

**Recognizing the Pattern of Understanding and the  
Hermeneutical Orientation of Mehdi Azaryazdi**

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**Introduction**

Mehdi Azaryazdi (1922-2009) is the father of Iranian children and adolescent literature. *Good Stories for Good Children* is one of his valuable works. He rewrote ancient Persian stories for children and adolescents. "Mehdi Azaryazdi's rewriting of the stories he extracted from ancient texts has been very instructive and effective for our new generations. Few people addressed this issue, and he was one of the first to pay attention to the rewriting of ancient texts for children (Islami Nadoshen, 2010).

To study children's and adolescents' literature, text criticism alone is not enough and it is better to analyze the author's attitude as well as his/her understanding, and even the hyper-textual and interpretive factors of the text. Our mental reaction to phenomena is called

“understanding”. From the perspective of traditional hermeneutics, understanding is a kind of psychological reconstruction.

The various readings of hermeneutics can be divided into two general periods, the traditional pre-Heidegger period and the philosophical period beginning with Heidegger (Razavi & Salah, 2011: 88). The rewriter’s understanding of the text and his/her perception of the audience can be discovered and evaluated through a precise test of the rewritten text, and the changes that the rewriter has created within it. By examining the changes that Azaryazdi has made in ancient stories, we can explain his hermeneutical approach and pattern.

### **Methodology, Review of Literature and Purpose**

This study has been carried out in the descriptive- analytical and content analysis methods.

The purpose of this study is to identify the pattern of Azaryazdi’s understanding. By examining and analyzing his rewriting of ancient texts, the volume and types of changes that Azaryazdi has made in rewriting these stories are determined. It is also revealed how Azaryazdi understands ancient texts and transmits them to a young audience. Finally, we reach Azaryazdi’s hermeneutic approach which is his understanding pattern in other words.

Various researches have examined various aspects of Azaryazdi’s works, such as “Reviewing the language element and its characteristics in the Azaryazdi’s poems for children and adolescents” (Jalali Pandari & Dehnovi, 2013) which studies the poems of the book *Hasht Behesht of Azaryazdi*; and “Transformation of the theme of mystical stories in Azaryazdi’s rewritings” (Arefi & Shabanzadeh, 2014), which examines

the extent and types of changes in the mystical themes of *Good Stories*. Also, several dissertations have been written about his works, such as “A structural comparison of Azaryazdi's rewritten stories with his creative stories” (Falah yasavi, 2012). In the field of analysis and interpretation of children's literature, we can mention the work of Salajeghe (2013). However, there is no research conducted about the hermeneutical perspective of Azaryazdi and his understanding of the author and the audience in children's literature.

### **Discussion**

By analyzing the content of 121 stories in 6 volumes of the collection *Good Stories for Good Children* and matching each story with its source, seven types of modifications are extracted in Azaryazdi's rewritings: 1) In all stories, the writing style is changed and in 35 stories there is no other change rather than the change in the style; 2) Adding a moral and social concept is more important than anything else for Azaryazdi; this is observable in 44 stories; 3) In 41 stories, he has reduced or expanded the subject to help the mental preparation of the audience and the correct understanding of the story; 4) Stylization of the story and elimination of violence is applied within 10 stories; 5) In 11 stories, he has turned mystical and Sufi concepts into moral and social ones; 6) In 8 stories, he has selected some new names and/or nouns to address the children's interests; 7) Unnecessary changes were observed in 5 stories.

As observed in the study of the stories, the ancient text is filtered through Azaryazdi's understanding and a new text is born. According to Azaryazdi, some ancient texts are not suitable for children; some

others are appropriate but not within the child's comprehension range, hence, they should be changed. In his view, the meaning of an ancient text is fixed and unique. This pattern of understanding is matched with the traditional hermeneutics of Schleiermacher.

The meaning of a word and its function is also unique and fixed in Azaryazdi's mind. To him, simplifying a text and clarifying it from any ambiguity makes it quickly and easily understandable by its young audiences. He is looking for a constant understanding so he can convey his moral orders and social ideas to his audiences more quickly. He commits himself to incorporate moral messages within his writings in the best possible way, and firmly aims to convey these moral messages to his audiences.

Azaryazdi expects the audience to have the same pattern that he has in dealing with ancient texts; therefore, he does not allow children to interpret his stories in different ways and figure out different meanings. The audience should get only one meaning from his text.

### **Conclusion**

In this study, in order to identify the pattern of understanding or hermeneutical tendency of Azaryazdi, after examining and analyzing the content of rewritten stories from ancient Persian works in his collection *Good Stories for Good Children*, the changes that he applied within the rewritten stories were classified into seven categories.

Considering the fact that Azaryazdi stands as the first mediator between ancient stories and the children of our era, three levels of his work were investigated and analyzed: a) his understanding of the ancient texts, b) his understanding of his duty and mission as a writer, and finally c) his understanding of the audience. Azaryazdi believes that the meaning of

a text is entirely understandable. This is one criteria to recognize his hermeneutical approach. Then he decisively separates good and bad throughout the rewritten stories and tries to convey fixed meanings and moral values to his audience hoping for a consistent and unified understanding. This is mentioned as another criterion of his hermeneutical approach. His stories do not have various interpretations and are written only for "good children". Considering Azaryazdi's absolutism and his emphasis on correct understanding and united perception, expressed in the three stages of understanding, one can conclude that his pattern of understanding is consistently matched with the traditional hermeneutic pattern and specifically with Schleiermacher's.

**Keywords:** Azaryazdi, Rewriting, Schleiermacher, Hermeneutics

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