



Extended Abstract

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A Correctional Center in the Amusement Park: A Critique of the Place of Imagination in Children's Cinema

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Introduction

Children's literature and cinema provide adults with the opportunity to control children's imagination, an attitude that harms the basis of imagination as a liberating element in children's future. Sometimes in films made for children, adults abuse imagination to dominate children's independence under the pretext of preparing them to enter the adult world. This study analyzes children's movies in which the children who feel frustrated with the status quo are provided with an imaginary world which can be a trip to know an imaginary being opening the door to a dream world or fulfilling a wish. Returning to the real world, yet, they feel regretful. This study critiques this abuse of imagination.

Method, Literature Review, and Purpose

Adopting a structuralist methodology, this study draws on Roland Barthes, Greimas and Vladimir Propp to critique the selected children's films in which the structure of imagination is rather similar. Considering children's film as a "phenomenon" whose components are interdependent, one can discern why all children's films in which the protagonist somehow enters a fantasy world have the same structure and what this structure implies. It seems that a recurring pattern has been repeated in most

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Iranian and non-Iranian works regarding the entrance, the trip, and the exit of a child from the imaginary world. Such a pattern is consistent with the structure of the adults' thinking in teaching children to follow their elders. In such a structure, children behave/act ignorantly and immaturely whereas adults are in the "all-knowing" position.

By examining the literature of the research, it is found that no work has examined children's films from the point of view of the present article. The purpose of the research is to answer the following questions: in Iranian children's movies, when do children take refuge in the world of imagination? What does the world of imagination do for the child to solve tensions? What happens when he/she returns to the real world?

Discussion

In children's movies, the protagonist takes refuge in the world of fantasy in order to escape what he/she considers to be undesirable. The world of fantasy, as it can be expected, is an ideal one. The escaping reasons are usually the parents' repeated warnings, or on the contrary, their neglect of the child, or the child's desire to have freedom of action; the reasons which are observable in the selected case studies. The protagonist spends a happy time in his imaginary world, yet everything falls apart suddenly as his/her happiness gets disrupted and contradictions appear. After a while, he/she is freed from the fantasy world and brought back to the world of reality. The protagonist is shocked, yet feels happy that nothing has changed in the world of reality whereby he/she appreciates parental orders. It is in this scenario that the role of adults in imposing behavioral patterns on children becomes identifiable.

In Iranian and non-Iranian children's films, except for a few cases, the protagonist regrets having taken refuge in the world of fantasy. In *Patal and Small Wishes* (1990), the characters feel fed up with parental orders and take refuge in the world of fantasy. Patal (the narrator's assistant) is the embodiment of an elderly parent who, despite having fulfilled the child's wishes, sets a condition for him to make him understand how foolish his wishes are. The movie found a large audience due to the absence of puppet characters at the time of release in Iran as well as its musical features. Parents receive satisfaction from witnessing how disobedient, gluttonous, and fighting children are punished.

In order to find a solution to solve obstacles, the protagonist takes refuge in the fantasy world where his heroic journey starts. Yet, having gone through the invitation step and crossed the threshold, he/she is gifted an artificial elixir. This pattern recurs in all of the case studies in this article. This elixir leads to neither growth nor maturity, yet takes the protagonist back to his/her initial position which is the best position for him/her. The hero's journey, without parental accompaniment or advice, is a failure. In this context, the hero is neither self-reliant nor successful.

Conclusion

As discussed, the fantasy pattern is constantly repeated in children's films. In this recurring deep structure, the protagonist is characterized as an immature one who should be controlled, commanded,

and forbidden in order to distinguish right from wrong. This mode of thinking, in order to modernize itself and avoid being accused of punishing children for the experience of freedom, decorates itself like a playground. It does not forbid fantasy, yet imbues it with regretful repercussions. This structure is observable among both Iranian and non-Iranian movies. It seems that the scripts of children's cinema should be reconsidered to break the vicious cycle of repeating this pattern which has yielded adverse psychological results.

Keywords: Children's cinema, imagination, recurring pattern, hero's journey, return without elixir

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