



Extended Abstract

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Ahmad's Phallocentric Adventure: A Psychoanalytical Reading of the Picturebook, *The Story of Ahmad and the Clock*

Amin Izadpanah* 

Introduction

Children's literature criticism arises from the dynamic interplay between theoretical frameworks and the content of children's literary works. This reciprocal relationship implies that theories influence the text, and the text, in turn, informs the theories. Classical psychoanalysis, pioneered by Freud, has been intertwined with literary works from its inception. Freud, credited as the founder of psychoanalysis, laid the groundwork for psychoanalytic literary criticism through his exploration of psychological aspects in literary texts (Freud, 1961: 83). When applying psychoanalytic criticism to children's literature, it implicitly acknowledges a perpetual engagement with childhood. Jacqueline Rose (1992) aptly describes childhood as a distinct developmental phase concluding with conscious and logical self-awareness in adulthood.

In this article, the focal point is the interplay between theory and text, with classical psychoanalytic theory, particularly Freud's psychosexual development terminology, serving as the theoretical framework for interpreting the selected children's literary work, *The Story of Ahmad and the Clock*, authored by Fereshteh Ta'erpour and illustrated by Mehrnoush Masoumian. Through a psychoanalytic lens, I aim to illustrate how seemingly straightforward children's literature can harbor

* Assistant Prof in Philosophy of education of Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran.
aizadpanah@shirazu.ac.ir.

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complexity and surprises in its underlying layers. Furthermore, I intend to highlight how specific examples of children's literature reflect distinct gender constructs. While the text analysis is theoretically rooted in Freud's psychosexual development theory, it is crucial to recognize, as Hollands (1968) suggests, that we all bring a selective reading to literature. Unconsciously projecting our fantasies onto the text, we reshape it based on our identities and characteristics, a phenomenon applicable to psychoanalytic literary criticism as well (Hollands, 1968: 12).

Literature Review

Bettelheim (1976) pioneered the exploration of renowned fairy tales through Freudian psychoanalytic concepts such as the Oedipus complex and oral fixation. Similarly, Rollin (2008) applied Freudian psychoanalysis to analyze Maurice Sendak's trilogy, incorporating concepts like the Uncanny, Lacan's real and imaginary, and Kristeva's Abject. West (2008) interpreted Carlo Collodi's "Pinocchio" using Freud's pleasure and reality principles, emphasizing the child's transition from the pleasure principle to the reality principle. Gooding (2008) proposed that Neil Gaiman's "Coraline" may serve as a preparation for adulthood, aligning with Bettelheim's views on the transformative potential of fairy tales. Rudd (2008) examined "Coraline" through Freud's concept of the Uncanny, providing insights into the story's unique blend of attraction, horror, and unease. Buckley (2015) critiqued previous psychoanalytic analyses, positioning "Coraline" as a platform for engaging with poststructuralist psychoanalysis. Lastly, McGillis (1998) utilized Freudian and Lacanian psychoanalysis to explore diverse readings of a four-line children's poem and the potential for varied enjoyment in literary texts.

Discussion

The book narrates the tale of a young boy, Ahmad, who becomes restless as he anxiously awaits the clock on the wall to move faster. Time seems to linger, hindering Ahmad's excitement about going mountain climbing with his father at six o'clock. However, Ahmad's impatience takes a mischievous turn. In an attempt to hasten the time, he forcefully manipulates the small hand of the clock, causing it to break. As a consequence, Ahmad faces punishment, and his father decides to cancel their planned adventure.

The narrative delves into the oedipal complex experienced by a boy, marking the moment for him to navigate and ultimately resolve the tensions inherent in this psychosexual stage. Symbolically depicted, the book captures the boy's quest, his ambitious yet futile bid to surpass his father, played out against the backdrop of a clock. However, this conflict is preordained, compelling the boy to acknowledge his father's authority. This acknowledgment becomes a requisite for the boy to secure his voice and position in the social hierarchy, aligning with the established law of paternal authority. Like other boys, the protagonist is not patient in achieving his desire and prolongs the expectation despite [apparent] mistakes. In the story of Ahmad and the Clock, this inclination is symbolically represented through the same desire and competition as the father. The competition between Ahmad and his father,

symbolized by the two clock hands, one representing the son and the other the father, is reflected on the clock page. Analyzing the text psychoanalytically, the clock hands can be seen as phallic imagery, representing the father's role in the phallic stage, as Freud emphasized, playing a crucial role in facilitating the successful transition through the Oedipal stage. The father's presence and involvement provide a model for the son to identify with and help him navigate the emerging sense of masculinity, ethics, and social cohesion. Freud believed that the ability to delay gratification is a sign of maturity in facing the reality principle (Freud, 1920). In the end, Ahmad learns, or rather, is compelled to accept reality and be patient in achieving his desires or satisfying his needs; something Freud referred to as "deferring gratification."

The book, replete with verbal and visual implications of phallocentrism, is entirely dominated by masculinity, despite both the author and illustrator being women. The entire narrative describes a phallogentric journey in which Ahmad is the protagonist, and all visual and verbal signs in the text confirm this phallogentricism and male dominance. Aside from previous discussions about time, the clock's hands, hand gestures, and the experience or possibility of reaching the peak—all of which are related to Ahmad and his father—the minor presence of women in this book cannot be overlooked. The events in the text, as analyzed, reflect the competition between Ahmad and his father, as well as Ahmad's Oedipal transition to secure his masculine position in the future. In the context of this analysis, the subtle presence of women in the story takes on significance.

Conclusion

A psychoanalytic analysis of the story of Ahmad and the Clock unveils the presence of gender and sexual issues in diverse layers of the text. These insights illuminate how certain children's books perpetuate specific norms and ideals for socializing children in alignment with adult expectations. Over different periods, these books have consistently portrayed and reinforced the archetype of the "good child." Concurrently, the joy derived from engaging with the text and theory is noteworthy for critics and enthusiasts of children's literature. In this exchange, both the theoretical and literary texts engage in a mutual dialogue. McGillis (2012) aptly captures the allure of literature, describing it as perpetually "silent, calm, mysterious, and strange" (169). While the critic and theorist bring forth explicit meanings, the enigmatic relationship between theory and criticism persists. Hence, in the interplay between text and theory, there exists both revelation and concealment, allowing each entity to delve deeper into self-discovery.

Keywords: *The Story of Ahmad and the Clock*, Freud, psychosexual development, classical psychoanalysis, picturebooks

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