DOI: 10.2478/aa-2020-0002

Emotional schemas and cognitive strategies in fiction: *Milkman*

Roghayeh Farsi

Roghayeh Farsi is an assistant professor of English literature at the University of Neyshabur, Iran. She has authored *Modernism and Postmodernism in James Joyce's Fiction* and *J. S. Anand's Theory of Biotext and Critical Perspectives on His Poetic and Spiritual Creed*; she is the editor of *Shunyata in Trance: Select Poems from Yayati Madan G. Gandhi* and has co-edited *World Anthology of English Poetry*. She has published several articles on literature in some well-established journals.

Abstract:
The present study approaches Anna Burns's novel Milkman (2018) via the lens of Leahy's Emotional Schema Therapy (EST) (2019) in order to examine the model's pros and cons for literary analysis. The study focuses on the protagonist's emotional schemas which are shaped by her beliefs, interpretations and emotional appraisals of her environment. The analysis is carried out on both textual and extra-textual levels. The textual level focuses on character-society relationships and her emotional responses to the demands of her context. The extra-textual level concerns readers and investigates how the protagonist's emotional appraisals and interpretations influence readers' emotional schemas, which in the process of reading become either confirmed or restructured. While textual analysis displays the protagonist's emotional development, the findings of the extra-textual analysis accentuate the therapeutic role that literary texts can play by addressing readers' emotional schemas.

Introduction

Like thoughts, emotions are of paramount significance in human behaviour. Backed up by the urge to survive, emotions shape people's quick responses to stimuli in their environment; this helps improve the chances of success and survival. Understanding the emotions of other people and adopting adaptive strategies to the demands of the social context play a crucial role in safety and survival in social interactions. A huge body of literature testifies to the central role of emotions in many great plays and novels. Melville's *Moby Dick* (1930) is the story of Captain Ahab who is propelled by his anger and revenge against the Great White Whale that deprived

him of his leg. Poe's short stories are all narratives of emotionally involved/disturbed protagonists who seek survival through their highly sharpened emotional responses to the people around. Jealousy is the focus of Othello's feelings about Desdemona, and Iago's envy drives him to destroy Othello.

Despite the decisive role that emotions play in the creation of literary works, analysis of emotions and their significance have relatively received less critical attention on the part of literary scholars. This is so maybe because scholars, by way of convention, regard literary characters as detached and therefore different from real people. Although one cannot view fictional characters such as Anna Karenina, Othello, Hamlet, Oedipus and the like as real persons, one cannot ignore their similarities to people in real life. If they were completely different, they would never be identified, appreciated, understood, hated and loved. This study takes fictional characters as the product of their writers' cognitive-emotional operations which draw upon cognitive as well as emotional schemas to render them familiar and thereby identifiable and enjoyable to readers. This perspective justifies applying theoretical approaches which have emerged out of studying people in real life to literary characters to examine their pros and cons for character analysis. As a case study, the present paper studies *Milkman*, Anna Burns's Booker Prize-winning novel of 2018.

In her novel, Burns presents how her female protagonist appraises and responds to the experience of emotion in the dystopia created around her. This study approaches the novel via the lens of Emotional Schema Therapy (EST) which proposes a social cognitive model of the theory of emotion. It deploys the assumptions and strategies that Leahy uses in his EST model and investigates the protagonist's emotional schemas throughout the novel (2019). The paper shows how these schemas are shaped in response to her environmental concepts, interpretations, beliefs, evaluations, as well as strategies for coping with emotions. This is achieved by focusing on the character-society relationship. The other objective of the paper concerns the socializing as well as normalizing effects of the novel upon readers' emotional schemas and cognitive appraisals. The main argument is that while reading, readers become exposed to alternative emotional schemas by way of the protagonist's emotional experiences and cognitive restructuring. *Milkman* (2018) is presented to provide alternatives to readers' emotional schemas through the protagonist's emotional epiphanies. The paper concludes by drawing attention to literature as a therapeutic means which can regulate readers' emotional reactions.

***Milkman*: A dystopia**

Josephine Livingstone takes the lack of proper names in *Milkman* (2018) as "a chief agent of its confusion" (2018). She classifies Burns's novel among the dystopian novels, contending: "Nameless people and places are hallmarks of dystopian novels and novels of estrangement" (ibid.). Referring to Ralph Ellison's *The Invisible Man* (1995) and Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* (1994) as "two of the best unnamed characters in literature", Sam Sacks argues that by renouncing names, these writers express both a distrust of language itself as a tool for understanding the world and an awareness that namelessness is "a social as well as a metaphysical disease, one that tends to afflict women, minorities, the poor, the outcast – those treated as background extras in the primary story lines of history" (cited in Livingstone, 2018).

Based on the politically stifling world the novel portrays, the study relies on a content-oriented definition of dystopia which entails the analysis of social relations in a fictional world. In this definition, "the estrangement and isolation of individuals, and their fear of each other, are central, as well as the ways this is engineered by external, usually collectivist, authorities" (Claeys, 2017, p. 290). *Milkman* fits well in the definition Claeys provides for literary dystopias that are "primarily concerned to portray societies where a substantial majority suffer slavery and/or oppression *as a result of human action*. Privileged groups may benefit from this. Others may escape it, either to a condition of previous (preferable) normality or to something better" (ibid., original emphasis).

The atmosphere the narrator portrays in *Milkman* (2018) is a politically agitated one in which everyone has a specific position with respect to the state: defenders of the state, renouncers of the state, paramilitary forces, "those from 'over the water' . . . and from 'over the road'" (Burns, 2018, p. 23), and rebels. This atmosphere politicizes everything and everybody; the narrator refers to this point when she says: "There was the fact that you created a political statement everywhere you went, and with everything you did, even if you didn't want to" (ibid.,, p. 24). In such a tense environment, everyone is exposed to the state's surveillance. In her first mention of official authorities, she informs, "at present the state forces were hiding in it [a large park] to photograph renouncers-of-the-state. They also photographed renouncers' known and unknown associates" (p. 11). While running in this park along with Milkman, she hears the clicks of a camera; since Milkman is a paramilitary, she interprets her being photographed because of her relation with him, "by 'involvement' I mean connected, and by 'connected' I

mean active rebellion, and by 'active rebellion' I mean state-enemy renouncer. . . . So now I was to be on file somewhere, in a photograph somewhere, as a once unknown, but now certainly known associate" (p. 11).

The narrator's sociopolitical atmosphere is doubt-stricken; her oldest friend describes the whole community as "a suspect community" in which everyone is being carefully and constantly checked, photographed, spied on, and kept an eye on (p. 156). The narrator states,

> These were knife-edge times, primal times, with everybody suspicious of everybody. . . . It was that people were quick to point fingers, to judge . . . so it would be hard to fathom fingers not getting pointed and words not being added, also being judged in these turbulent times, resulting . . . in having . . . guns at the ready, turning up in the middle of the night at your door. (p. 26)

The agitation and political polarization has penetrated all social institutions so deeply that there is no way out left for people. One such centre is hospital which is deliberately avoided by people when they get shot, poisoned, knifed or injured in any way they do not feel like talking about. The narrator details the process of becoming involved with the police authorities: the hospital authorities inform the police; depending upon which "side of the fence you came from", they would present a choice:

> either you were to be falsely rigged up and hinted at in your district to be an informer for them, or else you were really to become an informer and inform on the renouncers-of-the-state from your district for them. Either way sooner or later . . . your corpse would be . . . found up . . . with . . . bullets in its head. So no. According to communal rules you didn't want to bother with hospitals (p. 166).

The narrator describes her world as being immersed long-term "in the dark mental energies; conditioned too, through years of personal and communal suffering, personal and communal history, to be overladen with heaviness and grief and fear and anger" (p. 70). For the people of her world, dominant darkness and ensuing emotions such as fear, anger and grief are normalized and socialized. Therefore, these people "could not, not at the drop of a hat, be open to any bright shining button of a person stepping into their environment and shining upon them just like that" (pp. 70-71). When she says, "shiny was bad, and 'too sad' was bad, and 'too joyous' was bad, which meant you had to go around not being anything; also not thinking" (p. 72), she is actually

representing the evaluative base of her sociopolitical context based on which she is to be compared.

Literature review

The present study adopts Robert L. Leahy's model of emotional schema therapy (EST) (2019) and applies it to *Milkman* in order to achieve two objectives: first, it examines if a model of therapy that is usually used for real people can be used for literary analysis. Second, it investigates whether reading literature can have any therapeutic use for people. The paper refers only to those theoretical issues that are applicable to Burns's novel.

Leahy defines "emotional schema" as "a model of how we think about our emotions, and evaluate them and cope with them" (Leahy, 2019, p. 8). Drawing upon Wells's metacognitive model, the emphasis of Leahy's proposed model is on emotions, "not thoughts, as these are linked to values, behaviour, and interpersonal functioning" (ibid.). He contends that emotions are both biologically and socially constructed; accordingly, the EST "puts emotion in the center of thinking and experience and attempts to elucidate how these social constructions and strategies of regulation and expression are manifested" (ibid., p. 9). The EST model explores individuals' interpretations of events, their appraisals of their emotions and their strategies to cope with emotion.

For Leahy, the cognitive appraisal of emotion is the social construction of emotion (Leahy, 2019, p. 19; see also Lutz 1999; Rosaldo 1980; Levy 1975; van Hemert, van de Vijvert, and Vingerhoets 2011). Far from categorizing certain emotions as negative and some others as positive, the EST model "encourages the individual to view any emotion as making one aware of needs, values, frustrations and aspirations" (Leahy, 2019, pp. 20-21). Based on Leahy, individuals theorize about their emotions and those of others; these theories include their beliefs about causation, evaluation, legitimacy, duration, need for control, rules and strategies of expression, and display and beliefs about strategies for coping with emotion (ibid., p. 24).

As soon as emotions arise, individuals interpret them along a variety of dimensions and activate strategies for responding to them. These strategies may be maladaptive or adaptive. Maladaptive strategies comprise any strategy that "only temporarily relieves the individual from distress and that adds further stress later" (ibid., p. 87). These strategies include rumination, worry, avoidance, escape, substance abuse, binge eating, purging and blaming. Adaptive

strategies are cognitive restructuring of the situation, acceptance of the emotion and situation, problem-solving, behavioural activation, self-compassion, social support, mindfulness, assertion, validation, self-validation, change goals and modifying emotional schemas (ibid., p. 27, p. 68). The following tables provide a brief definition for each type of strategies. Table 1 focuses on maladaptive strategies. Table 2 deals with adaptive strategies.

Table 1. Maladaptive strategies of emotion regulation, developed based on Leahy (2019)

Strategy	Definition
Rumination	Thinking about the emotion and searching for its whyness, whatness, and howness
Worry	Developing stress about the emotion and its duration, intensity, and causation
Avoidance	Avoiding the cause of emotion or situations that remind one of one's distress, or attempting ways to forget about one's emotions
Blaming	Blaming others for one's emotions
Complaining	Complaining about one's emotions
Suppression	Suppressing one's unwanted, unpleasant emotions in order to eliminate them

Table 2. Adaptive strategies of emotion regulation, developed based on Leahy (2019)

Strategy	Definition
Behavioural activation	Planning rewarding activities, trying to keep busy
Change goals	Modifying goals and addressing values
Problem solving	Solving problems and overcoming obstacles
Cognitive restructuring	Thinking of things and/or viewing people differently
Acceptance	Accepting emotions as a normal part of human nature
Mindfulness	Mindful detachment in noticing, observing and allowing an emotion
Social support	Social connectedness and getting social support
Validation (self- and other-validation)	Understanding or being understood, accepting or being accepted, caring about or being cared about emotionally
Compassion (self- and other-compassion)	Loving kindness, acceptance and warmth towards self or others, and reducing self- and other-criticism
Modify emotional schemas	Modifying negative appraisals about one's emotions

According to Leahy (2019), the EST model relies on two main strategies of normalization and socialization of emotions. Normalization or universalization means presenting painful emotions as part of human nature and coming to the realization that many people feel the same way under similar circumstances. Leahy claims, "I normalize what is abnormal, because these emotions are universal" (ibid., p. 117). Set against emotional perfectionism which looks for something that is exciting and fulfilling, Leahy's normalization makes enough room for all kinds of emotions, be they pleasant or unpleasant, and thus eliminates intolerance of emotions (ibid., p. 119).

As for emotional socialization, Leahy recognizes the importance of attachment style and a parent's response to an infant's expression of distress (ibid., p. 71). The EST model recognizes how partners, friends and family members in the current environment respond to the individual's emotions. These reactions could be part of different strategies such as the dismissive strategy, disapproving style, dysregulation, and emotional coaching. In the dismissive strategy, the parent dismisses the child's emotions ("That's not such a big deal"). If the parent criticizes or over-controls the child's emotions, the disapproving style is adopted ("You're a spoiled brat"). Sometimes parents are overwhelmed with their own emotions and thus reject the child's emotions; in this case, they express their own dysregulation ("I don't have time for this, I'm dealing with my own problems"). In the strategy of emotional coaching, parents assist the child in expressing, identifying emotions; they expand the recognition of emotions, label emotions, validate and encourage problem-solving (Eisenberg and Fabes 1994; Eisenberg, Fabes, and Murphy 1996; Gottman, Katz, and Hooven 1996; Katz, Gottman, and Hooven 1996).

Analysis

The analysis of emotional schemas in *Milkman* addresses two main levels. First, there is a focus on the character-society level in an attempt to show how the character/protagonist draws upon the emotional schemas offered by her society. Then, the character-reader level is studied in order to present how reading a literary work challenges, confirms, transforms or revises its readers' emotional schemas. This part deals with the socializing as well as normalizing effects of *Milkman* on readers through the alternative cognitive strategies it offers.

1. Emotional schemas: Character-society

The dystopia that *Milkman* creates for its fictional inhabitants is highly threatening, and therefore the most dominant emotion that lurks behind its people's minds and behaviours is fear. Fear is a "dysphoric reaction to an actual object (e.g., a wild animal, a knife-wielding drunkard), event (e.g., an earthquake, a stampede), or situation (e.g., watching a horror movie, losing control of a car on an icy road) that is felt to be threatening" (Akhtar, 2014, p. 4). As a "needed emotion", fear activates a fight-or-flight response to threats. The stifling atmosphere of Burns's fictional world practically leaves no room for negotiation for the threatened party. Therefore, the whole society takes up either one of the reactions depending upon the situation: fight or flight. The narrator's story reveals that women, as the most vulnerable members of her society, adopt the cognitive strategies of avoidance and passivity with respect to some threats around, whereas in some other cases they unify to resist the imposing forces. This strategy is both biologically and socially constructed. Its instinctual dimension relies on the living organism's urge for survival and its socialized aspect reveals the different manifestations of this emotion in social values, interpretations, and manners.

Marriage is the main institution which offers protection for the women in the novel by monitoring their sex lives. The narrator's world is replete with the "fear of being alone because of the social stigma that automatically attached to it" (Burns, 2018, p. 192). Society in the form of gossiping neighbours steps onstage to comment on the narrator's rumoured affair with Milkman, who is a married man of 41 and a renouncer of the state. Milkman poses a threat to the values and criteria that bring about safety for the narrator and her family. Thus, the neighbours intervene in a critical manner, and in an accusative tone warn her by way of her mother. They invite her to stick to an ordinary lifestyle. Their negative appreciation of the affair determines a doomed end for it. By reminding her of such an end, they try to convince her to give him up. Instead of Milkman, they offer her other options, some "nice wee boys" (p. 42), to develop an affair which lands her in a safe, ordinary marriage. Her mother's preference for nice boys categorizes Milkman as out of the norm since he does not match the necessary moral and political criteria accepted by the community. She asks, "Why not instead take up with one of them nice wee boys from the area, suited to and more consistent with your religion, your marital status and your age?" (p. 42). The narrator explains, "Ma's understanding of the nice wee boys was that they were the right religion, that they were devout, single, preferably not paramilitaries,

overall more stable and durable than those . . . 'fast, breathtaking, fantastically exhilarating, but all the same . . . early-to-death rebel men'" (p. 42). Even the narrator is given names to force her out of love with Milkman.

Her mother formulates the affair as a naïve ill-working of the narrator's creative raw material to fashion a lover out of untamed maleness (p. 94). In a dismissive style, she prohibits her affair and instructs her by showing how far she is from the proper category in the community, "a proper girl, a normal girl, a girl with morals intact and a sensibility attuned to what's civilized and respectful, would get the hell out of there" (p. 95). Her instructions are based on the comparisons she makes between the narrator and a normal acceptable girl; they voice the morals and norms of their community against which she is invalidated. She further warns her against the political dangers of being associated with Milkman who is categorized as a paramilitary force, "being a wife can't be easy in itself. All those prison visits. The tombstone visits. The being spied upon by the enemy police, by the soldiers, by fellow-renouncer wives and renouncer-comrades of the husband" (p. 95). She then invites her to lead an ordinary life, "There's nothing wrong with being ordinary, with marrying an ordinary man, with carrying out life's ordinary duties" (p. 95).

Another occasion in which they deploy a avoidance strategy is when the narrator gets poisoned and her mother is convinced by the neighbours not to take her to the hospital. Upon her mother's pleading to take her to the hospital, the neighbours "gasped 'Enough! Oh enough!'"; they threaten her, "You can't take her to hospital. Apart from the district mores of not going should there be something wrong that might require a police report, there's also the fact of your daughter's reputation preceding her [referring to her affair with Milkman], which most certainly it will do if you take her there . . . they'll think themselves handed best bait to reel in one of the most shadowy renouncers of all" (pp. 172).

Her mother and neighbours' insistence on being ordinary and their interpretation of the "right" marriage as well as their reliance on their "homespun prescripts" as against medical aid highlight two points simultaneously. First, their resort to a safe affair and safe treatment emanates from their fear and their adopted avoidance strategy against the possible harms of a politically oriented affair and politicized medical treatment. Second, their interference and insistence render them a threat to the narrator against which she, following on from their own strategy, adopts an escape strategy. While in the case of her sickness she is totally helpless and

her physical condition renders her passive in the hands of her neighbours, in other cases she draws upon the flight strategy which she has learned from her people.

The narrator faces two types of threat based on her proximity to its source: distal and proximal. The whole community with its highly politicized and categorized structure is the distal threat, whereas her mother, Milkman, and her neighbours pose a proximal threat. Depending upon the asymmetry of power, she fights or escapes. If she finds herself capable of resisting, she fights; otherwise, she escapes. She takes up the adaptive strategy of escape and avoidance with respect to Milkman and her neighbours due to their being more powerful than her, and she runs into fights with her mother. Against the distal threat, she takes to the habit of walking-while-reading; and with respect to the proximal threats, she ignores or fights them.

Her intellectually unenlightened environment harshly criticizes her habit of reading books while walking on streets. She is condemned and severely under threat of being cut off from the community by almost everybody: her mother, her neighbours, her oldest friend, Milkman, her third brother-in-law, and even the real milkman. Hurt by their negative remarks, she analyses the reasons for this reaction. She speaks of two types of mental aberration in her community: the slight, communally accepted ones and the not-so-slight, beyond-the-pale ones. The former can be tolerated by the society; these include drinking, fighting and rioting; she describes these as being "run-of-the-mill, customary, necessary even, as hardly to be discerned as mental aberrations" (p. 49). The policy of her community towards these is "to rub along with, to turn a blind eye, because life was being attempted where you had to cut corners" (p. 49). By contrast, the "beyonds had funny wee ways which the district had conceded were just that bit too funny. They no longer passed muster, were no longer comfortable in the mystery of the human mind as fully to be accommodable" (p. 49). Her third brother-in-law warns her, "you're not vigilant as evidenced in particular by this reading-while-walking. I saw you with my own eyes last Wednesday night-time committing social insanity by entering the area completely and dangerously blind to the lower forces and influences" (p. 50).

She is reproached because, "it was best . . . in those days, to keep the lowest of low profiles rather than admit your personal distinguishing habits had fallen below the benchmark of social regularity" (p. 49). The narrator herself takes her habit of reading while walking as her specific policy of avoidance, "I knew that by reading while I walked I was losing touch in a crucial sense with communal up-to-dateness and that that, indeed, was risky. . . . Purposely not

wanting to know therefore, was exactly what my reading-while-walking was about. It was a vigilance not to be vigilant" (p. 53).

Based on Leahy's EST model (2019), her habit of reading while walking can be regarded as the adaptive strategy of behavioural activation. However, in the narrator's specific context, this habit proves to be maladaptive since, far from being rewarding, it draws people's critical attention to her and estranges her. Her oldest friend is the second person who raises the issue and tries to talk her out of this habit. Her oldest friend calls the habit as "Not natural" and "Unnerving behaviour" (p. 151). According to the communal norms and definition of the natural, her habit is categorized as unusual. Voicing her community's judgment about her habit, she categorizes her habit as being "creepy, perverse, obstinately determined. . . . It's deviant. It's optical illusional. Not public-spirited. Not self-preservation. Calling attention to itself. . . . They [the community] don't like it" (p. 151). Comparing her reading to taking Semtex, her friend judges, "Semtex isn't unusual. . . . It's not *not* to be expected" (p. 152). Her reason for this categorization is its normality; for their community, Semtex is "not incapable of being mentally grasped, of being understood, even if most people don't carry it, have never seen it . . . . It fits in – more than your dangerous reading-while-walking fits in. This is about awareness and your behaviour doesn't display awareness"; she thus judges, "*it is okay for him* [Semtex bearer] *and it's not okay for you*" (original emphasis; Burns, 2018, p. 152).

Although the narrator refrains from revealing her emotional schema directly, the dominant violence and her reactions show that her fear is unavoidable, undefeatable and will last as long as intruders such as Milkman exist. She views fear as "the most disguised of emotions" (p. 44). The more she avoids situations that remind her of her fear, the more she finds herself exposed to threats and accusations. Therefore, she develops her habit of reading while walking as a strategy to suppress fears she cannot stand. Another behaviour that she develops to evade the stifling atmosphere is attending a French class which offers her an ambience completely detached from the violence out there in her society; in her own description, this class "had surprising things" (p. 56). The spirit of avoidance and passivity is well portrayed in the way the students react to a French text that tries to show the sky is any colour other than blue. The narrator's interpretation of this passivity takes roots in the depression she shares along with her other classmates. She remembers she experienced her first sunset with her maybe-boyfriend and she witnessed "that there were more colours than the acceptable three in the sky – blue (the day

sky), black (the night sky), and white (clouds)" (p. 56); yet still, she does not admit that the sky is not blue. She further comments,

> It was the convention not to admit it, not to accept detail for this type of detail would mean choice and choice would mean responsibility and what if we failed in our responsibility? Failed too, in the interrogation of the consequence of seeing more than we could cope with? Worse, what if it was nice, whatever it was, and we liked it, got used to it, were cheered up by it, came to rely upon it, only for it to go away, or be wrenched away, never to come back again? Better not to have had it in the first place was the prevailing feeling, and that was why blue was the colour for our sky to be. (p. 57)

Her comment shows the belief that she shares with her community about the duration of joy. In the emotional schema that she shares in such a society her predictions about joy and its transiency and the fear of losing it convince them all not to venture cognitive restructuring and thinking or admitting otherwise. Hence, avoidance becomes their shared cognitive strategy. The same cognitive and emotional schema underlies the whole community's matrimonial behaviour. Fearing the transience of fulfilling happiness and avoiding the painful loss of true love debilitates her community so that "marrying in doubt, marrying in guilt, marrying in regret, in fear, in despair, in blame, also in terrible self-sacrifice was pretty much the unspoken matrimonial requisite here" (p. 192). Complying with the society's emotional and cognitive schemas, her third brother intentionally refrains from marrying the loving girl he loves; she explains that he "attempted to evade his great fear of theoretically losing what he wanted more than anything and to make do with a substitute instead" (p. 202). Therefore, just as they could not admit any colour other than blue for the sky, they could not venture to marry their loved ones and preferred to be "the wrong spouse" (p. 191).

Milkman and his intrusion upon her pose a proximal threat against which she resorts either to the strategy of flight or passivity when his presence is unavoidable. From the beginning of her narrative, she expresses her fear, stating: "I did not like the milkman and had been frightened and confused by his pursuing and attempting an affair with me" (p. 7). She describes his imposing presence in her life as "uninvited but much more frightening, much more dangerous" (p. 8). In their first encounter, she finds herself hesitating and frozen (p. 9). The second encounter happens in the park where she goes running; she is startled and finds herself unable even to speak (p. 10). She freezes, asking herself, "Why could I just not stop this running

and tell this man to leave me alone?" (p. 10). In order to avoid further encounter and protect herself against his encroachment, she decides to run with her third brother-in-law. This decision shows her avoidance strategy.

Women of her society sometimes adopt the cognitive strategy of fight against some threats. While they avoid taking the narrator to the hospital, they all rush to the hospital where the real milkman (their beloved neighbour) is taken after being shot. The narrator informs the hospital is not a safe place to go "owing to stigma of informer status" (p. 186). The real milkman is taken to the hospital while he is stigmatized as a terrorist. Despite all the dangers, the narrator's mother, and later on, all the other women of the neighbourhood rush to the hospital due to their love for the man. The rush of numerous women to the hospital puzzles the police, "How many has he? What sort of philanderer is he?" (p. 238). This kind of gang protection has a history in the district, "they [the renouncers] were for killing the man who didn't love anybody [the real milkman] except they couldn't because of the women who were in love with him" (p. 239). The women are said to have set up a camp on the street right outside the very hutment door, "they [the women]. . . meant their threatened betrayal of the renouncers should the man who didn't love anybody not be released at once" (pp. 239-240).

Like the neighbours, the narrator adopts the cognitive strategy of resistance against some threats. Before her mother turns out to be a lover of the real milkman, she is a threat which is to be avoided by the narrator; but when she finds her mother's presence unavoidable, she resists her. In times of face-to-face encounter, she finds no way other than to fight her, "So it became a battle of wills between ma and me as to which of us would wear the other down first" (p. 39). Her first strategy is not to reveal anything to her mother about her date; so her mother's inquiry whether her boyfriend is single or married, of the right religion or not, remained unanswered, "I refused to supply information. . . . There was no way, ever, I was going to give her him" (pp. 39-40). When she loses her temper, she speaks to her mother in an offensive and insulting way (p. 40). Her rude expression, "Gee-whizz", shows the rise of her anger and thereby arouses her mother's anger as well, "Now, full of bones and blood and muscle and strength and with a sudden self-definition which included anger, a whole lot of anger, she leaned over and took hold of me by the upper arm" (p. 41).

2. Emotional schemas: Character-reader

The second phase of analysis concerns the character-reader level. While reading a literary work such as a novel, readers become familiar with different emotional situations and the schemas the characters construct. This exposure has both cognitive and emotional effects upon the audience. Cognitively, they come to know about the different strategies characters adopt with respect to their emotional situations. In addition, as the analysis above shows, readers can come to detect links between the individual and her society by way of emotional schemas. Emotionally also, this exposure shows them alternative ways of interpreting the emotional situation based on which they decide to act. In addition, reading a novel and becoming involved with the emotional world of the characters has a normalizing effect upon the readers. Leahy argues that "Normalizing emotions can be enhanced by surveying others who may have similar emotional experiences, reviewing songs, literature, movies and art that reflect these emotions" (p. 50). While Leahy locates the normalizing process of emotions in reader-reader relationships, this study takes a further step and locates the normalizing effect in character-reader interaction which happens while reading.

The effects of literature upon its audience have already been mentioned by figures such as Pope:

> True wit is nature to advantage dressed,
> What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed. ("An Essay on Criticism",
> Part II, line 97, 1711; in Sowerby, 1988, p. 44)

What Pope says about what "oft was thought" can be adapted to what "oft was felt", which transmits the familiarity of the character's emotional situation to the readers. Observing how characters react to the emotional demands of their situations may itself set an emotional schema for readers. The readers' emotional schemas therefore may either be confirmed by those presented in the novel or become revised. For instance, the cognitive strategy of flight or fight in a threatening situation arises out of a character's fear. How this fear is schematized, whether it manages to protect the character against the danger and its behavioural manifestation are what the novel shows to readers (see the analysis above). Also, as mentioned above, the strategy of behavioural activation which is generally viewed as an adaptive strategy is not always adaptive; it can be a maladaptive style which arouses others' disapproval.

While the narrator's fight with her mother who invalidates her confirms readers' emotional schema of a disturbed parent-daughter relationship, her viewing the raging mother in an alternative way acquaints readers with the cognitive strategy of restructuring or thinking/viewing otherwise. In the middle of the fight with her mother, the narrator tells of how she stops viewing her in a clichéd "mamma anxious for wedding bells role" and comes to see "her real self" in bones, blood, and muscle (p. 44). The epiphany she experiences here brings her to a sense of shame which she regards as more potent than anger and hatred and much stronger than fear (p. 44). She finds herself impotent with respect to the shame of having rubbished her mother by the gee-whizz, "At that time there was no way to grapple with or transcend it" (p. 44).

Her cognitive restructuring experience presents her mother as not being a "cardboard-cut-out person"; it propels her out of "mistaking her compulsive praying for a head full of silliness instead of maybe a head full of worry" (p. 45). Having looked at her mother thus, she feels like crying out of regret, and then she feels like cursing as a way to prevent crying because she never cries. Finally, she realizes it is time to make amends, "This could be the moment to say 'sorry' – without, of course, saying 'sorry' because 'sorry', like 'shame', nobody yet knew here how to say. We might feel sorry but, as with shame, we wouldn't know how to contend with the expression of it" (p. 45). Instead of expressing her sense of shame for which her society has not provided her any schema (neither linguistically nor behaviourally), she decides to confess all about her affair with Milkman in order to offer her mother "exactly what she was after" (p. 45).

The other moment of cognitive restructuring occurs when her mother falls in love with the real milkman and uses the narrator's accessories. Having caught her mother in her room with the intention of raiding her possessions, she finds her room in a mess. She reveals, "Right away I intended to anger, to point out her violation in rummaging in what didn't belong to her" (p. 237). However, she starts to restructure her view of her mother in a new, more sympathetic way; thus she states, "Because of her panic . . . and because she seemed now to have entered some vulnerable, regressed, strange transition period, I found myself handing a pair of low slingbacks and saying, 'Try these on, ma' instead" (p. 237).

The other effect that Burns's novel leaves upon readers through her emotional schemas is emotional socialization. According to Leahy, individuals "learn about emotions by observing how parents and others respond to their emotions. This early socialization establishes the emotional schemas that may pervade interpersonal functioning and emotion regulation

throughout life" (Leahy, 2019, p. 71). The socializing basis of the narrator's emotional schemas directs one's attention to her relationship with her mother. There are two dimensions from which this relationship can be approached: mother-daughter, and daughter-mother. While the first part of the novel evolves out of the disturbed mother-daughter relationship, the second part develops a supportive daughter-mother relationship. The shift from a disturbed relationship to a sympathetic one displays the narrator's emotional development which occurs throughout the novel.

As analysed above, in the fight she has with her mother over her rumoured affair with Milkman, she reaches the point of shame emotionally due to which she feels obliged to express her apologies. Having been offered no (linguistic and behavioural) schemas for this specifically intense and highly avoided emotion by her society, she adopts an indirect strategy to procure her mother's validation and recover their disturbed relationship. Adopting a problem-solving cognitive strategy, she confesses everything about her relationship with Milkman. Her mother reacts in a disapproving style and invalidates her and her attempts to amend the things, "when I finished, and without hesitation, she called me a liar, saying this deceit was nothing but a further mockery of herself" (Burns, 2018, p. 45). The invalidation she receives from her mother pushes her back to thinking "gee-whizz, gee-whizz, gee-whizz" and she stops to care whether or not she blames her. This sets her on the cognitive strategies of suppression and avoidance from her mother as well as others, "From now on, she'd get nothing from me" (p. 47). The narrator's cognitive rumination of the disturbed relationship displays her affective forecasting, "But was that how it was to be always? Me, according to her, sharp of heart? And her, according to me, ending in nothing but arrowpoints herself?" (p. 47).

The event of her poisoning presents to the narrator the affectionate, caring, compassionate side of her mother. Finding her daughter at the edge of death, she almost ventures to take her to the hospital despite all of its political consequences, had her neighbours not intervened. Significantly, the narrator remains emotionally silent about the care and compassion she receives from her mother at that moment. This silence emanates from her cognitive strategy of suppression which her disturbed mother-daughter relationship has imbued in her. From now on, the mother-daughter relationship shifts to a daughter-mother relationship in which her mother appears as a lover (of the real milkman) rather than a mother.

Underlying this supportive relationship is her emotional predicament of being the "wrong person" in her romantic relationship with her maybe-boyfriend. While eavesdropping in her maybe-boyfriend's house, she finds out her fake role in her maybe-boyfriend's homoerotic life (pp. 216-220). The paralysis this disillusionment brings for her draws a line of comparison between her and other women in her world, including her own mother, who has been a wrong spouse for her father (p. 245). Understanding her mother's emotional life having been wasted on the wrong person (her own father), she appreciates and validates her mother's love for the real milkman and thus helps her.

The narrator's cognitive restructuring with respect to her mother's newly revealed emotional life makes her validate her emotions. Thus she appears as a supportive daughter whose compassion reaches her mother. Instead of getting angry over her mother's rummaging through her accessories, she supports her. When she finds out her mother has decided to vacate the ground for the sake of the nuclear son's mother to have the real milkman's love, she talks her out of her decision, pinpoints the weaknesses of the nuclear son's mother as a proper match for the milkman, and indicates the whole offer as a trick on the part of the neighbours to get rid of her as their rival in love (p. 246). Despite her dark relationships with her older sister, she calls her and seeks her support, asking her to intervene and change her mother's decision (pp. 250-251). All these behavioural signs display her cognitive strategy of restructuring, since she validates her mother emotionally as a lover of the milkman rather than an imposing parent. They also indicate her cognitive strategy of social support, validation, problem-solving, mindfulness, acceptance, and compassion which she learns to adopt.

These changes show the narrator's emotional as well as cognitive development all through the novel. Simultaneously, they present to the readers the process of emotional socialization and the crucial role parental messages about emotions play in developing one's emotional schemas and cognitive strategies. In the character-reader relationship, tracking down the socialization of the narrator's emotions develops a more sympathetic perspective with respect to the narrator along with a more refined sense of understanding human situations and emotions. Indirectly, the narrator regulates readers' emotional response by showing them, first, the social roots of her emotional schemas whereby her maladaptive cognitive strategies are justified; her narrative displays the significance of the (in)validation one receives or offers in social relationships and its role in constructing individuals' emotional schemas. Second, having

disclosed her life story normalizes readers' emotions and develops in them self- and other-compassion.

These moments of cognitive and emotional restructuring provide readers with alternative ways of looking at people around them and thus help them restructure their interpretation of others' situations from other perspectives. Showing her readers how cognitive restructuring monitors and changes one's decisions and behaviours, Burns challenges their long-held emotional schemas and exposes them to revision. Due to cognitive restructuring, a raging daughter changes to a sympathetic, supportive and understanding member of the family. Other-compassion takes the place of anger and hatred.

Conclusion

The present study analysed emotional schemas and cognitive strategies that characters adopt in Burns's novel. It then took a step out of the text and examined the effect of characters and their emotional experiences upon readers. It showed how reading about emotionally involved characters has a normalizing and socializing effect upon readers. It also investigated the way a literary text targets its readers' emotional schemas to either confirm or revise them by showing them how cognitive restructuring works and influences one's emotional schemas, one's appraisal of her emotions, and the decisions and actions that ensue from the cognitive restructuring. Therefore, this study recommends reading fictional stories as a therapeutic methodology which can develop readers both emotionally and cognitively. Applying Leahy's EST model to a novel proves literature to be an influential means of normalizing and socializing people's emotional lives and regulating their cognitive operations.

Works cited:

Akhtar, S. 2014. *Sources of Suffering: Fear, Greed, Guilt, Deception, Betrayal, and Revenge*. London: Karnac Book.

Burns, A. 2018. *Milkman*. London: Faber and Faber.

Claeys, G. 2017. *Dystopia: A Natural History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Dostoyevsky, F., Pevear, R., and Volokhonsky, L. 1994. *Notes from Underground*. London: Vintage Classics.

Eisenberg, N. and R. A. Fabes. 1994. 'Mother' Reactions to Children's Negative Emotions: Relations to Children's Temperament and Anger Behavior'. In: *Merrill-Palmer Quarterly*, vol. 40, no.1, pp. 138-156.

Eisenberg, N., Fabes, R. A., and B. C. Murphy. 1996. 'Parents' Reactions to Children's Negative Emotions: Relations to Children's Social Competence and Comforting Behavior'. In: *Child Development*, vol. 67, no. 5, pp. 2227-2247.
Ellison, R. 1995. *Invisible Man*. New York: Vintage.
Gottman, J. M., Katz, L. F., and C. Hooven. 1996. 'Parental Meta-emotion Philosophy and the Emotional Life of Families: Theoretical Models and Preliminary Data'. In: *Journal of Family Psychology*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 243-268.
Katz, L. F., Gottman, J. M., and C. Hooven. 1996. 'Meta-emotion Philosophy and Family Functioning: Reply to Cowan (1996) and Eisenberg (1996)'. In: *Journal of Family Psychology*, vol. 10, no. 3, pp. 284-291.
Leahy, R. L. 2019. *Emotional Schema Therapy: Distinctive Features*. London and New York: Routledge.
Levy, R. I. 1975. *Tahitians: Mind and Experience in the Society Islands*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Livingstone, J. 2018. '*Milkman* Is a Tale of the Troubles, Told Deep from Within'. Available at: https://newrepublic.com/article/152463/milkman-tale-troubles-told-deep-within.
Lutz, T. 1999. *Crying: The Natural and Cultural History of Tears*. New York: W. W. Norton.
Melville, H. 1930. *Moby Dick, or The Whale*. New York: Harper & Brothers.
Pope, A. 1711. 'An Essay on Man'. In: Robin Sowerby (ed.). 1988. *Alexander Pope: Selected Poetry and Prose*. London and New York: Routledge, pp. 36-54.
Robinson, J. 2005. *Deeper than Reason: Emotion and Its Role in Literature, Music, and Art*. Oxford: Clarendon Press.
Rosaldo, M. Z. 1980. *Knowledge and Passion*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
van Hermet, D. A., van de Vijver, F. J., and Ad J. J. M. Vingerhoets. 2011. 'Culture and Crying: Prevalences and Gender Differences'. In: *Cross-Cultural Research*, vol. 45, no. 4, pp. 399-431.

Roghayeh Farsi
Dept. of English,
University of Neyshabur,
Adib Blv.,2nd, Neyshabur,
Khorasan Razavi,
Iran.
rofarsi@yahoo.com