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The Development of Rewriting Theory in Iranian Children's Literature

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According to the annual reports of Children's Book Council, a large number of classical Persian literature have been rewritten, recreated and published for children and Young adults (cbc.ir). It is crucial to ask how these works are rewritten or recreated and whether they are based on certain views and theories. Hasan Parsaee's views on theory seems sound as he states, "In order to have any kind of theory of development regarding humanities, it is necessary to get to the philosophical roots of a certain subject so that the researcher may think upon why and how that field has historically developed" (38). Therefore, in this paper the philosophical roots of rewriting and recreation of Iranian children's literature are studied in order to reach its historical necessity as well as a definition. Considering the development of childhood institution from the 1906 Constitution onward, Mohammadi and Ghaeeni in volume 6 of their book, *The History of Children's Literature in Iran*, state that rewriting classical texts for children that was the focus of attention in the Constitution era gained new dimensions between the years 1921-1971 in the new society. In such societies, new culture and its byproducts are as important as understanding past literature and civilizations (428). Thus it can be said that the why and how of rewriting and recreation for children is rooted in the beliefs of those philosophers who believe life, whether in nature or societies, happens in a movement toward a renewal.

From historical point of view, rewriting and recreation for children happens at the right time. During the fifties, there was a trend in unsuitable translations for children which resulted in the reaction of intellectuals and

patriots. An example is stated in Mehdi Azar Yazdi's introduction to rewriting of *Kalila va Demna* from the collection entitled, *Good Stories for Good Children*. He writes, "...legends and ancient stories translated from other languages for children do not usually have anything new and we have better sources in eastern texts and classical books..." (11). Yarshater also writes, "It is a pity for our youth and students to be unaware of ancient stories born and raised in our country" (8).

With this warning, societies, institutes, publishers and independent scholars entered the domain of rewriting; works by Mehdi Azar Yazdi, Zahra Khanlari, Ehsan Yarshater, and Farideh Farjam were published. Hence, how and why of rewriting and recreation were shaped in these works though not edited and written down.

Children's Book Council of Iran (CBC) was established in 1962 and the next year the National Literature Seminar was convened discussing "How to use national Iranian literature in order to produce books for children and young adults and which texts are useful" (CBC Monthly 8). After this seminar, the first steps towards writing down a theory of rewriting and recreation were taken by Mohammad J'afar Mahjoub giving a lecture in Daneshsarye 'Ali, taking part in an interview and publication of the book, *Selecting and Adapting Persian Literary Texts for Writing Children's Books*.

The Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults (Kanoon) that was established in 1965 also focusses on publication of folktales, legends and mythology of Iran in its charter and publication policies and uses the specific word, "recreation" (Kanoon Report 9-8). In his report of his Munich National Library grant, Mahmood Moshref Azad Tehrani states that he has had a chance to talk to a French researcher about recreation and rewriting classical texts (CBC Report, 4). In 1975 the International Assembly of Children's Literature in Kanoon and the article by Mahmood Moshref Azad Tehrani entitled "Recreation in Iranian Children's Literature" helped writing down the theory. He states, "Recreation means a new creation. The poet or the writer is free to create a new story with a new theme keeping the elements, general outline and structure.... Simurgh has been created in a different way in the works of Avicenna, Ferdowsi, Naser Khosrow, 'Attar, Ghazali, Rumi and others" (*Kanoon Quarterly*, 63).

After 1975 the number of adaptation for children from classical works increases, yet the number of good works decreases. CBC notices the problem

and Tooran Mirhadi in her talk in Isfahan gives a warning, "If texts are not rewritten with expertise and attention quickly, there is the danger that no vital connection is made between the invaluable ancient culture and the contemporary culture; hence our youth will lose their real identity" (CBC Report, 17).

From 1978 the number of books written by Iranian writers increases and rewriting and recreating takes precedence over translated books but the problem of quality still persists. In 1985 CBC asks 27 professors of literature and rewriting authors (such as Nader Ebrahimi, Mehdi Azar Yazdi, and Mahmood Moshref Azad Tehrani) for a seminar on rewriting; the big question is about the theory of recreating and rewriting. In the same year, in order to follow up the seminar, a Persian Literature Working Group is established whose members consist of Dr. Hasan Anvari, Dr. Raoof, Ja'far Paivar, Tooran Mirhadi, Bahrololumi, Shokoofe Shahidi, and Fatemeh Minookadeh. The activities of this group are aimed at defining different types of presenting classical literature such as simplifying, recreation, summarizing, verse into prose and prose into verse as well as defining the aim and style of the writer and production of the books. However, this group is dispersed.

In 1991, Ja'far Paivar published a small book entitled, *Rewriting and Recreating in Children's Literature*. He discusses such incorrect titles such as "rewriting, adaptation and editing" and "translation and rewriting" that confuse critics and reviewers. He tries to define rewriting and recreating distinguishing them from concepts such as adaptation, editing, simplification, and summary. He asks the experts to find a solution for the problem. This book can be criticized from the point of view of methodology; the terms used are not comprehensive enough but it is said to be the first book to approach this topic.

In 1992, Sedigheh Hashmeminasab's thesis entitled, "Children and the Canon of Persian Literature" was published by Soroush Publishers. Sorraya Ghezel Ayagh, a children's literature writer and translator, was the supervisor. This book classifies different types of presenting classical literature to children and defines the aims of rewriting, recreating and simplifying. The book tries to give a definition of the theory and approach towards rewriting and recreating following an academic approach. However, concerning terms, its approach seems conservative. The term rewriting is considered a general

term with subheadings of rewriting, simple writing and recreating. There is no distinction between simple writing and summarizing. The definition of recreating should not be under rewriting since the writer does not accept a change of the theme when she describes rewriting generally; while in discussing recreation she states vaguely that, it is a kind of rewriting of ancient texts with no change in the original framework but with the theme presented in a novel way.

Many papers are published on the subject of rewriting in the seventies (1990s) in children's literature and the mainstream journals. Pooyesh, the journal of Kanoon (special issue on religion, vol. 6, summer 1998) conducts interviews in order to draw a framework for rewriting religious texts. Ayatollah Javadi Amoli is the first person interviewed in order to reach a definition of a "religious story" followed by interviews with writers and samples and papers to define "religious-historical stories", "religious biographies" and "religious story". Religious pictures and drawings are also considered for rewriting of religious stories. It can be said that the approach to rewriting from the 50s-60s to the early 21st is being faithful in presenting literary and cultural heritage; the aim is only to simplify the language; changing the structure and topic is not common.

In 2001, Ja'far Paivar publishes another book entitled, *Sage Critiqued, Methods of Rewriting, Recreating and Revision*. He defines different types of rewriting such as simple rewriting, creative rewriting, rewriting and recreating, specific rewriting, rewriting of social events and rewriting of a single topic. He has brought samples for each and analyzed them. He emphasizes that all these types are recreating just as Ferdowsi created Shahnameh through rewriting myth and history creatively. He points out that being faithful to the text is not the only way to approach classical texts; the writer is free to be creative. If s/he keeps the subject of a classic text giving it a new structure, it is creative rewriting but if s/he is inspired by the text changing the topic, then s/he is recreating. He gave the label of revision to changing and editing in translation, which we frequently see in the eighties in translations of children's literature. Another point in his work is applying his views to literature across the ages.

Attention to recreating and rewriting continues from 2001 to 2011. *Roshanan*, a children's literature journal, publishes a special issue on the topic with the editorial "An Inquiry in Recreating Reality" emphasizing the

importance of recreation in general and philosophically. Mohammad Reza Yousofi also publishes his book *Ancient Literature, New Literature, Collecting, Simple Writing, Rewriting, Emending, and Recreation* in 2008. He agrees with Mostafa Rahmanodoost, Reza Rahgozar and other experts on the what and why of rewriting but adds emending to the discussion stating, "One who emends does not want to rewrite the original text but to approach some elements of the text freely while being influenced by the text. With regards to elements such as subject, theme, plot, setting, characterization, emotional change in one or more elements, the writer creates his own work" (*Ancient Literature, New Literature*, 108). The above definition is not very distinct from his definition of recreating that he defines, "in recreating, the writer breaks down the general structure of a text and gives his own say" (168). Thus, we do not reach any lucid definition of emendation though Yousofi does his best by bringing examples.

In 2013, two books are published in the domain of ancient literature for children and young adults. One is *An Introduction to Rewriting and Recreation* by Asadollah Shokraneh that is a restating of what has been told before; the other book is *Adaptation Aspects in Children's Literature and Young Adults* by Maryam Jalali. The writer tries to apply an academic approach and has used sources from other languages with a lucid language, but as she mentions herself, the most prominent aspect of the book is using the term adaptation rather than rewriting and recreating.

My aim in writing this piece was to present the historical context in the development of terms such as rewriting and recreating for children's literature and young adults. These terms are now established in children's literature while "adaptation" has also its own historical context even if it seems to overlap semantically with rewriting and recreating. In the domain of children's literature rewriting has not been limited to making classical works suitable for children as in creative rewriting and recreation we see works, which have enriched the domain of literature. Works such as *Patesh Khoargar* by Arman Arian cannot be considered a rewriting of classical religious texts. In addition, novels by Marjan Fooladvand, Atoosa Salehi and many others do not fit the term adaptation. It is easy to classify texts while every finely rewritten or recreated text can belong to special genre so classification is not helpful all the time. On the other hand, discussing and presenting ideas and views will enhance this domain.

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