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Reviewing the Concepts of “the Modern Child” and “Small Adult” – A Plea for “Third World Small Adults’ Literature” as an Alternative to “Children’s Literature”

“Modern Çocuk” ve “Küçük Yetişkin” Kavramlarının Yeniden Değerlendirilmesi – “Çocuk Edebiyatı”na bir Alternatif olarak “Üçüncü Dünya Küçük Yetişkin Edebiyatı” için bir Çağrı

Devrim Çetin GÜVEN

Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, DEÜ Edebiyat Fakültesi Karşılaştırmalı Edebiyat Bölümü
Assist. Prof. Dr., DEU Faculty of Letters Department of Comparative Literature

devrimcetinguven@gmail.com

Orcid ID: 0000-0001-5248-8261

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Reviewing the Concepts of “the Modern Child” and “Small Adult” – A Plea for “Third World Small Adults’ Literature” as an Alternative to “Children’s Literature”

Abstract

The pre-modern “small adult”, who was treated as a grownup, used to be the complete opposite of the “the modern child” who needed to be protected and educated by adults. Because children’s literature, which was largely shaped by the Grimms and their followers, excessively isolated “the child” from the cultural sphere of adults, an impassable critical distance was constructed between the readers and characters, which supported “the modern child discourse” isolating the child from the world of adults and “history”. However, especially certain works of the “Third World small adults’ literature” written with an anti-colonial historical consciousness provides an alternative model. This article primarily reveals the flawed foundations of the discursive categories that are regarded as “the modern child” and “children’s literature”. Then, it analyses certain examples of the “Third World small adults’ literature” in order to manifest how this category could serve as an antidote to the conventional modern children’s literature within the scope of its potential contributions to the creativity and education of its readers.

Keywords: Samad Behrangi, Gao Yubao, Rabia Zochdi, Kojin Karatani, Postcolonial Literature, Children’s Literature.

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Öz

Erişkin muamelesi gören modernite-öncesi “küçük yetişkin”, yetişkinler tarafından korunmaya ve eğitime muhtaç “modern çocuk”un tam karşıtıydı. Büyük ölçüde Grimm’ler ve izdeşleri tarafından şekillendirilmiş olan “çocuk edebiyatı” “çocuk”u yetişkinlerin kültür sahasından aşırı bir şekilde tecrit ettiği için okurlar ile karakterler arasında aşılması mümkün olmayan bir eleştirel mesafe inşa edildi; bu da “çocuk”u yetişkinlerin dünyasından ve “tarih”ten soyutlayan “modern çocuk söylemi”ni destekleyegeldi. Ancak, özellikle sömürgecilik-karşıtı bir tarihsel bilinçle yazılmış “Üçüncü Dünya küçük yetişkin edebiyatı”nın bazı eserleri alternatif bir model oluşturmaktadır. Bu makalede öncelikle “modern çocuk” ve “çocuk edebiyatı” addedilen söylemsel kategorilerin kusurlu temelleri ifşa edilmektedir. Akabinde, okuyucularının yaratıcılığına ve eğitimine potansiyel katkıları kapsamında, bu kategorinin nasıl geleneksel modern çocuk edebiyatının panzehiri olarak kullanılabileceğini ortaya koymak amacıyla “Üçüncü Dünya küçük yetişkin edebiyatı”ndan bazı örnekler çözümlenmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Samed Behrangi, Gao Yubao, Rabia Zochdi, Kojin Karatani, Postkolonyal Edebiyat, Çocuk Edebiyatı



Introduction

Following the publication of the Grimm Brothers’ collection of folk tales in 1812, the category of children’s literature was consolidated as a proper sub-category of modern literature and became one of the most lucrative commodities of the book market. This category was largely shaped under the influence of Rousseau’s theses on “the modern/Apollonian/angelic child” articulated in *Émile* (1762), as well as in interaction with such modern institutions as pedagogy and child psychology. In this process, “the child” was transformed into an epistemological landscape and came to be portrayed as the absolute other of the adult. Exactly both like the Foucauldian “mad” that was constructed by modern European institutions and the Saidian “Oriental” which had been manufactured as an essential category by Western scholars, travellers, and artists, from the 18th century onwards, as the “uncivilized” yet sublime and mysterious others of the European “civilized” society, this modern child was represented as the complete opposite of the adults. Yet, whereas this child was sublimated as a pre-Fall, Edenic, angelic creature, s/he was also subjected to discrimination since s/he was completely isolated from the adult’s world as well as from its conflicts. Hence the modern child was not only sublimated as an Edenic landscape, but also underestimated as an immature, illogical and lesser human being just like “the mad” and “the Oriental”. For these reasons, “the modern child discourse” is flawed with multifarious incongruities and the realm where we can see these flaws in the most concrete is children’s literature, since it ironically either dismissed or sublimated both its *dramatis personae* and readers as “children”.

In this article, we firstly demonstrate the flawed foundations of the discursive categories of the modern child and particularly those of children’s literature. Then, we analytically present examples of “Third World children’s literature” which would be renamed in this article as “Third World small adults’ literature,” and which we argue could serve as an influential antidote to the conventional children’s literature. To illustrate this, we analyse three specific examples: Iranian Samad Behrangi’s *24 Restless Hours*, Chinese Gao Yubao’s *I Want to Study*, and *The Children of Algeria* (which is a collective work edited by François Maspero). It should be noted that, in this article the term “Third World” refers by no means to the pejorative meaning of the post-1970s signifying “backward, underdeveloped countries”, but exclusively to its authentic sense during the 1950s and 60s, denoting countries, regions and ethnic groups exposed to, and struggled against the direct or indirect oppression and exploitation of the imperial powers, before and after the Second World War.

Grimm Brothers’ Unintentional Invention of Children’s Literature

Until Grimm Brothers turned the folk tales they collected into fairy tales for



children, only a handful of writers had presupposed children as their main reader. For instance, in the medieval society a literature conceived for juvenile audience was absent. Although there were a few instructional works designed for children such as English writer Aelfric's *Colloquy*, in them intellectual entertainment functioned as a mere "sugar-coating". There were also didactic courtesy books written in vernaculars aiming to give children a moral education gained popularity throughout the 14th and 15th centuries, but "such works generally consist of dull lists of maxims concerning the rules of etiquette, frequently in uninspired verse" (Mc Munn and Mc Munn, 1972: 23). Thus, the major deficiency of these books written for children with the goal of giving them a religious and moral education was the lack of both literary quality and element of entertainment.

First attempts at designing literary texts that aim to be read by or to children occurred in late 17th and through the 18th centuries. Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou contes du temps passé, avec des moralités—Les Contes de ma mère l'Oye* (1697) which would have a great influence on Grimm Brothers is generally regarded as a milestone in the formation process of children's literature. However, Perrault emphasized that he did not write these tales only as moral stories for juvenile readership, "but he also intended them to be modern works that could be appreciated by a sophisticated, adult audience" (Boucquey, 2005: 221). Another key figure in paving the way for children's literature was English writer and publisher John Newbery. He broke with the tradition of educational children's books originating in the middle ages and managed to construct a new didactic literature. His *magnum opus* was *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744) whose motto was *deluctando monemus* i.e. "instruction with delight" (Granahan, 2010: 7). Yet, neither Perrault, nor Newberry nor other writers of 18th century didactic literature could have been as successful and internationally acclaimed as Grimm Brothers who managed to set the standards and patterns of children's literature.

However, ironically enough, even the Grimms themselves had initially rejected the common perception that their tales were conceived exclusively for children. They thought that critics and readers misread the aim of their collection —namely a literary archaeology for unearthing the genuine origins of German folk literature— because the criticism was mainly directed at the issue of appropriateness for children. For instance, in a letter to Achim von Arnim, Jacob denies that their collection is a children's book:

"Have children's tales really been conceived and invented for children? I don't believe this at all just as I don't affirm the general question, whether we must set up something specific at all for them. What we possess in publicized and traditional teachings and precepts is accepted by old and young, and what children do not grasp about them, all that glides away from



their minds, they will do so when they are ready to learn it.”
(Zipes, 2015: XXIX).

Nonetheless, in the course of time their strict attitude would soften, and they would gradually surrender to the idea of transforming the folk tales into children’s tales. For instance, one can easily notice that even in the “Preface” to the second volume of the first edition the Grimms’ attitude towards juvenile readership became more moderate, although they still denied that children were the primary audience:

“Some people have complained about this latter intention and asserted that there are things here and there that cause embarrassment and are unsuitable for children or offensive (such as the references to certain incidents and conditions, and they also think children should not hear about the devil and anything evil). Accordingly, parents should not offer the collection to children. In individual cases this concern may be correct, and thus one can easily choose which tales are to be read.” (Zipes, 2015: XXIX-XXX).

Thus, the young Grimms as the collectors of the first edition could not yet be situated as writers of children books, since they do not regard their tales as texts to be read only by or to children. That being so, in a sense they entrusted parents and nannies with the task of censoring their work, or mitigating thereby domesticating some tales that are not suitable for juvenile readership. Interestingly, this task of censoring and domesticating would later be adopted by the Brothers themselves. The re-writing process that had initially begun with the Grimms’ concerns about aestheticizing the language of the tales, took the form of adjusting them to modern, urban, mainly middle-class children’s tastes and intellectual levels.

In the course of time the transformation of folk tales into children’s tales through censoring and re-writing began to function as a pattern to be followed in designing the form and content of works of children’s literature. Such great works of world literature as *Don Quixote*, *Robinson Crusoe* and *Gulliver’s Travels* that are endowed with literary richness and historical consciousness have been domesticated and sterilized by getting shortened and simplified in order to be rendered appropriate for children. In children’s literature, another method of re-writing based on domestication and censorship was producing the derivatives or variations of a classical masterpiece. One example to this “proto-post-modern” re-writing practice is the gigantesque robinsonade canon that consisted of hundreds of works such as R. M. Ballantyne’s *The Coral Island*, R. L. Stevenson’s *Treasure Island*, Jules Verne’s *Two Years’ Vacation* etc. Accordingly, the founding texts of children’s literature that have today become an enormous sector, were produced through the execution of various linguistic violences such as censorship, domestication and distortion of the original texts.



Absence of the Child in Pre-modernity

Hence, children's literature was a forcefully and artificially invented genre mainly by the Grimms who initially had not intended to write children books, but gradually responded to the demands of the market and society (Dégh, 1979: 88). This invention was the outcome of a cooperation built between Grimm Brothers who had foreseen rich potentials for a successful career in it and the publishing market that had discovered children as their new and profitable customers. Therefore, it is evident that children's literature was a historical construction in the process of the commercialization of modern literature. At this point a radical question can be asked: did the child exist in pre-modern times?

As several historians like Philippe Ariès, Jacques Legoff, John Boswell and literary scholars like Meradith Tilbury and William Robert Mc Munn, Kojin Karatani articulated the child was almost non-existent in the representations produced throughout the middle ages. The main reason for this absence is the lack of a perspective that makes the child appear as though s/he were the absolute other of the adult. Thus, in the medieval times children were regarded as nothing but adults in miniature:

Children in medieval society were thought to be essentially the same as adults, except that they were smaller and less experienced. A child's world was that of the adult in miniature. His clothing imitated adult clothing in every detail... Portraiture presenting children as wizened adults, mature in feature if not in size, persisted into the nineteenth century. Our modern society's preoccupation with the moral, physical, and sexual problems of the childhood was unknown in medieval civilization. Indeed, there was no separation of generations in the Middle Ages as there is today, soon after he had been weaned (much later than is common now), the child became the natural companion of the adult, sharing his recreation and interests. (Mc Munn and Mc Munn, 1972: 21).

In short, since the modern perspective that reconstructed childhood and adulthood as a binary opposition of two totally distinct entities, medieval children were depicted as individuals who were similar to grownups. Japanese literary theorist and philosopher Kojin Karatani (柄谷行人) also believed that the child in the modern understanding of the word was absent in pre-modern times. For instance, in "The Discovery of the Child" where he asserts how modern critics and literary researchers sought futilely for the real child in literature without dealing with the historicity of the child *per se*, he argues that there was no child prior to modern times:

The further "objective" psychological studies concerning the child progress, the more we lose sight of the historicity of "the child" itself. Of course, children have existed since ancient



times, yet “the child” as we conceive of it and objectify it did not exist prior to a particular period. The question is not what is elucidated by psychological research about children, but what is obscured by the very concept of “the child”. (Karatani, 1998: 115-118).

What Karatani denounces is the tendency of psychology to focus on the progress, namely the maturation of children, which overshadows, and renders obscure the historical contingency of the child. The perspective through which we see the child today was constructed during the transition period from feudalism to capitalist modernity. Karatani maps out the phenomenon of the discovery of the child in the course of history by having recourse to Dutch psychiatrist Jan Hendrik Van den Berg who took a special interest in the connection between human psychology and historical change:

Van den Berg, in *The Changing Nature of Man*, claimed that “the child” did not exist before Rousseau and that it was Rousseau who was “the first to view the child as a child, to stop treating the child as an adult.” Rousseau wrote, in *Émile*, that “people do not know what children are. Since they hold mistaken notions about children, as arguments progress, they find themselves lost in a maze.” Rousseau’s discovery of the child may be compared to his discovery of the Alps, previously considered merely an obstruction, as an example of the beauty of nature, in the *Confessions*. In this sense, too, “the child” has been similar to a “landscape.” (Karatani, 1998: 118).

Van den Berg, who is along with Michel Foucault one of the first researchers to deal with the concept of the child, does not only suspect its self-evidence as an ever-existing phenomenon, but deepens his thesis by positing Rousseau as the discoverer of the child. Karatani likens this discovery to that of the Alps as a landscape which was also done by Rousseau. He had inverted the image of an impassable hurdle of this mountain range into that of a spiritually inspirational, sublime and exotic landscape to contemplate, which stands in a stark contrast to the coldly materialistic urban environment.

Hence, we can determine “the birth date of the child” roughly as 1760s, since this was the era when *Émile* was published. By citing Rousseau above, Karatani refers to the third paragraph of the “Preface” of *Émile* whose beginning is like a manifesto on the true essence of the child. Here, Rousseau holds that the knowledge people have concerning childhood is based on nothing but wrong ideas – furthermore, people always tend to search for a grownup human in the child, although children are not at all mature, but immature beings who go through different epistemological processes than those of adults in their interactions with knowledge (Rousseau, 1966: 32). The gist of this manifesto lies in the fact that Rousseau rejects the adulthood of the child, which used to be considered inherent to them.



The modern child, who was discovered by Rousseau during the transition process from feudal socio-economic system to capitalist modernity, is re-defined by British sociologist Chris Jenks as “the Apollonian child”. This angelic child is not contaminated by the corrupted civilization and society, and s/he is regarded as the embodiment of the pure, natural goodness of Eden before the original sin. This new type of child who is worshipped and idolized by his/her parents is “different from adults,” s/he is “an ontology in its own right and as such deserve[s] special treatment and care” (Jenks, 1996: 73).

With the emergence of this new child type, “we [=adults] have become their protectors and nurturers and they [=children] have become our primary love objects, our human capital and our future” (Jenks, 1996: 99). However, although the modern/Apollonian child seemed to offer a spiritual consolation to the unhappy adults of the capitalist industrial society, it had also a materialistic aspect, since the modern nuclear family whose centre is the child “has become the basic unit of social cohesion in advancing capitalism, and though loving and supportive in its self-image it has become the very epitome of the rational enterprise” (Jenks, 1996: 100). Moreover, some notions concerning the education and upbringing of the modern/Apollonian child were transformed into metaphors and applied to various levels of capitalist modernity, producing a comprehensive, expansionist utopia:

The modern family enabled the modern state to invest in ‘futures’. The ideology of care both lubricated and legitimized the investment of economic and cultural capital in the ‘promise’ of childhood. Childhood is transformed into a form of human capital which, through modernity, has been dedicated to futures. The metaphoricity through which the discourse of childhood speaks is predicated on the absent presence of a desired tomorrow; with ‘growth’, ‘maturation’ and ‘development’ writ large at the level of individual socialization, and ‘pools of ability’ and a concern with the ‘wastage of talent’ at the level of formal state socialization. As children, and by way of children, we have, through modernity, dreamt of futures, and in so doing we have both justified and sought justification for modernity’s expansionist urges in the post-Darwinian conflation of growth and progress. (Jenks, 1996: 100).

“Small Adult” as an Alternative to “Modern/Apollonian Child”

What Jenks suggests here is that such metaphorized concepts as “maturation”, “growth” and “development” are employed with ideological purposes for justifying the expansionism of capitalist modernity in different



realms such as industry, economy and imperialism. At this point, a question of critical importance to be answered is the following: “is the preconceived idea that children’s transition to adulthood occurs through gradual maturation correct?” According to Japanese folklorist Kunio Yanagita and Karatani, pre-modern children, or children who are out of modernity’s sphere of influence, did not need a “gradual growth” or “progress” in order to become adult, instead a “passage” was the case (Karatani, 1998: 118-119). Even the name “small adults” attributed to pre-modern children implies that there was no process of maturation for them. In pre-modernity the child is not regarded as the child of the capitalist society, on the contrary s/he is treated and is expected to behave, act and work just like an adult. This type of child was completely opposite of the modern child, who could be defined as a fragile, immature human offspring who needs to be protected and be given a standardized systematic education proper to his age group both by the state apparatus and by his/her parents.

Hence, a new vision of pedagogy and child psychology, that classify and categorize children according to their age was institutionalized, which led to the problem of “generational othering.” Namely, because children are posited as entirely different beings than, and as the absolute others of grownups, a gap or a discontinuum inevitably occurred between childhood and adulthood. As suggested by Karatani, the idea that children’s growth should follow a standard, linear pattern is wrong. A good example to this is preconscious, “genius” children. Child prodigies such as Pascal who was educated by his father “at an unusually early age” and Goethe who was trained to write not only in his native German but also in “French, Greek, and Latin by the age of eight”. What is more, “they were not really exceptional in the way they were educated”. For instance, in Japan, the education of Chinese classics began routinely at an early age and there was even a “Confucian scholar in the Edo period [who] gave lectures [...] while he was still in his teens” (Karatani, 1998: 118). This type of pre-modern child education was not based on strict age hierarchy, but rather takes into consideration the talents and intellectual level of each child while training them. In the modern education system that is based on the uniformization, standardization i.e. homogenization of all children, those talents are rendered invisible.

Furthermore, according to Yanagita the division of child-adult is the outcome of modern institutions that categorized children by age groups. He states that the predominant pre-modern pattern of growth was based on imitating and modelling after the elders. Needless to say, this type of children corresponds to the category of pre-modern small adults. Consequently, we can claim that in pre-modern Japan the predominant understanding of growth was not based on the idea of maturation, but rather on the idea of passage or initiation –namely small adults impatiently strove for passing to the adulthood, instead of enjoying their childhood



paradise like the modern child does. In pre-modern Japan there was a dynamic cooperation between the elder and younger children for becoming adult as soon as possible: "Not only did the older children take on the responsibility [of the younger ones] with enthusiasm since they became aware of their own growth through this process, but the younger ones also looked forward eagerly to joining the ranks of older children." (Karatani, 1998: 119)

What is suggested here is that the deep division between childhood and adulthood is not natural but a constructed binary opposition. This division is closely connected with the concept of the child and it did not exist prior to the transition to capitalist modernity. Nonetheless, this division was not caused merely by modern education but also by psychology. In this context, Karatani cites Foucault's radical postmodern analysis on the connection between neurosis and childhood. Foucault maintains that the causes of neurosis, whose main symptoms are regression to childhood or infantile behaviour, are not psychological but structural. For, the disciplines of psychology and psychoanalysis paradoxically generated neurosis by violently segregating childhood from adulthood, then indicating childhood as the source of neurosis. Hence, the child who is rendered even more childish by the modern institution of education or developmental psychology, is in turn accused for being too infantile once he grew up (Karatani, 1998: 127-128). This vicious-cycled structure caused distress both for the child who is afraid of not being able to grow up and for the adult who is taken by the angst of not behaving like an adult.

Furthermore, Karatani (1998: 121) tackles the issue of play, which is considered to belong to the realm of childhood, saying that the "division between play and [labour] bears a profound relationship to the division between child and adult." In the pre-capitalist era or in extra-capitalist environments there is no division between work and play. For instance, in the indigenous people like Nambikwara in Brazil, there is no precise division between [labour] and play, therefore play is incorporated into work. They do not feel the need to create plays or playthings for children, since this culture of work as play is shared by both adults and children. But, also in modern capitalist working communities that are not brought under the control of automation, a similar mode of labour as play might be observed; according to the testimony of American philosopher Eric Hoffer who had worked on the San Francisco waterfront, the workers were doing their jobs as if playing games (Karatani, 1998: 120-121). Hence, Karatani blames automation as the major factor that turned workers into robots and repressed play in the working environments.

Thus, "literature and amusements 'for children'" emerged only after the child, as a discovery of modernity, "came to exist" (Karatani, 1998: 119). Besides, the phenomenon of isolating and transforming play or playthings



that used to be major components of traditional work culture into tools of entertainment for children is analogous to turning folk and fairy tales into a literary genre for children. Namely, by being transformed into children’s literature, tales that hitherto used to belong to a story-telling culture mainly for adults but also shared by children became a category that excludes adults from its audience. In turn, literature that was shared by adults and children alike in pre-modern times became the exclusive property of adults, marginalizing the younger readers who possess the potential to read and enjoy it.

A Role Reversal between “the Pre-modern Small Adult” and “the Modern/Apollonian child”

The Grimms’ re-discovery of the folk tales through a modern perspective (i.e. transforming these tales into children’s tales through censorship and domestication, and subsequently imposing them on the new child generations of modern, capitalist, industrialized urban culture) is evidently an extension of Rousseau’s re-discovery, and sublimation of this child into the modern/Apollonian child. Furthermore, the Brothers, under the influence of Rousseau, and particularly German poet and philosopher Johann Gottfried Herder who “styled himself as a German Rousseau” (Lokke, 2005: 140) contributed greatly to the formation process of the modern/Apollonian child by founding children’s literature. In this process a role reversal occurred: whereas small adults were exiled to the intra-textual realm as *dramatis personae*, the modern child that existed in Rousseau’s *Émile* came out to the extra-textual level as “the reader”. In other words, children’s literature began by the segregation and exile of small adults to the imaginary realm. To put it in the terminology of Jungian psychoanalysis, the Apollonian/modern child was constructed by the repression of small adults to the collective unconscious.

One of the major flaws of this role reversal lied in the fact that the protagonists or other main characters of these texts consisted of small adults. These characters are by no means treated as innocent, vulnerable, Apollonian children, but are subjected to physical or psychological violence of adults, sometimes of their own parents (particularly of mother figures) even in the heavily censored and mitigated later editions. To give some instances, the protagonists of “Snow White” and “Hansel and Gretel” are attempted to be murdered and even be eaten by mother figures. Cinderella is bullied and discriminated by her stepmother and stepsisters. Cinderella and Snow White (who would later be forced to become a child bride of a paedophile and necrophile prince) work as maids, while Hansel and Gretel helped their woodcutter father. Moreover, in “Little Red Riding Hood” a pervert stalker (“the Wolf”) perpetrates an anthropophagic violence which symbolizes sexual assaults against young girls. These small adult characters are forced to struggle against evil minded, mean or



perverted adults, and particularly in most of the revised/domesticated tales they manage to overpower and kill these villains through setting clever traps and executing violence.

Furthermore, a fundamental contradiction underlies this paradigm shift. Namely, the modern institutions of children's education and literature used fairy tales of Grimm Brothers whose main characters are small adults who try to survive in the violent conditions and conflicts of adult life, in order to educate modern children. In addition, even in the "domesticated" versions of these narratives, such cases of extreme physical and psychological violence as infanticide, cannibalism, bullying, discrimination and so on that adults executed against small adults could be observed. Therefore, at first glance it appears as though modern children were unable to empathize with these characters who live or rather attempt to survive under totally different conditions. However, on the contrary, modern children were and still are fond of these tales. Undoubtedly, they do experience a sado-masochistic catharsis unique to the audience of thriller, action or horror genres which contradicts with fundamental aims of modern institutions of child psychology and pedagogy.

Yet, such an experience of psychological relief could by no means be possible unless a certain amount of empathy is built between the reader and the characters. The most probable reason that children love these tales is that they see in the scenes of abuse against small adults some commonalities with the refined modern forms of abuse to which they are subjected –this modern abuse is nothing but the continuation of the pre-modern child abuse, albeit it is executed by different means. Moreover, these modern children as new readers most likely experience emotional catharses in the achievement of revenge of small adult characters against evil adults through versatile traps and sadistic violence.

Thus, underneath the modern/Apollonian child's association and sympathy with the tale's juvenile heroes lies the problem of modern and contemporary exercise of power against the child. Namely, the role reversal between small adult and the modern child, did not lead to the total demise of child abuse, on the contrary it refined it. In this context Jenks' following argument is crucial: "The historical liberation of the child from adulthood [...] may simply have rendered abuse less visible or considerably more subtle." Furthermore, after the establishment of the modern nation-state, the state became the main perpetrator of the abusive power exercise (which paradoxically took on the form of "protection from abuse" by isolating the child from adulthood) against children, through the agency of nuclear family (Jenks, 1996: 98).



A Plea for “Third World Small Adults’ Literature” as an Authentic Children’s Literature

Even though the modern/Apollonian children have delighted in reading the Grimm tales (and the subsequent children’s literature mainly consisted of fantasy and adventure novels modelling after them) and empathized with their main characters, these tales, being excessively isolated from historical realities, functioned as tools for secluding their readers not only from adulthood but also from history. The non-historical or extra-historical character of tales stems from the difficulty of determining their authenticity as it is almost impossible to ascertain when and where they were produced and in what way they were revised.

This dimness and uncertainty concerning the history of folk tales contributed greatly to its image as a non-historical and universal narrative form. Consequently, as children’s literature –shaped by the Grimms and their followers– excessively secluded the child from the cultural sphere of adults, an impassable critical distance was constructed between the readers and characters, which supported “the modern child discourse” that isolates the child from adult’s world and “history”. Then, a much more appropriate mode of literature than shortened and simplified folk tales, domesticated classics, adventure novels, fantastic stories etc. should be presented to children, in order both to consolidate their bonds with history and reality, facilitate and accelerate their initiation to adulthood. For this end, they should be introduced to texts that have small adults as their main characters, that deal with universal problems of humanity through an accessible but thought-provoking style, whereby bring their readers closer to a consciousness unique to small adults. Such a mode of small adults’ literature could only be found in areas where the role reversal between small adults and modern/Apollonian children did not occur. Thus, we argue in what follows that the children’s literatures of peripheral areas of the world, namely Third World countries whose people were exposed to and struggled against the direct or indirect oppression and exploitation of the imperial powers, i.e. “Third World small adults’ literature” might provide an ideal alternative pattern for children’s literature.

Behrangi: Provocative Juxtaposition of Childish Fantasies and Bitter Realities

For instance, Iranian writer of Azeri-Turkish origin Samad Behrangi who began his career by collecting oral folk literature (mainly Turkish legends and myths) like the Grimm Brothers, produced children books as alternative texts for official textbooks that aim to educate children via an ideology based upon both narrow-minded and ethnocentric chauvinism, and an unconscious occidental self-colonialism. His stories and fables that were enjoyed not only by children but also adults, were in fact allegories through



which he criticized the oppressive rule of Shah Pahlavi and conceived alternate socio-political-cultural systems to replace it. Although official explanation of his death is drowning in the Aras River, it is widely believed that he paid the price of exposing the social realities to children as well as to adults through his literature, by getting assassinated by Shah's infamous security service SAVAK.

According to Behrangi a writer of children's literature must be socially engaged and render children "aware of inequalities and injustices and other social and political issues in the children's social environment" (Dehkordi, 2013: 59). In his article entitled "On Children's Literature" he presents his alternative vision:

The first point is that children's literature must build a bridge between the colourful world of carefree and sweet dreams of childhood and the dark and gloomy world of adults who are entangled in the bitter and painful realities of the social life... and the second point is that children's literature should introduce a scientific, exact world view to children which acts as a criterion according to which children can evaluate the changeable and unstable moral[/]social issues in different conditions. (Dehkordi, 2013: 59)

Hence, Behrangi was against the principal ideology of conventional children's literature that constructs childhood as an extra-historical, idyllic paradise distancing the child from adulthood. Therefore, he propounded that the pastoral/romantic world unique to modern/Apollonian child and, the bitter realities and conflicts that surrounds the adulthood must be juxtaposed. He also maintained that an ideal children's literature should educate children so that they could question and analyse the social, historical and international conditions they live in. One of the stories to which he most efficiently applied this theory was his posthumous *24 Restless Hours* (24, *Sa'at Dar Khab Va Bidary*, 1969).

The story revolves around the last 24 hours of the childhood of Latif in the streets of Tehran, at the end of which he would be forced to make a brutal passage into adulthood. Latif is a peasant boy who was taken to the capital by his father. The father's aim was to raise some money by selling vegetables for his family in the village, yet he is unable to earn enough even for the two of them; they are desperately destitute; they sleep on the handcarts with almost always empty stomach. Under these harsh conditions, Latif's only consolation is his dreams of possessing a big toy camel that is displayed on the shop window of a toy store. He sees in his dream at night that the camel who can fly takes him to a banquet, at a villa of a rich man, which is occupied by the toys and the servants of the house. He tries futilely to satisfy his hunger until he realizes that it was just a dream.



At the tragic finale, the camel is sold to the daughter of a wealthy man. Witnessing the store workers lifting up the camel, Latif runs forward and attempts to stop them by grabbing the leg of the camel and hysterically crying out that the plaything belongs to him. Yet, he is impeded by the storeowner while the customers drive away with the camel. Latif who had tried to hold on the car falls on his face on the pavement: “My face fell in the blood running from my nose. I pounded my feet against the ground and sobbed. I only wished the machine gun in the store window belonged to me.” (Behrangı, 1969)

While the childish fetishist infatuation for the camel symbolizes “regression” in front of historical realities such as the impassable gulf between the rich and the poor, getting deprived of it represents the inevitable awakening to those realities of which he is encircled, and a step forward to adulthood. The author gives the radical message (which acts in concert with his progressive political stance) that social inequality could by no means get solved by escaping into childish dreams, but through struggling against them as is implied by the motif of “the toy machine gun”.

On the other hand, this story attempts to shatter the main ideology of children’s literature based upon the idea that it consists of universal narratives which are out of time and place. Latif attempts to escape into the utopian, imaginary paradise centring on the camel and other toys of the store, but once the camel is sold, he is harshly pushed forward into the actual time and space by which he is surrounded. The camel is not only the object of Latif’s regressive dreams but also the spokesman for the realities of Iran. For instance, what follows is a passage of the dream episode where the camel translates the problem of gulf between the rich and the poor on geographic terms of “North” and “South” while flying over the sky of Tehran Latif on her back:

Many of the streets in the south aren’t paved; the dirty putrid water in the open sewage gutters of the North flows downhill to the South. In short, the South is where the poor, hungry people live, and the North is the area of the rich and powerful. (Behrangı, 1969)

Needless to say, this mapping of Tehran does not concern only the Iranian capital but is a compact allegory of the world of the 1960s based on the division between the impoverished, colonized or ex-colonial African, South American and Asian nations i.e. “the South”, and the wealthy, highly industrialized imperial centres i.e. “the North”. Such an allegory is closely connected with the actual historical and geopolitical realities, since the 1960s saw the explosion of the Third World movements on various levels against imperial violence, colonial exploitation, cultural assimilation and systemic discrimination.



Gao Yubao: A “Writer” who “Writes Against” Feudal and Imperial Power in order to Learn to “Read and Write”

Chinese novelist Gao Yubao’s (高玉宝) autobiographical short story *I Want to Study* (《我要读书》, *Wǒ Yào Dúshū*, 1951) relates the author’s personal struggle for the “right to education” during his childhood, firstly against his poor, uneducated family, then against the landowner Bao who represents the state authority in Liaoning Province during the Japanese imperial occupation. Although thanks to the financial and spiritual support of the teacher he temporarily manages to study at the school, due to his collision with Bao’s spoiled boy and other children of wealthy families, Bao arbitrarily punishes him by forcing him to work in his pigsty.

Gao’s story is a unique, *sui generis* work in many respects. This uniqueness is arisen from the ambivalences in its formation process. For example, although written by a single author, several figures such as writer Huang Cao actively assisted and advised the author in the writing process because –as will be briefly discussed in what follows– his literacy level was not sufficient (Kleemeier, 1981: 18). Furthermore, as a matter of fact this story is the fifth chapter of Gao’s autobiographical novel (which consists of series of autobiographical stories) entitled *Gao Yubao*. Yet, just like each one of Grimm Brothers’ or Perrault’s fairy tales, this text is also presented and read as an autonomous work. Another idiosyncratic characteristic of Gao’s short story lies in the fact that if it is read as an autonomous text it takes on the atmosphere of children’s literature, whereas in case it is experienced as an organic part of the novel *Gao Yubao*, it can be classified as adult literature. Moreover, this story, and the novel it is a part of, had been edited, revised and reprinted many times from 1951 to 1976 (Kleemeier, 1981: 18). Namely, just like Grimm Brothers’ fairy tales this text has never been a static, invariable work, but a dynamic one which has constantly been revised and renewed.

Finally, the most eccentric and equally remarkable characteristic of Gao Yubao in the context of world literature is that he has written this autobiographical piece in the process of acquiring literacy of Chinese, whose *hanzi* (漢字) ideogram system is (in)famous with its complexity and difficulty. Or to put it more precisely, Gao composed his autobiographical works in order to learn to read-and-write after he joined the People’s Army. Usually, in order to become a writer one ought firstly to become an avid reader, yet in the case of Gao very paradoxically this process of becoming a reader and writer progressed in a simultaneous manner. Hence, Gao is a writer who oscillates between the positions of amateurism and professionalism (Kleemeier, 1981: 18), as well as those of a reader (in the process of acquiring Chinese literacy) and a talented writer.



Thus, despite the bitter open-ended finale, the reader is “extra-textually” informed that Gao decided to write his memoirs in order to improve his literacy. The juvenile readers can deeply empathize with this text by remembering their own epistemological traumas they experienced during the process of acquiring literacy. In addition, this work could teach its readers both the importance of the right to education through the true experience of a young peasant boy, and the harsh conditions of the peasants living in the semi-feudal, semi-colonial China lead by the corrupted Chiang Kaishek regime as well as Japanese occupation forces during the late 1930s.

Refugee Children Writing against “Empire” during the Algerian War (1954-62)

Les Enfants d’Algérie-Temoignages et dessins d’enfants réfugiés en Tunisie, en Lybie et au Maroc (1962) is a collective work that is based upon the refugee children’s testimonies and paintings about their traumatic experiences and bright but realistic dreams during the Algerian War, that were collected and published in its last year. These texts consisting of the accounts of children who became the victims of imperial violence radiate a profound impact in spite of their shortness and simplicity. As is seen in the below-mentioned 11 year-old girl Rabia Zochdi’s text the geopolitical and economic background and motives of the evil deeds the occupational forces commit (the will to possess natural sources such as oil, vineyards etc.) are clarified through the broken, somehow minimalist, and naturally decentralized language unique to children:

One day, when we were in Algiers, we were taking out the wheat from its hiding-place.... We were busy when France invaded our house. She asked us what we were carrying to our house. We answered her, “I do not know.” Then they hit my sister and they laughed; for 3 days they did not leave us alone. And my father, [after] they hit him, did not stay a month and he died. And it is [all] over. And even then, they started to hit the donkey, and put my mother in another room, and we were very scared.

And now we think that Algeria will be independent and as for us, we will be happy Algerians with many patriotic songs and no longer see the dead fathers in France. And then, my brother has now gone underground. Goodbye. (*Les Enfants*, 1962: 29)¹.

Here, the villains of Grimm tales such as witches, monsters, stepmothers or wolves are reconstructed in the political context as “France”, “French soldiers” or “the native collaborators” embodying imperial occupation and colonial exploitation. Needless to say, these political, historical villains are very different from the fictional, non-historical villains of Grimm tales. It should also be noted that there is no racist or discriminatory rhetoric here. In

¹ All translations from French are done by the author of this article.



this children's book "France" is not a racial/ethnic/national essentialization, but a replaceable signifier exposing the destructivity of imperialism. There is no prejudice expressed against French people *per se*. This is articulated very clearly in the testimony of 16-year-old boy Muhammad Fellah:

I would like to live, have a place [to stay], hold a job, work for my homeland and myself. All Algerians, they want that, including Europeans and Jews who want to [stay]. Why not Jews will not get along with us? It is for the benefit of the rich that France wants to keep Algeria. But we will have independence. If it is not this year, it will be next year. I am sure of it, because we are all the people that will it. There are even some French people back in France who hold demonstrations [for the sake of our independence]. (*Les Enfants*, 1962: 172)

Finally, in these testimonies, there is a collision between the actual historical realities and the colourful fantasy world fed by children's imaginations. Yet, although this conflict seems to be traumatic, it transforms children's dreams and imagination into more realistic wishes while keeping them in touch with history. This is conspicuously observed in Rabia's and Fellah's "realistic idealism" about their future of their land and themselves.

Conclusion

The major common point of these non-European texts –whose main characters are small adults struggling against the harsh conditions imposed by historical realities– is the author's strategy of engaging the reader not only to the social/international phenomena s/he tackles in his text, but also to the process of construction of his/her text. This is also evident from the writers' technique of finishing their stories with an open ending, thus enabling the reader to connect it to the cultural and historical context. Out of these works from all over the world, to which a myriad of others might be added (such as the ghost tales of Amos Tutuola, fables and tales of Kenji Miyazawa and essays of Kenzaburō Ōe particularly written and illustrated for children with political, social and cultural insights) a canon of "Third World small adult's literature" must be formed. Certainly, the works of this canon must be introduced through comprehensive but accessible introductions that would enable their readers to contextualize them both in the temporal and spatial conditions under which they were written as well as the actuality the juvenile readers live in. In this way, an antidote to post-Grimm children's literature which has alienated the child both from the socio-political realities and adulthood could be created.

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