

**A Study of the Factors and Signs of Unreliable Narrator
in the Adolescent Novel *When Mozhy Went Missing* and
Its Influence on the Dominant Epistemological Element**

Mahdieh Rahiminejad (Corresponding Author)

PhD student in Persian language and literature,
Payame Noor University.tehran.iran

Ayub Moradi

Associate Professor of Persian Language and Literature,
Payame Noor University.tehran,iran

Mustafa Gorji

Professor of Persian Language and Literature,
Payame Noor University.tehran.iran

Ali (Pedram) Mirzaei

Associate Professor of Persian Language and Literature,
Payame Noor University.tehran.iran

Introduction

When Mozhy Went Missing is a novel by Hamid Reza Shah-Abadi (b. 1988, Tehran) published in 2012 for the age group E (15 and older). The novel is original both in its form and in realities it depicts. It has

successfully attracted a vast readership among adolescents thanks to its fluent prose and acceptable content.

One of the ways by which a writer can induce the ideology and the message of the text in the minds of the readers is involving them in the making of the text. Using unreliable narrator is a technique which makes the audience involved in the text and is effective in better inducing the message of the text in the readers while giving them more pleasure.

In *When Mozhy Went Missing*, the adolescent reader cannot accept the fact that the story is being narrated by different characters; so, he/she feels lost in the story. However, in the middle of the novel, the reader finds out that there is only one narrator in the story: Masoud, the 17-year-old boy and a character inside the story who puts himself in place of other characters and narrates the story from their points of view and with their languages. In consequence, the reader does not skim over the text but compares and contrasts all narratives with each other.

Methodology, Review of Literature and Purpose

In this research, the focus is on the narrator of the novel to assess his reliability by the use of a descriptive-analytical method. By discussing the topic of unreliability of the narrator and the factors and signs of this unreliability while focusing on the evidence in the story, the researchers try to find out how the writer uses this narrative technique to call attention to the epistemological element in the story, as well as to practice defamiliarization and involve the readers in the narrative and enhance their enjoyment.

At the same time, the researchers decode the complexities created by the unreliable narrator in the story and can be helpful to the adolescent audience in better understanding the text.

Only one research has been conducted on *When Mozhy Went Missing* by the title “Ideology and Narrative Discourse in the Adolescent Novel *When Mozhy Went Missing*” by Neda Moradpour and Marjan Kamyab (1394) presented in the International Conference for the Promotion of Persian Language and Literature. Having undertaken the task of explaining the hidden ideology of the work based on Stevens’ theory, the researchers come to the conclusion that this hidden ideology is the confirmation of gender roles and the failure of adolescents’ resistance in front of adults in a way as to represent the position of power.

Discussion

The story of *When Mozhy Went Missing* starts with a holiday trip of the families of two sisters from Tehran to the north of Iran. The older sister’s family members are Narges and Naser and their children, Masoud and Mozhgan (Mozhy) who are hosting the younger sister’s family, Fariba and Saman and their daughter, Mozhdeh (Mozhy), in their newly-built villa. An argument happens between Mozhy, Aunt Narges’s daughter, and her father in the villa. The next day, first she and then aunt Fariba’s Mozhy go missing.

In each chapter, Masoud, the main narrator of the novel, puts himself in place of one of the characters and narrates the story of Mozhy’s going missing from their points of view. As a result, the story is apparently narrated by six narrators (Naser, Narges, Masoud, Fariba,

Saman, Fariba's Mozhy, respectively), but in actuality, the narrator is only one person, Masoud. The information provided by the narrator in one chapter is questioned and negated by the narrator of the next chapter; and the main narrator is even forced to confess that he has lied to the audience about his identity. Consequently, the narrator loses his credibility in the eyes of the reader and turns into an unreliable narrator. Being a child, aligning with the implied author, being personally involved in the story and being distant from other characters (distance in attitude) are some of the characteristics of the narrator which lead the narrative toward unreliability. This is represented by such features as insufficient reports, discrepancies between fictional realities and the narrator's point of view, projecting of the problems, the narrator's own confession to lying, his negation of his own previous words, etc.

In this novel, the narrator makes it his objective to achieve knowledge and find the truth about the issue of Mozhy's going missing. He uses many techniques such as creating doubt and uncertainty, paradox, asking questions and giving incomplete information, in order to challenge the readers' understanding and lead them toward a deeper search for knowledge and truth. This gives rise to the epistemological feature which is a basic factor in modernist novels and a distinguishing factor between modernist and postmodernist novel. McHale argues that the most fundamental feature in modernism is its epistemological content, and other features are gathered around it in order to highlight it. Accordingly, one can consider *When Mozhy Went Missing* a modernist novel due to the dominance of the epistemological feature in it.

Conclusion

In *When Mozhy Went Missing*, the writer consciously and willingly uses the technique of unreliable narrator so that he can challenge the reader's concern with understanding and knowledge and effectively introduce the dominant epistemological feature which is one of the most important characteristics of modernist novels.

Interestingly, in contrast with the usual practice of unreliable narrators who try their best to hide the signs of their unreliability, the unreliable narrator of this novel freely confesses that he is lying in order to show the other characters' regret about the events. Therefore, one can argue that the narrator does not intend to beguile the readers or falsify the events; he plans to challenge the readers' understanding and epistemological concerns and, eventually, add to their enjoyment by giving them insufficient reports, creating paradoxes in the text and using other techniques of unreliable narratives.

Keywords: Hamid Reza Shah-Abadi, *When Mozhy Went Missing*, unreliable narrator, epistemology, adolescent audience

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