



# New fantastic tale in Persian children's literature

Fantasy stories trend in Iran  
Between 1990 and 2007

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## Abstract

The new fantastic tale in Persian children's literature from 1990 to 2007 comprises an introduction, a chapter dealing with theory and dealing with the history of the genre, an analysis of five books and finally a section detailing conclusions. The principal contention of the essay is that the new Persian fantastic tales for children can be seen as a genre with its roots in a broad tradition and folklore of fantastic tales for more of 1000 years ago and some of this element is same between other people and other countries. In order to examine and define this genre the essay takes as its base a number of theoretical works about fantastic literature and fantastic tales for adults and children. In the stories under examination one can detect a development of specific motifs, such as the strange or the chosen child, the journey, the metamorphosis and the secondary world. There are references to recurrent themes of identity, sickness, sorrow, death, evil and love. The five studies are taken chronologically to characterise Persian fantastic tales for children that have been written and/or published for children in Iran from 1990 to 2007.

**Key Words:** New fantastic; Persian children's literature; folklore; magic; dichotomy; binary oppositions.

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## 1. Introduction

Discussions in children literature have become so widespread in recent two decade that one can assign various branches to it. In youth and children literature; fantasy is one of those branches and it seems necessary to know the specifications of this fantasy in order to understand the issue.

In fact, in fantasy world, every impossible turns out to become possible. While most of these events cannot be explained logically; though the children believe them and embrace their effects. One of the strongest pleasures and joys of book reading for the children is the joy of surprise and excitement; and the fantasies do the same thing for children (Ghezal Ayagh, 2006 : 157).

In fantasy structure, a world is made which moves along with real world and it is where the story heroes' show off themselves and also sometimes it would be a real world that unreal elements penetrate into it; Fantasies mostly contain some themes that represent the goals and business of the man of today. Fantasies help the children in order to: expand their curiosities, become the life beholders learn the importance of rules and variety of them and also they open their minds to new facilities. Fantasies help the children to expand their imaginations or to improve them (Mohammadi,1997:135-136)

Dream beauty and pleasure are the three basics of youth and children literature house; and anyone wishing to enter this house should accept these basics. There is no creature more dreams making than children. The recent attention of youth and children to fantasy stories, demonstrate that how much they have ability of selection and ordering about their own literature trend. Dreams are of the main elements of fantasy stories. While analyzing the fantasy trend in Iranian children stories, we concluded that lots of attention is paid to personal issues and social important matters.

## 2. History of fantasy books for children in Iran

Attention has been paid to fantasy writing since 1961 in Iran. The trend starts with the stories of *Samd Behrangi*. However, the important issue is that the title of these stories has not been "fantasy" at the beginning and it was "New magic" against "Old magic"; and it was

continued until 1980. Also, since 1980, *Ahmadreza Ahmadi* made this fantasy writing even much more beautiful through writing the stories: “**The day of endless fog(2005)**” and “**I found my white rabbit in spring(1981)**”. In 1990, it was decided in children and youth book council/Tehran to replace “**New magic**” by “**Fantasy**”.

### 3. Elements of tales in new fantastic

Among the young generation of fantasy authors from 1990 onward; we can mention: *Mohammad Mohammadi*, author of “**Glasses for dragon (1996)**”, *Mohammadreza Yusefi*, author of “**Suny girls(2007)**” and *Shokufeh Musavi*, author of “**Searching for love(2001)**”.

It is not exaggeration to say that the configuration of fantasy is one of the most important of today's world children literature which has been also paid attention in Iran. These fantasies in their story format have various classifications regarding theme subject, design and personalization. Among the many manifestos of fantasy in Iran; the below are the most common used: hero fantasy, scientific fantasy, behavioral fantasy, legend fantasy, love fantasy, animal's fantasy, plants fantasy and non alive objects fantasy. Normally the themes of these fantasies are the goals and business of today human, including: loneliness, paying attention to identity, willing to liberty and friendliness, life, death and love and also social behaviors. In this paper we have investigated 5 outstanding fantasy stories of youth and children in Iran as well as providing quantity statistics of written fantasy stories since 2001 to 2008 in Iran.

#### 3.1 Glasses for dragon

In 1996, *Mohammad Hadi Mohammadi* wrote a book for the age group of B and G (9-14 years old), named “**Glasses for dragon**”. This is one of the most important story books in Iran which has been written in fantasy configuration.

This book is narrative of a daughter and her grandmother living in a far village. The grandmother is accustomed to narrate dreaming stories for her only granddaughter. However, some night she confesses that the dragon in her stories is a real creature. The girl, in search of the dragon sinks in deep dreams and thoughts for many nights and finally she gets lost in a scientific touring together with her classmates in mountains. After being lost in mountains, she finds a cave as a shelter and enters the cave and there she faces the gluing and purple eyes of the dragon. She finds that this she-dragon is very old. The dragon approaches her and

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apparently it is not able to see the little girl very well since its eyes are weak. The little girl does not fear from the dragon at all and even shows her glasses and utters “if you had such a pair of glasses on your eyes, you could see everything well”. The little girl comes back to home and tells the story to her grandmother. Then they decide to help the dragon and eventually the dragon, the grandmother and the little girl come inside the city to continue living. When the girl entered university, she became an ophthalmologist and does and did surgery operation on the 500 year old dragon eyes and also provided it a pair of glasses. The story will be finished when the dragon goes back to mountains.

*The below table shows the situation of fantasy world along with real world in above story book:*

| <b>Fantasy world specification</b>                          | <b>The world created in the book</b>                     |
|---|--|
| Impossible becomes possible, non real and dreaming creature | Dragon existence in today world                          |
| Non real and dreaming creature                              | Dragon   |
| Magic   | Spell- dragon  |
| Exaggerated personalization                                 | The relationship of grandmother and the girl with dragon |
| The story continues though the place changes                | Movement from village to city                            |
| Opposition of good and bad                                  | The people trying to kill the dragon                     |

The above fantasy story is the manifesto of behavioral legend fantasy stories. The author has utilized the below items in order to create the second world beside the current world:

1. Travel and metamorphosis: migration is not a custom in the village, however, they do migrate.
2. Change in real world through: dragon existence, magic pond, dragon purple eyes and endless cave.
3. New identity creation in the story: a 500 year old dragon, surgery on dragon's eyes, making glasses for the dragon by ophthalmologist.
4. Providing opposition between the first and second worlds: the doctor is afraid on the dragon; people are searching the dragon to kill it.
5. Providing magic in front of reality and versa: delicious food is cooked in stone magic boiler, the crows disclose the secrets, the dragon is believable for some persons, the world becomes more sweet with the dragon legend, the fire coming out of the dragon mouth is to make the legend warmer not burning.
6. Child in front of adult: an 8 year old kid stands in front of a 500 year old she-dragon and her grandmother, however, goes with both of them along the story.

Jalali, M. (2011). New fantastic tale in Persian children's literature, Fantasy stories trend in Iran, Between 1990 and 2007. *International Journal of Human Sciences* [Online]. 8:1. Available: <http://www.insanbilimleri.com/en>

7. Life in front of death: the dragon says “I am the last dragon”. The grandmother dies and the little girl goes the same way as her grandmother to narrate the story.

8. Love in front of hate: the dragon believes that the human beings do not love her, however the grandmother and the little girl love the dragon and help her to cure her eyes.

Also archaic and old items have been used in this story such as dragon, elf, the spell of using glasses, the purple light of dragon eyes, the magic bowl and ring, beads reading in water and breaking the spell.

The some new Persian fantastic tales for children can be seen as a genre with its roots in a broad tradition and folklore of fantastic tales for more of 1000 years ago and some of this element is same between other people and other countries“Children make world and think that is real and believe it.” Khosronejad. 2003: 172)

Dragon is a legendary figure and her presence in religious works date back to 3500 years ago.( Bahar . 1994 :190)

There are many stories about dragon and her fighting's with heroes in *Shahnameh*, that is one of the persian literature masterpiece.(Yahaghi.1996 :75 / Kazzazi. 2002 :67)

### 3.2 Searching of love

In 2001, in Iran, most of the story books have been allocated to fantasy literature. The busiest author of fantasy was *Mohammadreza Yusefi* who entered the author's worlds with 22 works. However, the outstanding work of this year was “**Searching of love**” by *Shookufeh Musavi*. This book is as follow:

A she-magician can sense the nature, universe and mankind with their pleasures, happiness, worry and difficulties by means of her magic power. She turns a young man into an eagle and then the eagle gives nice answers to the magician questions. Finally, the she-magician – fallen in love with his beauty – again turns back the eagle into a human and starts having love with him.The above fantasy story is a manifesto of love fantasy stories.

*The below table shows the fantasy world along with the real world of above book:*

| Fantasy specifications                             | The world created in the book                       |
|--|---|
| Making an impossible world within a possible world | Turning a man into an eagle by magic                |
| Unreal and dreaming creature                       | Talking eagle                                       |
| Magic  | A she-magician and making magic                     |
| Exaggerated personalization                        | A she-magician with magic power and a strange eagle |
| Opposition of good and bad                         | Magic in front of true love                         |

In order to create the second world beside the current world, the author has utilized the below items:

1. Travel and metamorphosis: a travel in search of human spirit aspect to discover inside the mankind.
2. Creating new identity: definition of universe factors from the view point of the non mankind creature, love appearance.
3. Creating opposition in two worlds: magic in front of real world.
4. Magic in front of reality and versa: turning a man into an eagle and versa in order to make connection.
5. Love in front of hate: by the help of knowledge and information, magic turns into love.

Using archaic and old items in this story:

1. Magician
2. Magic materials
3. Talking eagle.

This fantasy story book is a manifesto of love fantasy story.

So there are roots in a broad tradition and folklore of fantastic tales for more years ago and some of this story is same between other people and other countries change character human to animal by magic.

### 3.3 Words empire

In 2002, another outstanding fantasy story was created in Iran with the name of “**Words empire**” by *Ahmad Akbarpour*.

The story is about a little boy who reads a book in which there is a poem of a 11 year old Korean poet. The poet wishes if there was not any borders between different countries. In continue of the story, the little boy also reads the story of a Chinese girl who cleans the borders of countries on the map, in geography class. They move to find the Korean poet in the book and then they are arrested in a dreaming spinach story. Finally they find the Korean poet and at the end, the author frees the children.

Although this story does not contain the characteristics of a fantasy story, is within the fantasy world. The theme of this book is social-psychological and subjects such as need, childish dreams, love, cooperation and peace are mentioned in it.

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The below table shows the fantasy world along with the real world of above book.

| Fantasy specifications                             | The world created in the book                                       |
|--|---|
| Making an impossible world within a possible world | move to find the Korean poet in the book                            |
| Unreal and dreaming creature                       | any borders between different countries                             |
| Magic  | Nothing   |
| Exaggerated personalization                        | childish dreams, love, cooperation and Exaggerated peace            |
| Opposition of good and bad                         | Magic in front of true love and borders between different countries |

### 3.4 Baboor's nice heart

The, "**Baboor's nice heart**", is another fantasy story master piece in children literature. This book is written in 2003 by *Jamshid Khanian*. It is related to the character under name *Kahoor*, the poor black driver from *Halow* village, who is in love with *Hazba*. They ran away and married although *Hazaba's* father was rich and racist. *Hajiband*( another character in the story) and *Hazaba's* father asked village people to back *Hazaba* or bring *Hazaba's* pearl that is legendary pearl. Then he decided to stop his relation with village people. They blamed *Kahoor*. *Kahoor* who had two children by the name of *Hasoon* and *Baboor*, went to sea to find *Hazaba's* pearl but he didn't return. After many years his son went to sea because he found the way of catching the *Hazaba's* pearl in dream. He went and returned by pearl. But he couldn't speak any more. Because a big taps cast a spell on him. The above fantasy story is one of the love fantasy stories.

In this story, the writer get help from the below material to establish the second world.

- 1) Travel and evolution: the *Baboor* story is started by travel. It is the strangest trip that he went so far.
- 2) Establish the second world next to the first world by the way of dream: *Nanedarya* that wants cradle for her child.
- 3) Establish the new identity for the story: *Kahoor* identity that he is black remind the *Pinokiyo*, the Lyly duck and *Fandoghshekan*.
- 4) Sorrow: the *Kahoor* travel that is without back.
- 5) Death and life: *Baboor* fight to death and went to sea to give the cradle to *Nanedarya's* son.
- 6) Good and evil: Return to family versus octopus.

Jalali, M. (2011). New fantastic tale in Persian children's literature, Fantasy stories trend in Iran, Between 1990 and 2007. *International Journal of Human Sciences* [Online]. 8:1. Available: <http://www.insanbilimleri.com/en>

- 7) Love: the love of children who think to reach the *Hazba's* pearl to wipe out the separateness of family.

The inter of Lyly duck and its likelihood to *Kahoor's* identity, conformity of the small black fish to *Baboor's* identity, matching the octopus (Dell) to *Pinokiyo's* whale, and *Nanedarya* to kind mermaid, are the writer's artistry that could inter the world fantasy stories' characters to his story.

*The below table shows the situation of fantasy world along with real world in above story book:*

| Fantasy world specification                                 | The world created in the book                                       |
|---|---|
| Impossible becomes possible, non real and dreaming creature | founding the way of catching the Hazaba's pearl                     |
| Non real and dreaming creature                              | Hazaba's pearl- octopus-Nanedarya                                   |
| Magic   | Hazaba's pearl- cradle  |
| Exaggerated personalization(Seger 2001:191)                 | The relationship of personalization between old story and new story |
| The story continues though the place changes                | traveling   |
| Opposition of good and bad                                  | Opposition live and death and heat and love                         |

The expression *Nanae* refer to *Anahid* the Goddess of water and rain in archaic time. (Bastani Parizi. 1989:283 )

Magicians are a universal element in all nation culture.

### 3.5 The day of endless fog

Another fantasy story that is discussed a many child literature in 2005 is the story under the name of "**The day of endless fog**" which is written by *Ahmadreza Ahmadi*. This fantasy story has a behavioral characteristic.

The little son went to coastal city with his family. He stands lonely next to the window during fall and winter and looks at the fog.

One day he went to alley with a skein of thread. He dropped the skein suddenly and it lost in fog. But one of the head string remained in his hand.

Each time he moved the string something appeared in the fog, such as a basket of red apple, napery of bread and vegetable, a peacock and a reed which come out from fog. At the same time he heard a sitter that played his childish cradle song. Whenever he played the sitar song by the reed the fog became thinner. Finally, the little son saw an old man under cherry tree. All over the winter the old man taught sitar and singing to the little boy. On a spring morning

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the boy saw the sea at the end of alley and found his sitar and peacock under the cherry tree. But the old man is not there anymore.

These short fantasy stories have a psychological theme and talk about the loneliness and childish dream. The main point is the struggle between the character, his self and nature. The story is narrated by the writer.

In this story, the exaggerated characteristic of the story line and struggle between good and evil and also the fast happening of events could create the fantasy world next to the real world.

Loneliness is one of the new topics that enter the children literature at this time.

#### *The report of progress in story in Iran from 2002 to 2007*

| Years | Total book Examined | Total written/ translated Story book | Total fantasy story book | Total Fantasy story books by Iranian writers |
|-------|---------------------|--------------------------------------|--------------------------|--|
| 2002  | 601                 | 297                                  | 147                      | 82   |
| 2003  | 527                 | 284                                  | 135                      | 71   |
| 2004  | 514                 | 267                                  | 144                      | 71   |
| 2005  | 570                 | 339                                  | 143                      | 75   |
| 2006  | 605                 | 298                                  | 136                      | 50   |

## 4. Conclusion

The above studied stories represent that fantasy world in last decennial is not devoted to magic world in fact by progressing the child world; the adult world is progressing too. The main difference is that adult world is changed in real world but child world is changed in real world and in dream world too. Appearing magical the new child worlds take place in old template. At the time that the children want to enter the dream world, Fantasy stories in recent time focus on characteristic.

Fantasy story are divided in 3 categories: good, middle, weak. Dramas are not included in these categories. The most fantasy stories related to (9-16) years. More of fantasy stories in Iran that are interesting are Translated works. Some of this story related to old and international models. The analysis shows that the stories contain a number of frequently occurring typical features of the genre. The fantastic tale is based on a dichotomy or binary oppositions that its reference is back: magic versus reality, reality versus magic, the child versus the adult, living versus dead, and love versus hate.

Jalali, M. (2011). New fantastic tale in Persian children's literature, Fantasy stories trend in Iran, Between 1990 and 2007. *International Journal of Human Sciences* [Online]. 8:1. Available: <http://www.insanbilimleri.com/en>

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