

## An Introduction to Islamic Literary Theory: A Conceptual Framework for High School Students

FAWZIA GILANI-WILLIAMS

Bloom Charter School Libraries, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates

Corresponding Author Email: [fawziagilani@yahoo.com](mailto:fawziagilani@yahoo.com)

Received: 17 January 2023 / Accepted: 24 February 2023

### ABSTRACT

*This article is concerned with introducing a new analytical tool for high school students. Islamic literary theory uses an Islamic lens in the study and analysis of literature and cultural productions. It is an empowerment theory that seeks to provide morally-centric emancipatory perspectives grounded in the teachings of the Qur'an and authentic Sunnah. Empowerment theories are concerned with improving the human condition. Islamic literary theory attempts to do this through analyzing texts and discussing Islamic and common sense (fitra) solutions to determine how the human condition can be elevated personally, socially and spiritually. Islamic literary theory uses Islamic principles to critique cultural productions. It seeks to describe and analyze not only the ways in which certain literature reinforces the narrative of secularism and immorality but also how other literature promotes emancipatory and Islamocentric ideas that make the world a better place. It is concerned with exploring how personal, family and micro and macro social life confront problems and achieve transformation through offering insights based on Islam. The Islamic worldview rests on the notion that the individual is in a state of constant struggle from worldly encounters in which s/he must make a choice to act and speak morally and ethically in line with Qur'anic tenets to achieve success in the next life. Islamic literary theory in part critiques how individuals and groups are distracted from their true purpose in life. Texts are analyzed using the Qur'an and authentic hadith to discover in what ways individuals and groups freely, forgetfully or coercively commit wrongs against themselves and others. This paper discusses the emergence of Islamic literary theory as a critical lens for high school students. Furthermore, it discusses its historical foundation and purpose and it provides a conceptual framework for its application.*

*Keywords: Islamic literary theory; cultural productions; empowerment, literary anthropology; morality*

### INTRODUCTION

High school students sometimes experience difficulty in making sense of literature and its concepts. Literature is generally critiqued using a secular literary theory. Islamic literary theory, however, provides students with an analytic tool that scrutinizes texts with a theistic worldview. This enables higher order thinking skills to be developed to navigate the overt, covert and deeper meanings. Therefore, this paper argues that high school students can benefit from learning what Islamic literary theory is and how to apply it.

In 2010 I made attempts to gather material written about Islamic literary theory in the English language. There was enthusiasm to gather information about a theory that was Islamocentric which could serve as a theoretical lens for my post graduate research. The

expectation was to find a body of work that described what Islamic literary theory was and how to apply it to literature. For instance, if we search for texts on Marxist literary theory or feminist literary theory there are a large number of articles and textbooks to be found in university libraries. However, while searching the stacks no textbooks or articles were found on Islamic literary theory. Through email academicians were contacted at Ivy League and Russell Group universities, such as Harvard, Yale, Oxford University and Cambridge University, to ask what they knew about Islamic literary theory. All responded saying that they did not know what it was or they had not heard of it.

Following the disappointing responses, emails were sent to random British universities, the responses

were similar. However, one professor from a British University wrote, "There is no such thing as Islamic literary theory." Asking for further elaboration on his assertion he said, "Literary theory is a secular thing. There is no such a thing as Christian, Jewish, Hindu etc literary theory, either." This showed that Islamic literary theory was not something that this professor of Arabic literature was familiar with. However, scanning the library stacks at Oberlin College, I knew that eight years earlier Ferretter had produced a PhD dissertation, *Towards a Christian Literary Theory* (2002). Ferretter wanted to understand literature and culture through Christianity. He had identified weaknesses, gaps and contradictions in contemporary critical theories and proceeded to produce one that spoke from a Christian perspective. Ferretter's book resonated because it signaled the possible existence of an Islamic version. I wanted to use an Islamic theory for my graduate study since the subject matter involved Muslim groups. Using a secular lens to make sense of an Islamic study did not seem advisable.

#### LITERATURE REVIEW

This paper restricts its literature search to 2010 and prior years when it was initially written. The time period is important because it provides a window into the development of Islamic literary theory up to 2010. At the time the search for the theory in the English language produced very few results. A book in the Malay language was discovered online called *Polemik Sastera Islam* (1987) by Kassim Ahmad and Shahnnon Ahmad. *Sastera* in the Malay language means literature. Shahnnon defined *Sastera Islam* as literature produced in the name of Allah and for the good of humankind. It was hoped that the text contained some reference to a theory. Malaysian acquaintances had been asked if it was possible to get a translation or translate the pages but at the time it was not possible to find anyone who was able to do this.

There was considerable excitement when a book called *Teori Sastera Islam* (Islamic Literary Theory) was referenced by Rahmah Bt Ahmad H Osman in her thesis, *Islam and Literature: An Analysis of the Discussions in the Middle East and Malaysia*. *Teori Sastera Islam* was written in 1982 by the same authors, Ahmed and Shanon. But again, there was no available translation of the book and Osman's work did not provide an overview of the theory. Osman's study was concerned with the sociology of literature with a focus on the emergence and development of Islamic literature. Osman interrogated the idea of whether

Islamic literature should be concerned with aesthetics or religious properties (2003:3). Osman remarked that oftentimes she was asked whether there was such a thing as Islamic literature.

"The very assumption that Islam has an interest in the field of literature or that literature has anything to do with religion in general and Islam in particular causes many eyebrows to rise."  
(2003: 11)

Internet searches revealed that there had been some work done in Indonesia and Singapore, but again the articles were not available in the English language. The term 'Islamic literary theory' did produce results on the internet from Kuwait and India too. However, emails sent to professors in these regions did not get answers. It was noted that the International League of Islamic Literature (ILIL) held a conference in Bhatkal, Karnatka in India in October 2000. It was on children's literature. ILIL was contacted for any information on Islamic literary theory but no response was received.

Further internet searches on Islamic literary theory showed that Abu Al-Hasan Al-Nadawi who founded the *World Association of Islamic Literature* had referred to the term. *The International League of Islamic Literature* was another body that was looked at but access to articles or papers was not possible. Some work has also been done by Adli Hj. Yaacob in his article, *Satu Analisis Ringkas Konsep dan Teori Sastera Islam di Malaysia*. In 1996 the International Islamic University of Malaysia held a conference called *English, Islam: Creative Encounters*. One of their focuses was *The application of Islamic Literary Theory and criticism on English Language Literature*. Academics were contacted to see if I could get translations in English, however, this was not possible. Ross Dunn from San Diego State University also mentioned Islamic literary theory in his book *The Adventures of Ibn Batutta*. Ouyang Wen-Chin of the University of London, School of African and Oriental Studies wrote *Literary Criticism in Medieval Arabic Islamic Culture*. Other articles that had discussed Islamic literary theory include: Ungku Maimunah Mohd. Tahir, *Sastera Islam: Malaysia's Literary Phenomenon of the 1970s and 1980s, The Muslim World*.

The field of Western Islamic literature and Islamic children's literature has continued to grow slowly since the nineties (Gilani-Williams 2014). As a result, there is a need to develop theoretical models and tools that interrogate, investigate and analyze these and other cultural productions. This serves to empower

Muslim literary students and scholars to speak from their own beliefs and perspectives. For this reason, there was a need for Islamic literary theory in the English language.

## THE FOUNDATIONS OF ISLAMIC LITERARY THEORY

Establishing that there was a need for producing an Islamic critical lens, I looked at how other theories were developed. For students to be able to understand how to use an Islamic theory and how to apply it, it is important that they have an understanding of what Islam is. In this section, a description is given of Islamic beliefs and how an argument is provided on how Islamic is emancipatory and transformational. In order to devise a formula for Islamic literary theory, Islamic critical theory was used (Gilani-Williams, 2014). This is because the two are interconnected. In the same way that Islamic critical theory is grounded in Qur'anic teaching and authentic Sunnah, so too is Islamic literary theory.

Western literature generally begins the Islamic timeline with the prophethood of Muhammad ﷺ which gives rise to the misunderstanding that Islam is a new religion rather than a continuation of the previous message brought by prophets such as Abraham ﷺ, Moses ﷺ, David ﷺ and Jesus ﷺ. The Qur'an unlike Western texts posits the origins of Islam with Adam ﷺ. Islam's origins with Adam ﷺ engenders the acknowledgment that God's message to the world has always been consistent and is the same message that was given to the Jews and Christians through Moses ﷺ and Jesus ﷺ. It is important to clarify the timeline because Islam is not be restricted to the time of Prophet Muhammad ﷺ.

"God did choose Adam and Noah, the family of Abraham, and the family of Imran above all people" (3:33)

Two central tenets emit from the Qur'an. One is to recognise the existence and acceptance of God through the wonders of the living world. The second is to prepare for the Judgment Day when humans will be on trial for their earthly conduct.

"Your God is one God; whoever expects to meet his Lord, let him work righteousness and in the worship of his Lord admit no one as partner" (18:110).

Belief in God and the Judgment Day serve as the foundations for Islamic literary theory. Belief in God

acknowledges that humankind accept the terms that God prescribes. Belief in the Judgment Day serves as a reminder for an individual's purpose and goal on earth. Those who believe in God are encouraged to,

"enjoin what is right, and forbid what is wrong; and ... hasten (in emulation) in (all) good works" (3:114) and "give what is due to kindred, the needy, and the wayfarer. That is best for those who seek the Countenance, of God"

(30:38).

Furthermore,

"God commands justice, the doing of good, and liberality to kith and kin, and He forbids all shameful deeds, and injustice and rebellion: He instructs you, that ye may receive admonition"

(16:90).

Prophet Muhammad ﷺ like other messengers before him was instructed to model and encourage moral and ethical behaviour that infused all walks of life. Muhammad ﷺ was sent to a people who were the epitome of decadence telling them, "If you do love God, follow me: God will love you and forgive you your sins" (3:31). The Arabs at the time worshipped hundreds of objects besides God. They heavily indulged in alcohol, killed on whim, they dishonoured relatives and strangers, gambled and ignored the parameters of lawful marriage. They oppressed women, slaves, children, orphans and even buried their female infants alive. With the revival of God's message reiterated through Muhammad ﷺ, the Arabs accepted and began to expunge themselves of their immorality, oppression and racism. In return they were told "Allah loves those who are kind" (5:13), "For Allah loves those who judge in equity" (5:42). Islamic literary theory is an empowerment theory and this is best reflected in the account of Jafar bin Abu Talib where he highlights the emancipatory effect of Islam on the lives of the Makkans. Here he is speaking to the Abyssinian King and lists the degenerate behavior the Makkan people.

"O King, we were a people in a state of ignorance and immorality, worshipping idols and eating the flesh of dead animals, committing all sorts of abomination and shameful deeds, breaking the ties of kinship, treating guests badly, and the strong among us exploited the weak. We remained in this state until God sent us a Prophet, one of our own people ... he called us to worship God alone and to renounce the stones and the idols which we and our ancestors used to worship besides God. (Hamid 1995 online).

Jafar lists the behavioral transformation that came with the message of God.

He commanded us to speak the truth, to honour our promises, to

be kind to our relatives, to be helpful to our neighbours, to desist from all forbidden acts, to abstain from bloodshed, to avoid obscenities and false witness, and not to appropriate an orphan's property or slander chaste women. (Ibid)

He then lists the components that brought about the transformation and emancipation.

He ordered us to worship God alone and not to associate anything with Him, to uphold salah [worship], to give zakah [charity] and fast in the month of Ramadan. We believed in him and what he brought to us from God and we follow him in what he has asked us to do and we keep away from what he has forbidden us from approaching" (Ibid).

The Qur'an espoused that for individuals who changed their unethical and immoral behaviour, God offered His friendship, "Your only ally is God, His messenger, and the believers" (5:55). Secular texts did not generally associate Islamic teaching with care and love, justice or peace. This is not unusual since historically and politically secular writers have been the dominant spokesperson for Islam and have not been concerned with projecting the Qur'anic view in an authentic manner. According to Rane,

"Research, specifically content analysis, has continued to demonstrate that Islam and Muslims have overwhelmingly been portrayed pejoratively by the mass media. Since 9/11 further research has continued to show not only a massive increase in the volume of media coverage of Islam and Muslims but also an increase in the pejorative nature of this coverage"

(2006: 3).

Islam's emancipatory proclivity is based on Qur'anic teachings of peace, justice, goodness and freedom. For instance, the Qur'an states, "Let there be no compulsion in religion" (2:256). Further, the Qur'an states, "If it had been your Lord's will, they would all have believed, all who are on earth! will you then compel mankind, against their will, to believe!" (10:99). In addition, Muhammad ﷺ is told, "You are only a reminder, you are not over them a controller" (88:21-22). And elsewhere "Let him who will believe, and let him who will, reject (18:29). Force in Islam is thus prohibited. A religion or way of life that promotes the freedom of an individual is an attractive characteristic by those who understand that oppression, injustice and coercion is wrong.

The account of Jafar illustrates how Islam brought emancipation and elevation to the human condition. Furthermore, the Farewell Sermon reinforced how Islam impacted the Makkans and neighbouring Arabs

in terms of character modification, women's rights and vanquishing of racism.

"... Return the goods entrusted to you to their rightful owners. Hurt no one so that no one may hurt you. ... You will neither inflict nor suffer any inequity ... it is true that you have certain rights with regard to your women, but they also have rights over you. ... treat your women well and be kind to them for they are your partners and committed helpers ...an Arab has no superiority over a non-Arab, nor does a non-Arab have any superiority over an Arab; white has no superiority over black, nor does a black have any superiority over white; except by piety and good action."

It was on these precepts that the Arab world began to build and change their lives. Islamic literary theory is a theory that is grounded in an Islamic worldview which seeks to bring and maintain peace, love, justice, goodness and non-coercion. It acknowledges that God is the ultimate Judge. Islamic belief affirms that all individuals are responsible for their own actions.

"Nor can a bearer of burdens bear another's burdens if one heavily laden should call another to (bear) his load. Not the least portion of it can be carried (by the other). Even though he be nearly related" (35:18)

This knowledge of one's solo or stand-alone final reality is what governs the thoughts and actions of a person to do the right thing. The Qur'an is also known as the Criterion, Al Furqan. (Qur'an 25:1). The criterion is to judge something as right or wrong. The kiraman katibeen, or the angels who write the actions of a person, deal with only two classifications, right and wrong. Islamic literary theory is a lens that seeks to examine and identify the good in something or the bad in something. This is what makes it a useful tool for critical thinking which leads to empowerment and transformation.

## THE FORMATION OF THEORIES

Societies are in a continual state of flux. Changes occur scientifically, technologically, geographically, socially, spiritually, politically, economically, ethnically and educationally. Cultural productions either embrace or repulse these changes. New or changing phenomena lead to different ways of looking at or making sense of the world. These stimulate the formation of new theories. Literary theories in particular provide various ways of understanding a text. There are numerous literary theories for instance: Marxist, feminist, structuralism and postcolonialism. Each theory encourages the reader to dissect the



text using a specific style of questioning that has a particular focus. For example, feminist literary theory is concerned in part with centralizing women and interrogating texts to discover how women are oppressed socially, politically or psychologically.

“Feminist theory is a mode of analysis that involves specific ways of thinking and of acting, designed to achieve women’s liberation by eliminating the oppression of women in society” (Robbins, Chatterjee, Canda 1998:94).

For instance, if we were to take the story of *Little Red Riding Hood* and apply feminist literary theory, we would look at how the females are projected in the story. The questions that arise might include:

1. What is Little Red being cautioned about?
2. What is her role?
3. How is the grandmother portrayed?
4. What happens to the grandmother?
5. What does Little Red do?

In all of these questions feminist literary theory would look at how the female is being oppressed and restricted. And how she is weak and fearful and how is she being made to rely on males or seek help from males.

An Islamist critique of a text would also analyse oppression of women. An Islamic critique, would be similar to feminist theory in so far as the feminist theory is aligned to the Qur’anic worldview. The Qur’anic laws that emancipated women at the time of Muhammad<sup>ﷺ</sup> were unmatched in the history of civilization and it took until the 20<sup>th</sup> century for the West to accord similar rights, some of which have still not caught up.

“Muslim women gained full ownership over their money, while husbands had the responsibility to provide for them even if their wives were wealthier than them. Women had the right to divorce instantly on returning the dowry, something other religions don’t allow. One duty enjoined upon them was that of education. Early Islamic history saw the establishment of Muslim women as scholars, politicians, businesswomen, jurists and doctors. ... In fact some eight thousand accounts of Muslim female scholars have been documented, many of whom in addition to theology and jurisprudence, were skilled in calligraphy and philosophy, women who not only contributed to their society but actively shaped it” (Exploring Islam Foundation 2010).

An Islamic critique of women would look at where Islam has empowered women such as marriage, wealth, inheritance, education and divorce and see where, why and how those rights are being denied and how they can be reclaimed. Islamic literary

theory invites the interrogation of literature using an Islamic worldview. The Islamic worldview is not just confined to rituals and worship, but permeates education, history, sociology, economics, science, philosophy, art, music, literature, jurisprudence, architecture, art, mathematics, family, etiquette, hygiene, in fact anything that involves a moral action or thought. Although some regard Islam as a religion, it is considered by its followers to be a complete way of life, embracing all facets of living. Therefore, Islamic literary theory can be applied to a vast array of cultural productions where matters of morality and belief systems are concerned.

The most fundamental Islamic belief rests on the declaration of faith - *la ila ha ilal lah Muhammad ur rasool Allah* - which means there is nothing worthy of worship other than God, Muhammad is the messenger of God. Islamic belief advocates that the purpose of an individual’s life is to recognise God as the law-giver and to perform good deeds in order to be successful in the next life. Al-Attas writes,

“Muslim educators unanimously agree that the purpose of Islamic education is not to cram the pupil’s head with facts but to prepare them for a life of purity and sincerity. This total commitment to character-building based on the ideals of Islamic ethics is the highest goal of Islamic education”

(Al-Attas 1979:104).

Al-Attas’s statement can be modified by underscoring that the purpose of an Islamic education as one in which pupils are prepared for a life of kindness (good deeds), honesty, justice, peace and forgiveness. These character traits will empower pupils to create a society that exists in harmony with everything around it. Providing pupil’s with ‘facts’ is part of knowing and learning about the world. Science, history, literature, geography and other disciplines are ‘signs’ of God that allows individuals to make conclusions about the purpose of life.

“Behold! in the creation of the heavens and the earth; in the alternation of the night and the day; in the sailing of the ships through the ocean for the profit of mankind; in the rain which God sends down from the skies, and the life which He gives therewith to an earth that is dead; in the beasts of all kinds that He scatters through the earth; in the change of the winds, and the clouds which they trail like their slaves between the sky and the earth; (Here) indeed are Signs for a people that are wise” (2:164)

Islam makes no dichotomy between what the Western world generally considers secular and religious. In the Qur’an the laws of science and religion are one. Life is exclusively geared to living with the understanding that God is the ultimate Master

and that deeds must revolve around the principles of peace, justice, kindness, patience, humility and gratitude. On the Day of Judgment individuals are questioned on their earthly conduct. This is concluded with either a reward or consequence. In Surah Asr, God states that with the passing of time humankind is immersed in a state of hopelessness with the exception of those who have faith, do good deeds and encourage truth and patience.

1. By Time,
2. Verily man is in loss,
3. Except such as have faith, and do righteous deeds, and (join together) in the mutual teaching of truth, and of patience and constancy (Qur'an 103).

After the declaration of faith Muslims accept belief in the six articles of faith which are God, His angels, His books, His prophets, the Day of Judgment and Qadr, the belief that God knows the future. Each one of these belief articles can be considered to rotate around the idea of striving towards right action, right

speech and right thought. God's presence means that God is a witness to the actions of all humankind, the angels are concerned with helping humans, whilst some of them, the *kiraman katibiyn*, are assigned to record the deeds of individuals.

The books of God inform people that the message has been concurrent. Moreover, the books are guides on ethical and moral behaviour. Following the example of the prophets highlights on a human level how moral and ethical behaviour can be practiced. The Day of Judgment serves as a reminder that deeds are accountable. Qadr reiterates the power, majesty and glory of God. The five pillars of Islam: declaration of faith, worship, charity, fasting and pilgrimage further focus on how an individual can enhance their life to ensure that faith, peace, justice and kindness prevail on a daily basis. Figure 1 shows deeds and actions that are considered positive or harmful (not a complete list) for Muslims. Actions and words are judged by God. A person's actions and words are directed towards oneself, family, community and society.

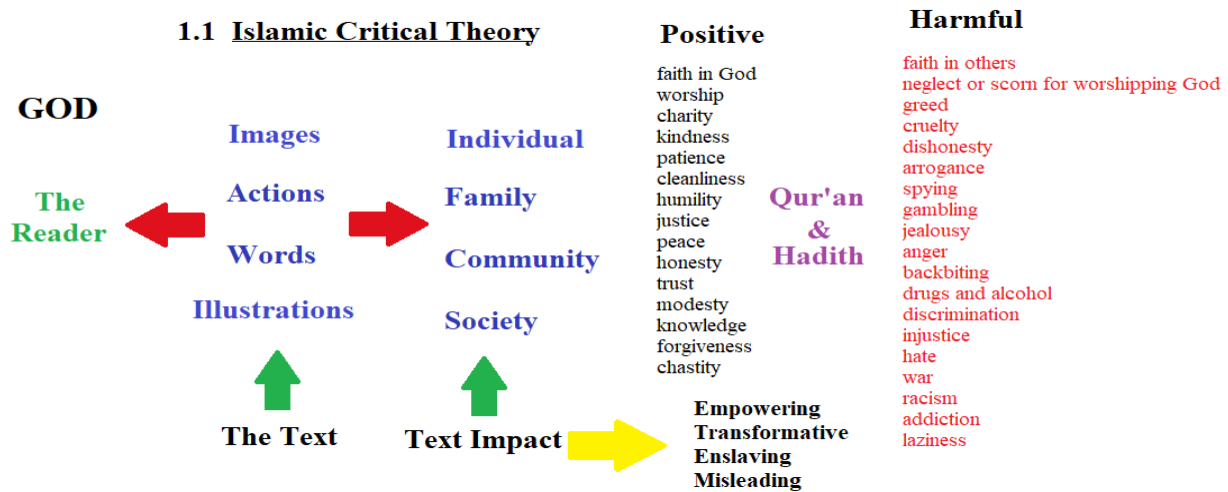


FIGURE 1. Deeds and actions that are considered positive or harmful (not a complete list) for Muslims

The discussion thus far has dealt with an overview of what Islamic belief is and what is considered right and wrong. Reference to the conversation of Jaffar Ibn Abi Talib underscored the positive impact that justice and kindness have on a people. When people begin to initially change their lives for the better and then proceed to adopt the prophetic mission which is to bring positive transformation to oneself and to

others then they are responding to the call to action. They are first responders to:

“And let there be among you people inviting to the good, enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong and those are the successful ones.”

(Qur'an 3:104)

Therefore, what is Islamic literary theory and how can high school students use it to analyse texts? Islamic literary theory is simply a lens through which one can study literature to see how far the contents are in agreement with enjoining the right and forbidding the wrong. This is discussed further in the next section.

## DISCUSSION

### ISLAMIC LITERARY THEORY: A CRITICAL LENS FOR HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS

Individuals who are aware of Islamic tenets are constantly using and applying Islamic critique in their everyday life. In this respect the concept of Islamic literary theory is not really new. However, because it has not been described as a critiquing lens in texts it is a newcomer. This paper hopes to encourage the study of Islamic literary theory and empower students to use it as an observational lens that allows them to develop their critical thinking skills and thereby empower themselves. While reading students begin to notice things that give awareness of hidden messages and what is missing or silenced. Pertinent questions arise, what is advocated, what is validated and what is right and wrong against the tenets of the Qur'anic way of life. Islamic literary theory like Islamic Critical Theory (Gilani-Williams 2014) is concerned with making the world a better place.

Literature transforms the way an individual thinks because between a book and thought processes there is no gatekeeper and there is no policing authority. Empowering students to critically analyse texts can contribute to their personal, social and spiritual development. However, students have to be given the knowledge and skills to understand how they can be influenced negatively by their environment. For instance, the 1939 Clark experiments showed that children of colour can develop internalized racism or prejudice towards themselves. As Naidoo (2014) noted,

“One way that children learn about the world around them and other cultures is through the social messages found in stories.” So, “When children cannot find themselves reflected in the books they read ... they learn a powerful lesson about how they are devalued in the society of which they are a part”

(Bishop 1990).

Islamic literary theory seeks to empower and transform. When students analyse the text they do so to establish whether it promotes good or bad attitudes, actions or traits. The empowerment and transformative element is actualized when the reader accepts the positive message of the text or rejects its negative message. For example, in very simple terms, in the story of *Rapunzel An Islamic Tale*, Shuna Leng ‘summoned the little girl but it was only to say unkind words’ (Gilani 2021:14). When the reader notes this behaviour and analyses it against Qur’anic teaching he or she will note that it is a harmful trait and one to be avoided.

From the age that children begin to read books socialization begins to occur. The images are the first things to impact a child. What kinds of illustrations are present and what are omitted? Picture books influence our cultural and religious beliefs and influence our attitudes and reinforce our social norms.

Familiar emotions, activities, families, and surroundings are sensed through the depiction of the characters and story settings. To evolve a national identity, youngsters need to develop ... a feeling of ‘This is where I belong’. It is crucial, therefore, that they see their communities ... country reflected accurately and authentically in literature

(Black & Jobe 2005)

Normalization, desensitization, identity, belonging, these are just some of the elements that can be imbedded in children’s books. For high school students the contents of chapter books become exponentially more complex. Matters that involve economics and law are just some of the content that can be explored using Islamic literary theory.

## A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR ISLAMIC LITERARY THEORY

Applying an Islamic lens is not difficult. Islamic belief permeates every aspect of life. The challenge would be where and how to start. In this respect a conceptual framework has been formulated that offers a way of applying Islamic literary theory. This is by no means the only way that the theory can be applied. It is hoped that as the field of Islamic literary theory grows modified techniques and various other approaches will be created.

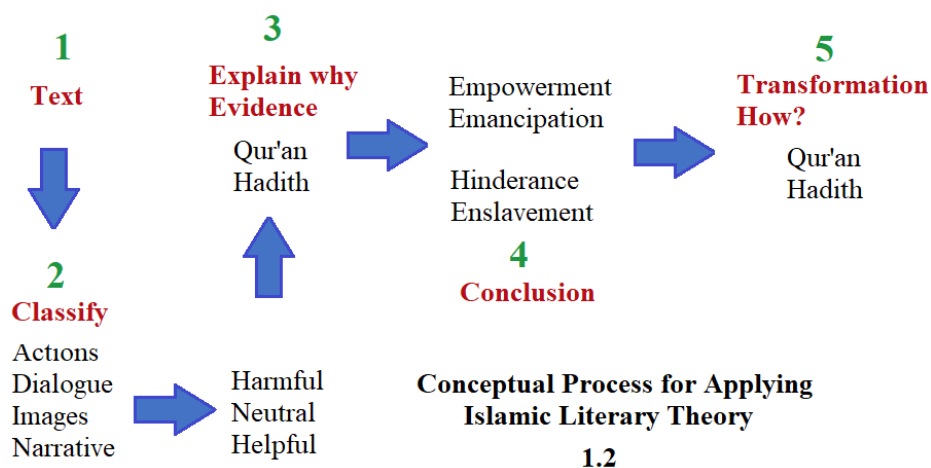


FIGURE 2. An overview of how the theory can be applied. There are five stages which have been broken down in the following way

Stage 1: This is a simple description of the kind of cultural production that is being analysed. If it is a book a description of it is given.

Stage 2: The second stage involves looking at various aspects of the text. What action, dialogue images and words make the text harmful, neutral or helpful? Chart 1.1 can be consulted to see the list of good and harmful traits.

Stage 3: This stage provides an explanation of why elements are harmful, helpful or neutral using the Qur'an, hadith and common sense (fitra).

Stage 4: Stage four draws conclusions on whether the text empowers and emancipates or whether it hinders and enslaves.

Stage 5: If the text hinders and enslaves then stage five shows how transformation can be achieved using the Qur'an, hadith and common sense (fitra).

The five-step process in applying Islamic literary theory is offered as one method for interrogating texts using an Islamic lens. If we apply the five steps to the story of *Little Red Riding Hood*, we note that the text is a book for children. Step two, we ask what are the positive messages in the story? How does Little Red behave towards her mother? Is she following Qur'anic directives towards a parent? Are her actions good towards her grandmother? Are any of her or other character's actions harmful? What Islamic practices could she have said or done? Step three, what Qur'anic verses and hadith can be applied? Step four, does the story of Little Red Riding Hood improve children's moral character and empower them through its messages or does it teach ideas that

are not wholesome? Step five, how can the characters and events in *Little Red Riding Hood* be aligned to Qur'anic teaching. What positive Islamic behaviors could transform the characters in the story?

## CONCLUSION

This paper has discussed Islamic literary theory as a literary theory that can be useful for high school students. It has provided a conceptual framework from which to critique texts through a five-step process. Islamic literary theory is concerned with empowering students to become reflective through the study of literature and encourages them to apply Islamic beliefs and teachings to cultural productions. Islamic literary theory is concerned with the discovery and analysis of ways in which individuals and groups are distracted from their true purpose in life and the social, economic and political machinery that powers that distraction. Finally, this paper hopes to serve as a springboard for academics involved with the study of literature to develop Islamic literary theory further.

## AUTHOR CONTRIBUTION

Dr. Fawzia Gilani-Williams is the sole contributor for this article.



## REFERENCE

- Abdullah, N., Lubis, A. & Isa, R. 2022. Exploring teachers' experience with student character development: A comparative analysis 44(1) 2022: 65 - 80 [https://myjurnal.mohe.gov.my/filebank/published\\_article/127839/IS\\_6.pdf](https://myjurnal.mohe.gov.my/filebank/published_article/127839/IS_6.pdf). Retrieved on 22 February 2023.
- Ahmed, K. & Ahmed, S. 1987. *Polemik Sastra Islam*. Kuala Lumpur: Language and Library Council, Ministry of Education.
- Al-Attas, M. N., & Jāmi'at al-Malik 'Abd al-'Azīz. 1979. *Aims and Objectives of Islamic Education*. Sevenoaks. Eng.: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Arora, S.K., Shah, D., Chaturvedi, S. & Gupta, P. 2015. Defining and measuring vulnerability in young people. *Indian Journal of Community Medicine* 40(3): 193-7. doi: 10.4103/0970-0218.158868. PMID: 26170545; PMCID: PMC4478662.
- Bacon, B. 1988. *How Much Truth Do We Tell the Children? The Politics of Children's Literature*. Minneapolis, MN: MEP.
- Bainbridge, J., Oberg, D. and Carbonaro, M. 2005. No text is innocent: Canadian children's books in the classroom. *Journal of Teaching and Learning* 3(2): 1-14.
- Black, M. & Jobe, R. 2005. Are children gaining a sense of place from Canadian historical picture books? *The Looking Glass: New Perspectives on Children's Literature* 9(3). <http://www.lib.latrobe.edu.au/ojs/index.php/tlg/article/view/35/40> (accessed August 10, 2013).
- Bishop, R. 1990. Mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors. Perspectives: Choosing and Using Books in the Classroom 6(3): ix - xi.
- Duderija, A. 2013. Critical-progressive Muslim thoughts: Reflections on its political ramifications. *The Review of Faith & International Affairs* 11:3, 69 - 79.
- Ferretter, L. 2003. *Towards A Christian Literary Theory*. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gilani, F. 2010. *Cinderella: An Islamic Tale*. Leicester: Islamic Foundation
- Gilani-Williams, F. 2014. Islamic critical theory. *The International Journal of Islamic Thought* 3.
- Gilani, F. 2021. *Rapunzel: An Islamic Tale*. Leicester: Islamic Foundation
- Gilani-Williams, F. 2014. Islamic critical theory: A tool for emancipatory education. *International Journal of Islamic Thought* 3(2): 93.
- Hamid, A. 1995. The fountain of life, knowledge and belief. <http://www.fountainmagazine.com/Issue/detail/Jafar-Ibn-Abi-Talib> Accessed 20/09/13
- Kasim, T., Yusoff, Y. & Mansor, F. 2021. A character through contextual learning approach: Islamic education novice teachers' experiences. *Islamiyyat* 43(2) 2021: 39 - 52 [https://myjurnal.mohe.gov.my/filebank/published\\_article/118402/I\\_4.pdf](https://myjurnal.mohe.gov.my/filebank/published_article/118402/I_4.pdf)
- Kazmi, Y. 2000. Historical consciousness and the notion of the authentic self in the Qur'ān: Towards an Islamic critical theory. *Islamic Studies* 39 (3) 375-398.
- Knoll, L., Leung, J. T., Foulkes, L. & Blakemore, S. J. 2017. Age-related differences in social influence on risk perception depend on the direction of influence. *Journal of Adolescence* 60: 53-63. doi: 10.1016/j.adolescence.2017.07.002. Epub 2017 Jul 26. PMID: 28753485; PMCID: PMC5614112.
- Munawar, I., Mujani, W. & Zuhaily, A. M. Methods of da'wah and social networks in dealing with liberalism and extremism. *Islāmiyyāt* 40(2): 131-139.
- Naidoo, V. 2014. Service Quality Perceptions of Students at a South African University. *Mediterranean Journal of Social Sciences* 5 (27): 199.
- Osman, R. A. H. 2002. *Islam and Literature: An Analysis of the Discussions in the Middle East and Malaysia*. London: University of London.
- Rane, H. 2006. Knowing one another: An antidote for mass media Islam. [http://www.griffith.edu.au/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0004/58315/Rane.pdf](http://www.griffith.edu.au/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/58315/Rane.pdf).
- Robbins, S.P., Chatterjee, P. & Canda, E. R. 1998. *Contemporary Human Behaviour Theory*. Boston, MA: Allyn & Bacon.
- Williams, R. 2020. Passing on religion as identity: Anglo-western Islamic children's literature and Muslim acculturation. *Journal for Cultural Research* 24:2, 85-100.
- Peim, N. 2009. The elusive object of transformation: English, theory and Bernstein's sociology of education. *Changing English* 16: 149- 164.