

Techniques of Hybridity in Picture Books: A Case Study of *The Tale of War and Peace*

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Introduction

Hybrid and its derivative hybridity, originally related to the realm of biology, refer to an offspring which is the result of crossbreeding. Nowadays, this term is used to refer to any kind of phenomenon that is a mixture of two or more constituents.

The usage of the term in humanities is to a great extent influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin's view of language development. Bakhtin makes a distinction between 'organic' hybridity, as a major characteristic of the evolution of every language, and 'intentional' hybridity. He goes on to say that intentional semantic hybrids are inescapably internally dialogic and not mixed (Bakhtin, 1981: 360).

In children's literature, picture books are inevitably dialogic and essentially hybrid since they combine two modes of communication or representation (i.e. words and pictures). Helma van Lierop-Debrauwer (2018) has identified six forms of hybridity in picture books. Her categories

can be applied to picture books to understand in what ways they maintain and develop their hybridity. Her classification provides the theoretical and analytical basis of this study.

Despite many research papers on Iranian picture books, there has been no prior study of the concept of hybridity and its forms so far. Thus this paper aims to probe the forms and techniques of hybridity in *The Tale of War and Peace* (2012) by Morteza Khosrownejad and illustrated by Mohammad Ali Bani-Asadi.

Methodology and Review of Literature

This case study is conducted through a close reading of the sample using qualitative deductive and reflective content analysis of both text and pictures as well as their interplay and transmediation. It is deductive in part since the analysis is based on pre-identified criteria, and it is reflective since I have set out to understand and uncover the implications, connotations, and allusions of pictures, words, and their synergy.

The six forms of hybridity outlined by van Lierop-Debrauwer are as follows: *Semiotic hybridity*, the most evident one, refers to the fact that pictures and words convey their meanings separately and together in a never-ending chain of reading. *Genre hybridity* reminds the fact that picture books have always combined, renewed and recycled familiar children's book genres as well as creating new ones. *Material and medial hybridity* refer to provisions through which some features of picture books and other media are incorporated or fused together. *Artistic hybridity* refers

to illustrators using, mimicking, and alluding to different and/or distinct styles or artworks intentionally. The *hybridity of address* in one sense refers to the rise in themes that are of interest to both adult and child readers; and in another sense, refers to some researchers' doubts about children being capable of decoding the allusions in the books, while others focus on the opportunities these books provide for the enhancement of the visual literacy of children. Finally, by *cultural hybridity*, she generally refers to the multicultural aspect of picture books, which has political implications regarding power balance and maintaining the voice of minorities.

Discussion

The book is about two roosters illustrated by two Iranian well-known illustrators (Ali Khodaie and Rashin Kheirieh, who are characters of story as well) that, too proud of themselves and their beauty, escape their illustrators' studios and when they come across each other, they engage in a fight so as to prove their superiority. The illustrators find them and convince them that if they want to prove themselves they need to have other qualities than beauty and it is better to participate in a roosters' tournament where they can compete peacefully. The story ends with the author's voice asking the child reader to have their say on the most beautiful rooster.

Throughout the book, there are several examples of semiotic, artistic and genre hybridity while medial and material hybridity is limited just to the use of different illustration techniques. The book owes its artistic hybridity to Bani-Asadi where he uses a drip technique work art for his

illustration of the page where roosters fight, which reminds one of Jackson Pollack's Convergence. His illustration of a rooster that reminds the viewer of Qajar portraits in the 19th century is another example. Genre hybridity in the book is maintained by incorporating poems into the process of narrating the events. Some verses are borrowed from other popular children's books intentionally which makes the book more intertextual. Semiotic, artistic and genre hybridity together make hybridity of address in the book more fluid since some textual and pictorial allusions of the book are familiar for the children and some for adults. This quality of the book can help ignite more talks between adult and young readers.

Regarding material and medial hybridity, the book had the potential to be more hybrid; for example, in some pages, the illustrations could engage readers/viewers in some sort of games and puzzles, especially where the roosters set out to find poets and songwriters when they decide to take part in the tournament.

Conclusion

Five out of six types of hybridity introduced by van Lierop-Debrauwer can be traced in the book; however, semiotic and artistic hybridity are more noticeable and their presence in the book is more significant. Different forms of hybridity of the book are sometimes intertwined which make the book even richer regarding this feature of picture books. Enriched by these techniques and forms of hybridity, the book turns even more dialogic when it comes to be read by both children and parents.

Aesthetic, artistic and literary qualities of picture books have made them invaluable educational material for the development and enhancement of children's visual literacy, multimodal literacy, aesthetic literacy, reading skills and social aptitudes. The more hybrid picture books are, the more they can be enjoyed by children and can invite them into a complex and absorbing world of semiotic, cultural, social and artistic dialogue between the constituents of the book.

Keywords: hybridity, picture books, children's literature, van Lierop-Debrauwer, Morteza Khosrownejad, Mohammad Ali Bani-Asadi

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