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**Empowering Iranian Young Generation by Writing: Studying  
Empowerment in Arman Arian's *Resurrection Begins***

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*"All I need is a sheet of paper and something to write with, and then I can turn the  
world upside down."*

*Friedrich Nietzsche*

**Abstract**

When it comes to words and writing, one cannot deny their power and the ideology they convey. And I think the situation is much graver when it comes to Children's Literature, because of its addressee. Children and youngsters are the main target groups and because of them, it is the task of the (adult) writer to take heed of what s/he is trying to communicate to them. It is based on such presumptions that the idea of empowerment and empowering Children's Literature emerges as significant. Therefore, any positive and creative message or idea in an oeuvre for children or young adults in Children's Literature and Young Adult literature is counted as empowering and in order to make this idea more comprehensive, I have proposed a model for studying empowerment in fiction in my Ph.D. dissertation. The final goal of bringing up such a discussion is to demonstrate how the mediators of Children's Literature shoulder the vital burden of empowering but not disempowering their audiences. Accordingly, in this paper, I study Arman Arian's last novel, *Resurrection Begins*, in his trilogy *Persians and I* (1382-1384Š/2003-2005) and decide how Arian has been successful in empowering his audiences. At the end of the paper, I would put the empowering techniques together in order to form a model of empowerment for this novel. Such a reading can show the reader how diverse but possible empowerment can be.

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### Introduction

Marah Gubar introduces an attractive model in Children's Literature and I share her ideas. With her 'kindship model' Gubar acclaims that: "[...] children and adults are akin to one another, which means they are neither exactly the same nor radically dissimilar. The concept of kinship indicates relatedness, connection and similarity without implying homogeneity, uniformity, and equality" (453). Accordingly, I should like to mention that children and adults are not at odds; they have differences but they are still akin and that is why we would like to talk about empowerment in Children's Literature and Young Adult Literature. This is the task of adults and especially the mediators of Children's Literature to be aware of their responsibility of parenting children and take heed in empowering their audiences. Not because children are powerless or voiceless, but the contrary, because we as adults want to help them get better. We are supposed to help one another if we want a peaceful life and world. This is based on such assumptions, that I have worked on empowerment in Children's Literature and would like to discuss it in one of the well-known Persian young adult novels in Persian Young Adult Literature. This said, after a brief summary and introductory points about *Resurrection Begins*, I will elaborate of its empowering ideas and finally put all these empowering elements into a model of empowerment.

*Persians and I* was chosen as one of the ten best books of the 1380sŠ/2001-2011; it has won several other prizes: Twenty-Third Round of Islamic Republic of Iran's Book of the Year in 1384Š/2006; Winner of Acknowledgment Medal from PEKA (Literary Mihrgan Festival) in 1384Š/2006; Fifth Round of Shahid Ghanipur's Book of the Year in 1384Š/2006; Winner of Children's Book Council in 1385Š/2007; Winner of Acknowledgment Medal from PEKA (Literary Mihrgan Festival) in 1385Š/2007; and Winner honorary diploma in the 31st IBBY World Congress in Copenhagen, Denmark in 2008.

*Resurrection Begins* is the third novel in *Persians and I* trilogy, and in reality it completes and complements the whole trilogy by giving an ending to the story of the three protagonists and the whole world. *Resurrection Begins* is the story of contemporary fifteen-year old Bardiya who is coming from a well-to-do family. His mother has died (or is rather killed, we have some hints) and his father is in Europe enjoying himself with a new wife. Bardiya, however, lives a secluded life with some servants but is a bookish teenager and takes some sport classes as well. Life seems to be normal when father wants Bardiya to join him in Europe. On the way to Europe, the plane crashes and all passengers, except Bardiya die. At night, he is going to freeze in frost when a giant bird, Simurgh, rescues him and takes him to his nest on Damavand Mountain. He falls asleep in Simurgh's nest, and wakes up in ancient Susa, as Prince Bardiya, Cyrus the Great's second son. He and his cousin Darius, have some adventures together and they even have a great share in the conquest of Babylon. There he sees Cyrus the Great and begins to know him as a great man. When his brother Cambyses comes to visit them in Babylon, Cyrus declares Bardiya as his successor and sends him away. After a romantic but vain affair with a tribal girl, Bardiya returns to Pasargadae. There he is informed of his father's death; however, after the burial he is killed by Cambyses. He wakes up in Simurgh's nest safe and sound and once again flies with Simurgh. This time they fetch the other two protagonists, Siavash and Ardashir from the places the novels have ended in preceding volumes. They finally end at the foot of Damavand Mountain where all children and teenagers have gathered to help Simurgh remove the Mountain. The Mountain is removed and the children place their daggers in their places and finally Saoshyant is born to fight with the evil forces. There all the mythical, legendry, and historical characters like Kaveh the Blacksmith, and Rostam are revived and they all help Simurgh kill the evil tyrant Zahāk and the utmost evil force, known as Angra Mainyu in Zoroastrian cult. The evil is diminished and Simurgh is killed too, but leaves the peaceful world to the children and young adults forever.

Critics have written much about this trilogy. For instance, Zari Na'imi believes that *Persians and I* is appealing to the reader and is successful as it

is a sort of “reader-based book”. I think what seems to be so outstanding in this novel is the good elaboration of empowerment. In order to do study empowerment in this novel, I will talk about different aspects in which empowerment can be found; aspects like literary, psychological, social, linguistic empowerments and the like.

### ***Literary Empowerment***

#### **Decentration**

As children by nature develop ‘centration,’ according to Morteza Khosronejad, it is the main task of Children’s Literature to develop ‘decentration’ in children (Khosronejad). Therefore, I am taking ‘decentration’ as an empowering technique in Children’s Literature and Young Adult Literature. I have studied the decentration devices Khosronejad enumerates and from among them I came across ‘interruption of the narrator’ and ‘gaps’ in this novel. Furthermore, I have found two new ‘decentration’ devices: flashbacks, and rhetorical questions, which are coming bellow.

#### **‘Interruption of the Narrator’**

Bardiya is the narrator of this novel and it is narrated from first person point of view. So Bardiya comments on his own thoughts and actions as well as other main characters. For instance, when Babylon is conquered and Bardiya and Darius are enjoying Cyrus the Great’s company, Bardiya envies Cyrus and Darius. He says: “... these two ... had new thoughts ... but I was nobody! I was neither myself, nor Prince Bardiya. I wasn’t even a good fake Bardiya!”<sup>ii</sup> (Arian 139). Such monologues occur quite frequently in the narrative and they distract the action of reading and thus we can take them as a device for ‘decentration’.

#### **‘Gaps’**

As the reader is supposed to make use of his logic to fill in the gaps in a narrative, Khosronejad takes them as ‘decentration’ devices (Khosronejad 210-16). In this novel, we come across some gaps and they are empowering. Here I mention just one of them. For instance, while Bardiya and others are passing through some alleys of ancient Susa, he notices two men and one woman who mumble something and disappear under a bridge. When they are

crossing the bridge, Bardiya hears some lustful noises from under the bridge (Arian 22). Obviously, the writer is making use of 'gaps' to beat around the bush to scape censorship! Thereby, he is not only empowering his implied readers but also himself!

### **Flashbacks**

Once in the narrative we have a flashback to Bardiya's first or real life. When they are on their way to Babylon, Bardiya looks at brilliant stars and remembers autumn evenings when he used to read books in his room and was worried about the day after's school day (42). Such a flashback to past memories and even the word 'school' distract the reader from the actual narrative and so it is decentering.

### **Rhetorical Questions**

In this novel we have some rhetorical questions which invite the reader to ponder on them and the effect is 'decentration'. For example, while Bardiya and Darius are discussing some religious matters with a young librarian in Ray, we have a series of rhetorical questions, like: "Will there be other prophets after Zoroaster, Abraham, Moses and other ancient prophets to fulfill God's purpose?" (196).

### **Literary Elements**

Setting, genre, plot, point of view, characterization, style are some of the literary elements that can lead to literary empowerment. A narrative is never void of these elements and it is worth studying them to see how they can make empowerment possible.

### **Setting**

While studying the imaginative worlds of Lewis Carol and Roald Dahl in my M.A. thesis, I came across this idea that 'A virtual and imaginative world' can lead to empowerment (Farnia "The Study of Power"). In this novel, Arian creates an imaginative world of ancient Persia. The reader is asked to imagine what the Pasargadae would be like along with the narrative.

### **Genre**

In my Ph.D. dissertation, I have explained some empowering genres (Farnia "A Comparative Study"). I think this particular novel is a corssgenre as it

combines fantasy, myth, history and adventure. Hassan Parsaie shares this idea of crossgenre as well (Parsaie 78).

### **Plot**

'Quest' is a dominant motif in Young Adult Literature and according to Khosronejad, it is through 'quest' that the protagonist can say goodbye to 'innocence,' enter 'the experience' stage and finally the 'organized innocence' stage. Thus 'quest' plays an important role in leading the protagonist towards empowerment. In this novel, it is Bardiya who talks about his own quest. At the beginning of the novel we read: "But the main point was that learning these ancient skills [fencing and horseback riding] awoke a sensation in me as if I, too, wanted to be the savior of my country from tyranny, poverty and misery" (Arian 8). Whatever happens in the plot actually helps Bardiya fulfill his quest. Accordingly, Sara Hosseinpour has studied quest in this trilogy and she believes that "the quests in this novel help the protagonist as well as the reader develop and grow mature" (201). This state of growth and maturity can be taken as 'organized innocence' and empowerment.

Another motif occurring frequently in Children's Literature is 'absence of parents' and some critics have talked about its direct effect on protagonist's process of empowerment (Firouzmand; Nikolajeva). However, in this novel we should talk about the presence of an adult! Cyrus the Great has an immense impact on Bardiya and he plays the role of his absent father. Thus it is the presence of an empowered adult figure which is helping the protagonist in this novel.

### **Point of View**

Elisheva Sadan<sup>iii</sup> talks about 'Informality in the professional intervention' as an empowering technique, when she discusses her theory of empowerment in sociology (Sadat 128). The professional is actually the person in charge of the social empowerment and by keeping the relationship 'informal' s/he is able to accelerate the process of empowerment. In fiction, such a situation is created when we have the first-person point of view (Farnia and Pourgivi). As came earlier, we have the first person point of view in this novel, and so the reader can easily identify with Bardiya.

### **Characterization**

As Sadan mentions the professional should be able to act as a model for the community members; her/his presence would be taken as a model (127). In fiction it is possible to take the main characters as models. In this novel, we can talk about three models: Bardiya, as the protagonist, Darius and Cyrus the Great as main characters. The mentality, behavior and attitude of these people, and especially those of Cyrus the Great and Darius, are very much stressed in this novel and as Parsaie hints it is as if the novel is only a pretext to make us familiar with the character of Cyrus the Great and his ideology (76).

### **Style**

Although this novel is an adventurous novel, one cannot deny Arian's literariness. Ja'far Payvar talks about the literary style of Arian; he takes this trilogy "as a combination of rewriting and creative recreation by mixing the mythical and legendary characters with individualistic and modern ones; and therefore, he is creating new novels" (67). Thus this literariness adds to the attractiveness of the novel. As an instance, after Bardiya has lost his beloved named Bahar, which means Spring in Persian, we read: "The heat and cold was in its most equinoctial moments, and I was heading for Ray's spring, deprived of my far-off highland Spring" (Arian 183). Such a literary style would affect the readers indirectly and one can say that it can improve the literary empowerment.

### ***Linguistic Empowerment***

In this part, I discuss 'language learning' and 'the interaction of involvement and subjectivity' as elements improving the reader's linguistic empowerment.

### **Language Learning**

As Jalil Doustkhah asserts the narrative and style of this novel is "... altogether simple, easy-read and is void of any incongruity and complexity and is at the service of the writer very well; that is, it is able to provoke young adults and young readers to read such texts" (46). The fact of being easy-read makes the book attractive and it would be possible to have some presumptions

on its possible effects on the readers. Language learning might seem to be general or redundant, however, thanks to Arian's literary style, some instances of extended metaphors and imageries might lead to some linguistic empowerment for the reader. Here are some examples:

- Extended metaphor: After the conquest of Babylon, in a whole paragraph, Cyrus the Great is compared to a clever cook:
 

We ... felt that just like a clever cook, Cyrus is holding a big ladle and is stirring everything in a huge pot. He tastes the salt and spices and smells the marvelous smell coming out of the delicious potage with satisfaction and [while he] is waiting for it to be ready, he manages and observes everything. (Arian 128)
- Imagery: We can find all kinds of imageries in this novel. In the following example, one might notice visual, tactile and auditory imageries: "Our horses were constantly panting and sometimes when their feet hit the rubble we could even see the sparks" (56).

### **The Interaction of Involvement and Subjectivity**

I talked about the process of involvement in 'point of view', however, in this novel there are some elements which would result in subjectivity of the reader and might thereby upraise his/her ability of critical reading. Likewise, decentering devices would make subjectivity possible.

In addition, there are some rather minute points which might also help the implied reader with subjectivity. For instance, when Bardiya, Darius and some other soldiers are on their way to Babylon, Arabs attack them and everybody is killed except for Bardiya who manages to rescue Darius. While Bardiya is putting Darius on the horseback, injured Darius whispers to him: "Tiger, you're the real *Rustam*" (My emphasis, 61). A vigilant reader knows that it is very improbable for Achaemenes to know the mythic character of Rustam. The main reason is that Ferdowsi might have used *Xwadāynāmag* ("*Book of Kings*") as his reference and this book goes back to Sassanid period and not earlier (Davis). This said, with the mention of the name 'Rustam' the attentive reader distances him/herself from the text and this leads to subjectivity. Thus one can claim that the interaction of subjectivity and

involvement is similar to the interaction of centration and decentration which is empowering and relevant to this novel. Such an interaction is empowering.

### ***Psychological Empowerment***

Reading, critical thinking, catharsis and 'individual empowerment leads to collective empowerment' are the parts discussed in psychological empowerment.

#### **Reading**

From the very beginning, we learn that Bardiya is into reading and we gradually learn that this habit has some effects on him. He says:

The books made me fly to other sides of the world and little by little I learned that there are many people living on earth; people who of course take themselves as the center of the world! I understood that the world is so much bigger than this castle, and city I am living in. And I understood I am not the only person who faces problems in life. However, it was by reading old and new books that I felt I have found my lost thing in life and the giant ices of my gloomy heart started melting. (Arian 7)

Thus by reading, he gains experience and this can encourage reading in the reader and might initiate some psychological empowerment in him/her, just as it did to Bardiya.

#### **Critical thinking**

Omidinia, Maktabifard and Mu'meni have studied the process of critical thinking in this novel and have proposed the following table for the critical thinking skills. This table is based on the number of skills and the characters who have them.

Skills	Amplitude	Character
interpretation	3	Bardiya-Darius-Cyrus
analysis	2	Darius
explanation	1	Cyrus
inference	1	Darius
self-regulation	3	Bardiya

*Figure 1 Taken from Omidinia et al., 15*

Everything goes as Omidinia, Maktabifard and Mu'meni have explained in their paper; however, regarding Darius, I would like to emphasize on this idea that he too, has the explanation skill. According to Peter Facione 'explanation skill' is when one manages: "[t]o state and to justify that reasoning in terms of the evidential, conceptual, methodological, criteriological, and contextual considerations upon which one's results were based; and to present one's reasoning in the form of cogent arguments" (10). Omidinia, Maktabifard and Mu'meni believe that when Darius is trying to console Bardiya after Bahar has been killed, he is using 'analysis' skill (15). Nonetheless, in my opinion Darius *is* using the three critical skills of 'interpretation,' 'analysis' and 'explanation' and that is why Bardiya smiles a bit and is consoled (Arian 174).

### **Catharsis**

As a teenager and the protagonist, Bardiya is believable, and this is because Arian has been able to portray his feelings, and emotions, or rather some aspects of adolescents' sensations in general. We can say that the result of such description and exposure of emotions and feelings might initiate catharsis and finally some psychological empowerment for the reader. Some of the emotions elaborated on in this novel are as follows:

- Loneliness: Bardiya is born in a nuclear family, but he has received little love from his parents. However, in his imaginative trip to the past, he is not alone and comes to understand what it means to have a peer and a family. Darius and Bardiya are all the time together and they enjoy each other's company. Moreover, Bardiya is loved by Cyrus the Great and just like a loving father, he is worried about Bardiya and this is what Bardiya needs to experience. Cassandane as Bardiya's mother, is not portrayed much; whereas,

Atossa his sister, plays a significant role. Having a sibling arouses new feelings in him: “I experienced the weird feeling of having a sister for the first time in my entity. This feeling that she is a little girl who is dependent on me and although I love her and want all the best for her, I am also stronger than her!” (Arian 202)

- Falling in love: When Bardiya is sick, a country woman named, Bahar, looks after him. She is a year older than him. She bathes and feeds him. Gradually they fall in love and by reading, the reader feels what Bardiya experiences. For instance:

We stared at each other’s eyes a bit more and she went out. Bahar! ... In reality, for me winter had finished, and I was feeling healthy, though I preferred to being sick as long as she was my nurse! I closed my eyes and tried to smell [her] remaining scent in the tent with my stuffy nose. Had I fallen in love?! (154-55).

- Loss: After Bahar’s death, we have a touching account of Bardiya’s mourning. Literally speaking, he does nothing and just stares at people and things: “Something had died in my heart, maybe it was a part of my thought, or a part of my soul” (172). Such genuine expressions of feelings can be taken as empowering as the reader shares or rather feels with Bardiya.

### **Individual Empowerment Leads to Collective Empowerment**

Last but not least, I should point to the whole process of empowerment in Arian’s trilogy. In each novel we have a protagonist who has gone through the process of individual empowerment throughout the novel. Yet, it is towards the end of *Resurrection Begins* that Simurgh collects all the three protagonists— Ardashir, Siyavash and Bardiya—and takes them to the foot of Damavand Mountain. There the protagonists join other children and through their collective power, Saoshyant is born and by the help of Simurgh they are all able to defeat the Evil. Hence such collective empowerment is the result of separate individual empowerments.

### ***Social Empowerment***

In order to be socially empowered, I think one needs to be aware of social values and have some general information. John Stephens supports such socialization when he says: “If a child is to take part in society and act purposively within its structures, he or she will have to master the various signifying codes used by society to order itself” (8). Furthermore, Sadan points to the importance of providing information and knowledge and the ‘precise formulation of values’ (128) in the process of empowerment. I have included these items in social empowerment.

#### **‘Precise Formulation of Values’ and ‘Giving Information and Knowledge’**

I have categorized the lists of pieces of information and values in this novel into five groups: historical and cultural; geographical; religious and mystic; political and psychological: pieces of information about life in general. For each category, one or two examples would suffice.

#### **Historical and Cultural Information:**

- In the state of Illam it is possible to find the giant ziggurat: Chogha Zanbil (Arian 41-42); Darius’ services and achievements in history (48); the ruler of Babylon was Belshazzar at the time of Cyrus (81) and etc.<sup>iv</sup>

#### **Geographical Information**

- The river ‘Arvand’ or ‘Dijli’ in Arabia leads to Babylon (41); the difference between plateau of Iran and that of the Arabs (42); Solomon the prophet had already built a temple for worshipping God in Jerusalem (127) and etc.

#### **Religious and Mystic Information**

- Daniel is a Jewish prophet who loved Cyrus the Great (38); some information about Mithraism (43-44); some verses about Cyrus the Great, from a book from Isaiah the prophet (45); God is omnipresent (69); some information about Zoroastrianism in general (chapter seventeen: 189- 98), and etc.

### **Political Information**

- It is decent to let people free in their beliefs, just as Cyrus the Great did (43); “those who don’t deserve to be kings and are only after producing thieves and beggars, must perish. This is the real and only justice” (57); “[t]he aftermath of a false government is nothing but corruption, devastation, and curse...” (200), and etc.

### **Psychological: Pieces of Information about Life in General**

- “*Observe well and think well and experience well...*” (Original emphasis, 30); it is decent to let people free in their beliefs (43); “[p]eople forget everything except for pure kindness” (130); one has to do his/her best to become a wiser person and use all the facilities s/he has. “Every moment of life is a chance for becoming better” (139-40); and etc.

### ***Physical Empowerment***

From the beginning we understand that Arian is empowering his protagonist from mental point of view; he makes Bardiya read different books. However, Arian is careful to prepare his protagonist from physical aspects as well. Bardiya takes sport classes (swimming, fencing and horseback riding) and all these classes have already made him ready for the forthcoming adventures. This idea of physical empowerment might also be brought up in this novel and it is also possible that only via the action of reading this novel, the reader might become aware of the importance of physical fitness and sports. Therefore, I would like to add this item to the model of empowerment as well.

### ***Philosophical Empowerment***

During a talk I had with my professor, Dr. Morteza Khosronejad, this idea was brought up that we can add ‘philosophical empowerment’ to the model as well. This idea that the ultimate nature of the novel brings about optimism and not pessimism is philosophical. First of all, the empowering and foreshadowing testimonial is proposed in the title: *Resurrection Begins*, then little by little such positive attitude towards the divine ending of the world is put forth in the plot. Finally, in the final chapter, Resurrection occurs based

on the Zoroastrian belief; Simurgh manages to summon Saoshyant and all together they succeed in banishing the Evil. Simurgh dies, but we find optimism in his last talk to children and his farewell to Bardiya (239-40). Such an outlook is at odds with pessimistic approach and is thus empowering.

## Conclusion

In this paper, I have tried to show how an adult writer can empower his/her implied reader via writing. Arman Arian, as an adult writer, has been able to empower his protagonist in *Resurrection Begins* from different aspects. I have put together the above mentioned empowering items into a sort of a model, which is coming below.

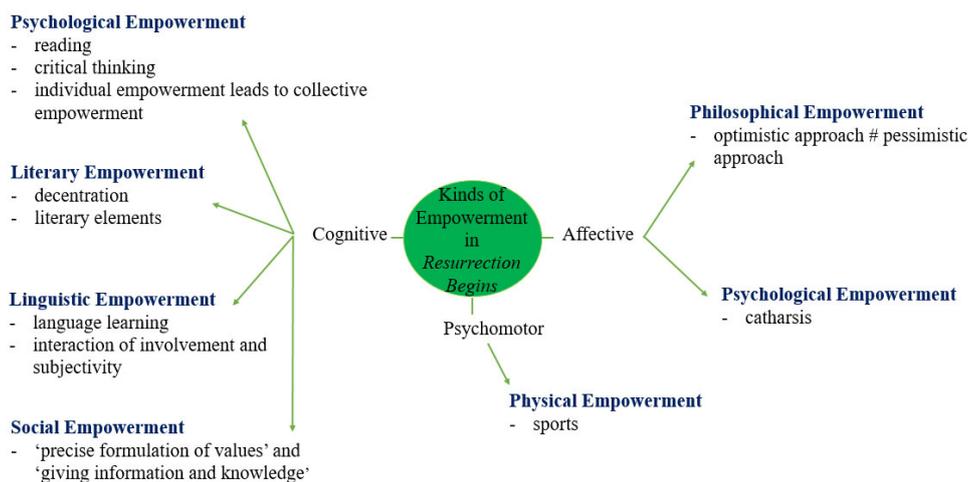


Figure 2 A Model for Empowerment in Arian's *Resurrection Begins*

In order to make the model more comprehensive, I have divided the items into three main groups of 'cognitive,' 'affective' and 'psychomotor'. This is actually based on Benjamin Bloom's taxonomy of learning objectives in educational psychology (Bloom et al.). As you may notice, most of the empowering elements are put in cognitive category; however, I have decided to put philosophical empowerment (here, optimistic approach) and catharsis from psychological empowerment in affective category as they tackle the audience's affection more. Next, physical empowerment would fit in

psychomotor part. Finally, I hope to have been able to show the mediators of Children's Literature how their role is important in empowering children. They have the paper and the pen, but the aim is not to turn the world upside down but to empower its citizens, especially its younger generation.

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<sup>ii</sup> The translations from the novel are mine.

<sup>iii</sup> I owe the whole idea of 'empowerment' to Dr. Elisheva Sadan and her book on community empowerment in sociology. I should like to take this opportunity to thank her.

<sup>iv</sup> In order to study the whole list, please refer to my Ph.D. dissertation.