



Patterns of Values in Children's Literature

Dr. gadoum hamida ¹, Dr. souad hemiti ²

¹: Emir Abdelkader University of Islamic Sciences Constantine, Algeria, hamida.gadoum@univ-emir.dz

²: Emir Abdelkader University of Islamic Sciences Constantine, Algeria, s.hemiti@univ-emir.dz

Abstract:

This study falls within the field of children's literature and examines contemporary women's literary discourse aimed at Arab children in general, and Algerian children in particular, focusing on its effectiveness in shaping the child's thought, beliefs, identity, morals, and knowledge. This is explored through the literary output of the writer Leila Laouir, in both her poetry and prose. It is reflected in the set of values upon which her texts directed at children are based, such as religious values, social values, educational values, moral values, and others.

Keywords: values – patterns – child – literature – poetry – morals.

Received: 06/08/2025 **Accepted:** 05/10/2025 **Published:** 24/12/2025

Introduction:

Since its inception, literature has been concerned with interacting with society, expressing it, and contributing to its construction. It has thus come to be recognized as a reflection of society, expressing its diverse issues, revealing its problems, and seeking to propose solutions. Literature has varied across multiple genres—poetry and narrative, with each genre further subdivided into other forms, such as classical poetry, free verse, novels, short stories, plays, and others. All these forms work, in one way or another, to express reality through different methods. Writers have not overlooked anything in their surroundings, and the child is considered one of the most important pillars relied upon in building and developing societies.

Consequently, literature has been dedicated to the child, adapted to their way of thinking and psychological development. Children's literature thus emerged in a specific form, with a special language and style that allows them to understand these texts. Writers addressed various issues that could arise in the child's world, imagination, and cognitive perceptions. These texts were distributed among poetry, short stories, plays, songs, and other forms.

This study—on one hand—focuses on analyzing selected poetic and narrative texts directed at children to uncover the language, style, and values upon which children's literature is built, as well as its suitability for the child's mind and its role in shaping their awareness.

On the other hand, it emphasizes the effectiveness of literary discourse and its ability to shape the

thoughts of individuals and societies. It is important to highlight the most challenging task facing societies: forming a virtuous individual from a young age, enhancing their role in life, and encouraging resilience and perseverance despite all obstacles. This monumental task, arguably, cannot be achieved without the role of women—as mothers, educators, doctors, teachers, and in many other capacities.

For this reason, the study focuses on the role of children’s literature and its significance in complementing women’s role in raising children with morals, religious values, and knowledge. The research therefore examines the patterns of values that can be identified in this regard through the literary output of Leila Laouir.

1- The Importance of Children’s Literature in Raising the Arab Child:

The entire world today is witnessing a tremendous technological development, which has changed concepts, strained relationships, disrupted morals, and almost caused values to disappear—especially for the emerging generation, particularly the child: today’s child is tomorrow’s adult.

Amid these conflicts and challenges, the Arab woman has remained perceptive and aware of the necessity to focus on child-rearing, guiding behavior, and instilling religious and social values. She has relied on gentle, simple, and purposeful educational discourse, concentrating all her attention and refining all her expertise in texts dedicated to the child, using accessible language and dense meanings through which the spirit of responsibility carried by women toward children is manifested. This is reflected in principles and methods of shaping the child under the slogan: “Today’s child is tomorrow’s adult.”

Interest in children’s literature, in general, emerged with the appearance of the first children’s newspaper in France between (1747-1791), which "published stories translated from various countries and languages, giving children’s literature in France a wide richness and enabling it to influence children’s literature in other nations".¹ In 1865, **Lewis Carroll** authored *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, considered "the first literary book for children, bringing into existence one of the important foundations in psychological life: anxiety".²

Later, the first children’s story collection appeared in the late seventeenth century, titled *Contes de ma mère l’Oye* (“Mother Goose Tales”) by the famous writer **Charles Perrault**. This was in 1667 and included a number of well-known titles that were translated into most languages of the world, such as *Cinderella*, *Sleeping Beauty*, *Little Red Riding Hood*, and *Tom Thumb*...³

In the Arab world, the emergence of children’s literature was delayed until the late nineteenth century. Othman Jalal, the author of *Al-Uyoon al-Yawaqiz fi al-Amthal wa al-Mawa’iz* in 1885, is considered "the first Arab attempt to pave the way for writers to establish the foundations of children’s literature".⁴

This idea is the same one on which the Arab nation has historically relied to achieve victory over the largest invading armies—by planting the first correct seed in the hearts of its people, such as encouraging strict and serious pursuit of knowledge, as exemplified by Umm Sufyan al-Thawri, who told him: "Seek knowledge, and I will support you with my spinning wheel." Or through disciplined guidance, corrective instruction, and the call to study religion. This is illustrated by Imam Malik ibn Anas regarding his mother, who said: "I grew up as a young boy admiring the singers. My mother said to me: ‘My son, if a singer is ugly in appearance, his singing should not be attended to. Leave singing and pursue jurisprudence.’ So I left the singers and followed the jurists,

and through this, God brought me to what you see".⁵

These examples and others demonstrate the active role of Arab women in shaping individuals imbued with correct educational and moral values. Their discourse was educational and guiding, imbued with maternal compassion, gentle speech, simplicity of language, and guidance from religious scholars. This leads us to seriously consider the literary discourse of women and its ability to correct the course of society by shaping the righteous individual, starting with the child, who is born as a blank slate upon which we inscribe what we desire.

Children's literature thus became an important tool for awakening the nation and educating children in accordance with their intellectual and aesthetic abilities. In this way, moral, educational, and religious objectives can be achieved for different age groups. From this emerged Islamic children's literature, which focuses on teaching the child all aspects of religion and belief, because it is "beautiful literary expression, truthful in its influence and meanings, drawing upon Islamic values, principles, and beliefs, and making them a foundation for building the child's intellectual, psychological, emotional, behavioral, and physical being (...) thus allowing the child to grow and develop properly, preparing him to fulfill the mission entrusted to him on earth, to be happy in life, and to bring happiness to and with his society, provided that the literature maintains clarity of vision, persuasive power, and logic".⁶

Specialized children's literature authors strive to give their texts an educational character through an entertaining style that encourages the child to engage without fear or embarrassment. Children's literature often focuses on the psychological and emotional aspects of the child, as these texts serve as "an educational medium providing children with opportunities to discover answers to their questions, inquiries, exploration attempts, use of imagination, and acceptance of new experiences gained through children's literature".⁷

Referring to the literary and educational texts employed by the writer Leila Laouir, this balanced approach to shaping the Arab child's personality becomes clear, teaching them correct principles and guiding their behavior within the framework of religion, society, and thought. This is what the study aims to reveal through selected examples.

2- The Presence of Values in the Literary Output of "Leila Laouir"

The literary output of Leila Laouir is considered part of the literary discourse that focuses on properly raising the Arab child—free from social illnesses, educational shortcomings, psychological lapses, and doctrinal disorders. Indeed, her texts carry a comprehensive set of these values, whose importance stems from the concept of values as a term. Values are "a measure or standard for judging something as desirable or undesirable, and they form the basis for setting goals, considering that a goal is what an individual aspires to personally, either directly or indirectly".⁸

These meanings of values reflect the writer's awareness of the objectives she seeks through texts that carry educational, pedagogical, religious, and social values. With each text, she provides a dose of training appropriate for the young child's mind, aiming to reinforce these values and guide the child along the correct path in building a sound intellect and forming healthy relationships with family and society. This ensures that values are not perceived as "abstract intellectual judgments issued by the individual on things, situations, and people to define their relationship and mode of interaction with the object of value, such as cleanliness, faith, profit, democracy, and art".⁹ Instead, the author uses clear and smooth language, free from ambiguity, and a stimulating style to capture the child's attention and endear these values to them.

Awareness of the true nature of values, as noted above, led the writer to focus on the child and consider how to actively contribute to shaping a child who benefits society. She does this by raising the child's awareness of their own importance on the one hand, and the importance of accompanying them educationally, pedagogically, and emotionally on the other. This approach is evident in Leila Laouir's poetic works, beginning with the dedication—such as in the collection *Anashid 'Ala 'Azfal-Sighar*—in which she addresses the child directly to indicate that this literary effort and emotional wealth is a gift for them alone. She writes:

*"To every student who sings for life, I dedicate my feelings, Anashid 'Ala 'Azfal-Sighar. Leila."*¹⁰

Through this dedication, the writer emphasizes the necessity of addressing the child's mind and drawing their attention to the work, which is a gift for every child/student who loves life. She shows that these texts will increase the child's love for reading, learning, and celebrating all that is beautiful. The dedication serves as an important threshold of the text, enticing the child to read and capturing their attention. In addressing the child in this way, the author approaches the child's inner world, reassuring them of their importance in life and inspiring them simultaneously. The phrases in the dedication invite joy and celebration of life ("to every student who sings for life"), while adding an expression filled with love and compassion ("I dedicate my feelings"). This ensures the child's attentive engagement and eagerness to read the texts that follow. Above all, it demonstrates the writer's attention to the psychological and emotional aspects of the child during their journey of discovering life.

3- Patterns of Values in the Literary Output of Leila Laouir

Based on the analysis of the literary output of Leila Laouir, the study identified several patterns of values that appear clearly in both her poetic and narrative texts. These represent the overall set of values that have proven effective in guiding the child's development, refining their behavior, and teaching them the principles of their religion. Her work combines education and guidance on one hand with ethics and religion on the other—these being the most important elements nurturing the child from an early age. Focusing on teaching the fundamentals of Islam has always been the primary priority of educators in the Islamic world, followed by moral conduct and behavior, which enable the child to live peacefully and respectfully within their environment.

When examining the genre of poetry directed at children, a special style and language suitable for the child's mind and comprehension at the intended age stage become evident. "This poetry must be appropriate for the child's mind, consistent with what they feel, taste, and are familiar with; it should allow them to interact with it, both emotionally and intellectually, bring joy to their soul, provide new benefits, develop their perception, increase their experiences, enrich their language and vocabulary, and enhance the child's ability to appreciate language, love it, and perceive the beauty of proper composition and expressive phrasing".¹¹

It is also worth noting that poetry for children often aims to teach general ethics that the child needs in life, such as honesty, trustworthiness, respect for others, and helping those in need. These are behaviors instilled in the first generation, and the texts under study demonstrate the author's attention to these values, giving them priority in all her writings.

These values can be categorized as follows:

1.3- Religious Values in the Formation of the Muslim/Peaceful Child

These values focus on correcting the child's doctrinal development and raising their awareness of religious teachings and the methodology of the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This

is achieved through poetic texts that are easy to pronounce, rich in meaning, and clear in wording, with the aim of shaping a Muslim child who is peaceful and accepts coexistence with various groups and communities without conflict.

These religious values are evident in the collection *Taghreed*, in which the author focuses on introducing the child to the Divine Being in all His greatness and sanctity. She writes in the poem "Allah is My Lord":

Allah is my Lord

Allah is my Lord * Companion of my path**

I sing and I soar * Me and my companion**

Allah is my Lord

Lord of beauty * Lord of majesty**

Lord of gifts * In every situation**

Allah is my Lord

I knock at Your door * Hoping for Your reward**

I knock at Your door * Fearing Your punishment**

And my heart soars * I sing with my companion**

Allah is my Lord

Allah is my Lord. ¹²

In this poem, the poet works to instill love and reverence for the Divine Being by employing repetition at the level of the refrain (*Allah is my Lord*), which is repeated five consecutive times, focusing on a single central idea—the oneness of God with no partner. From the phrase *Allah is my Lord*, another idea branches out: (*Lord of beauty, Lord of majesty, Lord of gifts*), all of which revolve around the greatness of God in His names and attributes. These expressions aim to develop the child doctrinally and raise them in faith in God and His power.

This poem aligns with others in the same collection, such as *Mabahij al-Ruh*, which encourages the child to contemplate God's creation and teaches them glorification (*tasbeeh*) and reflection on God's kingdom, as in the lines:

Glory to Him who created beauty, and perfected it,

For His servant to care for it

Thus the luminous soul glorifies, among people,

And says: O Allah, O Allah, O Allah, O Allah...

This repeated invocation (*O Allah*) is sufficient to make the child aware that God is the most beautiful and greatest being in existence, capable of all matters and concerns.

The same approach is followed in her storytelling projects for children. Stories are considered one of the most important methods for developing a child's linguistic capacity and openness to the world, whether the stories are heard or read, depending on the age stage. Storytelling is "a form of literary expression, with its rules and methodologies, whether relating to language and its alignment with the child's vocabulary and stylistic level appropriate for the age, or relating to

its content and suitability for each stage of childhood, or relating to matters of taste, and techniques in crafting the story, or in the oral narrative".¹³

Through this method, the poet focuses on instilling religious values in the child's character and teaching love for the Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him). This is evident in the fixed opening phrase she uses in all her stories: "Once upon a time, in the distant past, and no story is complete without mentioning the Prophet, peace be upon him."

Careful examination of the themes of these stories shows that they aim to attract the child-reader toward understanding the principles of their religion. Thus, whenever the Prophet Muhammad is mentioned, it is accompanied by the phrase (*peace be upon him*), and when speaking of deceased Muslims, it is accompanied by the phrase (*may God have mercy on them*), among other religious values intended to establish a correct doctrine upon which the child grows and learns the virtues of morality.

2.3- National Values in Shaping a Loyal Child to Their Country

These values focus on instilling love for the homeland in the child, raising their awareness of national identity and belonging. This is crucial for forming a child who is loyal to their country and loves the land of their ancestors. Leila Laouir emphasizes this clearly in her collection *Anashid 'Ala 'Azf al-Sighar*, beginning with the song "Biladi al-Jaza'ir" in which she writes:

Ask my heart * about my country**

A seed in the heart * growing love**

And a wonderful song * in every valley.**¹⁴

The poet emphasizes the theme of citizenship and the child's awareness of their belonging to their country, as well as their duties toward it—love, loyalty, and dedication—through the poem "Biladi al-Jaza'ir", where the refrain "I love you, Algeria" is repeated. This underlines the poet's emphasis on shaping the child as a righteous citizen, loyal to their country and reconciled with their Arab-Algerian identity. This is further expressed through the child's words: "O my God, protect the heart in my chest... for in my chest is my country."

These national values are also present in the collection *Taghreed* through the poem "Mawtini", which begins:

My homeland, my homeland * You in our eyes**

A towering mountain * Proud not to bow**

If misfortunes strike you * Or troubles befall you**

We were, O my homeland * Flames in the wars**

Your honor, my honor * Your humiliation, my humiliation.**¹⁵

The poet does not stop at teaching the child love for Algeria alone; she also plants in their heart a love for Arab Palestine, the land of prophecy and the origin of divine messages. The Palestinian cause is a pan-Arab issue that unites Arabs who believe in it. Teaching the child the correct understanding of Palestine is also teaching them their Arab identity and belonging through literature, which provides the child with opportunities "to develop self-confidence, a spirit of risk-taking in exploration and discovery, curiosity, and the motivation for achievement that drives calculated scientific risk for the sake of discovery and liberation from habitual modes of thought and exploration, in pursuit of further knowledge".¹⁶ The Palestinian cause has long been one of

the most important issues that have attracted attention from writers and creative artists.

The poet Leila Laouir, in her poetic texts, seeks to convey to the Arab child the suffering of the Palestinian child and to awaken in them a spirit of solidarity and empathy for the pain of others. This is evident in her poem, in which she expresses Palestinian anguish and the pain of childhood when the child becomes homeless and insecure. She writes:

Jerusalem, some of my pains, mother
And I, traveling in the poems, ah
The pain of existence, I and some of its burdens
The world has not known a cure for my despair
My path is lost
And the friendly justice is gone
The soil is gone
And what we love is gone
The fool's mischief on our land
And he went to defile our honor
And I am here, a captive pain, ah, if you encounter it
O traveling child, come with me
Look there.....¹⁷

This poem highlights the spirit of solidarity with the Palestinian children displaced from their land and constantly threatened in a world from which justice has vanished (*the friendly justice is gone / the soil is gone*). At the same time, it affirms that all children of the world stand in solidarity with the steadfast children of Palestine, seeking to instill hope in them (*And I am here, a captive pain, ah, if you encounter it / O traveling child, come with me / Look there...*).

Notably, this poetic text, addressed to the child, works to shape the child's personality and develop their awareness of what is happening in the world. Through it, the child grows with a sense of responsibility toward their peers and their homeland.

3.3- Educational Values in Forming the Knowledgeable/Learning Child

These values aim to encourage the child to seek knowledge and persevere in learning, as it is the path to the development of nations and the child's future, shaping them into an important member of society—whether as a doctor, engineer, teacher, or any other virtuous profession the child dreams of from an early age. The poet's attention to this value stems from her awareness of the importance of knowledge in the life of a Muslim in general, since seeking knowledge is a religious duty in Islam. It opens horizons for understanding the universe and everything in it. Our noble religion has encouraged this, as in God's words:

*"Read in the name of your Lord who created *Created man from a clot*" (Surah Al-'Alaq, verses 1-2).

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) also recommended this. As narrated by Abu Al-Khudri (may Allah be pleased with him), the Prophet said: "People will come to you seeking knowledge; when you see them, say to them: Welcome, welcome, the Prophet's advice. And guide

them." He was asked, "How should we guide them?" He replied: "Teach them knowledge".¹⁸

These values are reflected in the poem "*I Am a Small Child*", which combines a set of educational values encouraging the child to seek knowledge and pursue their dreams. She writes:

I am a small child * And my heart speaks**

Hoping for great good * Dreaming as a traveler in knowledge**

Carrying the book of light * Reviving the mind to be safe**

I am a small child

Standing on the earth * Glorifying and remembering God**

Seeking help and protection * And success in life**

I am a small child

If a doctor, to heal the fortunate * Or a writer, to refine the emotions**

Or a scholar, to revive consciences * This world is aspirations, and my aspirations are rites**

I am a small child.¹⁹

4.3- Educational and Moral Values in Forming a Dutiful Child Toward Their Parents

These values are among the most important to instill in the child. If the child succeeds in being dutiful to their parents, they will have acquired the foundation for all other values. The poet has recognized the significance of this topic and writes about it with insistence and persuasion, helping the child learn obedience and cultivate dutifulness and benevolence toward their parents. This aligns with God's words:

"And your Lord has decreed that you worship none but Him, and that you be dutiful to your parents. If one or both of them reach old age with you, do not say to them 'uff' nor scold them, but speak to them with honorable words" (Surah Al-Isra, verse 23).

Accordingly, she dedicates poems and songs to the mother and father, aiming through them at the child's moral education. She recounts the sacrifices of both parents so that the child may grow up with peace of mind. In the poem "*Kiss of My Mother*", which celebrates the mother, she writes:

The kiss of my mother, how sweet it is * How beautiful, how gentle it is**

An eternal paradise planted * On earth, it is imprinted**

A color of the colors of paradise * Made from the light of mercy**

A gift from the Merciful Lord * Virtues rising, multiplied**

For the little one, richness and pride * The kiss of my mother, how sweet it is.²⁰**

Similarly, in praising the father, the poem "*My Father*" expresses:

My father, O face of light * That wipes the fatigue from my chest**

And soothes the cries of longing * So that we live the flames of presence**

Painting the world with its smile * And comforting a broken heart**

Read and learn, my son * For knowledge is the light of light**

Worship none but the Merciful * And turn away from Satan's path**

Build a kingdom of love * Whose spark is faith**

If you carry virtues, you shall receive * Praise, honor, and even sovereignty**

My father, O face of light * O dearest of all in the universe.²¹**

These poetic examples demonstrate the poet's focus on training the young child's mind to love their parents and homeland, and to glorify Islam as the correct faith of the Muslim, which provides the foundation for moral conduct and interaction with God, family, and society. It is evident that the poet consistently employs concise and precise language in a style that makes it easy for the child to absorb this wealth of functional knowledge and behaviors, especially religious principles that guide them along the correct path.

Conclusion

Through the examples addressed in this study, the effort of the poet Leila Laouir becomes evident in her attempt to establish sound foundations for raising the Arab/Algerian/Muslim child. She imparts the essential principles that will enable the child, in the future, to integrate into society with a balanced mindset and ethics that shape them into a model of a righteous individual—one who knows their religion, loves their homeland, and defends their family and Arab identity.

This is achieved by exploring topics relevant to the child's life using appropriate methods and simple, enjoyable language. Furthermore, the poet's ability to compose poems that effectively influence the child's character—carefully crafted—allowed the renowned Algerian singer **Abdelrahman Bouhabila** to set some of her poems to music and perform them skillfully, making them closer to the child's inclinations and motivating the child to sing them as educational and moral songs. An example is the song "*I Am a Small Child*", presented as an alternative to songs and instruments that distort the child's mind and fill it with emptiness and trivialities.

This demonstrates, above all, the importance of written children's literature in education, guidance, and cultural formation simultaneously.

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* Algerian writer, academic researcher, and professor at the University of Emir Abdelkader, Constantine, with several poetry collections including *Sajdat 'Ala Jabin al-I'tiraf*, *Taghreed*, and *Anashid 'Ala 'Azf al-Sighar*. She co-authored a poetry collection with Hassan Al-'Urmany titled *Ghadabtan* and has written children's stories, including the collection *Lil-Tifl Ahki*. She is active in multiple national and international journals and authored the significant work *Mada Law Ta'attal al-Nahar*, a series of reflective essays on the universe and society.

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