



Extended Abstract

DOI: 10.22099/JCLS.2025.52196.2081

Zahhak: A Tale of Seven Narrators Through the Labyrinth of Rewriting, Image-Text Interaction, and the Community of Philosophical Inquiry

Saeid Hessampour

Neda Moradpour*

Introduction

Philosophy for Children (P4C) program has undergone significant transformations in its concepts, structure, and objectives. One of the most pivotal of these shifts is the movement from humanism toward posthumanism. This paradigm shift has also brought about changes in the sources and narratives used in communities of inquiry. Whereas Lipman and his colleagues authored philosophical novels that echoed the history and challenges of Western philosophy, the second and third generations of P4C have drawn upon picturebooks, high-quality children's literature, and more culturally localized texts. As the texts have changed, so too have the criteria for selecting appropriate books for philosophical inquiry. Haynes and Murris (2012), adopting a novel approach, have turned to children's literature and picturebooks and proposed new criteria that encompass both aesthetic aspects and epistemological, ethical, and political considerations.

Method, Review of Literature, Purpose

This study aims to investigate the potential of *Zahhak: A Tale of Seven Narrators* by Atousa Salehi for use in the community of philosophical inquiry with children. The methodology is qualitative, and data were

* PHD Candidate of Persian Language and Literature, Shiraz University, Shiraz, Iran (Corresponding Author)
neda.moradpour@gmail.com

Article Info: Received: 2025-02-01, **Accepted:** 2025-04-19



COPYRIGHTS ©2021 The author(s). This is an open access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY-NC 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, as long as the Original authors and source are cited. No permission is required from the authors or the publisher.

collected and analyzed through deductive content analysis. The theoretical framework is based on the evaluative criteria proposed by Haynes and Murriss. In the background section, the study draws upon Lipman's criteria for selecting philosophical stories for children, Matthews's attention to philosophical fiction in children's literature, and Wartenberg's focus on picturebooks. Nevertheless, the primary emphasis is placed on Haynes and Murriss's triadic criteria, which include aesthetic, epistemological, and ethical-political dimensions, all aiming to identify texts capable of evoking reflection and philosophical questioning.

Discussion

The analysis reveals that this adaptation, which falls under interpretive and critical rewritings, possesses significant philosophical depth. Aesthetically, the use of polyphonic narration, multiple narrators, first-person perspectives, open-ended dialogues, the contradictory relationship between image and text, and a distinctive visual style all render the text intellectually stimulating. Epistemologically, although it is difficult to draw strict boundaries between aesthetic and epistemological techniques, the text adopts a critical stance toward historically fixed notions of truth. By employing a unique narrative style and the interplay between image and text, the book creates moments that provoke readers to question their prior beliefs about the well-known story of Zakhak.

Regarding ethical and political aspects, Haynes and Murriss emphasize the child's position within the story and the power dynamics between adults and children. Although the original myth does not explicitly address child-adult power relations, the concept of absolute power is nevertheless problematized. Zakhak, representing tyranny, is ultimately overthrown by the people and by Fereydoun—a youth in this adaptation—who stands against him. Thus, the book offers readers a model of resisting absolute authority. Certain illustrations also depict children playing with a crown and throne, symbolically neutralizing the myth's absolute power structure. The book's critical approach to the *Shahnameh* is noteworthy, questioning the authority of the original text itself. The interaction between image and text is deeply thought-provoking. All characters share similar facial features, and at times the illustrations contradict the text. For example, while the narrative describes Fereydoun's weapon as a cow-headed mace, illustrations depict a branch of olive, a plain mace, and a cow-headed mace in various scenes, leaving the reader uncertain about the true weapon.

Conclusion

The findings indicate that from an aesthetic perspective, the use of visual cues, multiple narrators, diverse viewpoints, and open-ended dialogues facilitates multiple interpretations. Epistemologically, the text challenges the narratives of its various narrators and invites readers to reflect on concepts of truth, history,

and established beliefs. Ethically and politically, the book centers on questioning absolute power and encourages critical thinking about inherited narratives. The interaction between image and text is significant across all three evaluative dimensions. Based on these findings, this picturebook holds great potential for philosophical exploration within communities of inquiry.

Keywords: picturebooks, rewriting, P4C, PWC, community of philosophical inquiry

References

- Fisher, R. (2006). *Teaching thinking to children* (M. Safaei Moghadam & A. Najarian, Trans.). Ahvaz: Rasesh. [in Persian]
- Flick, U. (2008). *An introduction to qualitative research* (H. Jalili, Trans.). Tehran: Ney Publishing. (Original work published 1998). [in Persian]
- Ghaedi, Y. (2021). *Shahnameh stories and philosophy for children: With facilitator's guide*. Tehran: Avaye Haya. [in Persian]
- Ghasroddashti, F., Rezaei Dasht-Arzheneh, M., & Hajiani, F. (2022). An analytical study of the relation between Zakhak and Nahusha. *Journal of Mystical and Mythological Literature*, 18(67), 203–224. [in Persian]
- Grenby, M. O., & Reynolds, K. (2021). *Children's literature studies: A research methods handbook* (M. Farhangi, Trans.). Tehran: Madreseh. (Original work published 2011). [in Persian]
- Haynes, J., & Murris, K. (2012). *Picturebooks, pedagogy and philosophy*. London: Routledge.
- Javidy Kalateh Jafari, T., & Colleagues. (2012). Philosophy for children: Philosophical themes in the classical Persian literature. *Tafakkor va Koodak (Thought and the Child)*, 9(2), 1–25. [in Persian]
- Kavakebi, M., Hariri, A. H., & Maktabi-Fard, L. (2010). Analysis of critical thinking skills in Iranian children's and young adult stories. *Studies in Children's Literature*, 1(2), 157–193. [in Persian]
- Kennedy, D., & Kohan, W. (2017). Geret Biesta and philosophical work with children. *Childhood and Philosophy*, 13(28), 409–414.
- Khosronejad, M. (2007). A reflection on the co-existence of children's literature and philosophy in the Philosophy for Children program. *Educational Innovations*, 109–124. [in Persian]
- Khosronejad, M. (2018). Still in search: Dialogue with existing views on picturebooks in Iran. In *Proceedings of the Second Festival of Rewritten Picturebooks* (pp. 73–136). Shiraz University, Center for Children's Literature Studies. [in Persian]
- Khosronejad, M. (2024). *The answers are blown away by the wind*. Tehran: Kargadan. [in Persian]
- Khosronejad, M., & Shokrollahzadeh, S. (2018). The meaning and foundation of dialogue in the Philosophy for Children movement: An effort to develop a dialogic theory of learning and teaching. *Studies in Education and Learning*, 10(1), 56–93. [in Persian]

- Khosronejad, M., & Shokrollahzadeh, S. (2020). From silencing children's literature: Changing views towards picturebooks in the P4C movement. *Childhood & Philosophy*, 16.
- Kohan, W. (1999). What can philosophy and children offer each other? *Thinking: The Journal of Philosophy for Children*, 14(4), 2. <https://doi.org/10.5840/thinking19991442>
- Lipman, M. (2011). Philosophy for children: Some assumptions and implications. *Ethics in Progress*, 2(1), 3–16.
- Lipman, M., & Naji, S. (2009). Philosophy for children and adolescents: A new approach in philosophy and education. *Farhang Journal*, 69, 151–175.
- Lipman, M., Sharp, A. M., & Oscanyan, F. S. (2015). *Philosophy in the classroom* (M. Z. Baqeri Noeparast, Trans.). Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies. (Original work published 1977). [in Persian]
- Lipman, M., Sharp, A. M., & Oscanyan, F. S. (2016). *Thinking children: Philosophy for children and its implementation in the classroom* (M. Z. Baqeri Noeparast, Trans.). Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies. [in Persian]
- Matthews, G. (2018). *The philosophy of childhood, children's literature theory and the concept of childhood* (S. Hessampour & M. Hessampour, Trans.). Tehran: Institute for the Intellectual Development of Children and Young Adults. [in Persian]
- Mozaffari, A., & Zarei, A. (2013). Zahhak and Mesopotamia. *Journal of Mystical and Mythological Literature*, 9(33), 87–115. [in Persian]
- Murris, K. (1997). *Metaphors of the child's mind: Teaching philosophy to young children* (Doctoral dissertation). University of Hull.
- Murris, K. (2016a). Philosophy with picturebooks. In M. A. Peters (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Educational Philosophy and Theory*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-532-7_164-1
- Murris, K. (2016b). The posthuman child: III. In D. Kennedy & B. Bahler (Eds.), *Philosophy of childhood today: Exploring the boundaries* (pp. 185–197). Lexington Books.
- Naji, S. (2016). *P4C criteria for children's stories*. Tehran: Institute for Humanities and Cultural Studies. [in Persian]
- Naji, S., & Rosnani, H. (2020). *Dialogues on the history, theoretical foundations, and implementation of the Philosophy for Children program: A global perspective* (H. Mohammadi, Trans.). Tehran: Ney Publishing. [in Persian]
- Nikolajeva, M. (2019). *An introduction to aesthetic approaches to children's literature* (M. Farhangi, Trans.). Tehran: Madreseh Publications. [in Persian]
- Salehi, A. (2020). *Zahhak: The tale of seven narrators* (N. Safakhoo, Illus.). Tehran: Madreseh Publications. [in Persian]

Sedaghat, M., Khoshbakh, F., & Alborzi, M. (2014). Themes and motifs in Iranian children's stories. *Studies in Children's Literature*, 5(2), 107–128. [in Persian]

Shokrollahzadeh, S. (2019). *Polyphony in theory and practice: Exploring the process of achieving polyphony in philosophical inquiry circles for teenagers* (Doctoral dissertation). Shiraz University. [in Persian]

Vansieleghem, N., & Kennedy, D. (2011). What is philosophy for children, what is philosophy with children after Matthew Lipman. *Department of Educational Foundation Scholarship and Creative Works*, 114.