

Safe Fear and the Cultivation of Aesthetic Sensibility in Translated Young Adult Literature: A Reading of Salim A Tour of the Wonders of the World

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Abstract

This article traces the manifestations of **safe fear** in translated young adult literature through the novel by the Turkish author **Mustafa Orakçı**, titled *Salim: A Tour of the Wonders of the World*. Blending fantasy, adventure, and a passion for discovery, the novel frames fear as a formative human experience that can be pedagogically deployed within a safe context one that provokes emotion without leaving residues of terror or psychological disturbance. The study adopts an analytical approach combining aesthetic and psychological perspectives, seeking to reveal how wonder, risk, and heightened affect intersect with epistemic enthusiasm. The findings indicate that the narrative draws on innovative, quasi-scientific techniques to satisfy the reader's spirit of adventure, establish psychological balance, and motivate young readers toward exploratory learning and the acquisition of human values.

Keywords: safe fear; young adult literature; Mustafa Orakçı

Introduction

Young adult literature is directed at an age group spanning the transition from childhood to adulthood. It is among the most sensitive literary branches and among the most influential in shaping aesthetic feeling and value-consciousness in the emerging reader. At this stage, adolescents incline toward adventure and move beyond folktales, fairy tales, and myths to novels and realistic narratives that combine artistic pleasure with pedagogical meaning, directed imagination with plausible reality.

Among the aesthetic elements that contemporary Arab criticism has relatively neglected is “**safe fear**” an affective-aesthetic experience that generates anticipation and arousal without disrupting the adolescent reader's psychological equilibrium. Instead, it reconstructs the reader's relationship with the world through complex emotions that hold together anxiety and discovery, caution and amazement. One might assume that such a topic belongs more to psychology than to literature; yet safe fear is, in fact, an aesthetic component that disposes the human psyche toward loving beauty and

seeking its traces within the lines of literature written for adolescents. Infusing this literature with measured doses of fear, caution, and wonder makes it more engaging. What is meant here is not frightening the reader into dread, but rather unveiling a distinction between two matters indeed, matters that are far apart. The first kind (terrorizing fear) is undesirable and unacceptable, especially for younger age groups; by contrast, safe fear is often desired by adolescents themselves, who experience a form of joy and satisfaction when the author succeeds in directing it in a way that harmonizes with their inclinations.

1. Research Problem

The novel *Salim: A Tour of the Wonders of the World* translated from Turkish into Arabic provides a significant model in intermediary literature that addresses the adolescent reader through a cognitive and aesthetic adventure, awakening a love of discovery and the pleasure of participating in the pursuit of forces of evil that seek to destroy the spirit of human beauty in various parts of the world. Accordingly, the central research problem concerns the **aesthetic and pedagogical function of fear** in young adult literature:

1. How can a writer in children's/young adult literature transform this feeling seemingly negative into an effective tool for cultivating aesthetic taste and developing imagination?
2. Has the Turkish author Mustafa Orakçı succeeded in employing safe fear in a manner that generates suspense and makes the reader anticipate the happy ending sought by every young reader?
3. How did the novelist employ language so that fear becomes an artistic, aesthetic touch?

These questions, among others, constitute the axes of this study, which seeks to address them on scientific and methodological foundations in the analysis of literary texts directed to children.

2. Objectives of the Study

This article examines a novel of **141 pages** to achieve the following aims:

- A) To help transform literary texts translated by amateurs in Algeria into texts that genuinely serve aesthetic sensibility, rather than rushing to print global stories for other purposes.
- B) To benefit from Arabic translations produced by pioneers in Arab countries that have advanced far in their attention to global children's literature.
- C) To enable Algerian authors to benefit from this purposeful orientation by producing novels similar

to this text, and to move so far as possible away from classical global texts repeatedly translated and thus familiar to both general and specialized readerships.

D) To direct public attention to the novel form, since a child older than ten often believes themselves to have outgrown children's stories.

E) To provide doses of safe fear so that the adolescent becomes accustomed to it, and pathological fear is transformed into a natural fear whose outcome is reassuring and joyful.

Methodology

To address the core question and its subsidiary questions, we adopted a **descriptive approach** to trace the phenomenon under study, supported by a **semiotic approach**, which we believe should be present in the analysis of children's narratives, given that the illustrator functions as a second creator and may signal meanings the author leaves implicit.

Conceptual and Theoretical Framework

1.1 Young Adult Literature

Young adult literature is directed to an age group that has moved beyond early childhood. Scholars define it as encompassing the stages of adventure and heroism and the stage of adolescence specifically between the ages of **nine and nineteen**.¹ In this period, the child believes they have surpassed short stories written for young children and thus leans toward booklets and novels for adolescents whose length often ranges from about **120 pages to 200 pages** depending on the sub-stage within the age range. Young adult literature is among the most sensitive literary genres and among the most deeply influential in shaping the aesthetic conscience and value-awareness of the emerging reader, as it combines artistic enjoyment with educational messaging, directed imagination with possible reality.

1.2 *Salim: A Tour of the Wonders of the World*

Salim: A Tour of the Wonders of the World by the Turkish author **Mustafa Orakçı** (*Mustafa Orakçı*) is a prominent example of this intelligent deployment of fear in young adult literature. It does not present fear as a negative feeling; rather, it treats it as a channel for cultivating aesthetic sensibility through a cognitive and human adventure that takes the reader across multiple civilizational and geographical spaces. In this way, danger becomes a means for self-discovery, and adventure becomes an entry point to affective maturation.²

1.3 The Meaning of Safe Fear

Safe fear is not intended to induce disturbance, but to achieve a balance between affect and knowledge between sensing danger and recognizing it as an imagined danger that can be overcome. Through this balance, the adolescent reader learns how to face the world and regulate emotional responses. Bruno Bettelheim, in his well-known work *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), argues that fairy tales containing fearful scenes provide the child/adolescent with a symbolic experience of confronting evil in a safe way, thereby helping to build a more coherent psychological apparatus.³

2. Character Variation and the Construction of Aesthetic Affect in *Salim: A Tour of the Wonders of the World*

The novel is structured around a wondrous journey in which a group of friends come to know the Seven Wonders of the World through an intelligent narrative device. The adventure begins with an announcement of a competition to interpret certain drawings and symbols, and success favors **Nader**, the central figure in the narrative, who embodies calm analytic reason. He represents intelligence tempered by wisdom, symbolizing balance between enthusiasm and thought.

Opposed to him is **Karam**, who represents simplicity of thought and voracious appetite: his concerns are largely confined to food, yet he possesses the physical strength the group needs in times of hardship. Thus, Karam becomes a symbol of unreflective bodily energy that can be guided toward good when led by conscious direction.

The narrator **Salim** functions as the center of affect and the engine of narration. Through him, the reader is invited to participate in a renewed reading experience: living events alongside him, at times feeling fear rise, and at others experiencing relief as the crisis recedes. The **teacher** figure is a companion who steps beyond classroom instruction and follows the journey with spontaneity. At times, he appears as a serious guide a cognitive reference and a bridge between the real and the imaginary; at other times, he appears in the mode of companionship, one of the classical traditions in young adult literature that connects learning with a pedagogical, peer-like accompaniment.

The novel adopts an adventure-based narrative structure compatible with the adolescent stage and constitutes a “scientific” method of educating and informing young readers in a smooth manner that combines humor with pleasure and comic artistry. The author distributes roles across carefully designed characters, each playing an indispensable function in the plot what may be called **collective emotional equilibrium**. Despite the novel’s density of information and the many names of places and persons across different countries names that may be difficult to memorize the author uses humor as a form of satirical mimicry and unusual movement to generate a cheerful psychological state that creates affective balance and facilitates retention of knowledge.⁴

At times, play is integrated as an important means of learning. When Salim wishes to introduce his brother (Nader) to the Earth's roundness and to locate the Great Wall, he borrows a ball from his friends and places his finger on Beijing, likening the globe to a football familiar within children's everyday world.⁵

The character **Maram** adds an unexpected dimension to the plot. She initially appears as a tour guide, yet the illustrator leaves space for children's interpretation because they are accustomed to a distinct outfit for guides. This triggers negative thoughts in Salim, which he immediately cuts off by reminding himself that he is accompanied by his teacher, who has traveled with him often. Here the narrative provides a signal of safety: the teacher is a second parent and will certainly be protective of all companions. The truth about Maram is then revealed: she is a police officer near the Great Wall of China pursuing the thief **Shuja'**, reinforcing suspense and the principle of not being deceived by appearances.

Rami, by contrast, introduces a fully different dimension: a comedic-pedagogical register. His jokes add an aesthetic touch that follows each crisis that intensifies tension. Readers pass through a momentary phase of incidental fear, which the author soon dissolves within minutes through relief, with laughter emerging via a joke or by re-framing the event itself artistically through Rami's humor. In this way, information becomes an enjoyable affective experience, making humor a pedagogical tool that cultivates aesthetic sensibility and positive thinking.

What is notable is that the author places on Rami's tongue certain humorous phrases that nonetheless carry explicit **bullying** toward the companions (Karam and Nadim). For instance, Rami says mockingly to his teacher, targeting Karam: "Sir, the theater accommodates seven thousand people naturally; but it only accommodates three thousand five hundred people like Karam."⁶ The author may be intending bullying here as a gradual pedagogical exposure, training adolescents to confront it in social life: just as natural fear is accepted, bullying is also encountered as part of reality in order to avoid the psychological problems experienced by those with particular disabilities or excessive obesity such as Karam by learning to face traits that earlier children's stories avoided, like bullying or fear-inducing situations.

The Paradox of Narrative Labeling: The Significance of the Name "Shuja'" Between Safe Fear and Aesthetic Sensibility

The final character confronts us with a striking paradox: the thief who repeatedly attempts to blow up historical landmarks is named **Shuja'** ("Brave"). After close investigation, we found that the naming is indeed transmitted literally from Turkish. This appears deliberate: it places the reader in a

state of productive disorientation, prompting them to rethink the character and thereby dilute pathological fear of “evil figures” in general. Simultaneously, the reader experiences joy at the ending the author crafts capturing Shuja‘ thus delivering closure.

The contrast between name and action unsettles the reader, yet it yields an aesthetic effect by attributing “heroism” to deviant behavior. From one angle, the author removes from children’s minds the aura formed through parental upbringing or children’s stories around villainous figures; instead of sustaining a rigid barrier between the adolescent and the “villain,” the narrative pushes the reader to search for the motives behind the thief’s actions: why destroy global heritage, and what does he gain? The text quickly supplies an explanation and thus produces safe fear. Maram states: “The man called Shuja‘ wants to cause an incident in these ruins and stir disorder in order to draw attention to himself; he wanted the incident to occur in one of the Wonders of the World.”⁷

At that point, the adolescent reader begins imagining root solutions for the existence of evil in their world. We see how Salim and his companions participate in chasing the thief an intelligent method of transforming acquired fear into courage, or at least into the performance of courage. Salim explicitly acknowledges this: “If I have to admit it, I was afraid too, but I didn’t show my fear; it’s hard sometimes to be the older brother...” This sense of responsibility makes Salim display bravery and conceal fear to serve as a model for his younger brother a responsibility evident from the beginning of the novel, as Salim holds his brother’s hand for fear he might get lost.

The Aesthetics of Safe Fear Between Pleasure and Pain

Pleasure and pain accompany the human being throughout life. The small child often experiences them in close succession: giving a beautiful toy to a crying child may make them soar with joy, while taking it away forcibly flips their mood into bodily protest and distress. Adults, however, can repress overt expressions of pleasure or pain because their mood is typically more regulated.⁸

The novel under study carries notable depth in correcting the idea of pleasure and pain and in training the adolescent, through modeling, to tolerate pain despite its harshness. A key example appears when lunch is served: Karam eats all the rice because he has a spoon in his pocket, while the others struggle to pick up grains with chopsticks. Salim comments humorously yet pedagogically: “While we were trying to pick up grains of rice, Karam had finished what was on his plate and started eating from our plates.”⁹ If Karam were among very young children, this would likely provoke crying and screaming; but at the adolescent stage, the scene is reframed as an aesthetic of patience, forbearance, and a gesture of masculine endurance and generosity.

In other situations involving the pursuit of the thief, the adolescents display patience and the zeal of the brave, seeking to prove themselves and demonstrate an ability to match adults in confronting evil. The appearance of laughter after the frightening adventure with Shuja' signals the return of vitality and the restoration of equilibrium, along with enjoyment of an atmosphere that begins tense and ends in relief. The episode of the Roman sword passing above their heads is perhaps the most intense: yet the author succeeds in transforming the charged atmosphere into one of joy and training in problem-solving. The sword becomes a clue for the next stage of travel: "That thing that passed quickly over my head lodged between two stones in the opposite wall... It was a sword; Maram pulled it from the wall with difficulty, and when Nader saw the sword he recognized it and said: it is the sword of Roman gladiators."¹⁰ The discovery points them toward Rome.

Nader's Heroism: Constructive Thinking and the Courage to Speak

Perhaps the most distinctive heroic figure is **Nader**, a model many young readers might wish to emulate and the name may itself be purposeful. Nader functions as a unique semiotic and aesthetic model, since he triggers the journey by his precise analysis of the puzzle behind the thief's movements. The clues are presented online to assist Officer Maram, and Nader, through exceptional intelligence and careful inference, solves the problems of the posted images: they are, in fact, indicators of the thief's travel among the Wonders of the World.

Because Nader possesses literary courage intended as a trait for every reader the author has him explain the solution to his teacher, peers, and Maram. This offers training in creative thinking and the ability to present ideas publicly for discussion. Beyond that, the narrative gestures toward restoring the human to their humanity, for mobile phones have harmed our youth and even children by being used contrary to educators' aims. This novel implicitly invites the productive use of technology: when Nader cannot decode a heritage image, he seeks help from Rami, skilled in searching: "He took a photo of it with his phone and pressed the search button; then I understood what he wanted to do."¹¹

This may be read as a call to educators to care for children's thinking what is sometimes termed "small creativity," the study of children's creativity as the foundation of societal creativity, a field that suffers from relative neglect.¹² We believe children's and adolescents' reluctance toward invention from an early age is largely due to two major reasons:

1. The lack of encouragement from those responsible for education for any child accomplishment, even if simple; indeed, discouragement from parents and siblings may implant fear through external and internal surveillance.

2. The abundance of ready-made inventions and toys in the market often foreign-made leads the child to consume pre-made products without effort, which kills creativity.

The author thus seeks to awaken aesthetic sensibility in children's innovation and to normalize the beneficial use of the internet in a gentle manner free from commands, prohibitions, or scolding thereby giving the reader a sense of inner safety that makes imitation of the protagonists plausible.

The Aesthetics of Laughter in Young Adult Fiction: From Relief to Training the Self to Overcome Fear

The novel draws adolescent readers into its ideas and awakens repressed feelings, functioning as a form of affective "diagnosis" that enables descent into the human self and comparison between one's own behavior and that of the protagonists leading to reflection, influence, imitation of what is good, and avoidance of what is harmful. In *Salim: A Tour of the Wonders of the World*, Mustafa Orakçı adopts a strategy that satisfies adolescents' desire for enjoyment and delight (thus warding off boredom) while supplying them with scientific information. Contemporary theories urge educators to build bridges of affection with learners to transmit knowledge: harshness increases aversion to learning. Many of us recall loving the subject taught by a cheerful teacher, while counting minutes in the class of one who relies on rote instruction and intimidation. Amal Ismail *'Abd al-Raziq* confirms this: "If we want our children to grow soundly, we must begin our efforts with them before they are born by a quarter century meaning we begin with the family by preparing it to deal with children according to correct methods." ¹³ Among such methods is the use of cheerfulness and humor in presenting information.

The author begins the novel with a humorous description of Nadim to capture attention and draw the reader into following the plot in search of fun and lightness, particularly at a time when adolescents' sense of security is strained by images of war, kidnapping, burning, organ trade, and other violent content circulated through screens and social media content that can undermine calm and trust. When children then enter educational institutions and spend long hours receiving dry content, boredom seeps into the heart, pushing them toward the phone like a thirsty person toward water, searching for relief yet falling into digital swamps that mix the trivial with the harmful and often deliver violent clips that erode ethics. Hence, every educator at home or in school must bear part of the responsibility for returning youth to a sound path.

When a person smiles even slightly while reading and interacting with a text, the brain sends signals to the nervous system, leading to the release of dopamine and serotonin, two neurotransmitters associated with comfort and tranquility. Mood changes, and the reader becomes more eager and

positively engaged. This is what psychologists refer to as **affective facilitation of cognition**.¹⁴For this reason, some modern educational studies encourage learning through laughter because it helps store information positively. When Nader shows an image of a giant dragon on a mountain and asks Karam to interpret it, Karam laughs and answers: “An animal whose meat cannot be eaten so it’s of no use to me.” The scene is likely to remain fixed in readers’ memory.

Similarly, when the author provides information about China’s high population density, he begins with a joke on Nadim’s tongue: “I think we’re famous here, Salim look, they’ve come to welcome us!”¹⁵a clever cue that anchors the idea of a large population. To deliver a dry numerical fact, the author again plays on the binary of “Karam and food,” as Nadim proposes building a Great Wall between them and Karam so that he will not share their food, calling it “Karam’s Wall.” After laughter, a factual statement follows: “The construction of this wall lasted more than two thousand years, and its length is 8,850 kilometers.”¹⁶

To avoid prolongation, the author proposes summarizing these joke-information pairings in a table.

Joke	Scientific takeaway	Page
“This is the first time being short has actually helped me give me twenty-five yuan, Salim.”	Identifying China’s currency (the yuan).	31
“How did my grandpa get here? Because his grandpa has a cart.”	It is said that the wheelbarrow was invented during the construction of the Great Wall of China.	34
“I won’t get lost here, Salim no one here has round eyes like mine.”	A common stereotype about East Asian eye shape .	34
Karam: “When I hear the words ‘oil’ and ‘spices,’ food is all I can think about.”	Interpreting a map containing incense, oil, perfume, and spices an indication of trade in the city of Petra.	43
“The name of the kingdom is funny couldn’t they find any	Petra was the capital of the Nabataeans from around 400 BCE.	46

name other than ‘the Nabataeans’?”		
“You’re hilarious, Salim how can a ‘brother’ be a country?”	The “brother country” idea (Petra and Machu Picchu).	62
Karam: “Look how beautiful it is we’re not going to eat it; we want to play with it.”	The animal is a llama, which lives in South America.	77

Based on what we have observed in the table, we argue that an adolescent reader would hardly sustain engagement across the novel’s full 141 pages were it not for the author’s deliberate use of humor and entertainment. These comic interludes captivate the young reader, encouraging them to continue reading in search of novelty, while also accompanying Karam and Nadim through witty moments that keep boredom at bay.

Conclusion

This article concludes with the following results:

1. The young adult novel is an artistic form of engaging literature for adolescents, because at this stage the young reader feels a degree of transcendence over the previous childhood stage and tends to read realistic novels, disliking being given “children’s stories.”
2. In this Turkish-to-Arabic translation, the reader may feel as if reading a novel of Arabic origin perhaps due to cultural proximity between Arabs and Turks and the translator’s ability to preserve meaning without distortion.
3. We examined an element of significant importance in dissolving inherited fear within society and environment; the novel offers a model for training adolescents to practice natural fear and acquire courage.
4. The author couples each scientific fact or frightening event with a joke that dissolves fear or facilitates learning an innovative method of preparing a generation that possesses courage alongside caution, which is what is meant by safe fear rather than recklessness.
5. Narrative is among the best means by which an author can embed human values smoothly, without resorting to violence or coercion.
6. In the novel, the effect of images is reduced compared to early childhood books, yet illustrations remain present and meaningful as visual language that expresses or clarifies.

7. The novel effectively trains critical and creative thinking through modeling the hero; Nader becomes an example, and nothing earns a child respect like knowledge and creative thought.

8. Laughter relaxes facial muscles and stimulates the brain to release hormones that support comprehension and retention.

9. Returning to novels that do not exceed one hundred pages may reduce irrational use of smartphones.

10. The novel also shows Nader and Rami using the phone as a serious research tool rather than mere entertainment or reckless browsing that leads to cognitive decay and then scientific, ethical, and other consequences.

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³ See Bettelheim, B. (1976) *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales*. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, p 9.

⁴ Muhammad Qaranya, *Manifestations of the Children's Story: The Syrian Experience*, Arab Writers Union Press, Damascus, 2010, p. 274.

⁵ Mustafa Orakçı, *Salim: A Tour of the Wonders of the World*, p. 23.

⁶ Mustafa Orakçı, *Salim: A Tour of the Wonders of the World*, p. 52.

⁷ Mustafa Orakçı, *Salim: A Tour of the Wonders of the World*, p. 40.

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¹⁵ Mustafa Orakçı, *Salim: A Tour of the Wonders of the World*, p. 26.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 30.