's double-spread illustration effectively visualises the moment of the children's fascinated realisation of the fact that in the parallel appearance of these two figures, the snowy existence of the snowman represents the short span of their

grandfather's life: his death cannot be stopped, as snow cannot be kept safe from melting. However, in a very creative pictorial technique, both of these paralleled figures appear as not being depressed from the knowledge of their upcoming death. In fact, their upward and geometrical posture with heads high up strongly facing one another display their thoughtful determination, confidence and even acceptance of their potential future death as if having faith in a deeper truth that is hidden from the surprised eyes of the children who are staring at them.



Figure No.9 Grandpa and Baba Barfi

To disclose the truth behind the grandfather's confident appearance, the author involves the child characters in a task, which draws their attention to the contrast at the heart of the dual category of death and rebirth with an opportunity to reinterpret it:

Grandpa came out, stood in front of Baba Barfi (snow papa) and said:

'Bravo my dear children for not being scared of winter and cold weather. Now that you have built me, think of a task for me to do, so that I won't stand useless. I can do anything you ask me'... suddenly one of the children said:

'Baba Barfi, bake bread, if you can, bake bread!'

This suggestion which Grandpa promises to carry out for children when they come back the day after is discursively attached to a dream that the children see that night in which Baba Barfi is baking bread for people in front of a big furnace with strong beams of fire that gradually melt him away. The next morning, the sun has really melted Baba Barfi. However, neither the advance of Uncle Norouz nor spring cheers the sorrowful children up. It is the internalisation of a newly learnt fact that this effective comparison of Grandpa with Baba Barfi reminds the children that makes them hopeful. The intervening voice of the third person narrator who restates the direct parallel between Baba Barfi's decease and Grandpa's potential upcoming death, clarifies this realisation for readers. By focalising through the children's thoughts, the narrator reflects the author's theme in revealing death not as a loathsome reality since, *"even if Grandpa was really made of snow like Baba Barfi to melt away from fire or sun, the memory of all the things he has done for others would remain in minds and never die"*. Consequently, the children learn that this natural death can have an implicit significance in portraying a new sense of rebirth that is independent of the advance of spring. It is simply Grandpa's memories that would remain "alive forever" as if he is enabled to be reborn any time the children and others remember his deeds in life. With the discursive choice of replacing Uncle Norouz by a Grandfather real-life active character and his double figure in winter, the author effectively inverts the focus of the readers' meta-narrative expectations into a new potential for narrative retellings in this context. In this retelling, an appealing winter setting and character along with an embedded rebirth catharsis deconstructs the formerly horrifying concept and demonic presence of death.

Conclusion

With the rise of the politically turbulent Modernism era in Iran and specifically during and after the period between the Constitutional and Islamic Revolution (1911 - 1979), amongst so many other underlying transformations within literary contexts, the nation also faces the very first signs of an evolutionary trend in its novice field of Children's Literature. This literary rebirth thrives progressively and allows its canon to develop a notable alteration from the already recognised origins of literature produced for children in Iran merely associated with a rich folkloric narrative past prior to the advance of the twentieth century. This study began its analysis by attempting to examine the ways through which the nation's mythological heritages merge with its folktales in the body of Iranian Children's Literature of this era. To narrow down the focus, one archetypal dualistic cycle -death and rebirth- as embedded within the body of a corresponding folktale (pre-text) was selected and the folkloric characters were revealed to have been masking and preserving their mythic counterparts. Secondly, laid on an analytical continuum, three additional retellings of the original pre-text were studied to examine the distance and degree of creative transformation they adapt in the minds of their readers from the folkloric contexts. It was, consequently, noted that this transformation could not only present signs of the mythic/folkloric characters' elimination; but also their connotative values' deconstruction within the presented hierarchies of death and rebirth.

As exemplified in one mythological meta-narrative, this transformative trend can also be proven in a series of modernised, creative and at times critical retellings of folkloric common tales in different genres within this era if the focus is casted upon other ancient Iranian archetypal dualistic cycles. Such a narrative and illustrative evolutionary pattern can enable the researchers of the field to theorise that what is left of the body of Iranian Children's Literature in the mid and late twentieth century, implicitly offers an embedded, layered, decodable and interactive narrative potential representing more than it says on a textual surface. This hidden potential allows the child readers to grow into the text as the literary creation and the child age together. While the fading process of the nation's mythological and

folkloric characters in the creative retellings that contradict their original contexts is not glorified here, this study acknowledges that the discovery of such an evolution in Iranian Children's Literature can inspire more creative writing innovations. It can model inherently progressive trends through encouraging the authors of this field in the current century and possibly a generation of child readers to question or create their own national identities in dialogue with their rich narrative and cultural heritages.

Iranian Children's Literature of the twenty-first century can benefit from this evolutionary trend by simply questioning if the faithful representations of strictly hierarchal meta-narratives on one end or their thematic deconstruction on the other could empower or restrict the creativity of reader-responses and the agency of children's authors in exploring new discursive narrative modes. This realisation can nurture an interest in modes of retellings that recognise the significance of representing the mythological and folkloric heritages for child readers flexibly. It will also demand the retellings to actively refrain from intensifying the one-dimensional polarisation of their inherent hierarchies in favour of any particular side. By illuminating the Iranian Children's Literature of twentieth century's success in tackling the alienated stances of the subverted mythological concepts, a less static and more discursively experimental future is proposed to be envisaged for this branch of literature in Iran. With this illustrated archetypal battle for survival comes an inevitable metamorphosis that if identified and utilised as a benchmark can inform prospective evolutionary creations in Literature targeting contemporary generations of Iranian children and young adults.

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