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The Study of the Implied Audience in *Shekarestān* Animation Series

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Abstract

Critics have affirmed the existence of dual, double, or sometimes triple *implied* audiences for a single work. Therefore, the study of the implied audience in the media and literature becomes quite essential, especially if the media is to be broadcast for very young people. *Shekarestān*, the Iranian animated television series, broadcast on national TV channels for children and teenagers, has envisioned varied audiences within its different parts the study of which reveals the multiplex nature of its narrative as well as the narration itself. The authors have attempted to reveal how the narrative multiplicity assumes mainly double implied audiences by deploying Aidan Chambers' theory of the implied reader as the main approach as well as that of Barbara Wall, utilizing the findings of other theoreticians of the field, too. It is hoped that the results will be useful to those who are interested in children's literature and media.

Keywords: *Shekarestān*, Implied Audience, Iranian Animation, Children's Media

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Introduction

Then shall we so easily let the children hear just any tales fashioned by just anyone and take into their souls opinions for the most part opposite to those we'll suppose they must have when they are grown up? (Plato 377b)

The reader's role has been important since the time that the literary works existed. Going far back to the ancient Greek literature and criticism, one notices Plato's emphasis on the "disturbing power of poetry," its effect on the "passions and morality" of the people, on "their basic conceptions of gods," and on "the reality itself" (Habib 708). When defining a "properly structured tragedy," Aristotle considered the response of the audience important because "such a tragedy must inspire the purgative emotions of fear and pity in the audience" (708). In their opinion, books of poetry or philosophy had always had to be appropriate just because their goal was to influence the reader. This implied that the readers were effective forces/factors behind the mechanism of the production of the artistic works. To put it the other way round, those who produced works of art were also concerned about the type of the readers/audience that they might have and, if there were pedagogical intentions involved, the desire to specify the reading communities/spectators would become stronger. Therefore, identifying the intended or ideal readers/audience of a book/art work could be part of the true understanding of it. This very act of identification finds a crucial significance in the places where books for children are written with much emphasis on instruction, especially in the countries like Iran where families and school administrators pay a lot of attention to the suitability of the contents of the course books in nurturing the kids/students' moral well-being.

The media, in its broadest sense including television has transcended all the other discourses in influencing children, and critics have emphasised the fact that (violent) media forms children's (aggressive) behaviour (see Finney et al. 192; Gunter and McAleer 88). Today, children spend more time watching television rather than reading books. Television, more specifically, as "the most ubiquitous medium of mass communication" (Özer and Avcı 418) is very influential and children "become television addicts" before the

age of six (quoted in Özer and Avecı 419). They are vulnerable to the materials presented to them in/by the televised animated films because they imitate what they see. Although these animations can also have positive effects on them “foster[ing their] educational development,” their destructive effects can surely mar their “socialisation stages, physical, cognitive, and emotional development, eating habits,” giving them “inclination to aggression and violence” (419). One of the reasons for these problems is that media which is appropriate for adults may not always be appropriate for children because they may harm their way of thinking, undermining their self-esteem, and encouraging aggression in them. These occur especially when children are either exposed to violent or obscene scenes or confused by the content or style beyond their ability to comprehend. As an example, Richardson refers to “Betty Boop cartoons of Max and Dave Fleischer, which are filled with brazen sexual innuendo” (259). As the open expression of sexuality is forbidden in some countries including Iran, which is the geographical and cultural setting of the present study's subject matter, *Shekarestān*, the exposure to sexual contents or any other content above children's age will lead to a lot of controversy at school and home and will put both teachers and parents in a lot of difficulties. These and many other reasons are sufficient to make an Iranian parent ask: is this program suitable for my kid(s)? This is another way of asking: whom does the present program truly address?

The Statement of the Problem

When watching *Shekarestān* animation series, the alleged conception is usually that children are the actual addressee because firstly, it is an animation series broadcast in children's program on national TV, and secondly, it uses some techniques that are traditionally appropriate for a child audience. Nonetheless, there are some other qualities that challenge this kind of conclusion. Hence the question: What is the relationship between the real and the implied audience? Do they compare closely? If not, does the lack of affinity between the apparent and the implied audience violate the main

objective or objectives of the animated content of the series? There is an attempt here to answer these questions.

Significance of the Study

The study finds significance especially because despite all the attempts to show the advantages or disadvantages of animations for children, no academic research has investigated the relationship between the real and the authorial or implied audiences of the Iranian animations, and in the case of *Shekarestān* series, no previous study has attempted to refer to the dichotomy between the real and implied audience. While many studies in the world focus on animations and their influence on the children, few have investigated them in Iran. Mofidi and Kafili Moqaddam refer to the influential role of animated films in developing the children's knowledge of morality (1) because the programs made for children and broadcast for them by the Iranian national TV are mostly loaded up with moral lessons. Razavi Tusi and Samadi also suggest that watching Iranian animations affect the young adults' religious thinking while gender and religious backgrounds matter as well (105), but no study has been attributed to the investigation of the implied audience in *Shekarestān*.

Methodology

The view of the implied audience or the implied reader has developed since 1960s. In all the different perspectives ranging between Wolfgang Iser and other much recent scholars of the concept of the readership such as Barbra Wall, the role played by the reader has become more and more complex especially with regard to the plurality that the term has found. As an example, let's consider the terms used by Iser (implied reader), Genette and Prince (narratee), Riffaterre (superreader), Booth (postulate reader), Rabinowitz (authorial, intended, or hypothetical audience), Nodelman (implied viewer), Wall (dual and double audience), or Salstad (split triple address and triadic address). All of these terms with their individual portrayal of the audience accentuate the untamed/able nature of the concept of the reader or audience.

This finds even more complexity when children are specifically concerned because they naturally build an oppositional relationship to the adults.

The dichotomy between the two words, child and adult, most often builds a binary construction which excludes all the other minor classifications such as adolescent, young children, young adults, teenagers, etc. Who is a child? Who is an adult person? What age limit distinguishes the two from one another? The answers to these questions are basically *deferred* in most studies because of the fact that the spectrum of the different groups of the people, reductively called children or adults, is dissolved in the transparent metaphysics of a binary hegemony. Dominic Cheetham, though *cynically*, points to Barbara Wall's depiction of this dichotomy or division in the manner as follows:

Wall's analysis freely uses the words 'adult' and 'child' as though they were mutually exclusive terms. This is not unusual. Shavit (1999) argues that within Western society the words 'adult' and 'child' are defined in opposition to each other, such that adults are defined by being 'not children,' and that children are defined by being 'not adults'. (20)

In fact, unlike Barbara Wall's free usage of the two terms, child and adult, the effacement or disregard for the division between the children and adults is not unusual in the study of the implied reader in children's literature. Actually, there is a gradual disappearance of the existence of such division,

It is certainly true that the distinction between children's literature and adult literature has become increasingly blurred in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. The borders of literary fields in general are ever more vague and shifting. (Beckett 9)

With the much recent zeal for the cross-over literature which celebrates the emergence of a rather new genre in children's literature, a genre that addresses "a diverse, cross-generational audience that can include readers of all ages: children, adolescents, and adults" (Beckett 3), the division is deemed ignorable by many scholars. This kind of (cross-over) literature does not acknowledge separate readership believing that the two generations, young and old, can benefit equally (3). As in Beckett's words,

Crossover fiction blurs the borderline between two traditionally separate readerships: children and adults. However, crossover texts do not necessarily address a dual audience of children and adults. Some may even seem to target a single audience of hybrid adult-child readers.

(3)

Nonetheless, the study of the relationship between the text and its audience with regard to the child vs. adult classification can lead to quite interesting results especially when the cultural contexts of the artifact is taken into consideration. In fact, despite the general disregard for the dividing line between a child and an adult reader/audience by the recent scholarship, especially with cross-over literature being now the vogue, what a child sees, understands, or expects is not the same as that of an adult even if there be some overlapping interests. This difference originates from the child's cultural background which must not be ignored. For example, the inclusion of an obscene speech or action in an animation may not evoke much of a commotion or distress in people in a country like the US as it does in Iran because of the people's religious belief; one is always on guard to see if the program has remained in the scope that delimits the child audience or not. Therefore, Aiden Chambers, Barbara Wall, and other children's literature scholars, who take into consideration the dividing line between the child and adult readers, can help determine whether the literary work has given priority of the readership to children or to adults, and in this manner, reveal the truth about the work's either remaining loyal to the dominant cultural codes of the society or deviating from it.

Although this study does not intend to launch a cultural study of the series, and will concentrate on the narrative structure or techniques to determine the nature of its implied audience, it shows how much potentiality there is in the study of the implied audience/reader for the study of the culture; this is because culture itself is a metanarrative and can be studied under the rubrics of *literary* theories.

***Shekarestān* Animation Series: an Overview**

Shekarestān, the Iranian children's animated television series, was first produced in 2008 and directed by Bābak Nazari and Sa'id Zāmeni. It has been very popular ever since. Taqvāyi refers to it as the most successful animation among the adaptations of Persian literature produced by Sabā Company (7). It was broadcast on the second channel of IRIB, and eventually became popular in a very short period of time.

The settings and the costumes in *Shekarestan* animation series are all designed in accordance with the traditional architecture and clothing in Iran. It values the simple and traditional ways of living by admiring poor families and their traditional lifestyle whereas it attributes negative characteristics to rich families possessing a modern way of life (Rezvān-niyā "A Critical Study on the Narration Style and Semiotics in *Shekarestān*"). In addition, it is rich with proverbs and folktales which are the basis of the themes of the stories. Besides, each part of *Shekarestān* is associated with a specific story. The stories are all narrated from a book. When a sequence finishes, it continues on the next page (See for example "Zardak" in *Shekarestān*). The pages follow in right-left order just like the Persian books. The book includes both texts and pictures. Although the two are not compatible (in all parts, the transcription on the page is always fixed and illegible whereas the title of each story is legible and changes), the reader is able to follow the pictures and motions which have been made in the funniest and the most interesting form to attract all watchers, especially children.

The name of the series, *Shekarestān*, is also one of its strengths. Ja'fari believes that this name has both comic connotations and traditional ones ("Intimate Words of the Cardboards"). It is comic in the sense that it literally means a sugar producing land and connotes an amiable place referring to the series which is filled with sweet and interesting stories. Its traditional connotations also result from its being repeated several times and in varying places in the great masterpieces of Persian Literature, like those of Sa'di, Hafez, Khaqani, and Nezami.

There is also a fallible narrator in *Shekarestān* who adds to the humorous tone of the series. He is a man whose voice indicates his old age, but he identifies with a child observer and uses pauses to show surprise or laughs

with sweet giggles. He is not omniscient and does not have more information than the audience about the plot (As in the case of the part called “Chelow morgh e parandeh” [The Flying Chicken and Rice]¹). The use of fallible narrator is helpful because it increases the audience's curiosity and develops their thinking ability. Dewey, as an example, believes that he could “advocate developing thinking by developing curiosity and the habit of exploring and testing as these will increase questioning and the love of inquiry” (Behrenbruch 49). The adult narrator with childish tone and attitude not only produces a lot of humour, it also adds to the dual nature of the narrative of the animation in addressing the audience. This is one reason why the authors here aim at revealing the duality that exists between the structural and conceptual aspects of the series which in some critics’ opinions might be a sign of its addressing a double or multiple audiences (see for instance Taqvāyi 7). To do so, Aidan Chambers' theory of implied reader in children's literature offers a very good practical means.

The Implied Audience in *Shekarestān* Animation Series

To determine the implied reader in children’s literature or the literature that is specifically written for children, Aidan Chambers has referred to five major techniques, namely, style, point of view, intermission, taking sides, and tell-tale gaps that work simultaneously. Every single technique is explained and used individually; however, it must also be noted that the results of the analysis of these techniques should not be considered exclusive; it is the effect created by the majority of these techniques used in the text that determines the final result.

Style

Chambers considers “style” very helpful since it “quickly establishes a relationship between the author and reader” (6). The text “selects’ its appropriate reader, projects an image of such a reader, through its specific linguistic code, its style, [and] the ‘encyclopaedia’ it implicitly presupposes” (Rimmon-Kenan 121). Therefore, “The audience [is] presupposed by the narrative itself” (Chatman 150). To understand the dominant style in the text,

one must see whether the tone and the manner by which the text has presented can be communicated to a child reader. One has to pay attention to “the appropriateness of language” when addressing children (Melrose 7). McDowell enumerates the qualities of the books that address the children:

Children’s books are generally shorter; they tend to favour an active rather than a passive treatment, with dialogue and incident rather than description and introspection; child protagonists are the rule; conventions are much used; the story develops within a clear-cut moral schematism which much adult fiction ignores; children’s books tend to be optimistic rather than depressive; language is child-oriented; plots are of a distinctive order, probability is often disregarded; and one could go on endlessly talking of magic, and fantasy, and simplicity, and adventure. (McDowell 551)

In children's books, it is usually expected that the themes, allusions, and connotations be appropriate to the age and level of children's understanding. Accordingly, the same is required for an animation intended for them. All these stylistic matters are of crucial importance in *Shekarestān* series including several other equally important factors such as vocabulary, proverbs, genealogy, tone, theme, and stereotype, the parameters by which Chambers distinguishes the texts appropriate for children from those for adults. The same can be utilized to help the argument in the present study.

Vocabulary

To begin with the vocabulary, it must be emphasized that the vocabulary used in *Shekarestān* series is very easy to understand; however, sometimes some archaic words are deliberately used either for creating humour or for giving a historical ancientness to the stories. In each case, it is clear that the audience must have the needed experience or knowledge to enjoy the created effects. For example, in “Chelow morgh e parandeh” [The Flying Chicken and Rice], the archaic *Maktab khāneh* for school or *Tājer Bāshi* for the merchant; in “Rammāl e bozorg” [the Great Fortune Teller], the archaic *Rammāl* for fortune teller; and in “Samad e sar beh rāh” [The Complaisant Samad], the archaic *Ejbāri* for military service have all been either outdated

or unknown to children. The very idea of the obligatory military service is mostly comprehensible to the young adults. Another example is found in “Khar beraft” [The Donkey Went]; the concept of *Naqqāli* [archaic equivalent for story-telling] has been introduced which is not much known to children². The use of archaic words and phrases suggests the complexity of language and becomes quite challenging for the young audiences of the series. However, as Cheetham observes, “Learning is part of the reading process” (25) and “child readers are perfectly capable of actively changing their experience of a text by asking questions, by re-reading . . . or by otherwise negotiating understanding of a text” (25). Therefore, with the help of an adult reader, children can “take action to change their level of non-understanding” and turn into “sophisticated’ readers” (25). The use of archaic words can add to children’s knowledge of their language and thus, lead to their learning about the past history and people. At the same time, using such words helps the producers to increase the number of the audience by the inclusion of adults, hence “dual structuring of the text” (to use Shavit’s terms); now, at least, two groups of readers/audience approach the text, though differently: children accustomed to simplicities and adults demanding complexities (Shavit *Poetics of Children's Literature* 70). This is how the series is actually addressing a "double" audience in Barbara Wall’s words, that is, to “address adults, either overtly . . . or covertly” along with children (Wall 35). The inclusion of both children and adults in the readership of the series despite increasing the number of the audience to the benefit of the producers of the program may lead to the young audiences' dependence on adult companions, which needs careful attention.

Proverb

The same thing happens with proverbs. Some proverbs have been used in the animation which cannot be understood by children or sometimes by teenagers. This part also involves double audience. To clarify the case, Astrid Lindgren explains that “Many who write for children wink slyly over the heads of their child-readers to an imaginary reader; they wink agreeingly to the adults and ignore the child” (qtd. in Shavit “The Double Attribution of

Texts” 90). In this situation, children are in desperate need of some adults to explain the meanings to them.³ In “Khiyālbāf va kuzeh ye rowghan” [The Daydreamer and the Oil Pot], another ancient Persian proverb has been stated, “our donkey did not possess a tail since it was a foal.”⁴ “The bed is wet and the kid is missing” (in English “the bird flown”) is a similar example in “Bachcheh dozdi” [Kidnapping a Child].⁵ Fortunately, however, all these proverbs are presented in the context of their accompanying images and pictures to make them comprehensible to the young audience. The unfamiliar and archaic terms and proverbs in the series may be intended to familiarise children with the traditions of their country; nonetheless, it will be difficult for them unless they are explained by their adult companions.

Genealogy

The stories of *Shekarestān* series are mostly adaptations from traditional tales. Some stories like “Khar beraft” [The Donkey Went] are adapted from *Masnavi* (Rumi 201). Some refer to Mollā Nasraddin stories, all for the adults to read. An example is “Tājer e dizi” [The Merchant of Dizi]. Some like “Qasr e jadid e soltān” [The King's New Castle] allude to Buhlul who was “a semi-legendary figure . . . extremely well known in the popular literature of Iran and neighboring countries” (“Buhlūl” *Encyclopaedia Islamica*). The very aim of this and other similar allusions and adaptations have been to teach morality to adults. However, if the adaptations are produced to address children, it is expected that the message suit children’s level of understanding which does not seem to happen in some parts of *Shekarestān*. In “Khar beraft” for instance, the audience learns not to be proud and be fooled when people flatter them. This is quite contrary to children’s need for being admired especially at very young ages. In addition, in these adaptations, the adults act as the sole wrong doers who must get punished and therefore, in all occasions, it is the adult characters who must learn the moral lessons. Eventually, the borrowed lessons from the original sources reflected in *Shekarestān* are just meant for the adults. Even if we ignore the origin of the stories, the fact that the main protagonists of all the parts of the series are adults proves that the series has addressed the adults more than children.⁶

Tone

In the series, the tone is both appropriate and inappropriate for a child to follow. The way the narrator narrates the story is humorous and children are easily attracted to its world. However, the satirical tone which aims at correcting the vices of the adults becomes dominant in many parts of the series. Satire makes the audience ponder on his own folly by “diminishing or derogating a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking toward its attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn, or indignation” (Abrams and Harpham 320). In “Chelow morgh e parandeh” [The Flying Chicken and Rice], the very representation of a teacher as covetous is satiric.⁷ In “Qānun e Soltān” [King's Law], the king being manifested as reluctant to act for betterment of the affairs of the country is satiric.⁸ In “Soltān e mush hā” [The King of the Mice], Bohlul satirically addresses the judge and tells him that “the mice in your house are accustomed to stealing”⁹, which is an oblique reference to the judge as a thief. Similarly, in “Chupān e dorughgu” [The Lying Shepherd], television advertisements on different commodities have been satirised to tell the audience that they are not always trustable.¹⁰ The point is that kids may not communicate well with the language and intentions of satire. They can enjoy its humour whereas an adult audience can easily understand the intention behind the laughter or derision that is evoked by the ideas within or without the work. In addition, satire's main role is usually to criticise the vices of the grown-ups. This is aligned with the fact that in some texts the narrative “wink[s] slyly over the heads of their child-readers to an imaginary [adult] reader” (Shavit “Double Attribution of Texts” 90).

Theme

Major themes should come into consideration, too. As Rabinowitz contends, “while authorial reading without further critique is often incomplete, so is a critical reading without an understanding of the authorial audience as its base” (Rabinowitz 32). As a result, the following question must be carefully answered: do the themes of the stories in the series concern children or adults? In “Chelow morgh e parandeh” [The Flying Chicken and Rice], the story is about a teacher who is covetous and tries to hide the food

which is sent from the merchant to the children. He hides it because he wants to have it for himself, but the clever children realise his trick and eat the food when the teacher is out.¹¹ The major theme is to teach the audience, whether young or old, not to be greedy since the one who is, loses at the end. The lesson can be useful to both children and adults because the former know the meaning and the latter observe the effects of greed. Nonetheless, the presentation of the children as crafty is a bit unpleasant to the older audience, especially to parents who desire to see innocent children. Kids are almost always considered innocent, who have not yet learned to be covetous in the same manner as some adults are; they get satisfied very easily. The adults, on the contrary, most often want more and more. The same thing happens in “Qasr e jadid e soltān” [The King's New Castle]. The king, being greedy, collects all the people's possessions in the name of law, and as a result, his castle is ruined.¹² In “Qānun e soltān” [The King's Law], it is revealed that whereas kings in truth must be concerned about people's welfare, they are reversely busy with meaningless affairs; they only want to have fun.¹³ Consequently, they fail and suffer for their errors. “Ganj e penhān” [The Hidden Treasure] addresses the grown-up people who only consider money important and forget about their loved ones. As an example, an old man is demonstrated bequeathing all his money and possession to his sons. Since he has no money left, they do not care about him. He tries to devise a trick to show them why they are wrong; his adult sons learn about it when it is too late to regret.¹⁴ Thus, nearly all the major themes point to a problem in the adult world. Some of the stories are intended to teach morality to children, too; however, it is the adults who can typically understand the themes fully because they are more experienced and the series merely enjoys giving its young audience pleasure by audio-visual effects, that is, colourful scenes, funny visages of the characters, and unusually funny voices of the old and young characters, which, despite lacking in educational matters, are still sufficient to attract them to the series.

Stereotype

The presence of stereotypes is another interesting factor that must be carefully considered when analysing the style of the *Shekarestān* series. In all cultures, the judge is the symbol of justice, but in *Shekarestān*, he is seldom trustable. In “Ayāz va qāzi ye tama’kār” [Ayāz and the Greedy Judge], “Soltān e mush hā” [The King of the Mice], and “Bohlul va farib e qāzi” [Bohlul and the Judge's Trick], the judge is presented as the one who only counts his money not being reliable at all.¹⁵ He even tries to play tricks on the poor people to gain more money.¹⁶ Similarly, the kings who are the symbol of power are shown as weak creatures that do not really care for the welfare of their people. In “Qānun e soltān” for example, having fun is the only important factor to the king. In addition, he is beaten by Bohlul several times in the same part¹⁷ which is very funny to the adults though it may sound quite strange to the children who lack the background knowledge about the role that a Fool plays in the ancient Iranian court. In “Qasr e jadid e soltān” [King's New Castle], a little flea is the source of the destruction of the king's palace, and in “Borj e kaj” [The Crooked Tower], an old woman can make all the people declare publicly their own opinion about the tower contrary to that of the king.¹⁸ Teachers who typically stand for good manners are also depicted greedy and covetous in “Chelow morgh e parandeh” [The Flying Chicken and Rice].¹⁹ The series has deconstructed the usual roles given to these personages in a rather negative sense of the word because the deconstruction of these roles do not really offer much to children or teenagers except for a shocking experience. This may suggest that the series, at some parts and moments, has not paid much attention to the fact that there will be very young audience who will try to find familiar people and will try to connect with the characters and stories. All in all, the major themes, satiric moments, and the way stereotypes are presented somewhat ignore the children's age and level of understanding, giving the adults the upper hand and making them the candidates for the favoured and/or dominant implied audience in the context that corresponds with Barbara Wall's idea of ‘double audience’.

Point of View

M. H. Abrams defines point of view as “the way a story gets told” (271). To put it simply, it refers to the position the narrator chooses to narrate the story. The author may establish different points of view to narrate a single story and “many single works exhibit a diversity of methods” (272). In Chambers' opinion, two factors must be taken into consideration concerning the children's books: first, there must exist “a very sharply focused point of view” (Chambers 6), and secondly, this point of view must have been constructed by “adoption of a child” (7). In *Shekarestān*, the main narrator of the stories, as his voice proves, is an adult who paradoxically usually speaks in a manner as if his only audience is children. As an example, we refer to “Chelow morgh e parandeh” in which the narrator laughs at the fall of the main protagonist who is also an adult person and describes him in terms of his greed²⁰ but he does it in a manner as if all the young children who watch the series are able to understand the hidden or explicit meanings in his narration. The narrator, although not an omniscient narrator, actually acts paradoxically like the ancient drama chorus who appears in different parts of a play to give a summary or to elaborate on the moral implications of the events. This is however not the only task that he has to accomplish. He uses childish tone in his speech to keep the connection between the child audience and the stories of the series which are dramatized in the funniest form and the most colorful audio-visual manner possible.

Intermission: What the Writers/Producers Say

Intermission is the third technique mentioned by Chambers. To elaborate, he states that an “author may write for a single person or a large public, for himself or for nobody. But the work itself implies the kind of the reader to whom it is addressed and this may not coincide with the author's private view of his audience” (Chambers 5). Rabinowitz, one of the pioneers of the study of audience, believes that “the meaning of a text is simply identical to the author's intended meaning” which might lead to the conclusion that “authorial intention is the necessary object of interpretation” (29). As Nikolajeva also avers,

It is not seldom that writers misjudge their audience. Writers may declare that they write for boys and girls between ten and twelve, while the implied readers of the novels may have to be slightly older and more mature to understand the character. . . . All this does not necessarily prevent real readers from enjoying a text that postulates a different implied reader. (6-7)

All being true, the author's remarks about his audience is, however, not always helpful because in many cases the author's chosen audience is different from what the text intends. Bābak Nazari, the director of *Shekarestān* series, declares that “at first the series was supposed to address teenagers . . . but then gathering feedback from the people, led to the point that all the family members watch it” (see “*Shekarestān* as a mirror in front of the audience”). The statement “all the members of the family” implies that both children along with teenagers and adults are potential audiences of the series simultaneously. The problem may be that the content that pleases a young adult or an adult person does not necessarily guarantee its attraction to or even suitability for a child or a teenager. It is possible that the series draw its young audience into a locus of experience which is somewhat beyond their ken and sometimes harmful, too. For instance, in the opening scene of “Fut e ostād” [The Master’s Knack], the father of the young boy called Samad beats him by a wooden cane and punishes him by throwing objects at his head which makes him cry out of pain. In “Chelow morgh e parandeh” [The Flying Chicken and Rice] the teacher goes to school having a wooden cane in his hand threatening the students with it.²¹ Physical punishment, unlike a few decades ago, is now banned at schools in Iran. The adults surely know what the cane signifies because they have seen it in their school days and most of them have had the experience of being punished by their teachers. But to the children today, it proves nothing but a vile image of their present or future (if yet very young for school) teachers who are supposed to be kind and caring. Besides, the demonstration of a false teacher, judge, or king (as mentioned before) will teach the young children that the best of the adults who are supposed to be protective of the people’s rights are themselves vicious or corrupt. It is however undeniable that even today children are exposed to

different types of punishment as part of their education either by parents or teachers; although the physical punishment is out of question now, the necessity for different methods of training young children is still part of parental or school education. The examples brought in the previous parts of this article are good evidence that the series' popularity depends on addressing a wide range of people, young or old, though children are mostly given less heed in the multiple addresses of the stories.

Taking Sides

The technique of “Taking Side” may not be as lucid as the other ones and there is always a kind of ambivalence that is hard to escape. This is because the writer may take sides with children in his text but the created effect is intended to attract the adults or vice versa. In Chambers’s view, when an author makes an alliance with a child, he wants to address children instead of the adults. As he puts it, “Taking sides can be crudely worked for, simply as a way of ‘getting the child reader on your side.’ Enid Blyton provides the obvious example. She quite literally places her second self on the side of the children in her stories and the readers she deliberately looks for” (8). But this very allegiance with the child reader can also be a means of manipulation. A good example is Enid Blyton herself. As Chambers continues to explain,

Ultimately Blyton so allies herself with her desired readers that she fails them because she never takes them further than they are. She is a female Peter Pan, the kind of suffocating adult who prefers children never to grow up, because then she can enjoy their pretty foibles and dominate them by her adult superiority. This betrayal of childhood seeps through her stories: we see it as the underlying characteristic of her children who all really want to dominate each other as well as the adults. (9)

Although the main intention behind taking sides with children in *Shekarestān* series is not to fail them, it is possible to see the ruthless dominance and authority of the adults in most parts of this animation. The stories end in the dominant presence of the adult characters that are either

punished for their wrong-doings or helped to resolve their problems; children mostly stay in the backdrop of the picture.

Buhlul is the only adult with whom the narrator takes sides. This is because he is always on the side of the children and acts as if he were really a child. That is why, unlike other adults who are the target of derision or criticism, he ends up victorious all the time.²² In brief, the author considers the children as innocent, and therefore, does not need to manipulate them because from the beginning to the end of the story he makes sure that they never really dominate the scenes; he makes sure that it is the adult character that makes mistakes and suffers the final poetic justice. Consequently, it is the adult audience who needs to learn a moral lesson (as in the case of “Qānun e soltān” [King’s Law] or “Chupān e dorughgu” [The False Shepherd]); if there is any cathartic effect, it is meant for the adult audience. This, being a proof for the double audience in the series, also emphatically shows how the director stealthily “winks at the children over his shoulder whereas he has a serious conversation with the adults.” Even though it is true to say that he takes sides with the children, it cannot be ignored that he gives the central role to the adult characters who will not let the little ones grow just like the example of Peter Pan mentioned above.

Tell-Tale Gaps

Chambers starts his argument for this part by saying that “as a tale unfolds, the reader discovers its meaning” (10). Similarly, Benton believes that “Reading is not the discovering of meaning . . . but the creation of it” (88-89). This is a natural side of every human being since according to Gestalt psychology, human beings are able to “complete or close an incomplete part of whole so as to attain maximum simplicity or stability in the entire configuration” (Corsini 537). In addition, as Rimmon-Kenan observes, a gap or hole “always enhances interest and curiosity, prolongs the reading process, and contributes to the reader’s dynamic participation in making the text signify” (133). *Shekarestān* is filled with many moments that calls upon the experience of the adult audience. Examples are in “Chupān e dorughgu” [The False Shepherd] in which the shepherd starts to advertise for different

products like the way advertisements on television channels try to attract people.²³ The way he talks about a special kind of perfume alludes to the real advertisements on Bic perfume. In 1996, an Iranian company advertised Bic perfumes on television. The advertisement mentioned each and every smell attributing it to the people's personality. For example, if a person was educated, "A" fitted him and if he was a high-class person, "B" was the best choice. The Shepherd in the series satirically advertises his products in the same manner as Bic perfume is advertised.²⁴ "Turaj e hoqeh bāz" [Phony Turaj] is another good example in which the main topic demands experience to fill the gaps in the line of the story. There is a character who reads in the newspaper that the football team of Shekarestān city has lost the soccer match against that of Namakestān. Another character argues that despite the plenty of money spent on hiring a foreign coach for the team it has made no progress.²⁵ This is in fact sarcasm on the Iranian soccer team which spends a lot of time and money on different coaches with no positive results. In "Shamshir e chubi" [The Woody Sword] the minister suggests that the king find the solution to his problem inside the books. When reading the title of the different books, the minister comes up with a title, "Men from Shekarestān and Women from Namakestān",²⁶ which is allusive to John Gray's famous book, *Men Are from Mars, Women Are from Venus* (1992). Hence, as Salstad suggests, "The implied adult reader is constructed in part through certain unexplained cultural referents" (225); the audience should have the background information that the text desires so that he can share his own memories, experiences, and knowledge to fill the gaps in a gestalt reaction to the gaps in the text. The children do not have that kind of experience to actualise the gestalt realisation and completion of the narrative meaning. However, the gaps are not enough to detach them from enjoying the series which is replete with scenes that correspond to the actual or virtual experiences of a child audience such as running after a real ball or after Buhlul when he gallops on his wooden horse, etc. There are many other examples in the whole thirty-two parts of the series, but we have sufficed to some of them just for the sake of brevity. Surely, each and every topic in this study needs more elaboration and exemplification which in turn demands separate other

studies. The authors, therefore, invite scholars of children's literature and media to further the study, which will certainly benefit the cinema and film or animation industry in Iran and in the world.

Conclusion

This study has shown that *Shekarestān* animation series attracts both adults and children and has intended to address different groups of people; however, the implied double audience of the series gives an ambivalence to the structure of this animation series which benefits adults more than children. The series has the ability to attract children by audio-visually humorous narration, the presence of child characters, funny stories, etc. But, in its double address, it mostly favours the adults. *Shekarestān*, despite all its fun and amusement, is quite challenging for children because they may either fail to connect to the stylistic and thematic intricacies and/or complexities, or mistakenly be exposed to semantically ungraspable or culturally inappropriate content. In fine, the authors hope that the results of this study will be useful to the scholars who are interested in the study of the reader/audience in animations and films.

Notes

1. The titles of the Persian animations or books as well as the citations from the Persian sources have been translated by the authors.
2. See 00:02:00 to 00:02:30 in “Khar beraft”.
3. See for example the way the proverb “Two cooks spoil the broth” is manifested in “Chelow morgh e parandeh”.
4. See 00-03:00 to 00:03:10 in “Khiyālbāf va kuzeh ye rowghan”.
5. See 00:02:50 to 00:03:00 in “Bachchēh dozdi”.
6. See “Khar beraft,” “Borj e kaj” or “Sedā ye sāz” as examples among which children have no or few roles.
7. See minutes 00:02:35 to 00:09:05 in “Chelow morgh e parandeh”.
8. See minutes 00:00:30 to 00:05:24 in “Qānun e soltān”.
9. See minutes 00:11:11 to 00:12:38 in “Soltaan e mush haa”.
10. See minutes 00:07:40 to 00:11:48 in “Chupān e dorughgu”.

11. See minutes 00:03:10 to 00:11:27 in “Chelow morgh e parandeh”.
12. See minutes 00:02:28 to 00:10:28 in “Qasr e jadid e soltān”.
13. See minutes 00:00:27 to 00:05:20 in “Qānun e soltān”.
14. See minutes 00:04:35 to 00:13:47 in “Ganj e penhān”.
15. See for example minutes 00:07:20 to 00:12:18 in “Buhlul va farib e qāzi” or 00:06:08 to 00:07:51 in “Ayāz va qāzi ye tama’kār”.
16. See minutes 00:03:07 to 00:05:21 in “Soltān e mush hā”.
17. See minutes 00:09:08 to 00:12:50 in “Qānun e soltān”.
18. See minutes 00:11:26 to 00:13:40 in “Borj e kaj”.
19. See minutes 00:03:43 to 00:03:51 in “Chelow morgh e parandeh”.
20. See moment 00:11:27.
21. See minutes 00:04:32 to 00:05:16 in “Chelow morgh e parandeh”.
22. See “Soltān e mush hā” as an example.
23. See minutes 00:07:40 to 00:10:45 in “Chupān e dorughgu”.
24. See 00:10:32 to 00:10:39 “Chupān e dorughgu”.
25. See minutes 00:10:31 to 00:10:48 in “Turaj e hoqqeh bāz”.
26. See minutes 00:00:54 to 00:01:03 in “Shamshir e chubi”.

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