

**Contrary to the Prevailing Notion: A Reflection on the  
Picture-Books *Two Friends* and *The Parrot and the  
Merchant* from the Perspective of Feminism**

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**Introduction**

The rise of feminism as a social movement in the 1960s and 1970s challenged various dimensions of the art world. Feminists' attention to the art is a logical consequence of the main commitment of feminism to address the attitudes that men and women have towards the position of women in the society of their time. Art resulting from this movement, by deliberately re-interpreting and refuting the meaning of all traditional aesthetic values and by challenging the central core concept of art as well as the age-old focus of art history on painting, architecture and sculpture, has joined important artistic movements and has itself created movements within it. Illustration, as a branch of the visual arts

that has played a key role in both storytelling and information sharing, as well as in our understanding of the modern world, is no exception. At a time when it seems that various artistic currents and movements, influenced by feminist ideas around the world, each in their own way are trying to bring an equal and gender-free world to all, the attention of illustrators as members of the art community to this trend is inevitable. Today, illustration in various ways, both where it is used alongside a text and where it is used independently, has a strong presence in the lives of different sections of society with different genders, races, ethnicities and ages; therefore, the relationship between society's observability of gender equality and attention to other marginalized groups with the field of illustration is very plausible. This connection sometimes arises due to the existence of egalitarian literature and text, and sometimes it is the illustrators themselves who bring such an idea and approach to their images and create this connection.

### **Review of Literature, Materials and Methods**

Although in non-Persian studies we find research on the relationship between children's literature and feminism, such as Hadar Netz and Ron Kuzar (2020), Dae Ryun Chung and Yeon Kyung Jung (2001), Stuart Oskamp and Karen Kaufman and Lianna Atchison Wolterbeek (1996) and Kay Vandergrift (1995), it seems that the issue of feminist tendencies in children's literature is a topic that has received less attention in Iran. Few research has been conducted on illustration and picturebooks based on various theories of feminism. We can mention the works of Masih Zekavat (2018), Ahmad Razi and Somaye Hajati

(2011), Morteza Khosrownejad (2008) and Shokouh Haji Nasroullah (2003) that are related to this issue to some extent.

In this research, which is qualitative in terms of the nature of the data and is considered practical in terms of purpose, various sources such as books, articles, archives, Internet and videos are used collected through tools such as observation, study, interview, collection, photography and archiving. This research, benefiting from the method of visual analysis, is descriptive-analytical in general. The illustrations are read and analyzed from a feminist approach.

This study aims to identify the use of different types of feminism in the illustrations of Hoda Haddadi and Marjan Vafaeian.

### **Findings and Discussion**

The findings of this study show that the feminist approach in the works of these two illustrators goes beyond gender stereotypes and raises issues such as women's choice and activism, woman-woman and woman-nature relationship, women's presence in the public arena and women's job status in relation with power structure. Because of the insufficient space in the stories for female characters, their multidimensional aspects are often hidden from the audience. The choice of girls and women as the main characters of the stories by both illustrators provides a good opportunity to explore different dimensions of the character.

In the works of both illustrators, the characters appear in their roles as girls and women and not in relation to men or other people. None of them have the role of mother, sister, wife or child. The independence of

the characters offers the audience an independent existence that is not defined in relation to others.

The concept of freedom is also presented in the works of both illustrators with a different narrative. In *Two Friends*, the free movement in the forest, free choices, decisions and perceptions of the two girls are quite noticeable. In the story *The Parrot and the Merchant*, the freedom of Mah-Jahan as a business woman traveling to far and near the world for business emphasize the importance of the liberation and freedom of girls and women in the eyes of their audience.

In the works of both illustrators, there is a relationship between women and women, but in Haddadi's works, issues such as strengthening sisterhood, self-expansion or strengthening the woman-woman relationship are more prevalent. However, by placing female characters at the top of the pyramid of power, Vafaeian weakens gender structures, challenges the power structure in patriarchal systems, shows the conflict between the capitalist class and the working class and the intersection of gender and class, and reveals their different life experiences to the audience.

### **Conclusion**

By using different visual techniques, both illustrators create a new perspective on feminist illustration that addresses both child and adult audiences by choosing women as the main characters of their works, depicting unconventional situations, breaking common gender stereotypes, emphasizing on women's activism, avoiding making them passive and increasing women's self-confidence.

**Keywords:** Illustration, picturebook, Feminism, *Two Friends*, *The Parrot and the Merchant*, Hoda Haddadi, Marjan Vafaeian

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