



## Extended Abstract

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# **The Role of Character Naming in Contemporary Iranian Children's Fantasy Literature**

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## **Introduction**

Fantasy literature holds a long-standing connection with myth, folklore, and the literary traditions. Characters such as fairies and giants, commonly rooted in ancient narratives, require names that evoke a sense of antiquity or deviance from modern linguistic norms to sustain the atmosphere of fantasy. In contemporary children's literature, the creation of believable and enchanting fantasy worlds depends in part on the creative naming of characters, creatures, and places.

This paper explores the significance of naming conventions in contemporary Iranian children's fantasy literature. It highlights how the use of archaic, imaginative, and unconventional names can enhance the immersive quality of fantasy worlds, while generic or modern names may weaken the intended narrative atmosphere. Drawing on selected national award-winning works, the study employs a genetic-structuralist approach to analyze the role of intertextuality, cultural heritage, and linguistic creativity in fantasy character naming. The findings suggest that successful fantasy stories strike a balance between innovation and

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tradition, using meaningful and imaginative names that resonate with young audiences while honoring the genre's deep roots in classical literature.

### Review of Literature and Methodology

This study employs a qualitative content analysis of nationally recognized fantasy novels for children, including Shokuh Qasem-nia's *Little Heli in The Land of Giants*, Jamshid Khanian's *Childhood of the Earth*, and Ahmad Akbarpour's *Ghoulmaz*. Through the lens of genetic criticism, the research examines how naming conventions reflect historical influences, cultural references, and structural dynamics of fantasy narratives. Sources were collected from public and digital libraries, and data were analyzed using note-taking and descriptive-analytical methods.

In 1401, Sadeghi et al., in an article titled "The Use of Mythological Elements in Children's Fantasy Stories of the 2000s," discussed the features of fantasy in Iranian mythology and criticized the face of a mythological figure based on these features. This research was published in the *Journal of Children's Literature Studies*, Issue 1, Spring and Summer (pp. 111-132). Research on the criteria for selecting the morality of fantasy characters in the present research has been of interest to the authors, and research on the criteria for selecting proper and unusual fantasy names is the focus of the present research. Another study titled "Criticism and Study of Proper Names in Persian in Fantasy Literature," was also published by Shanki et al. in the *Journal of Literary Criticism*, Issue 15, Fall 1401, pp. 193-219.

### Discussion

Many modern fantasy writers rely on common or contemporary names for their characters, which often undermines the fantastical elements of the narrative from the outset. To maintain the magical tone and depth of the fantasy genre, the use of old, invented, or non-standard names is crucial. Such naming practices align the story with the genre's heritage and prevent disconnection from the mystical worlds often inspired by classical works.

Contemporary fantasy, though innovative and forward-looking, remains closely linked to traditional stories and motifs. This connection naturally places fantasy literature within the realm of postmodernism, which embraces both modernity and reimagination of the past. Authors must therefore balance these elements carefully: naming characters with overused or real-world names can lessen emotional engagement, reduce narrative suspense, and make the story feel derivative. For instance, choosing the name "Rostam" for a new character immediately evokes the epic figure from Ferdowsi's *Shahnameh*, regardless of the originality of the plot. This type of intertextual reference limits narrative possibilities, causing the story to follow a familiar and predictable path. It creates a mental overlap in the reader's mind, making it harder for the new

narrative to establish its unique identity. Moreover, stories filled with familiar or reused names may be mistaken for adaptations, even when they are original.

Fantasy authors often borrow from folk traditions and cultural archetypes. This reliance on heritage is not a limitation but rather a source of depth and richness. However, the success of a fantasy novel lies in its ability to create a new universe within this traditional framework –one that feels fresh and unique through inventive language and naming.

## Conclusion

Naming plays a pivotal role in shaping the fantasy genre. While invented names may seem nonsensical or overly creative at first glance, they often follow underlying rules of coherence, role-assignment, and genre logic. The use of archaic or innovative names helps bridge the gap between ancient and contemporary fantasy, enriching the narrative and engaging the reader more deeply. Ultimately, the success of an original fantasy work depends not only on its plot but also on the linguistic imagination behind its characters' names.

**Keywords:** Fantasy names, children's novels, formative criticism, non-normativity

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