

**Owner of a Thousand Horses: The Interaction of Image and Text  
in *Zahhāk* Picturebook Based on Perry Nodelman's Text-Image  
Theory**

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**Introduction**

A picturebook is a type of children's book in which the text and the illustrations are separate elements that run parallel to one another and shape the entire book through their interaction. Some theorists of children's literature, such as Perry Nodelman, have paid more attention to the autonomous and distinctive identity of illustrations and have identified six functions in delivering information and the message as well as the relationship between the text and the image. *Zahhāk*, as one of the examples in which the image moves beyond the text and forms the narrative of the book, has been chosen to be examined according to Nodelman's theory.

Using the method of qualitative data analysis, this study aims to identify the features of text-image relationship in Farshid Shafiei's picturebook

*Zahhāk* (2016) according to Perry Nodelman's theory of six text-image relationships.

*Zahhāk* has a brief text that only relates to the main plot, and the author depends heavily on the audience's prior familiarity with the story. Eleven illustrations are included in the book (eight monochrome and two color illustrations and one on the cover). Each monochromatic image is divided into one to twelve smaller sections, each telling a different part of the detailed tale. The details are not included in the text or in the summary at the conclusion. As a result, the audience has to recreate the narrative in his/her mind by searching and delving in the images.

From the beginning of the book, Shafiei employs the method of prioritizing the image above the text in close connection with the narrative, and he uses the fifth type of Nodelman's theory in all images as well as the third to the sixth type in five images. This means that illustrations are to convey ideas that words are incapable of conveying.

The narrative of Shafiei's *Zahhāk* begins with the cover image which relies on the audience's imagination. By representing a realistic picture of real people on the cover beside the title of the book, the writer tries to make the meanings of the images and the title of the book compatible with each other. He becomes successful in retelling the old story in the context of contemporary events and warns us that each of us has a *Zahhāk* inside him/her.

Shafiei consciously tries to make a connection between the old and familiar story of *Zahhak* with today's world. According to Perry Nodelman, he seems to use "a specific style in his illustrations to represent a set of values" and help readers to gain an understanding of

the narrative based on their lived experiences. He attempts to connect this old tale to modern times by the use of Iranians' collective memory and such well-known terms as “Tulips bloomed from the blood of the youth of the country” borrowed from Āref Qazvini's renowned ballad, which was used not only during the constitutional revolution events but also throughout the Islamic Revolution and the Iran-Iraq war. He encourages the audience to decode the short narrative of the book based on signals he has put in the illustrations including traditional indications such as wedding bands, black clouds and rain, tulips, as well as signs created by the author, such as identity numbers and trampled-on flowers. As a result, the illustrations in this book expand and interpret the book's short, succinct, and referential text.

*Zahhāk* breaks the frameworks of the text and creates other layers of the narrative. Here, a repetitive and familiar text of ancient Persian literature is reproduced by the use of pictorial metaphors to signify contemporary concepts such as human rights and environmental protection. This work is interesting and attractive not only for children and adolescents, but also for adults, and it communicates with each group of audiences with different concepts and perceptions. It is as if each time it is read, it reveals a new layer of meaning and codes to the audience and allows the audience to move smoothly like a semiologist to its hidden layers. The audience is eager to anticipate later parts of the story, eagerly searching for its meaning and deciphering signs in the labyrinth of images and communicating with the text of the book. Finally, the narration of the book connects the story to reality, and the past to the present time and space.

**Keywords:** picturebook, illustration, *Shāhnāmeḥ*, adaptation, *Zahhāk*, Farshid Shafiei, Perry Nodelman

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