

**Young Adults' Agency: A Study of Mahdi Rajabi's *The Bean Man's Report***

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**Introduction**

One of the most important issues in theories about young adult fiction is the issue of agency of young adults in these stories, because it is agency that determines subjectivity in this literary type. Accordingly, the shaping of subjectivity in young adult fiction is considered as its main issue and its distinguishing feature from other types of stories.

In the studies conducted on Iranian young adult novels, this issue is either ignored or left without a precise definition. The study of the hero's agency in young adult fiction helps us understand whether young adults are imagined with or without agency in general. This is of course a very wide-ranging topic which cannot be confined to one article. The goal of the researcher is to introduce an integrated approach to the issue of the agency of young adults in the theory of young adult literature and then to analyze this issue in one exemplary story.

**Methodology, Literature Review and Purpose**

The researcher will use content analysis with the technique of parallel methods for the first time in Iran. This is an in-depth and wide-ranging analysis which will cover all the different aspects of the issue. The theoretical basis of the article is based on this definition of agency: a

position from which resistance against ideology occurs. This concept is traditionally in contrast with the concept of structure which delimits and determines the subject's agency in the interaction process and the form of social relations.

In the field of young adult literature, Robyn McCollum and Roberta Seelinger Trites have shown a relationship between the issue of agency with the issue of subjectivity. Young adult fiction is a showcase of growth, and growth means the formation of subjectivity in the young adult. The formation of subjectivity itself necessitates an understanding of social institutes and power relations and also one's own place in these relations and power stratifications (dual understanding of structure and power).

In fact, young adult fiction shows the growth of the character in the path of recognizing the relations and structures of power in the society and realizing their own place in these structures. The type and the level of agency for young adults can be described in different ways. In this study, two perspectives are combined to provide a theoretical basis for the assessment of this agency: The first perspective is Roberta Seelinger Trites' perspective which views young adult fiction as a site of competition between romantic and postmodern attitudes. The first attitude emphasizes the subject's independence, self-determination and individuality with rejection of society; but the second attitude emphasizes the importance of social institutions in constructing subjectivity and defines growth as the increase of a person's understanding of the determining power of these institutions.

The second perspective is Karen Coats' which views young adult literature as the site of appearance of two aspects of young adults'

identity: the monstrous identity and the generative identity. Young adults are initially viewed as dangerous for the society because they are thought to have a potentiality and a tendency toward destroying social values; however, one should not forget that on the other side, young adults are on the threshold of an ethical and complex understanding of the world which shapes their ethical agency and creates a generative identity for them which is committed to taking care of other human beings and making connections with others. In Coats' view, if the society is ready to accept young adults, it helps them to develop this generative identity and to shape their ethical agency based on it.

### **Discussion**

The analysis of stories with the combination of these two views will show us, first, whether the agency of young adults in the stories under study is closer to the romantic approach (individualistic) or the postmodern approach (socialistic); and second, in this type of agency, whether the monstrous aspect or the generative aspect is more prevalent.

The story which will be analyzed in this study is a short story by Mahdi Rajabi entitled "The Bean Man's Report" in which it is easier to classify power structures. Also, prior to a methodical analysis, the hero of the story –who is also its narrator- seems to be relatively passive with weak agency.

A theoretical concept is needed for any type of analysis. In the analysis with the technique of parallel methods, we use both types of inductive (self-made) and deductive (theory-based) categories. In this analysis, we have extracted the representation of main issues (agency,

power structures and subjectivity) with the help of inductive reasoning. Accordingly, we have classified the power structures in three categories: characters and institutions, things and lifeless nature (related to value-ideology) and concepts revealing value-ideology.

The characters and institutions are formed in four directions, each of which related to things and concepts of specific value-ideology from three categories above. The narrator of the story is surrounded by these four directions and the three main categories which construct the power relations. The researcher has tried to analyze the relationship of the narrator with each of these items.

### **Conclusion**

All the instances of the narrator's interaction with these structures (pinpointing their contextual situations) were collected. Put together, these interactions show that in the beginning of the story, the hero is relatively passive; however, as the story goes on and the hero gets conscious of the other parts of the power structure, he moves toward taking a specific stance (which tends toward the father) which is not explicit first, but becomes more and more obvious. The most obvious characteristic of this stance is the rejection of the society and ignoring the structures. These characteristics show that the young adult's agency tends toward the romantic approach; while the significance of power institutions and death (a biological and inevitable fact which limits agency) is also emphasized by the fact that the story open-ended and puts forward the possibilities of death or insanity.

On the other hand, the narrator's emphasis on "being together" (in the form of a small family) relates this romantic agency to generative

identity. It should be noted that the open ending of the story relates it to the destructive (monstrous) identity, too. On the whole, we can identify the type of agency for the hero of this story as a romantic and generative– monstrous agency.

**Keywords:** young adult fiction, postmodern subject, romantic subject, agency, The Bean Man's Report, Mahdi Rajabi

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