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## Moral-Educational Teachings and the Issue of Cognitive and Emotional Standards in Children's Poetry: The Case Study of Latif Halmat's Children Poems

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**Abstract:** Children's poetry, as a foundational component of children's literature, plays a significant role in conveying moral and educational teachings. However, the effectiveness of these teachings depends on their alignment with the cognitive and emotional capacities of the child audience. Neglecting such standards not only disrupts the communication process between the poem and the child reader but also undermines the primary aim of conveying ethical and educational teachings. Latif Halmat, a prominent poet of children's poetry in Kurdish literature, pays particular attention to expressing and conveying moral and educational teachings in his poems. In the present research, we critically examine the children's poetry of Latif Halmat, relying on the emotional and cognitive criteria and components within children's literature and the extent to which the cognitive, emotional, and narrative components of his poems align with the cognitive and emotional developmental criteria of child audiences is critically examined. The findings indicate that while Halmat is notably attentive to developing educational themes—addressing issues such as environmental ethics, individual and social values, and literacy—his poems often fall short in several areas: incorporating children's lived experiences, aligning with their cognitive and emotional development, maintaining an appropriate narrative structure, and avoiding a sermon-like tone.

**Keywords:** Children Cognitive Development; Educational Teachings; Kurdish Children's Poetry; Latif Halmat; Narrative Structure.

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## 1. Introduction

Children's literature, as one of the key factors shaping the mind, language, and behavior of children, plays a crucial role in the processes of socialization and moral education. Within this domain, children's poetry—characterized by brevity, rhythm, imagery, and emotional resonance—occupies a distinct position and has consistently served as a medium for conveying educational, moral, and pedagogical concepts. However, the moral and educational impact of children's poetry on its audience can only be realized when it is composed with a sound understanding of children's cognitive capacities and adheres to principles of narration appropriate to their developmental stage and psychological needs.

In recent decades, the necessity of aligning the cognitive and emotional standards of children's literature with the age groups of young audiences has gained attention. Since the 1950s, child audiences were categorized based on their age-specific characteristics, needs, and requirements (Morshedi, 20). Each of these categories possesses distinct characteristics, capabilities, and limitations in the mental, emotional, and cognitive domains.

In children's poetry, this matter is of particular importance. Some works in the field of children's poetry, despite possessing positive moral messages, suffer from inadequacies in terms of their suitability with the cognitive, linguistic, and emotional characteristics of the child audience, which can undermine the effectiveness of these educational messages. Disregarding such criteria in the creation of children's works can lead to superficiality, sloganism, or even the unconscious resistance of the child's mind. Therefore, examining and evaluating the reciprocal relationship between educational themes and the cognitive-emotional mechanisms in children's poetry is an undeniable necessity for creating and evaluating effective literature for children.

Latif Halmat (1947) is one of the prominent poets in the field of Kurdish children's literature, known for his special attention to educational and moral themes in his poetry. He has published numerous collections of poems, and in 2000, he received the APIC Prize of Sweden in recognition of his contributions to children's literature. In this article, relying on the emotional and cognitive criteria and standards in children's poetry, we will critically examine the children's poems of Latif Halmat and the extent to which the linguistic, narrative, and content components of his poems align with the cognitive and emotional development criteria of child audiences are critically assessed. The statistical population of the study includes Latif Halmat's collection of children's poems, titled *Dîwanî M'ndälân*<sup>1</sup> (2016).

## 2. Literature Review

The examination of the suitability of narrative strategies in children's literature for child audiences, along with the explicit or implicit discursive and ideological implications embedded in these works, constitutes a central concern in the field of children's literature studies. The earliest research in this area dates back to the 1970s, a period in which critical attention to the representation of gender, race, and class in children's literature gained significant momentum. Bob Dixon, in his influential work *Catching Them Young* (1977), explored the ideas, attitudes, and perspectives that authors seek to instill in children, analyzing the methods through which such ideological messages are conveyed. Nodelman in *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* (2008) critically examined the methods and strategies through which adult ideologies are embedded in children's literature. In his view, children's texts are thoroughly surrounded by ideological frameworks. McKenzie, in the article "Gender, Power, and Children's Books: The Politics of Representation" (2022), investigated the representation of gender roles and power dynamics in contemporary children's literature, along with their implications for child and adolescent audiences. McKenzie emphasizes that children's books, in addition to their entertainment and educational functions, play a crucial role in shaping children's attitudes, beliefs, and gender identities. For instance, male characters are typically portrayed as active, powerful, and independent heroes, whereas female characters are more often depicted in passive, nurturing, and dependent roles. Such stereotypical representations, he argues, may influence children's understanding of gender roles and the constraints associated with them.

Another critical area relevant to the present study, concerns the inappropriate use of language and narrative in conveying abstract and complex concepts that do not correspond to the cognitive and emotional levels of child readers. Winner and colleagues in their article "The Development of Metaphoric Understanding" (1976) investigated the developmental constraints in children's understanding of abstract concepts. They argue that younger children often interpret metaphors according to the literal meaning of the words. Tatar in his book, *Off with Their Heads! Fairy Tales and the Culture of Childhood* (1992), addresses how overly complex or dark narratives can negatively impact children's psychological well-being. Similarly, Fox in the article "*The Role of Children's Literature in Social and Emotional Development*" (2001), underscores the importance of well-crafted children's stories in fostering children's personal, emotional, and cognitive development, while emphasizing that unsuitable narratives in children's literature can

hinder enjoyment, learning, and comprehension. Nikolajeva in her book, *Reading for Learning: Cognitive Approaches to Children's Literature* (2014), contended that the use of metaphors and complex language in children's literature necessitates considerable caution, since children are only able to comprehend metaphors and abstract concepts as they gradually progress through successive stages of cognitive development. She further emphasizes the importance of aligning narrative complexity with children's developmental stages in order to ensure the effective transmission of values.

Among the studies conducted in Iran that are relevant to the present article, Hamed Shirvan and Sharifi in their article "An Examination of Ideological Teachings in Selected Works of Iranian Children's Literature," (2013) have explored the ideological components and frameworks embedded in religious narratives targeted at children. According to these researchers, authors employ various techniques to convey and teach religious and spiritual concepts, including narrative and storytelling strategies, rationalization, differentiation and universalization strategies, obscuration, euphemism, and concealment. Amankhani and Khojeh in their article, "Children's Literature and Contemporary Ideologies" (2016) argue that contemporary children's literature in Iran has been influenced by certain modern intellectual and ideological schools. By examining two narrative works—*Ketab-e Ahmad* (1874 CE) and *The Little Black Fish* (1968 CE)—as well as the poems included in Persian literature textbooks from the First Pahlavi period (1925–1941), they analyze the extent to which each of these texts reflects the influence of pre-revolutionary ideologies and discourses. In their view, modern ideologies, owing to their differing conceptions of childhood, also introduce distinct norms and models for children's literature (Amankhani & Khojeh, 161). Jowkari and Hadaegh in their article "An Exploration of the Extent of Ideology's Influence in Young Adult Novels" (2018), through an analysis of narrative elements such as the implied author, narrator, story agents, narratee, and implied reader in a contemporary young adult story, examined the presence of polyphony, double voicing, and monologism, as well as the degree of ideological influence conveyed in the text. Hosseinpanahi in the article, "The Narrative Origins of Fairy Tales and the Political-Ideological Foundations of Indo-European Cultures" (2023), argues that these tales share a common narrative and epistemological system, one that carries an educational and pedagogical function framed within a political-ideological approach. He further notes that depending on whether the intended audience is children or adults, fairy tales have assumed distinct narrative and cultural forms and functions.

With regard to the poetry of Latif Halmat, which is the focus of the present study, Muzaffar M. Ismail in his book, *The Form and Content of Children's Poetry by Latif Halmat* (2011), adopting a descriptive approach, examined narrative elements such as time, place, event, and description in Halmat's children's poems. Sajadi in his article, "Stylistic Analysis of the Works of Ruwange and Kifri Literary Schools: with Especial Reference to the Poetry of Sherko Bekas and Latif Halmat" (2017) conducts a stylistic comparison of Latif Halmat's poetry as a representative of the "Kifri" school in contemporary Kurdish poetry with the poetry of Sherko Bekas as a representative of the "Ruwange" school. Sajadi argues that Halmat's poetry, due to its inclination toward simple and lucid language (after the collection of *God and Our Small Town*), and its predominant emphasis on content over form, has received less scholarly attention compared to the poetry of Bekas. Sajadi's analysis is based on Halmat's non-children's poetry. Yousefi and Gorgani in their article, "The Image of the Palestinian Child in Latif Halmat's Poems" (2019), through a content analysis of Halmat's poetry, focused on the reflection of the Palestinian issue in his verses and the expression of Palestinian suffering. Given that Halmat has also written stories for children, Malmir, in his article "Critique and Evaluation of Latif Halmat's Children's and Young Adult Stories" (2024), regards his stories as educationally and pedagogically valuable. However, he notes that, in terms of narrative and storytelling, the alignment of perspective is not consistently maintained in some characterizations, and the explanations that Halmat often provides at the end of his stories limit the reader's interpretive freedom, thereby reducing their narrative and fantastical qualities.

### **3. Theoretical Framework**

The essence of children's poetry lies in childhood imagination, fantasy, and playful detachment from reality. Scholars have identified several key features that make poetry appropriate and effective for young audiences. Such poetry should be perceptible and comprehensible at the child's developmental level, relate meaningfully to their everyday environment, and incorporate joy and imaginative elements. Furthermore, it should foster children's interest in the creatures and elements around them, expand their perception and appreciation of beauty, and stimulate curiosity and attentiveness (Dehghanian & Bashirizadeh, 128). These characteristics distinguish children's poetry from adult poetry, as it must align with a child's unique cognitive and perceptual capacities. Unlike adults, children are not guided by complex reasoning, established mental assumptions, or mature cognitive frameworks. As Hunt observes, children are developing readers whose engagement with life and text is shaped by cultural standards

that differ fundamentally from those of adult audiences (130). This underscores the importance of aligning children's poetry with the intellectual and cognitive capacities of its young audience. In this regard, O'Sullivan notes that strategies such as simplifying language, adapting subject matter, and moderating both formal and thematic elements are commonly employed in children's literature to bridge the gap between the "adult author" and the "child reader" (32).

One of the major aims and functions of children's literature—including poetry—is its educational and moral dimension. This function has long been regarded as a fundamental and indispensable goal of children's literature and, in fact, represents a shared tradition across cultures and societies worldwide. Without such an orientation, the survival of cultural values and their transmission to future generations would face serious challenges. The importance of this aspect is such that even in ancient times, didactic and moral purposes were evident in the creation of children's narratives (see Hosseinpanahi, 196).

Essentially, the pedagogical approach in children's literature forms part of the broader process of social normalization of children. In this regard, Bob Dixon argues that children's literature constitutes a form of social experience through which readers are socialized by means of representing desirable models of human character and behavior, interpersonal relationships, social organization, and patterns of living in the world (see Khosronejad, 60).

The dual challenge of preserving the essential elements of childhood in children's poetry while simultaneously embedding the moral and educational values of society within it represents one of the most significant creative tensions in composing poetry for children. This balance largely depends on crafting poetry within cognitive structures that correspond to the child's mental capacities. Therefore, observing cognitive standards and criteria in the creation of children's poetry is of great importance. By "cognitive criteria" in children's poetry, we refer to the alignment of language, poetic devices, structure, and theme with the level of cognitive development of the target age group. Piaget emphasizes that children pass through distinct stages of cognitive development as they grow—from the preoperational stage (ages 2 to 7), during which their thinking is concrete and egocentric, to the concrete operational stage (ages 7 to 11), when logical reasoning begins to emerge (Berk, 410–412). Therefore, paying attention to the child audience's

cognitive and mental capacities plays a crucial role in enhancing the appeal and effectiveness of poetry. For instance, children typically lack the ability to comprehend or process abstract and complex imagery or concepts before the ages of twelve to fifteen; instead, they tend to prefer concrete images, tangible ideas, and simple language (Piaget & Wallon, 14–17). Consequently, poems that employ vivid sensory imagery, simple narrative structures, and repetitive patterns are more closely aligned with the cognitive abilities of these age groups.

In fact, children's literature often educates less through explicit content and more through its narrative structure and plot design. Given children's developmental stage, where abstract reasoning is limited and concrete imagery is preferred, well-crafted narratives can convey complex or abstract lessons in ways that are both engaging and memorable. For instance, without relying on complex terminology, animal-based characterization and compelling storylines can effectively teach sophisticated concepts. A prominent example is the story of *The Tortoise and the Hare* (2023), which enables young readers to internalize the abstract concept of perseverance and effort; the symbolic characters in the story leave a lasting impression, serving as enduring representations of this idea in the child's mind. Similarly, the tale of *The Wolf and the Seven Young Goats* (Shangool & Mangool) (Grimm & Grimm, 45–48) illustrates how narrative and characterization can impart important lessons such as self-protection against strangers. These examples demonstrate how aligning narrative structure with children's cognitive capacities enhances both the educational impact and the enduring appeal of children's literature.

Another influential cognitive component is phonological awareness. This aspect is closely related to meter and rhythm in children's verse. Goswami and Bryant in *Phonological Skills and Learning to Read* (2016) demonstrated the importance of meter and rhythm in enhancing children's linguistic and cognitive development. These poetic features are not merely sources of auditory enjoyment; rather, they help organize the child's mental framework, strengthen memory, and facilitate the transition from oral to written language.

Based on the foregoing discussion, the relationship between moral-educational content and cognitive criteria in children's poetry is reciprocal and interdependent. Moral and educational lessons achieve their greatest impact when they engage children in a cognitively active and interactive process. Such lessons must not only align with the child's cognitive level to foster deep and lasting understanding, but the cognitive

structures themselves are most effective when they are meaningfully connected to the child's moral and emotional world. At its highest form, children's poetry integrates these two dimensions, serving not only as a tool for moral education but also as a medium for cognitive, linguistic, and aesthetic development. Poetry with these qualities creates a unique mental representation for the child and establishes itself as an innovative reading experience in the child's mind. Many stories or poems that remain vividly in memory for years—or even into adulthood—achieve this enduring presence precisely because of such literary and creative qualities.

#### **4. The Poetry of Latif Halmat**

Latif Halmat's children's poems encompass a diverse range of themes aimed at young readers in age groups A and B (approximately six to nine years old). Prominent didactic themes in Halmat's poetry include literacy and the pursuit of knowledge (Halmat, 53, 122, 289, 325, 424), patriotism (61, 129, 223, 328, 423), family and social values (226, 233, 296, 297, 308), and environmental ethics (54, 83, 172, 217, 393, 427).

In terms of expressive techniques, Halmat's children's poems can be categorized into three main types: descriptive, didactic-rhetorical, and narrative. Among these, the descriptive and didactic poems constitute the greater portion of his collected works. The descriptive poems are those centered on depiction and illustration, primarily aiming to convey and describe values such as patriotism, literacy and the pursuit of knowledge, and environmental awareness (98, 217, 281, 348, 361). In the didactic-rhetorical style, the poet typically conveys familial, social, and moral values in a direct and exhortative manner (42, 92, 171, 234, 350). In the third category of Halmat's poems—those that feature a narrative structure—the poet constructs a brief storyline to create a narrative framework within the poem. Because these poems possess a complete or semi-complete plot, they are more capable of engaging the child's mind with the central theme or core idea of the poem. In these poems, an educational or pedagogical theme is conveyed to the child through a narrative structure, typically without resorting to direct address or moralizing (90, 166, 289, 349, 362, 364). In Halmat's earlier collections, the number of such poems is relatively limited; however, in his later collections—beginning with *Golī nāw ?injānaka* (The Flower in the Vase) (215 ff.)—the frequency of narrative poems increases notably.

Despite Halmat's efforts to produce poems that are engaging and appropriate for a child audience, a critical examination of his works reveals elements that fall short of contemporary standards for children's poetry, creating a disconnect between his verses and young readers. A critical examination of his poetry from this perspective can offer guidance in addressing similar issues within contemporary children's literature.

## 5. Analysis

Children's poetry is not merely a vehicle for conveying educational or moral messages; it is a literary and artistic form that must simultaneously provide cognitive accessibility, emotional resonance, and aesthetic pleasure for the child. This dual responsibility (both to instruct and to stimulate the imagination) places substantial demands on the genre of children's poetry. Accordingly, the evaluation of pedagogical elements in Halmat's poems is not limited to their moral messages; rather, linguistic choices, narrative coherence, the depth of imagination, and the musical-rhythmic quality of the verse are also essential components. These factors together allow for an assessment of how well the content and structure of Halmat's poetry align with the cognitive and emotional needs of its intended young audience. Through the analysis of these elements, the study seeks to demonstrate the extent to which the poet's narrative techniques and linguistic choices succeed in *capturing attention, engaging the child's mind, and eliciting an emotional response*. This analysis situates Halmat's poetry within the context of contemporary children's literature and, while highlighting his strengths, also reveals limitations arising from the intersection of *traditional, didactic-oriented methods* and *modern, child-centered expectations*.

### 5.1. Lived Childhood Experience

The concept of lived childhood experience constitutes a crucial component of children's literature. This dimension encompasses a wide range of emotions, imaginations, actions, insights, and child-specific mentalities that children gradually encounter and internalize throughout their growth and development across different situations and stages. Within this framework, the structure of a poem and its various elements should be crafted from the perspective of the child's lived experiences. In practice, focalizations, event processing, characterization, dialogues, and other narrative components must be constructed through the lens of a child's unique perceptions and experiences, enabling the young reader to connect with the text and perceive—or imaginatively project—their own self and experiences within the poem.

In some of his poems, Latif Halmat appears less concerned with narrating from a child-centered perspective and more focused on recounting or conveying adult-specific values, perceptions, or experiences to young readers. In these works, focalizations are often constructed from the standpoint of adult mentality and worldview, giving the poetry a didactic or exhortative tone. Rather than presenting events through a child's perspective, the poems transmit adult-oriented themes to the child audience.

For example, in the poem *Mär Nābeta Hāwře Kas* (A Snake Befriends No One) (63), the narrative recounts a dervish who, during winter, finds a snake frozen and immobile from the cold. He places the snake in his bosom to warm it. Once revived, the snake bites the dervish under the arm, fatally wounding him. As he dies, the dervish instructs that if the snake is found, its head should be crushed, declaring that “a snake befriends no one” (63). This narrative reflects a worldview grounded in adult lived experiences, particularly in its allegorical emphasis on human ingratitude. Given that Halmat’s audience comprises children in age groups A and B, this allegorical layer exceeds their cognitive capacity. Moreover, the directive to kill snakes runs counter to principles of environmental ethics, further complicating the suitability of the poem for a child audience.

In another poem titled *Ziāni J’gara* (The Harm of Cigarettes) (173), the poet attempts to convey the dangers of smoking to a child audience. However, the poem’s thematic content diverges from the child’s lived experience and fails to establish an effective connection with young readers. Adopting a directly didactic approach, the poem communicates complex concepts such as “poison” (the toxicity of cigarettes), “enemy,” and “disease” in a literal manner rather than through language and narrative structures appropriate to children’s experiences. This method not only lacks the imaginative and experiential qualities suitable for age groups A and B, but it may also provoke anxiety or fear, moving the poem away from providing a pleasurable and instructive experience.

Furthermore, the poem exhibits a strongly exhortative or sermonizing tone. Research in children’s literature emphasizes that poetry should employ narrative patterns grounded in play, imagination, and tangible child-centered elements, thereby stimulating curiosity and sensory experiences, while avoiding rigid, didactic, or authoritative instruction. In Halmat’s poem, everything is predetermined and the child functions as a “duty-bound subject”, required only to receive and absorb the messages. This approach suppresses the crucial dimension of discovery and active understanding, transforming the child from an active experiencer and explorer into a passive recipient of commands and advice (for additional examples, see: 176, 177, 294).

The absence of lived childhood experience can be observed in Halmat’s poetry in other ways as well. In the following, we examine two additional forms in which this component is lacking.

#### 5.1.1. Incompatibility with Children’s Emotional Development

Due to their distinct mental and emotional structures, children are unable to comprehend complex concepts, which underscores the necessity of differentiating child-centered content from adult-oriented material. The differences in cognitive developmental stages between children and adults require that children’s literature be tailored to their age and

emotional capacities (Nikolaiva, 67). The use of violent imagery and heavy thematic content in children's literature can have negative effects on their psychological and emotional well-being, and may even impede their ability to grasp important values such as cooperation, peace, and respect for others (Fox, 21-22). Such inappropriate literary experiences can disrupt the learning process and provoke undesirable emotional reactions, including anxiety and fear.

In the poem *Otom* ("Atomic Bomb") (Halmat, 22), Halmat addresses the theme of the atomic bomb and its lethal consequences, subsequently introducing the concept of peace as a human counterpoint to the destructive phenomenon of war. Beyond exhibiting musical weaknesses in the final lines, the poem's content—featuring violent imagery such as the death of children, the dismemberment of bodies by explosions, and the annihilation of entire nations (22)—negatively affect a child's emotional engagement with the poem.

Similarly, in other poems such as *Kčeki ?ázä* (A Brave Girl) (29), *Juwäni Däyk* (The Beauty of Mother) (64), *Mař o Bžn* (The Sheep and the Goat) (86–88), and *Läy Läy* (Lullaby) (267), Halmat depicts the death of a character. The explicit and sometimes gruesome depiction of death for children in age groups A and B is more likely to induce fear and anxiety than to function as an educational or moral lesson. Rather than fostering conscious behavioral guidance, such portrayals trigger psychological and unconscious reactions intertwined with fear and distress, thereby undermining the pedagogical and ethical potential of the poetry for young readers.

The poem *Kała Kewi* (The Mountain Goat) (256–257) narrates the story of a mountain goat enamored with its large horns, considering itself more attractive than all others. When a hunter appears, the goat flees into the forest, but its horns become entangled in the branches, leaving it vulnerable to capture. Before the hunter kills it, the goat remarks that it was not the hunter's cleverness that led to its capture, but rather the beauty of its horns, which became its undoing.

Although the poem possesses a rich thematic content, it is more appropriate for an adult audience and functions as an allegorical narrative on the dangers of narcissism and pride. Young children, however, lack the lived and cognitive experience necessary to grasp the concept of narcissism, and the cognitive processing required to understand the deep allegorical meaning is beyond their developmental capacity. Consequently, the poem fails to establish a constructive connection with child readers. Moreover, Halmat's collection contains additional examples that are similarly misaligned with the emotional and cognitive development of the intended child audience (19, 126, 130, 143, 178, 243, 256, 265, 266, 283, 299, 351, 418).

### 5.1.2. Presenting Labor Themes without Engaging the Child's Mental and Experiential World

In certain instances, Halmat addresses labor-related themes, such as the importance of work and diligence or the need to appreciate the efforts of workers (179–180). While these are valuable topics for children's poetry, in some cases, Halmat presents labor themes in an abstract form that exceeds children's cognitive capacities. For example, in the poem *Goräni Řož* (Song of the Day), he refers to the "working class" and asserts that they, in the "Congress of Reconciliation and Chaos, represent all the hungry people on earth" (24), and that in the struggle against oppressors, they will stain the earth with their blood (24). Such content, layered with abstract concepts like oppression, justice, and struggle, is understandable to an adult audience, but children cannot meaningfully engage with it.

Similarly, Halmat references the concept of imperialism and condemns it in another poem (204), a theme that is clearly unsuitable for a young child audience. In these instances, the poetry fails to connect with the mental, emotional, and experiential world of the child, reducing its pedagogical and developmental effectiveness.

### 5.2. Narrating Abstract Concepts Beyond the Child's Cognitive Capacity

Piaget's cognitive theory demonstrates that children in the early stages of development (sensorimotor and preoperational) engage with the world through concrete and perceptible experiences, while the ability to process abstract concepts emerges only in later stages (concrete operational and formal operational) (Berk, 411–412). Piaget identifies the ages of twelve to fifteen and beyond as the onset of abstract reasoning and formal operational thinking in adolescents (Piaget & Inhelder, 14–17), a developmental stage beyond the intended audience of Halmat's poetry (i.e., age groups A and B).

Introducing abstract concepts and themes at stages when the child's mind is not yet capable of understanding or inferring metaphorical or cognitive domains is often confusing and, at times, potentially harmful. Considering that cognitive growth and the capacity to internalize metaphors occur in subsequent stages following the development of experiential and social interactions (Lakoff & Johnson, 239), the primary audience of Halmat's poetry—children aged six to nine—are not yet cognitively equipped to comprehend complex abstract concepts.

In certain instances, Halmat positions complex abstract concepts as the central signifier of his poems—concepts that exceed the cognitive capacity of child audiences. For example, the central theme of “freedom” in the poem *Cotr-o-Mnäl* (Pigeon and Child) (Halmat, 23) is beyond the mental processing abilities of young readers, who cannot fully grasp such a fluid and sophisticated concept. In this poem, Halmat employs a collection of symbolic and metaphorical constructs whose meanings are difficult for children who are not yet familiar with symbolic representation or metaphorical reasoning.

The poet depicts an image in which the pigeon, through its high flight, reaches the horizon—symbolizing freedom of action. Understanding such metaphors and their implications is challenging for children, as they lack the cognitive and experiential framework to interpret these ideas. At this stage, children are still unfamiliar with social limitations and norms, making it difficult for them to imagine such scenarios in their minds. The concept of “Shināyī” (meaning “horizon”) in this poem can signify the future, distant goals, utopia, or higher realms. Similarly, the symbolic roles of “rain,” “storm,” and “sky” (23) carry multiple layers of meaning that exceed children’s mental frameworks, thereby complicating or even obstructing the effective transmission of the poem’s intended significance.

In another poem, Halmat narrates a dialogue between a police officer and a child. The police officer, relying on hasty and inaccurate judgments, attempts to define the child as a “criminal,” even using trivial pretexts, such as the child crossing the street. After an extended conversation, the child asserts to the officer: “You have no right to interrogate me about what I am thinking” (35). This poem carries deep conceptual significance, effectively critiquing a police-dominated societal environment. However, the themes, characterization, and dialogue are not developmentally appropriate for a child audience; fundamentally, this poem is more suitable for adult readers.

Similarly, the poem *Yäsäy Pšila* (The Law of the Cat) (73–75), which addresses the theme of betrayal to society, is framed through the story of a treacherous mouse that sells its community to a cat. The complexity of this concept, with its multiple cultural, social, and political dimensions, far exceeds the cognitive and emotional capacity of a child audience, making it primarily appropriate for adult readers. Other examples in Halmat’s oeuvre also demonstrate similar disparities between content and child audience suitability (93, 250, 251, 318, 421).

Taken together, these issues underscore the necessity of focalization from the perspective of the child’s mind and language in children’s poetry. Focalization refers to the perspective or position from which narration is conducted. Focalization is divided into two categories: internal and external. Internal focalization encompasses focalizations

conducted by one or more characters within the narrative, such that the perceptual and cognitive position through which the narrative situations and events are reflected passes through the mind and interior of the characters. Consequently, their narration is subject to perceptual and insightful limitations (Prince, “Dictionary” 62). In external focalization, the focalizer narrates from outside the fictional world (64).

By focalizing through the child’s mindset, the poet positions themselves alongside the child—playing, exploring, and observing together. In this process, the child discovers new things, poses new questions, and identifies novel relationships among objects, animals, plants, and humans. Accordingly, perception in children’s poetry must be presented in alignment with the child’s cognitive framework and developmentally constructed along the linear progression of the narrative, rather than conveying pre-formed, complex, or adult-centered perceptions. Naturally, if this developmental alignment is absent, the child cannot engage with the poem, and the fundamental goal—facilitating interaction and cognitive-affective engagement with the child—remains unattained.

### *5.3. Inappropriate Narrative Structure*

The narrative structure or plot is not limited to prose fiction; it is also a fundamental element in poetry. Plot refers to the causal sequence of events in a narrative of a story or poem (Lanser, 128), which logically organizes the existing relationships among events within the narrative structure (Mirsadeghi, 64). In children’s poetry, the narrative structure has a significant impact on children’s comprehension, engagement, and learning. Plots with a clear beginning, middle, and end help children understand the concept of sequence and causal relationships, which are foundational for the development of narrative and cognitive skills, while also strengthening logical thinking abilities. By embedding an appropriate narrative structure in a poem, the poet can present conflicts, problems, or challenges that require resolution, thereby encouraging children to think critically about possible solutions and their consequences. Furthermore, the narrative structure can convey important life lessons and positive values to children. A well-constructed plot also facilitates recall and retelling, as it organizes events in a linear, causally connected framework that is easier for children to follow and internalize.

The sequential presentation of elements without establishing causal relationships, and without incorporating components that interact with changing circumstances (thereby producing a particular or contrasting outcome), results in a one-dimensional narrative in poetry. According to Prince, events that are unrelated to the beginning, middle, or end of a narrative, or events that do not bear a significant relationship to the

changes in the presented situation, are narratively neutral; such events compromise narrative cohesion and weaken narrativity (Prince, “Narratology” 160). In the poem *Nän Xwärdn* (Eating Food), Halmat briefly and linearly describes a sequence of activities: playing, eating, washing hands and face, and then sitting in front of the television to watch cartoons,

käte yäri kotäyi hät/ wä däyk̄m bängmān dakät/ daḷe kati nän xwärdna/ dwäy  
nän xwärdn dast šuštna/ la dwäy dastiš dam o ddän/ ba ḷča dašoyñ juwän  
juwän/ ewära damaw xornešin/ lay talafzion dädanışin/ la sar šäšay talafzion/  
dařwänina filmi kārton (Halmat, 222).

(Translation: When playtime is over / Mother calls us / and says it is time to eat / After the meal, we wash our hands / then brush our teeth and clean our mouths / carefully with a good toothbrush / In the evening, near sunset / we sit in front of the television / and watch a cartoon movie / on the TV screen).

Although this poem addresses simple, everyday moments from a child's life, it presents a fragmented plot in which events are narrated merely sequentially, without establishing causal relationships among them (and without notable turning points or striking contrasts). The poem is devoid of character development or elements that could evoke curiosity or empathy in the child. Its conclusion also lacks a clear message, ending simply with sitting in front of the television and watching a cartoon. The poet could have employed creative elements such as introducing dialogue between the child and the mother or adding emotional details to the narrative structure. Another example illustrating the issue of an overly simple narrative structure is the poem *Kčeki ?äzä* (A Brave Girl) (29).

Another form of unsuitable narrative structure in children's poetry is the creation of incomplete narrative arcs. Child audiences of Halmat's poems (ages six to nine) generally prefer coherent plots with a clear beginning, middle, and end. Incomplete plots, if not designed skillfully to stimulate curiosity and creativity in the child reader, lead to disruptive ambiguity and generate a form of cognitive conflict for the audience. This can result in an unpleasant and unsettling experience with the poem, particularly for sensitive children. In the poem *Mäng* (The Moon), the poet, through focalization from a child's perspective, beautifully engages in a dialogue with the moon,

ba mängm got: häwřey derin/ wara xwäre la ?äsoy šin/ wara häwře  
juwänakam/ topa bčkolänakam/ wara xwäre ba be dang/ topi juwän o  
řangäwřang/ mačo koši hawri čḷkn/ wara xwärawa bo läy mn/ wara ba tiška  
kälakän/ ba pršnga ?älakän/ řun karawa mälakän/ čäwa řetn mndälakän/  
mäng be dang bu ?awa čiya?/ mäng hazi la yäri nya (279).

(Translation: I said to the moon, O old friend / Come down from the blue sky / Come, my beautiful friend / O my lovely ball / Come down gently / O colorful and beautiful ball / Do not sit in the lap of the black (and dirty) cloud / Come down next to me / With your white rays / With your shining beams / Illuminate the houses / The children are waiting for you / The moon became silent. What happened?! / The moon is not in the mood to play!).

The poem “*Māng*” depicts a childlike dialogue between a child and the moon, in which the child, using simple, innocent, and intimate language, invites the moon to play. However, in response, the moon rejects the child’s invitation and refuses to engage in interaction with the child.

This poem, relying on adult logic, prevents the moon from serving as the child’s playmate simply because it occupies a position in the sky. This approach disregards one of the sensory and emotional prerequisites of Halmat’s child audience: the ability to transform “reality” in a fantastical manner according to their own needs and desires. Piaget’s findings indicate that children typically adapt “reality” in their play to align with their own wishes, so that elements of the external world serve the child’s personal emotions and subjective experiences (see Piaget & Inhelder, 60–61). In this poem, allowing the moon to engage as a playmate could have elevated the poem to a memorable and exceptional work. The moon’s abrupt and unexpected refusal to interact with the child narrator creates an emotional rupture. The poem also employs an incomplete narrative structure, which, rather than stimulating the child’s creativity, generates ambiguity and a form of cognitive dissonance, as the young audience cannot discern a clear reason for the moon’s refusal to play. For another example of an incomplete narrative structure in Halmat’s poetry (see 62).

#### 5.4. *Issues of Meter and Rhythm in Poetry*

A well-constructed meter and rhythm in children’s poetry serve not merely an aesthetic purpose but also a cognitive function. Meter and rhythm are directly related to the processes of working memory and long-term memory in children. The child’s mind naturally responds positively to repetitive patterns, as repetition and predictability facilitate retention and recall. Consequently, melodic poems with regular metrical structures become highly effective tools for conveying moral lessons or even scientific information to children. This phenomenon has long been recognized; the composition of rhymed Arabic–Persian dictionaries for children in earlier centuries—such as *Nesāb al-Şebyān* in the seventh century AH—illustrates the enduring pedagogical and ethical value of metrical and rhythmic forms in children’s learning. A regular and pleasant rhythm unconsciously captures both cognitive attention and emotional response, engaging the child in listening (or reading), repetition, and meaning processing. Therefore, neglecting the importance of appropriate musicality can cause serious disruption in the effective transmission of educational and moral lessons within children’s poetry.

The musical element in Latif Halmat’s poetry is an aspect that the poet could have addressed with greater precision and deliberation. One of the key issues with musicality in Halmat’s verse lies in the inconsistency of rhythm and meter in certain poems—where the metrical pattern suddenly shifts in one or more couplets without correspondence to the preceding verses, only to return to the previous rhythm after a few lines. Such musical fluctuations tend to alienate young readers and hinder their engagement with the poem. For instance, in the following poem, the first three couplets each exhibit a distinct rhythm, while only from the fourth couplet onward does the poem achieve a sense of metrical and rhythmic coherence:

Kurdish Poem	English Translation
bačka çolakaiak la däre	A little sparrow chick fell from a tree—
qäçî xzî kawta xwäre	its foot slipped, and it tumbled to the ground.
na bäî bu na paî jwän	It had no strong wings, no feathers yet,
tä ko bfîe bo äsmäj	to fly up again into the sky.
dawriän le dä hande mnäî	A few children gathered around it,
ḵrdiän ba harä o gälägäl	and started talking all at once.
şälä gutî mn daibam	Shahla said, “I’ll take it home—
bo xom yäri pe dakam	I’ll play with it!”
roža gutî daibam bo xom	Roji said, “No, I’ll take it—
gawra bu goştakai daxom	when it grows up, I’ll cook it for food!”
näzdär gutî bä mn bîbam	Nazdar said, “Let me take it—
waku däikî ba xewî kam	I’ll care for it like its mother would.”
?awîn gutî nänä naibai	Evin said, “No, no! Don’t take it away—
daixaina näw helänakai	let’s put it back in its nest.”
mnäîlakän hamu gutiän	All the children said together,
qsakat juwäna ?awîn giän	“What a beautiful idea, dear Evin!
(Halmat, 119–120)	

Meter, by virtue of its auditory quality, constitutes the first stage of a child’s engagement with poetry. Any metrical irregularity, therefore, disrupts this initial level of connection between the child and the poem. In some of Halmat’s poems, the meter abruptly changes midway through the poem—what may be termed a “metrical break”—before the poet returns to the original rhythm. For instance, in the poem “*Rain*” (240), the meter suddenly shifts in the fifth couplet, and the poet reverts to the previous rhythm

from the sixth couplet onward. The cause of this metrical inconsistency lies in the inclusion of the phrase “*la sar xo*” (meaning “continuously”) at the end of the first hemistich, which disrupts the metrical structure. Had the poet used the shorter form “*sar xo*”, the metrical problem would have been resolved.

It appears that Halmat’s approach to meter and rhythm is largely governed by a “prosaic logic”. In some instances, without altering the meaning of the poem or disrupting the process of semantic transmission, the poet could have preserved the metrical pattern of a hemistich in alignment with the other hemistiches of the poem by deleting, modifying, or rearranging a single word. However, rather than prioritizing metrical harmony, Halmat seems more intent on preserving the syntactic and logical flow of prose within his declarative sentences. For example, in the poem below (of which only the first three couplets are cited), the poet’s insistence on maintaining a prose-like logic in the fourth hemistich results in a metrical break and a lack of rhythmic coherence in that line:

Kurdish Poem	English Translation
?äw guti: mn xoštrîn xoräkm la sar zamîn	Water said: “I am the tastiest thing to eat on the earth!”
näniš wti ba be mn mrov tawäw dakä mrđn	Food said: “Without me, all people would die!”
bä häta qsa-w guti ?awa ?ewa ?alên çi	The wind spoke up and said: “What are you even saying? ...
(274)	

In the second couplet, the second hemistich could have maintained the meter and rhythm of the verse through slight rearrangements or omissions, such as “mrov dakä ba mrđn” or “mrov tawäw ?amrđn.” These features reflect the predominantly didactic or exhortatory approach characteristic of Halmat’s poetry, where the transmission of information often takes precedence over literary form. The poet’s primary concern is the direct communication of instructive propositions. This exhortatory tendency appears to be influenced by the religious and legalistic traditions in which Latif Halmat was raised (see Sulayman, 9, 78), resulting in a “preaching and advisory” mode that dominates his

works. Consequently, important aspects of children's poetry—such as consistent meter and rhythm, child-centered imagery that avoids adult notions of causality, and the essential role of “play” in the formative layers of the language of children's poetry—are sometimes neglected in his poems under the shadow of this didactic approach. For additional examples of metrical irregularities in Halmat's poetry, see Halmat, 165, 177, 240, 261, 262, 281, 316, 326, 332, 342.

## **6. Conclusion**

The findings indicate that although Latif Halmat's children's poems encompass moral themes such as environmental ethics, family and social values and the importance of learning, in many instances his poems deviate from the modern standards of contemporary children's poetry. One of the major challenges in Halmat's poetry is the absence of an authentic “childhood lived experience” in some of his poems. In these works, narratives and concepts are focalized through an adult perspective, positioning the child as a merely passive recipient of moral messages. This mode of focalization lends a didactic and rhetorical tone to his poetry, in which the dominant stance is that of an “admonishing narrator.” Consequently, his poems often lack emotional depth and imaginative vitality, which adversely affects their ability to establish an effective connection with the child's mind and sensibility.

In some of Halmat's poems, the content does not align with the cognitive and emotional developmental stages of children. The presentation of complex themes such as death, war, or social justice—without the use of metaphor or symbolic distancing—can evoke anxiety in young readers. Likewise, subjects such as imperialism or labor issues, due to their high level of abstraction, offer limited comprehensibility for Halmat's target age group (6–9 years old), thereby diminishing the communicative effectiveness of his poetry.

In some of Halmat's poems, the narrative structures lack sufficient coherence, or the stories are presented in an incomplete manner, which may confuse young readers. From a musical perspective as well, sudden shifts in meter, rhythmic irregularities, and inconsistencies between the verses have weakened the overall rhythm and prosody of his poetry. Consequently, the “direct transmission of moral messages” often takes precedence over the “musical structure and poetic language,” resulting in a partial loss of auditory appeal. This imbalance diminishes the poem's ability to capture children's cognitive attention and evoke their emotional response effectively.

In the last few collections of Halmat's *Collected Poems*, the poetic themes and the subjects chosen for characterization demonstrate a greater and more effective alignment with the child audience compared to his earlier works. One of the major strengths of these later collections lies in the poet's increased attention to constructing narrative structures appropriate to the child's mindset. Nevertheless, closer consideration of child developmental psychology, conceptual simplification, and a richer use of imagination and linguistic play are crucial aspects that, if further emphasized, could bring Halmat's poetry closer to the contemporary standards of children's literature.

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### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Collection of Children's Poetry