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A Comparative investigation of the Horror Factor and Its Function in Hamidreza Shahabadi's Novels (Lullaby for a Dead Girl, Well of Darkness, and Funny Nightmares)

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Abstract

Hamidreza Shahabadi, a storyteller and history graduate, has shown his interest in using the elements of the horror genre, in his adolescent novels. The purpose of this research is to investigate and analyze the adolescent novels of this author; lullaby for dead girl, well of darkness, and funny nightmares, to be examined from the point of view of the Horror-causing factor to make it clear that these works are imitations of foreign works or adapted to Iranian cultural and native characteristics and the function of the monster in these works should be determined. To achieve this purpose, the monster of three books was investigated and analyzed from several aspects, in terms of nature, the adventures and incidents they follow and the symbolic concepts they have and were compared with similar works or themes of the horror genre. A comparative study of the horror factor and its function in Shahabadi's three novels showed that the author, intelligently and with a correct understanding of the audience's taste, uses the elements of the horror genre and especially the monster to give a new flavor to the narrative.

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of history and take advantage of the appeal of the horror genre and attract the audience to its reconstructed historical world and in this way. The combination of the history of the Qajar era with the monsters of the horror genre distinguishes these three stories from any foreign and domestic counterparts, and even by repeating some events and themes, it makes them appear original and unique.

Keywords: *Well of darkness, Hamidreza Shahabadi, Monster, Funny nightmares, lullaby for a dead girl.*

1. Introduction

Hamidreza Shahabadi has shown his interest in utilizing the elements of genre literature, especially in his children and adolescent's books, such as *When mozhi disappeared*, *Lullaby for the Dead Girl*, *Gate of the Dead* collection, and *Funny Nightmares*. Of course, the horror genre has a greater share in the works of this successful author. A genre that, despite all the different opposing and agreeing views that exist about it, is still one of the most popular and best-selling genres, especially for adolescents.

Therefore, the purpose of this research is to examine and analyze three Iranian adolescent novels by one author; to examine them from the perspective of the horror factor in order to clarify whether Iranian works of this genre are a mere imitation of foreign stories or have been adapted to Iranian cultural and indigenous characteristics. And also to explain, if possible, to what extent the capacities of Persian legends and literature have been utilized in the creation of these books. In addition, it should be clarified what function the use of monsters, in these books.

2. Literature Review

Despite its popularity, the horror genre has received less attention from researchers, and it can be said that no independent research has been conducted so far on the subject of examining and analyzing adolescent horror literature or novels in Iran.

Research on the horror genre has also been limited to brief, mostly theoretical, articles and definitions of this genre. None of these articles have addressed the status of Iranian teen horror literature, but have merely introduced this genre and the pros and cons of this genre.

Of course, only two articles, one in a specialized scientific journal, by Khaliqfard et al. (2020) and the other in a conference, by Lavimi

(2020), have addressed Iranian teen horror literature in a very general way, and only in terms of characterization and content.

There are very few books written in Persian in this field, which deal with the horror genre as a cinematic genre and have no connection with the world of teenagers and children's literature; such as Hosseini (2012) and Rahmati (2018). Most of the theses that have been compiled in this field are related to the horror genre in cinema and the world of adults; such as Eslami (2011), Ahmadi-Soleimani (2016), Bahrampour (2016) and Ghasemi (2020).

In the field of adolescent novels that have been examined in this study, only one of them, the oldest selected novel, has been of interest to researchers, and there are only four articles about the book *Lullaby for the Dead Girl*, which, of course, are not about examining the horror factor and its function in Hamidreza Shahabadi's stories and generally have no connection with examining the horror genre in this author's books.

Erami-Avval et al. (2017) examine how gender relations are represented in the novel *Lullaby for a Dead Girl* within the framework of critical discourse analysis. Izadpanah (2017) has examined this novel in terms of dialogue and polyphony, according to Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the novel. Jokari and et al. (2018) by examining narrative factors according to Bakhtin's approach, seek to show to what extent this novel has advanced towards instilling ideology or its failure in the text, and Mortezaei (2021) has examined this novel semiotically. Almost the same authors and several others, in their theses, have included *Lullaby for the Dead Girl* among the various novels they have selected from different authors in their studies of the adolescent novel in the context of topics such as confrontation, ideology, characterization, language, discourse, and gender.

Therefore, so far, no comprehensive and independent research has been conducted on the subject of studying and analyzing adolescent horror literature in Iran, and specifically the selected books of Hamidreza Shahabadi; nor has any research been conducted on the comparative study of the horror factor and its function in the books of Hamidreza Shahabadi. Also, no research has been conducted focusing on the two books *Well of Darkness* and *Funny Nightmares*.

3. Methodology

For a comparative study of the horror factor in the books of Hamidreza Shahabadi, three prominent books were selected that contain the elements of the horror genre, have a prominent and influential writer in

the field of adolescent literature who has won numerous awards for his books, and have a tangible horror factor or monster. The horror factor in this study is the driving force of scary stories, or in other words, a monster. Hakimeh in *Lullaby for a Dead Girl* and Razi in *Well of Darkness* are monsters returned from the world of the dead, who are also more or less human-making monsters due to their fate and the influence of society on their fate and emergence. Salar al-Dowleh and his character complement, Ezzat Soltan, should also be considered self-created monsters.

In this study, the monster in each book has been examined and analyzed from several aspects. First, what is the monster, what is its nature, and how was it formed? Second, what goal does it pursue and what adventures does it have? And third, what is the symbolic meaning and significance of the monster? This is important because one of the components of most powerful books in the horror genre is their symbolism.

Also, in response to these three questions, similar stories or similar themes and motifs in the horror or fantasy genre are mentioned and the selected books are compared with them.

4. Results

In the comparative studies conducted, it was found that, in terms of the nature of the monsters, the adventures and incidents they have, and also in terms of the symbolic concepts they have, the three adolescent novels studied have similar examples among foreign horror or fantasy works, myths and legends of other nations, as well as Iranian legends and culture. According to these studies, it can be roughly said that the share of foreign works in these similarities was greater than that of domestic works. This issue can be related to the fact that the horror genre in its modern sense is a genre with little precedent in Iran, and the modeling and influence of Iranian writers from foreign works should be considered inevitable.

However, a very important point in concluding this comparative study is the discussion of history. Without a doubt, the main, distinguishing and recurring element of Hamidreza Shahabadi's stories, especially the three selected adolescent novels, is history, namely the history of the dark Qajar era, and this issue is undoubtedly derived from the education of this author and his personal interests.

In his book *Lullaby for a Dead Girl*, he discusses the benefits of history and contrasts the metaphor of exhuming a grave with summoning a spirit, stating that learning from the experiences of the

past as a guide for the future is the main benefit of reading and knowing history. This issue has given his works a historical aspect, even in the horror genre. This approach, namely learning lessons from history and not merely entertaining with its anecdotes, has also made his stories indigenous in the form of narrative. This technique, namely the combination of Qajar-era history with horror monsters, distinguishes these three stories from any foreign or domestic analogues and makes them appear innovative despite the repetition of some events and themes.

In addition, Shahabadi has managed to create horror stories that are much more local, unlike similar Iranian horror novels, which are sometimes just Iranian names in a completely foreign setting, by utilizing history, historical spaces, and cultural and indigenous elements that are intertwined with the plot of the story, such as a monster emerging from the pond (Like a small pool) of a completely Iranian mansion, a wandering ghost from the Qajar era, or completely Iranian scenes in the heart of a hellish mansion.

This research can be a guide for writers of young adult novels to be more successful in writing popular genres and also to be able to create attractive and innovative works with Iranian culture.

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