

DERRIDA'S "DEMOCRATIC INTELLECT" IN *THE LITTLE PRINCE* (1943) AND *THE LITTLE BLACK FISH* (1967)

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ABSTRACT

In this article, we undertake a comparative study of the need for democracy as presented in Jacques Derrida's "The Laws of Reflection: Nelson Mandela in Admiration" (1986), Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (1943), and Samad Behrangí's *The Little Black Fish* (1967). Despite their differences, these works share a common objective of highlighting the significance of a democratic intellect as their central focus. The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine the similarities and differences of the two main fictional characters, however fantastic and non-realistic they might look, with/from Derrida's portrayal of the character of Nelson Mandela. Our findings reveal that all three authors effectively convey the dichotomy between individuality and idolatry while illustrating how the main characters employ their critical thinking to scrutinize injustice and the need for democracy and freedom.

KEYWORDS: Literature and Philosophy, Jacques Derrida, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Samad Behrangí, Humanism, Children's Books.

L'INTEL·LECTE DEMOCRÀTIC DE DERRIDA A *EL PETIT PRÍncep* (1943) I *EL PEIXET NEGRE* (1967)

RESUM

En aquest article, realitzem un estudi comparatiu sobre la necessitat de la democràcia tal com es presenta a «Les lleis de la reflexió: Nelson Mandela en admiració» (1986) de Jacques Derrida, *El Petit Príncep* (1943) d'Antoine de Saint-Exupéry i *El Peixet Negro* (1967) de Samad Behrangí. Tot i les seves diferències, aquestes obres comparteixen un objectiu comú de ressaltar la importància d'un intel·lecte democràtic com a enfocament central. El propòsit d'aquest estudi, per tant, és examinar les similituds i les diferències dels dos personatges principals ficticis, per molt fantàstics i no realistes que puguin semblar, amb la representació de Derrida del personatge de Nelson Mandela. Les nostres troballes revelen que els tres autors transmeten eficaçment la dicotomia entre individualitat i idolatria mentre il·lustren com els personatges principals fan servir el seu pensament crític per analitzar la injustícia i la necessitat de democràcia i llibertat.

PARAULES CLAU: literatura i filosofia, Jacques Derrida, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Samad Behrangí, democràcia, llibres infantils.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In 1986, Jacques Derrida published an essay titled “The Laws of Reflection: Nelson Mandela in Admiration”, in which he expressed his admiration for the South African anti-apartheid leader, both in terms of Mandela’s attitude and his written works (Peeters 2013). Within this essay, Derrida discusses Mandela’s accomplishments by dissecting his actions and speeches. He holds Mandela in high regard as a democratic intellectual who employed critical thinking to scrutinize the prejudices inherent in the apartheid system. Indeed, Derrida commends Mandela not only for his respect for the law but also for being a living embodiment of it (Cornell 2005: 71). Perhaps this explains why critics consider this essay to be one of the most compelling instances of Derrida’s attempt to summon forth “the possibility of justice” (71).

Similarly, Antoine de Saint-Exupéry (1900-1944), in his renowned work *The Little Prince* (1943), portrays a young child who examines different facets of society and questions the absurdity of people’s behaviour. Critics view the little prince as a “champion of human freedom” (Wadsworth 1951: 96) because he passionately promotes social reforms designed to liberate “humanity from individual’s weaknesses” and the often-inhumane bonds (Triebel 1951: 92). This novella, therefore, reflects a humanistic perspective, emphasizing the importance of compassion, understanding, and the quest for deeper meaning in life. The protagonist’s encounters with various characters symbolize the author’s critique of societal norms and his advocacy for a more enlightened and liberated human experience.

In a parallel manner, Samad Behrangi (1939-1967), the Iranian author, portrays the life of a small fish yearning for human freedom. In this story, the little fish embarks on a quest for “knowledge and freedom” (Asgharzadeh 2007: 174). He has

the anxiety of search, the thirst to know, to find out, the insatiable curiosity, and the spirit to go ahead, to break the norms and regulations, to break the taboos and commonsense, to rebel against the conservatism of parents and elders, to swim against the flow, to defy the accepted rules of ... [his] environment, to run, to struggle, fight and be defiant of that which limits ... [his] freedom, to live and die in the open seas, in the ocean. (Asgharzadeh 2007: 174)

The little fish fights against the long-standing values and ultimately makes its way to the sea (174), symbolizing a journey toward freedom and self-discovery.¹ In doing so, the author aimed to illustrate “a humanistic vision” of a united world unbound by “borders”, highlighting the possibility of harmony and unity beyond conventional divisions (Marchessault 2017: 130). Critics argue that the story endeavours to convey profound themes such as “freedom, identity,

¹ To explore the symbols in *The Little Black Fish*, see Asghari *et al.* (2019: 194-200).

existential dilemmas, diaspora, [and] nonconformity", reflecting the universal struggles of individuals against societal constraints (Hashemy *et al.* 2011: 65). The narrative not only champions the quest for personal liberation but also serves as a broader commentary on the human condition and the relentless pursuit of a more inclusive world.²

While these three works originate from distinct historical and cultural contexts and cater to diverse audiences, they all share a common thread—an individual as a democratic intellect who serves as the central figure in each work. These protagonists engage in critical introspection, examining the flaws within their societies, and employ their free will and analytical acumen not only to transform their own lives but also to foster understanding in the world. It is this shared element that we find particularly intriguing to explore in detail. Therefore, in the present study, we aim to conduct a comparative analysis of Jacques Derrida's ideas in his aforementioned article alongside the themes presented in de Saint-Exupéry's novella and Behrangi's short story, paying particular attention to the ways in which they align in promoting humanist ideals such as free will and critical reflection.

2. NELSON MANDELA'S INFLEXIBLE LOGIC OF REFLECTION

In his essay "The Laws of Reflection" (1986), Derrida explores the idea that Mandela's "political experience" is intimately linked to a theoretical contemplation regarding "history", "culture", and, most importantly, "jurisprudence" (14). Thus, it is through his profound knowledge and critical comprehension of society that Mandela is able to unveil the biases of the apartheid regime. Consequently, what sets Mandela apart is "the rationality" of his actions (14). Mandela has consistently been "a man of reflection" (14). His contemplation, much like that of a mirror, brings forth enlightenment and consequently, "understanding", beyond which only "ignorance" exists (14). Mirzaee Porkoli further elaborates on this by suggesting that, on one hand, [t]here is enlightenment in reflection (2013: 48). In other words, reflection is steeped in "thought, reason, and rationality" (48). As a result, the cogitation of reflective individuals like Mandela sheds light on complex issues, such as the relationship between "an individual and the state" (48). On the other hand,

there is also a sense of mirroring in the term —'reflection' that is related to the illuminating power of light. Direct light, more than illuminating, tends to blind. Reflected light, on the contrary, is not blinding and it does the significant work of clarification and elucidation.

² Belet Boyaci *et al.* argue that *The Little Black Fish* offers potential for both direct and indirect educational activities aimed at instilling values like courage, kindness, honesty, and curiosity among elementary school children. It can encourage children to be brave, helpful, and truthful, while also fostering their curiosity and independence in setting their own goals (2017: 194).

The force of reflection is to turn back the violent darkening light of a system over it so that it becomes visible and readable enough to be identified and analysed in depth. ... Mandela has this mirroring effect on the Apartheid Regime and its corrupted laws. He illuminates the violence and injustices of the white-governed system. (Mirzaee Porkoli 2013: 48)

Thus, Derrida views Mandela as a unique and significant figure due to his unwavering commitment to a thoughtful and reflective approach (see Derrida 1987: 17). This approach is not only a personal endeavour but also holds profound implications for society as a whole (23).

Derrida admires Mandela for his reverence for what is morally praiseworthy, namely, "the Law" (15), which he upholds through critical thinking. Consequently, it is Mandela's own commitment to "radical and critical reflection and analysis" (Mirzaee Porkoli 2013: 45) that elicits admiration from others (14). One might wonder, what exactly does "the Law" entail? Derrida goes on to elucidate this concept. He asserts that Mandela admires and aligns himself with "the tradition inaugurated by the Magna Carta, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights ... parliamentary democracy" and the doctrine of "the separation of powers", and judicial independence (Derrida 1987: 17). These ideals collectively aim to establish equality, democracy, and justice within society. Thus, Mandela distinguishes between the broader societal need for lawful principles and the laws already imposed by institutional structures. This distinction contributes to his status as an admirable figure.

According to Derrida, Mandela's aspiration is for "all human beings" to "become effectively the subjects of the Law" (21), marking him as a champion of "the Law" (26) and of individual "conscience" (27). He heeds the call of his "voice of conscience" (27), prioritizing his moral compass over existing social norms, a course of action consistent with individuals of integrity, purpose, and ethical principles (28). Consequently, Derrida's essay not only highlights "Mandela as an exemplary historical figure" and showcases the "reflective structure of admiration" but also serves as an illustration of how the reiteration of universal principles becomes ingrained in the essence of a unique individual (Guerlac 2009: 261).

It is important to note that Derrida himself was an activist, adding depth and resonance to his perspective. As Caruto states,

over the years, Derrida has been personally active on a number of political reforms. Early on, an opponent of the French war in Algeria and the American war in Vietnam ... he has been active on behalf of Nelson Mandela, was one of the founders of the Jan Hus Association, a society formed to express solidarity with persecuted Czech intellectuals (which earned him a night in jail), supports the rights of Palestinians, and participates in international associations aimed at protecting the rights of writers everywhere. Recently, Derrida has taken an active part in calling for a new trial for Mumia Abu-Jamal, a broadcast journalist and African-American, who was convicted of killing a Philadelphia policeman in a trial that has been widely criticized by legal scholars ... (Caruto 1997: 60-61)

Hence, it comes as no surprise that he lauds Mandela's political efforts in the fight against apartheid (see Calcagno 2007: 8). In fact, Derrida's purpose in writing this essay is inherently political. As Buonamano argues, Derrida's dedication to Nelson Mandela can be seen as a discussion about challenging the foundations of a "political-legal system" and attempting a transformation while being aware of the historical baggage of existing and former political-legal systems (1998: 177). In this context, Derrida sees Mandela as a figure he had long envisioned, especially since the Algerian war—a man capable of using the English democratic model against apartheid proponents, a kind of "deconstructor in action" (Peeters 2013). For Derrida, Mandela embodies both a philosopher and an activist, much like himself.

Derrida delves into two key aspects of Mandela's approach, both rooted in the logic of reflection. The first is Mandela's rejection of any "alliance with liberal whites" who sought "to maintain the struggle within the constitutional framework" (1987: 17). The second is Mandela's belief that the black community's struggle would be carried out under the auspices of "an imported law and model", the Anglo-American, with a leaning toward universality (22). Mandela's unique perspective allows him to scrutinize the entire system from within and without, continuously examining and questioning every facet. His method is unwavering because there are no exceptions for him; he questions all systems, applauding their admirable aspects while critiquing their flaws. This is what makes Mandela so admirable to a deconstructionist like Derrida.

Furthermore, as Garrison contends, Derrida's essay effectively presents a compelling case for the relevance of deconstruction in "politics and ethics" (2003: 354). Clearly, Derrida's admiration of Mandela is influenced by his deconstructive perspective on the notion of a transcendental signified. Throughout his works, Derrida emphasizes "the instability of systems" and contends that there is no central authority or ultimate truth (Sim 2011: 5). He argues that while Mandela admires parliamentary democracy for uniting the nation, he simultaneously opposes the violence and racism inherent in the same system (Derrida 1987: 17). In this way, he refrains from idealizing anything; instead, he appreciates and critiques in tandem. Consequently, it is fair to characterize this essay as a testament "to Derrida's (and Mandela's) deconstruction of an oppressive system of laws" (Garrison 2003: 352).

As Derrida himself asserts, his intention in this essay is to admire Mandela without elevating him to the status of an idol: to "honor without succumbing ... to loftiness" (1987: 13). Derrida distinguishes the admiration he attributes to Mandela from idolization, emphasizing that it is not rooted in his subjective impressions. Instead, he asserts that admiration is closely tied to reason and critical thinking, qualities deeply embedded in Mandela's reflective approach. Regarding the admiration of Mandela, he suggests that Mandela's influence throughout history makes him admirable, or as he puts it, "singular". However, one should never deify or idolize him or consider him the embodiment of

ultimate Truth because, like any other human being, he may have flaws. Therefore, Mandela is singular but not sacred. As Mirzaee Porkoli explains,

we must respect Mandela, Derrida writes, ‘in his irreplaceable singularity,’ which is not exemplary. In other words, Derrida reminds us that our admiration of admirable people like Nelson Mandela should not lead to their idolization, making them absolute exemplary figures and models. We must instead respect and pay attention to his radically critical examination of the violent apartheid legal system, through which he aims to bring justice to his people and humanity. (Mirzaee Porkoli 2013: 45)

In this manner, Derrida endeavours to encourage his readers to distinguish between appreciating an individual and elevating them to the status of a revered model. Consequently, any “example is just a singular example, not exemplary” (Mirzaee Porkoli 2013: 47).

This very approach is employed by Mandela himself, as even though he appreciates “the democratic, parliamentary system of government” as it has developed over time, he does not regard it as “exemplary” (52). Mandela continually scrutinizes each and every law within this system. In this fashion, he regards established laws and legal systems as distinct instances but certainly not as models of excellence (53). This is the essence of what deconstructionists engage in. As Harris observes,

deconstruction opens its own metanarratives to what it sees as a necessary unravelling. It is committed to what Derrida calls “an incessant movement of recontextualisation.” ... Whether we are taking a critical work decision, or formulating a professional interpretation, or, indeed, arguing with a spouse, we must concede the possibility of as yet undetermined contexts changing our view, shifting our position. We never know it all. In the words of Derrida, justice “bears witness to that which will not allow itself to be enclosed within a context.” Justice will not tolerate a totalising narrative, even one which has spurred the liberation of a country or energised its reconstruction. (Harris 2011: 122)

In this way, a deconstructionist such as Derrida has the ability to question everything, and he endeavours to both mirror his political reaction to apartheid and unveil the political accountability of “his deconstructive practices” (Garrison 2003: 352).

3. THE LITTLE PRINCE AS A DECONSTRUCTIONIST

So far, we have delved into a detailed examination of the rigid logic of reflection as elucidated by Derrida in the context of Mandela, and we have explored the notion of admiration when it comes to appreciating Mandela’s actions. The character of the little prince in de Saint-Exupéry’s novella exhibits both similarities and differences in this regard. Unlike Mandela, the little prince is not a political figure; he is merely a young child who observes the adult world with a simple yet critical mindset. His approach to reflection is dissimilar to Mandela’s

in that he does not rely on formal speeches or engage in political actions, nor does he wield any leadership authority. However, what sets him apart from Mandela is his method of posing questions, his unwavering determination to seek answers to those questions, and his use of irony to convey his ideas and awaken people's consciences. The dialogues he initiates serve as a platform for presenting his critical ideas.

3.1. The use of questions

Let's examine the first strategy employed by the little prince: the use of questions. Right from the outset of his presence in the novella, the little prince inquires about the purpose of thorns in flowers. When faced with an illogical response from the indifferent pilot, who is preoccupied with his plane, the little prince persists. He contemplates the idea himself and applies his critical thinking not only to challenge the pilot's indifference but also to arrive at the correct answer: "I don't believe you! Flowers are weak creatures. They are naïve. They reassure themselves as best they can. They believe that their thorns are terrible weapons" (de Saint-Exupéry 1995 [1943]: 48). Through his critical insights and his determination to find answers to his questions, he becomes a potent voice capable of influencing not only the adult pilot but also the audience. The narrator himself admits to being at a loss for words in the face of the little prince's justifications: "I did not know what to say to him. I felt awkward and blundering" (53). This illustrates the success of this method in impacting the adult character.

This pattern recurs throughout the novella. The narrator underscores the fact that "the little prince ... never, in his life, let go of a question, once he had asked it" (108; see also 74, 21, 22). Having already visited seven planets, his critical questions about human behaviour closely mirror Mandela's method of reflection. He not only articulates his observations about the shortcomings of humanity but also, akin to Mandela's powerful speeches, alters the perspectives of those he encounters. The best example is his encounter with the tippler:

"What are you doing there?" he said to the tippler, whom he found settled down in silence before a collection of empty bottles and also a collection of full bottles. "I am drinking," replied the tippler, with a lugubrious air. "Why are you drinking?" demanded the little prince. "So that I may forget," replied the tippler. "Forget what?" inquired the little prince, who already was sorry for him. "Forget that I am ashamed," the tippler confessed, hanging his head. "Ashamed of what?" insisted the little prince, who wanted to help him. "Ashamed of drinking!" The tippler brought his speech to an end, and shut himself up in an impregnable silence. (de Saint-Exupéry 1995: 83-84)

As we observe in this context, the little prince's probing inquiries serve to awaken the tippler to his own actions. This dynamic also unfolds during his visits to other planets, as exemplified in his encounter with the proud king on the first planet, where he gently reminds the monarch that there is no one on the planet to rule (71-75). All of these instances underscore the fact that, much like Mandela,

the little prince possesses a keen insight into life. Through his questioning, he seeks to shed light on the imperfections in people's lives and actions.

3.2. The use of ironic statements

Another method the little prince employs for reflection involves the use of strong and ironic statements. For instance, in response to the pilot's claim of being "busy with matters of consequence!", the little child echoes the same phrase with a disdainful tone, prompting the pilot to contemplate his own words (48). He proceeds to expand upon this idea by recounting the tale of a man, a narrative that not only serves as ironic commentary directed at the pilot but also engages the wider audience:

I know a planet where there is a certain red-faced gentleman. He has never smelled a flower. He has never looked at a star. He has never loved anyone. He has never done anything in his life but add up figures. And all day he says over and over, just like you: I am busy with matters of consequence! And that makes him swell up with pride. But he is not a man—he is a mushroom! (de Saint-Exupéry 1995: 49)

Although he appears to be a child, he displays remarkable courage in articulating his opinions on various matters, utilising methods typically employed by adults. Throughout different segments of the story, we witness his bravery akin to Mandela's in his stand against perceived injustices.

"You talk just like the grown-ups!"
That made me a little ashamed. But he went on, relentlessly:
"You mix everything up together . . . You confuse everything ..." (de Saint-Exupéry 1995: 49)

It is of some use to my volcanoes, and it is of some use to my flower, that I own them. But you are of no use to the stars ..."
The businessman opened his mouth, but he found nothing to say in answer. And the little prince went away. (de Saint-Exupéry 1995: 93)

The little prince, displaying both cleverness and bravery akin to that of a powerful leader, openly critiques, questions, and scorns the foolishness of adult actions.

Additionally, much like Mandela, the little prince possesses a profound theoretical understanding of the planets he visits, enhancing the rationality of his actions. For instance, when confronted with the prospect of becoming the minister of Justice on a tiny planet, he astutely retorts, "But there is nobody here to judge!" (75). This response serves as a reminder to the king that he governs a planet he has never visited, while the little prince demonstrates his knowledge by stating, "Oh, but I have looked already" (76). This suggests that the little prince possesses sufficient knowledge about the planet. Consequently, despite their distinct objectives and audiences, both Mandela and the little prince, as democratic intellectuals, fearlessly confront societal flaws to effect positive change.

3.3. The role of critical thinking

Similar to Derrida's view of Nelson Mandela, de Saint-Exupéry portrays the little prince as a democratic intellect. Right from the beginning of the novella, the author underscores the uniqueness of this character. He is the only one who comprehends the true significance of the narrator's drawing, which had been dismissed by all the adults as needing explanations. As Narey asserts, "The adults in de Saint-Exupéry's story fail to recognize the child's drawing as the visual traces of his critical thinking and meaning-making", dismissing them as "irrelevant to 'more serious'" matters" (2017: 292). In contrast, the little prince stands out because he genuinely grasps the meaning of these drawings. Unlike the adults, he relishes conversations about "boa constrictors, primeval forests, or stars" instead of the seemingly "sensible" topics of economy and politics. He is the sole individual who critically examines the world and can meticulously distinguish one drawing from another.

The little prince raises profound philosophical questions about the nature of life, earning the admiration of the author. Nevertheless, similar to the approach advocated by Derrida, the little prince is unique but not infallible. The author reveals that he, like any other child, is prone to making mistakes. Regarding his treatment of the rose, he confesses:

The fact is that I did not know how to understand anything! I ought to have judged by deeds and not by words. She cast her fragrance and her radiance over me. I ought never to have run away from her... I ought to have guessed all the affection that lay behind her poor little stratagems. Flowers are so inconsistent! But I was too young to know how to love her... (de Saint-Exupéry 1995: 61-62)

In doing so, the author illustrates that while the little prince is indeed commendable for his critical thinking, it is important not to idealize him, as he is not immune to making errors. Much like Mandela, the little child's approach to introspection is unwavering, encompassing a thorough examination of everything, including himself.

Additionally, the little prince displays admiration for others without falling into arrogance, echoing Derrida's observation about Mandela (see Derrida 1987: 13). He holds a deep appreciation for the rose, finding her "exciting", yet simultaneously noting that she lacked modesty (de Saint-Exupéry 1995: 56). Despite the genuine goodwill embedded in his affection, the little prince begins to doubt the rose due to "her behavior" (60-61). Similarly, he holds the lamp lighter in high regard for his unwavering commitment to his duties:

It may well be that this man is absurd. But he is not so absurd as the king, the conceited man, the businessman, and the tippler. For at least his work has some meaning. When he lights his street lamp, it is as if he brought one more star to life, or one flower. When he

puts out his lamp, he sends the flower, or the star, to sleep. That is a beautiful occupation. And since it is beautiful, it is truly useful. (de Saint-Exupéry 1995: 94)

Nonetheless, the little prince makes an effort to demonstrate to the lamplighter that his actions lack rationality and seeks a solution to assist him. Concerning the geographer, despite his initial admiration, as he views him as “a man who has a real profession!” (102), the little prince eventually comes to the realization that the geographer’s expertise remains purely theoretical and lacks practical utility for society (103-108). The question of admiration becomes the special concern of the little prince once he meets the conceited man:

Do you really admire me very much?” he demanded of the little prince.

“What does that mean — ‘admire’?”

“To admire means that you regard me as the handsomest, the best dressed, the richest, and most intelligent man on this planet.”

“But you are the only man on your planet!” (de Saint-Exupéry 1995: 81-82)

His ultimate response aligns the little prince with a deconstructionist perspective, akin to both Derrida and Mandela. This shift in perception reveals the little prince’s growing understanding that knowledge without application is limited in value, pointing to a critique of academic or intellectual pursuits that fail to engage with real-world needs.

4. THE BLACK FISH LONGS FOR FREEDOM

The same narrative unfolds in the Iranian children’s book, *The Little Black Fish*, authored by Samad Behrangi. Behrangi paints a vivid picture of a small fish who makes a bold decision to depart from its insular society and venture into the vast sea. However, the community opposes this choice, questioning the fish’s ideals and attempting to dissuade it from its path. Despite facing disdain from the others, the little black fish remains resolute in its determination to exercise its free will and embark on its journey, declaring, “I’m weary of this swimming; I yearn to venture forth and explore what lies beyond” (Behrangi 1967: 6). This portrays the fish as a humanist, driven by a longing for humanistic ideals such as individual freedom.

One noteworthy aspect of this book is that the protagonist is a “black” fish, a creature not only distinct in its thoughts but also in its perspective from the rest. Moreover, like de Saint-Exupéry’s little prince, Behrangi’s protagonist is a child—a “little” fish—observing the world of adults. Similar to Mandela, the little black fish possesses profound knowledge of the world, enabling it to discern and critique its imperfections. As it acknowledges, it possesses “reason, intelligence, and understanding,” along with the eyes to perceive (8):

Maybe you think someone taught me these ideas but believe me, I've had these thoughts for a long time. Of course, I've learned many things here and there. For instance, I know that when most fish get old, they complain about everything. I want to know if life is simply for circling around in a small place until you become old and nothing else, or is there another way to live in the world? (Behrangi 1967: 6)

As we observe, the young fish possesses a profound understanding of the lives of those around him, despite his youthful age. Leveraging his knowledge, he makes a deliberate choice to lead a different life. Nevertheless, both before and during this journey, he engages in introspection, scrutinizing the actions of the individuals he encounters and offering critiques. Much like Mandela and the little prince, his approach to reflection remains steadfast and uncompromising, with no room for exceptions.

4.1. Reflections, inquiries, and bold criticisms

Akin to the little prince, the little black fish poses unanswerable questions to seemingly mature individuals, such as his mother.

The mother laughed: "When I was a child, I used to think a lot like that. But, my dear, a stream has no beginning and no end. That's the way it is. The stream just flows and never goes anywhere."

"But mother dear, isn't it true that everything comes to an end? Nights end, days end, weeks, months, years ..."

"Forget this pretentious talk," interrupted the mother — "Let's go swimming. Now is the time to swim, not talk." (Behrangi 1967: 5-6)

His mother, much like the pilot in the story of *The Little Prince*, finds herself unable to provide a satisfactory response to the little fish's reasonable question. Consequently, she fails to persuade him to change his mind.

The little black fish not only possesses intelligence but also displays courage akin to figures like Mandela and the little prince. However, it is crucial to note that the extent of bravery exhibited by these characters differs due to their respective societal contexts and audiences. Nevertheless, in the story, we witness the "little" fish, despite its diminutive size, bravely confronting the neighbours who seek to prevent its departure. The fish responds to them with a blend of cleverness and rationality, even if this stance elicits their anger.

"Little one," said the neighbour, "Let's see. Since when have you become a scholar and philosopher and not told us?"

"Madam," answered the little fish, "I don't know what you mean by 'scholar' and 'philosopher,' I've just got tired of these swims. I don't want to continue this boring stuff and be happy as a fool until one day I wake up and see that like all of you, I've become old, but still am as dumb as I am now." (Behrangi 1967: 8)

The same scenario unfolds when the little prince addresses the mother of the tadpoles. Despite her physical strength, the little prince continues to express

his critical viewpoints. He boldly declares, "If you lived a hundred years, you'd still be nothing more than an ignorant and helpless frog" (16). These assertive responses to adults who possess greater physical power than him exemplify the courage and determination of the little fish in defending his life principles.

Much like Mandela, he defends the Law, representing individual free will, against the norms of his small pond. When he encounters a group of self-centred tadpoles in the sea who take pride in their beauty, he condemns their actions and openly criticizes them, drawing upon his theoretical knowledge about the world. He insists that they should not take pride in themselves, as there are countless more beautiful creatures in the world.

The fish said, "I never imagined you would be so conceited. That's all right. I'll forgive you since you're speaking out of ignorance." In one voice the tadpoles demanded, "Are you saying we're stupid?" "If you weren't ignorant," replied the fish, "you'd know that there are many others in the world who are pleased with their appearances. You don't even have names of your own." (Behrangi 1967: 13-14)

This awakens the tadpoles' consciousness, similar to the pilot's experience in de Saint-Exupéry's novella, causing them to remain silent. Consequently, his approach serves as an enlightening example for others. As acknowledged by his friends, he has roused them from a deep slumber and imparted knowledge they had never contemplated before (12). Consequently, the illuminating reflection observed by Derrida in Mandela's actions can also be seen in the life of the little fish.

4.2. Admiration without loftiness

Regarding the theme of admiration in Derrida's essay, the Iranian short story highlights the uniqueness of the little fish. Unlike other fish who fear taking the same path, the little black fish displays the courage to confront powerful creatures, exercise its free will, and embark on a journey toward self-discovery and worldly recognition, thereby helping others understand their own identities (26). In the opening of the story, we witness the little fish's willingness to even criticize his beloved mother and ultimately distance himself from her because he deems his quest more significant than conforming to societal expectations. However, the author also acknowledges the little fish's limitations, such as its need for assistance from the lizard due to its lack of strength to challenge the fishpond on its own.

This aspect of the narrative reveals a complex understanding of admiration. The little fish is admired not for an unblemished heroism but for a relatable courage. Its journey is not marked by infallibility but by a persistent struggle against both external obstacles and internal doubts. The fish's willingness to confront its own weaknesses and still push forward becomes a key point of

admiration, reflecting Derrida's emphasis on the uniqueness of individual experience and the importance of self-questioning in the journey of life.

The story's conclusion leaves the audience in suspense, uncertain of the fish's success, as it becomes trapped in the jaws of the fishpond, symbolizing the final step towards death. This ending serves as a poignant reminder that the little fish, like all of us, is mortal and vulnerable to the dangers of the world. Thus, much like Derrida and de Saint-Exupéry, the Iranian author underscores the little fish's singularity and discourages idolatry. The narrative emphasizes its courageous struggle to transcend its fate, even if it ultimately does not achieve its goal. This nuanced portrayal invites readers to admire the little fish's bravery and determination without elevating it to an unattainable ideal, thereby maintaining a realistic perspective on the nature of heroism and human endeavour.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study aimed to explore the humanistic ideals conveyed in three literary works: Jacques Derrida's "The Laws of Reflection" (1986), Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's *The Little Prince* (1943), and Samad Behrangi's *The Little Black Fish* (1967). Despite the diverse subjects and backgrounds of these three authors, they all share a common theme —the presence of a "democratic intellect" at the core of their narratives.

After analysing these three figures through the lens of two critical concepts, namely the inflexible logic of reflection and the question of admiration as delineated by Derrida, it was concluded that all three authors effectively depicted the tension between individuality and hero-worship. They also portrayed how their central characters employed critical thinking to scrutinize the flaws in both individuals and society.

Nelson Mandela directed his critical reflection towards the apartheid regime through his speeches and political actions, whereas the little prince criticized adults through his probing questions and ironic statements. Similarly, the little fish in Behrangi's Iranian story defended his freedom and individuality by employing critical insights, questioning, and verbally challenging the members of his small community, including his family and friends. The results of the study underscore the power of language as a potent means to defend identity, liberty, and individual human rights. This is illustrated by how protagonists in the works of Derrida, Behrangi, and de Saint-Exupéry utilize discourse to articulate and defend their rights.

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