

Discursive Developments in Nader Ebrahimi's Fictions for Children and Young Adults

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Abstract

Nader Ebrahimi has published 49 works for children and young adults, the impact of political-social discourses on which has not yet been examined in any research using a discourse analysis approach. This article draws on two discourse analysis theories—those of James Paul Gee and Norman Fairclough—to demonstrate the impact of political-social discourses on Ebrahimi's children's and young adults' works. Research findings show that “love of Iran” was always a central concern in Ebrahimi's works, except that, under the influence of political and social developments, elements are added to or subtracted from this nationalist discourse: (1) in the years before the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Ebrahimi's fiction tends to fall under endogenous national discourses, underscoring national endeavor to build Iran; (2) during the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the element of “politics” clearly finds its way into his fiction, subsuming his works under a revolutionary discourse centered on combating tyranny and honoring the revolution

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and the campaigns by revolutionaries; (3) after the Iran-Iraq war, his fiction can be formulated under the “construction discourse,” in which love of Iran is still pivotal, and more than anything else, it emphasizes Iran’s potential for industry and economic development. His literature in this period remains political, and the “anti-Western” element is more evident in his works relative to his previous works.

Keywords: *children and young adults fictions, Nader Ebrahimi, critical discourse analysis, James Paul Gee, Norman Fairclough.*

Extended Abstract

1. Introduction

Nader Ebrahimi was born on April 3, 1936, in Tehran. He started writing fiction at the age of sixteen. While Ebrahimi began his career by writing stories for adults, he did not confine himself to this enterprise and wrote stories for children and young adults as well. His first children's fiction, titled *Away from Home*, was published in 1968, and his last children's fiction, titled *All of My Cats*, was published in 1998. The beginning of Nader Ebrahimi’s career as an author of children's and young adults' literature coincided with a period when authors such as Samad Behrangi, Amin Faghiri, Ahmadreza Ahmadi, Ali Ashraf Darvishian, Nasim Khaksar, Morteza Keivan, Mansour Yaghouti, and Mahmoud Hakimi were widely active in the “production” of ideological literature for children and young adults. In fact, Ebrahimi began writing for children and young adults in the 1970s, a period when widespread social and political transformations made social and political relationships more evident in children's and young adults' literature than in any other period. Subsequent events in Iran shaped each decade into a distinct social period, inevitably influencing Ebrahimi, whose goal in writing was social reform. This article aims to identify the impact of these social developments on Ebrahimi’s approach to writing for children, particularly given his prolific output during this period. Accordingly, this research seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What discursive periods can be identified in Nader Ebrahimi’s writing for children?
2. What discursive features have been most frequently recurring in his fiction for children and young adults?

2. Literature Review

Hossein Sheikholeslami, in the article “Opaque Romanticism, Bourgeois Marxism” (2002), traces political ideologies in Ebrahimi’s theorization of children’s literature. In “Critical Rationality and Nader Ebrahimi’s Role in the Transformation of the History of Children’s Literature in Iran,” Mohammad Hadi Mohammadi analyzes the components of modern rationality in Ebrahimi’s works for children and young adults. Sara Ahmadi et al., in “Rethinking Modern Utopian Thought in the Fictional Literature of the Last Two Decades Before the Islamic Revolution (The Case of Nader Ebrahimi’s Works),” draw upon Laclau and Mouffe’s discourse analysis theory to examine the features of utopia from Ebrahimi’s perspective. However, these and other studies fail to analyze the impacts and developments of politico-social discourses in relation to Ebrahimi’s children’s and young adults’ fiction across different periods of his writing career.

3. Methodology

In this article, we employ a combination of James Paul Gee’s and Norman Fairclough’s discourse analysis theories, as they best suit our purposes. Gee views discourse analysis as the study of language as it is used in the world. According to him, whenever we use language in speech or writing, we construct one of seven components, which he calls the “seven building tasks”: significance, practices, identities, relationships, politics, connections, and sign systems and knowledge. To examine and analyze each of these components, Gee formulates guiding questions, the answers to which help identify and interpret the discursive features of a work. Fairclough, on the other hand, structures his discourse analysis around three levels: description, interpretation, and explanation. In this research, we draw on his second level of analysis, i.e., interpretation.

4. Results

Ebrahimi began writing for children and young adults during a time when Iran’s politico-social environment was marked by conflicts and rivalries among various political discourses, particularly the widespread influence of leftist discourse on the country’s literary and cultural sphere. The findings indicate that the central feature of his fiction across these three periods was a deep-rooted love for Iran, or Iranism, with elements being added or removed in response to the discursive shifts within Iranian society.

1. In the stories he wrote during the Pahlavi era, love for Iran is conveyed through a didactic, non-political language. During this period, Ebrahimi emphasized the necessity of hard work in building Iran, at times encouraging the audience to draw inspiration from the successful experiences of Western countries. Overall, his stories from this period can be categorized as “didactic literature,” as they highlight the concept and value of labor and prioritize collective interests over individual ones.

2. In the early years following the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the themes in Ebrahimi’s stories underwent a significant shift toward realism, focusing on the events of the revolution. The “element of politics” explicitly emerged in his language and literature. His realistic political stories, which highlight the activities of revolutionary figures, the fight against tyranny, the concept of martyrdom and the elevated status of martyrs, the suppression of dissident and non-revolutionary voices, and even the encouragement of armed struggle, suggest that his primary goal was to praise the Islamic Revolution and introduce it to children and young adults.

3. The third period of Ebrahimi’s career began in 1989, following the end of the Iran-Iraq War. With the onset of the so-called “Construction” era, he focused on writing works that encouraged the audience to contribute to rebuilding Iran. His works from this period emphasize industry, the foundations of industrialization, and Iran’s economic development based on domestic capacities. Unlike in the first period, where he spoke of “labor” in a more general sense, Ebrahimi now framed it within the discourse of reconstruction, incorporating an anti-Western and anti-American element. Thus, his post-revolutionary stories can be categorized as “didactic-political” literature.

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