



*The Visual Representation of Gender in
Illustrated Children's Books in Iran and Sweden Today:
A study of
'The lover and Sanam' and 'That's what a princess does'*

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ABSTRACT

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MASTER OF ARTS IN VISUAL CULTURE

The Visual Representation of Gender in Illustrated Children's Books
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Since culture has been changing over the time in all of the societies, the notions of gender and sex-role stereotypes as two of the constitutive parts of culture have been altering as well; due to the development of contemporary movements such as feminism and gender-related discourses. Nevertheless, because of different social environments and different rituals and values the development pace and pattern of such changes do not follow the same rhythm and same character in all countries.

Moreover, culture has always been depicted in sagas, fairytales, as well as visual arts, and recently on TV and other modern media. Thus, traces of the mentioned alternations can be found in them; as it is nowadays in the alternation of the way gender is depicted in advertisements for example.

Thus, the question that the current thesis is looking for is that to what extent the visual representation of gender in the children's books has been influenced by these global changes; or has there been any change that can be distinguished in this part of artistic-cultural products which is aimed for children at all or not? In addition, how the depiction of gender can be seen and tracked in them?

This research argues about an examination of two children's books namely *The lover and Sanam* (عاشق و صنم) written by Mohammad Reza Shams and illustrated by Ali Namvar published in Persian language in Iran 2003, and *That's what a princess does* (Så gör prinsessor), written and illustrated by Per Gustavsson and published in Swedish in Sweden 2003, which both have slightly the same concept in the story, but are illustrated in two different cultural contexts, shows existence of gender-based stereotypes in these two examples of artistic-cultural productions of the mentioned cultures. This might also show that to what extent the development of feminist or similar cultural discourses as well as changes in the society, can potentially affect the artworks and in this case illustrations.

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1. Introduction

1.1 Research objectives, questions, and hypothesis

Young people's situations and conditions have experienced dramatic changes during the past decades. As the recent discourses of feminism and gender issues getting more developed and debated in the society, accordingly they find their ways into every constructive part of each society's culture; and children's world and its related cultural products are not an exemption of this global change. A general view is that society¹ and media² have become increasingly sexualized and that this sexualization influences children and their daily lives in the very young age; and as Samuelsson mentions³, sexuality can be found in all spheres of society and has become an important and significant part of a person's lifestyle.

On the other hand, I would argue that nowadays a contemporary tendency has emerged -with different intensities in different countries- that aims to neutralize the sexuality of the two genders and depict a more moderate concept for each; a more 'masculine' female and a more 'feminine' male. The visual representation of this new trend tangibly can be tracked in today's cultural productions such as today's advertisements or fashion world; where the concepts of equality between genders and changing the angel of looking at them can be seen.

However, has this trend found its way into that part of the visual culture which is dealing with children? If so, to what extent these alternations have affected and are depicted in the related cultural products? Moreover, in what ways depiction of these effects are different in diverse cultures around the globe? These are core issues that construct the central debate of the present thesis.

1.2 Research focus

Despite the fact that the ideas of gender and sex-role stereotypes as two elements that construct our cultural conceptions of the gender, have been changing due to the

¹ Jenny Samuelsson, 'Som om min kropp inte är min: bilden av unga kvinnors sexualitet i svensk ungdomslitteratur' English: 'As if my body is not mine: Young women's sexuality in Swedish youth literature', Borås, Högskolan i Borås: Master Thesis in Library and Information Science at the library and information sciences / school library, 2006, p. 5.

² Sonja Weaver, 'From Bracelets to Blowjob: The Ideological Representation of Childhood Sexuality in the Media', *The McMaster Journal of Communication*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2005, p. 43.

³ Samuelsson, p. 5.

contemporary movements such as feminism and evolution of global gender studies; yet, the development speed and quality are not similar in all of the countries. This is because of differences in social environments, rituals, and values. Indeed, doing a comparison between several aspects of these differences can be interesting research subjects for sociological and psychological studies, but such a study is beyond the scope of this research project. I have therefore chosen one aspect from this giant complex that lies better into the district of my specialization, which is the visual representation of gender in illustrated children's books.

To reach the mentioned purpose, and to make a more specific subject and adapt it to the limitations of a master's thesis project, I have decided to do an examination of two children's books with similarity in the subject matter, but when the narrative have been illustrated in two different cultural contexts. Iran and Sweden are my choices since I have grown up, lived, and studied in Iran and have been in Sweden as a student for the past two years. In addition, the mentioned countries have many interesting differences in their development paces and patterns, and many social and gender values are already changed or under changing process in them.

Thus, this comparison might eventually indicate the existence or nonexistence of gender-based stereotypes in the two cultures. This might also explain to what extent the development of feminist or similar cultural discourses as well as changes in the society, can potentially affect the artworks and in this case illustrations. Consequently, there can be a tangible difference in the way a Swedish illustrator depicts gender, and the way his/her counterpart does in Iran.

1.3 Research method

In the following research, I will have a visual and to some extent a contextual analysis of children's books illustrations. To provide my claims with more evidence of the changes that has happened in the mentioned societies –especially in the west– concerning the development of notions of gender, a concise comparative analysis on similar cultural products such as advertisements is included in my research. The purpose is providing more evidence of if the current state of gender discourses has had any noticeable reflection in the visual culture of human society. For this propose, the current state of the gender discourses in both of the societies, as well as other factors that can have an effect on the illustrations of the books are analyzed and

described; as an instance, the existing strong censorship and monitoring in Iran, which is being applied to all of the cultural products. Furthermore, a concise historical and cultural analysis also will be included to address that such changes in people's contemporary culture have taken place.

For the mentioned research method, the best state is having the previous research in three languages of Persian, English, and Swedish. Inasmuch as the Persian and Swedish materials will help to form the theoretical structure of the thesis, concerning the social state of the countries and current state of the gender discourses in them. This will help to create a hypothesis that to what extent the sensitivities about representation of gender has affected the publication of cultural and artistic products.

Furthermore, I have chosen semiotics as a methodological approach for visual analyzing of illustrations and the method of Gemma Penn¹ in semiotic analysis of the books will be my reference. I have chosen her method inasmuch as she discusses how certain myths –in my case myths of gender, and gender stereotypes– are connoted from a literal/visual content; as well as, how cultural knowledge works for deciphering the hidden codes in that context, and how cultural knowledge is generated through conceptualizing of the myths. She argues² that myths are invisible and seemingly expected sign-systems that reflect values created within cultures.

1.4 Research material and delimitation

For the mentioned visual analysis and concerning the scale of this thesis project, the decision is to compare two children's books; one from Iran and one from Sweden. Thus, the decision for my imperial materials is analyzing two books namely *The lover and Sanam*³ written by Mohammad Reza Shams and illustrated by Ali Namvar published in Persian language in Iran 2003, in addition with *That's what a princess*

¹ Gemma Penn, 'Semiotic analysis of still images.' In *Qualitative researching with text, image and sound: a practical handbook*, by Martin W. Bauer and George Gaskell, 227-245. London: Sage Publications, 2000.

² Penn, p. 231.

³ Original Persian name: [عاشق و صنم]; English title is taken from the publisher's official website; <<http://www.shabaviz.com/books/pages/ashegh%20sanam.htm>>, accessed March 1, 2010.

*does*¹ which is written and illustrated by Per Gustavsson and published in the same year as *The lover and Sanam*, but in Sweden.

I selected two books that have almost the same concept in the story, and also are published in the same year. Accordingly, both of the books that I have chosen feature a princess at center of the story. While taking account of the previously mentioned criteria for choosing my empirical materials, the other reason for choosing these books is that I assume the way a princess is depicted in the stories, represents the expectations of that culture or society are from an idealized female character. Of course, this might be more strongly germane to sagas and fairytales, where the more traditional thoughts and archetypes construct the story line. However, in this case I would argue that the representation of female or male at least reflects the thought and approach of author or illustrator of the work. Even so, artists or authors in my opinion are not always necessarily trend creators of societies, but could also be seen to reflect the main trends and discourses in their society.

1.5 Previous and current state of research

2.1 The importance of childhood

“With honor and bravery, the second half of the 20th century can be called the age of children. Almost in all over the globe [...] a huge part of material and immaterial resources is spent on the children issues and supporting their mental and physical health.”² This is not surprising since the science of psychology has shown that children, immediately after birth -and even before that- excessively are under the influence of their nurturing environment; and “through the socialization process, not only learn the common social values and assimilate with them, but also remarkably become influenced by any inadequacy [...] in their surroundings.”³ Shirin Ebadi’s reflection of this critical importance can briefly explain why scholars in many branches of humanities have been putting such a strong focus on children and children’s cultural products.

¹ Original Swedish name: [*Så gör prinsessor*], the English title is taken from a digital catalogue about Swedish publications of children’s books, published by Natur & Kultur, <http://www.nok.se/PageFiles/857/NoK_FR-blad2008Frankfurt.mindrepdf.pdf>, accessed April 6, 2010.

² Shirin Ebadi, *The Rights of the Child. A Study of Legal Aspects of Children's Rights in Iran*, Tehran: Roshangaran, 1994, p. 21.

³ Ebadi, p. 22.

Many scholars¹ have already investigated gender roles and gender stereotyping reflected in children's books. However, the common concern in almost all of them is that there is an ideological context represented in the children's books within which social learning takes place. Athena Theodore notes that "Children learn both the content of these roles and the cultural rationalizations for different sex role expectations and rewards, and form ideas about sex roles that affect their behavior."²

According to Gender schema theory³ and social cognitive theory⁴, in the early childhood period children start creating attitudes and thoughts about the differences between the two genders. In other words they construct a gender schema, that is a series of information about the meaning of being male or female and what roles society and people expect from those concepts. Thus, appropriate toys, behaviors, activities, appearance, jobs, and so on, become a part of development of children's gender attitudes. It is believed that "gender stereotypical thinking may limit children's choices, interests, and abilities."⁵

However, education is all about transferring the treasure of knowledge, experiences, culture, and values, achieved by human society throughout the time, to its people and especially to the next generations which are supposed to take the responsibility of guarding and applying this invaluable historical-cultural humanistic heritage.

¹ For example: Kathryn P. Scott, and Shirley Feldman-Summers, 'Children's Reactions to Textbook Stories in Which Females Are Portrayed in Traditionally Male Roles.' *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 1971, pp. 396-402.

Eleanor Ashton, 'Measures of play behavior: The influence of sex-role stereotyped children's books.', *Sex Roles*, vol. 9, 1983, pp. 43-47.

Athena Theodore, 'Children's Perceptions of Gender and Work Roles .', *Contemporary Sociology*, vol. 10, no. 6, 1981, pp. 842-844.

Mary L. Trepanier-Street, and Jane A. Romatowski, 'The Influence of Children's Literature on Gender Role Perceptions: A Reexamination.' *Early Childhood Education Journal*, vol. 26, no. 3, 1999, pp. 155-159.

Angela M. Gooden, and Mark A. Gooden, 'Gender Representation in Notable Children's Picture Books: 1995-1999.', *Sex Roles*, vol. 45, 2004, pp. 89-101.

Mykol C. Hamilton, David Anderson, Michelle Broaddus, and Kate Young. 'Gender Stereotyping and Under-representation of Female Characters in 200 Popular Children's Picture Books: A Twenty-first Century Update.' *Sex Roles*, vol. 55, no. 11, 2006, pp. 757-765.

² Theodore p. 842.

³ Bem, Sandra Lipstiz. 'Gender schema theory and its implications for child development: Raising gender-aschematic children in a genderschematic society.' *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society*, vol. 8, 1983, pp. 598-616.

C. L. Martin, and C. F. Halverson.'A schematic processing model of sex typing and stereotyping in children.' *Child Development*, vol. 52, 1981, pp. 1119-1134.

⁴ Kay Bussey Bandura, and Albert, 'Self regulatory mechanisms governing gender development.', *Child Development*, vol. 63, 1992, pp. 1236-1250.

⁵ Trepanier-Street, p. 155.

Therefore, the importance of transferring the recently developed gender attitudes to the children becomes something that the contemporary culture cannot forget about.

This conveyance can be done through many different means such as parental nurturing, education, TV programs, animated movies, and many other phenomena that create the everyday's environment of children; but children's literature as a potentially influential source of creating thoughts about gender roles and similar subjects, is an important issue which makes the main concern of this thesis. Nevertheless, as Mallan puts it "children's literature will not change the world but it does make significant and often undervalued contributions to how its child readers see the world and their place in it."¹

2.2 Children's literature

Originally, feminist criticism of English-language children's literature has its roots in the development of British and American feminist criticism. It was in the 1970s that feminist critics and social scientists started examining the images and gender roles of women and girls in children's media and that included literature. This was where the "passive Sleeping Beauties and helpless Snow Whites"² became criticized for the first times.

Since the emergence of gender studies as an academic discipline, much research has taken place concerning children's literature and gender issues, and the positive or negative effect of literature on children. As an instance, research published in the 1970s and 1980s³ suggests that the use of children's literature and related book activities can positively change children's gender attitudes. However, these studies are followed by more recent ones, as an instance a study done by Trepanier-Street and Romatowski, that certifies the findings of previous research about the effects of books on children's perceptions about gender stereotypes –in this case occupational roles–; yet they note that there are noticeable developments in children's attitudes,

¹ Kerry Mallan, *Gender Dilemmas in Children's Fiction*, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009. P. 3.

² Clark, Beverly Lyon, and Margaret R. Higonnet. *Girls, boys, books, toys: gender in children's literature and culture*. JHU Press, 2000, p. 3.

³ Ashton.

Scott and Feldman-Summers.

Vicki C. Flerx, Dorothy S. Fidler, and Rowland W. Rogers, 'Sex role stereotypes: Developmental aspects and early intervention', *Child Development*, vol. 47, 1976, pp. 998-1007.

despite they are still generally stereotypic, children have more flexible regarding occupational roles and bear a gender-equitable view¹. They consider it as positive impacts of efforts in school, society, and home.

However, I would argue that children's literature and visual representation of gender is relatively an unexplored area still. Even though the issue of gender has been discussed in many different contexts, and there are many studies for children's books and children's educational materials, my research suggests that visual representation of gender has not been given its due attention in earlier studies. Even in research about picture books or illustrated children's books, it seems being illustrated is more or less a factor to define the research material, not as a fact that needs to be described and analyzed in itself. For example, illustrated books might have been chosen as empirical materials, but the visual content of images, and the ways they can portray gender biased attitudes is not analyzed.

¹ Trepanier-Street, p. 158

2. Gender discourse and Visual Culture

2.1 Gender discourse in western visual culture

In the following sub-chapter I will give a short account of the state of gender discourses in the western world with a specific focus on Sweden, as well as a brief overview on Iran which has a different interplay with, and gets differently affected by the flow of sociological and cultural developments and discourses that happen in the west.

Due to constantly developing subjects such as feminism that refers to political, cultural, and economic movements that try to set up better rights and security for women, which has a longer history in the west in comparison with the other countries around the globe, issues like gender differences and gender discrimination has been under debate; at least since 1950s that gender studies appeared as an academic discipline from different areas of sociology. Critical gender issues argued through these socio-cultural debates not only had noticeable effect on laws and legal topics, but also stage of gender discourses in today's western world has reached to such an extent that affected the representation of gender in many aspects of contemporary visual culture. Books reflect one side of this development but additionally traces of such a change can be tracked in today's advertisements. This means that in the western world they have become already a part of social consciousness. I will not do a deep analysis about this issue since this subject by itself can be a complete research project; yet the concept that I am going to go through is helpful for developing my discussion.

2.1.1 Gender representation in western advertisements

It is understandable that advertizing always works with a close contact and parallel to contemporary culture of society, and both has counter effect on each other. Advertizing is considered to be “one of the most universal and pervasive channels of communication”¹, in which advertisers try to attract the attention of their audience by making as unique and creative advertisements as possible.

¹ Iris Mayne, ‘The Inescapable Images: Gender and Advertising.’ *Equal Opportunities International (Emerald (MCB))*, vol. 19, no. 2, 2000, p. 56

However, in producing advertisements it is an important concern that the social meanings of advertisements need to be understood. Therefore, not only a literate population who can understand the messages sent through advertisements should exist, but also the messages should reach the correct audiences, which are those who have right age, gender, and financial affordability. Furthermore, it should be noticed that through the history of advertising the notion of audience has changed. For example, before the post-war fast economic developments that started in the 1950s, newspapers' advertising policies only aimed the wealthy people; but nowadays, all the people are counted as the target group, since in the current cultural and social state, almost everybody can afford to be a part of the consumer society of which advertisements aim at. This can point that to what extent advertising is close to, and under the influence by popular culture.

However, concerning the effect of adverts I would argue that because of the way they represent us humans and because of their effect on us, they are a part of our socialization, and therefore become part of our expectation from ourselves also. Moreover, as Jean-Louis Tilleuil puts it "The socially constructed and organized inequality between men and women is one of the major injustices of our times".¹ In addition, we perceive advertisements and inasmuch as we have been nurtured with an understanding of this genre since a very early age, we can easily decipher the signs and messages in them. Many of the signs are transferred via representation of human body in the adverts. Mayne mentions that while "beautiful people enact the commercial, the ad creates a myth, a beauty myth"²; and people think if they buy the product their lives too will be like that of the myths. What I want to stress here is that these myths speak of what is socially accepted in terms of gendered identities. Though, what are the accepted gender related characteristics in today's culture?

Scholars³ suggest that the concept of 'man' or male myth, and its representation has changed, and notions of masculinity are shifting nowadays. There are numbers of

¹ Tilleuil, Jean-Louis. 'Woman and Man in Advertising: Narrative Illustration of an 'Equality which Cannot Be Found'.', In *Image [&] Narrative: Online Magazine of the Visual Narrative.*, 2002, accessed March 20, 2010. <<http://www.imageandnarrative.be/gender/jeanlouistilleuil.htm>>.

² Mayne, p. 57.

³ Joanne Entwistle, 'From Catwalk to Catalog: Male Fashion Models, Masculinity, and Identity.' In *Cultural bodies: ethnography and theory*, by Helen Thomas and Jamilah Ahmed, pp. 55-76, Wiley-Blackwell, 2004.

developments which “have helped to establish a cultural milieu in which a ‘new man’ could emerge and flourish”¹. One of them is “rise and influence of feminism and new social movements, which have put gender under scrutiny”².³ Thus, as the mentioned scholars argue, the new concept of so-called a perfect man is being altered from a masculine macho, to a slimmer, more affectionate, and heterosexual kind of person; and this contemporary masculinities are being visually depicted in advertisements.

In addition, the same shift is happening for women myths as well. If earlier studies⁴ on women’s magazines as an instance, show that there is a cult of femininity that locks women into subordination, but the more recent ones such as Iris Mayne⁵ reflect gradual developments in portraying women images in the advertisements. She argues that the stereotypical visual appearance of slim, beautiful, blond, and smiling female characters with cosmetics, personal hygiene products, or housekeeping, cleaning and cooking products which was a 70s trend in advertising, is under a cultural manipulation nowadays; and the bodily representation of women is under changing and neutralizing process. Nevertheless, she believes that “the myth that slim is beautiful is [still] a major obsession with many young women”⁶.

However, women are depicted in different situations where they have more financial and physical power. They appear more to do stereotypically masculine works, and it is becoming more common that they play the roles that men used to play in the adverts previously, such as buying a car or being in the serious official situations⁷.

Gill, Rosalind, Karen Henwood, and Carl McLean. ‘The Tyranny of the ‘Six-Pack’? Understanding men’s responses to.’ In *Culture in psychology*, by Corinne Squire, pp. 100-118, London: Routledge, 2000.

¹ Entwistle, p. 56.

² The author additionally mentions the following other phenomena of the rise of “style press” such as *Arena*, *GQ*, and *The Face*, and the expansion of retailing for men, *ibid.*, p. 56.

³ *ibid.*, p. 57.

⁴ Marjorie Ferguson, *Forever feminine: women’s magazines and the cult of femininity*. London: Heinemann, 1983.

Janice Winship, *Inside women’s magazines*. London: Pandora, 1987.

⁵ Mayne.

⁶ Mayne, p. 60.

⁷ An example for the new notions about contemporary women can be the TV commercial of DELL XPS M1330 laptop that depicts some sexy women, working in an extremely masculine environment to build a car engine. Despite having stereotypical feminine motives, they appear to be state of power, and do masculine jobs. This commercial can be reached via:

<http://www.dell.com/content/topics/segtopic.aspx/popup_xps_comm_big?c=us&cs=19&l=en&s=dhs&~lt=popup>, accessed 16 May, 2010.

Nowadays, the audience is not the rich men, women are also able to buy and to be the one who earns and spends money.

All these, reflect the current trends in the western society which are accepted by the people. Additionally, it should be considered that advertising agencies do not tend to do something wrong by representing an unacceptable narration of gender. Since they want to win the market, thus they respond to changes in the society and follow up the trends very carefully. It can be inferred that reflection of such a change in appearance on gender have roots in the actual appearance of gender, and expectations of different genders in the society.

Nonetheless, despite having this development in the contemporary visual manifestation of gender in the advertising world, we still face many advertisements aimed at children that follow the stereotypical way of categorizing the two genders. As an instance having a quick glance over today's toys catalogs in Swedish market, it can easily be noticed that still the blue color theme of, aggressive, cool, powerful, and all those macho characteristics present boy's toys; and the pink theme of beautiful, cute, maternity and housekeeping stuffs illustrate girl's. It seems that the alternations of gender myth in adults' related adverts have not affected the advertisements for children yet. Certainly, more research should be done in this field to draw a more concrete conclusion.

However, the eighth revision of both Swedish and English versions of the "Consolidated ICC Code of Advertising and Marketing Communication Practice."¹ published in August 2006, does not appear to reflect any specific concern about issues of gender connected to advertising, neither for adults, nor for children. Except one instance that explains: "Marketing communication should respect human dignity and should not incite or condone any form of discrimination, including that based upon race, national origin, religion, gender, age, disability or sexual orientation."²

Another example can be the Nike+ campaign of 'Men vs. Women' (known also as 'Nike+ Human Race') which was a global virtual running race, motivated by the two companies of Nike and Apple, established in 2008. The aim was to challenge both genders to join this challenge, and motivate them to get the higher place. However, the TV commercials portrayed a strong image of women who could beat the men. For more information see: < <http://www.nikeplus.com/>>, accessed 16 May, 2010.

¹ International Chamber of Commerce, (ICC). 'The Consolidated ICC Code of Advertising and Marketing Communication Practice.' *International Chamber of Commerce*. August 2006, accessed March 19, 2010, <<http://www.iccwbo.org/uploadedFiles/ICC/policy/marketing/Statements/330%20Final%20version%20of%20the%20Consolidated%20Code%20with%20covers.pdf>>.

² *ibid.*, p. 13.

Therefore, what makes this issue more noticeable, is the semiological approach that “assumes that these constructions of social difference [class, race, gender and so on] are articulated through images themselves.”¹

All in all, it by no means mean that gender stereotypes are totally removed from the advertising milieu, but the range of social awareness and expectations in the western world has influenced and is reflected in this part of culture-related visual productions.

2.2 Gender discourse in Iranian visual culture

In the previous part I stretched a brief account of the development of gender notions in the western world, but the facts in Iran can show a relatively different and controversial state of gender concepts.

Due to the suppressive atmosphere in the last decades in Iran, as well as its old heritage of gender discrimination, discourses about women and their place in the current situation and future of this country, existing dilemmas in criminal and civil laws and similar subjects faced a huge delay. Nevertheless, as Davar Khishavandi² counts, many social movements such as the publication of one volume of the *Education Periodical*³, under the title of *Girls' Gender Identity*⁴ which was published more than before the year 2000, as well as other phenomena such as stabilization of feminist nongovernmental organizations, increasing involvement of women in labor market, elections, governmental and nongovernmental job positions, shows that the success in development of overcoming gender discriminations in the mentioned society has made a considerable progress. There are more facts related to this, for example women occupying over 60% of the capacity of higher education centers, and achievements of Iranian sportswomen such as the first two Iranian women that

¹ Gillian Rose, ‘Semiology: laying bare the prejudices beneath the smooth surface of the beautiful.’ In *Visual methodologies: an introduction to the interpretation of visual materials*, by Gillian Rose, London: SAGE, 2007, p. 77.

² Davar Khishavandi, ‘Reflection of Gender in Schoolbooks; my translation from Persian: [بازتاب جنسیت [در کتاب های درسی].’ *Persian language and literature; my translation from Persian: [زبان و ادبیات فارسی]*. accessed April 23, 2010, <<http://aryaadib.blogfa.com/post-721.aspx>>.

³ My translation from Persian [فصل نامه تعلیم و تربیت].’ for more information about this magazine visit <http://www.rie.ir/index.aspx?siteid=75&pageid=366>

⁴ My translation from Persian [ویژه نامی هویت جنسیتی دختران]

conquered Everest, or the woman who becomes the national car-racing champion amongst both men and women challengers in Iran¹.

It is believed that the root of efforts for equality between men and women roots back to over a century ago that the first public narration of Iranian feminism was triggered by an intellectual poetess Tahereh Qorat-al-Eyn born in 1814, who removed her veil in public and did many other anti-religious movements, “at a time when women were not allowed to set foot outside their homes without their husbands' permission”².

However, gender discrimination and patriarchal culture have been challenged in the visual culture of Iran, especially in the realm of film production. Many movies have criticized the power of fathers, or authorities over the women. According to Minoo Derayeh³ since the 1990s, women's cinema and movies made by female filmmakers such as Bani-Etemad and Tahmineh Milani have challenged patriarchy in Iran's film industry. She explains that these filmmakers have critically questioned the female identity which is created by cultural and religious traditions in Iran. Moreover, they have challenged the existing laws and statutes relating to women, and reflected various abuses against women in the society. However, in this relation, Najmeh Khalili Mahani also notes that “if we anchor the Iranian encounter with modernity to the inception of the feminist movement in the 19th century Iran, we can consider the cinematic representation of women as a gauge to the success of the Iranian women's discourse of social equality and democracy.”⁴ Furthermore, appearance of many female and male artists who specifically work with a feminist approach⁵ or with emphasize on sexual and gender expression⁶, is also another evidence for my claim.

Nevertheless, the specific political condition constructed by a religious totalitarian regime has a strong side effect on the flow of the gender discourses in Iran's society.

¹ Parastoo Do-Koohaki, ‘Eight Years of Work for Women Between Traditional Thoughts and Modern Manifestos.’ *Zanan*, May 2005, pp. 15-21.

² Azar Nafisi, ‘The Quest for the ‘real’ woman in the Iranian novel: Representations of privacy in literature and film.’ In *Iran Chamber Society*. 2003, accessed May 5, 2010, <http://www.iranchamber.com/literature/articles/quest_real_woman_iranian_novel1.php>

³ Minoo Derayeh, ‘Depiction of women in Iranian cinema, 1970s to present.’ *ScienceDirect*. February 20, 2010, accessed May 2, 2010, <<http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/B6VBD-4YF5V26-1/2/c92e55715def1be494468fd5385437d8>>.

⁴ Najmeh Khalili Mahani, ‘Women of Iranian Popular Cinema: Projection of Progress.’ In *Offscreen*, vol. 10, no. 7, July 2006, accessed March 4, 2010, <http://www.offscreen.com/index.php/phile/essays/women_of_iran>.

⁵ Such as Nikoo Haji Tarkhani, Mitra Farahani, etc...

⁶ Such as Shirin Fakhim, Abbas Kowsari, Shahram Entekhabi, etc...

“Patriarchy in Iran is not fundamentally different from that in non-Islamic societies, but the religious dogma is bound to raise higher the bar of challenge for attaining equality for women’s right.”¹ A tangible example of the negative effect of governmental considerations, on development pace of gender issues can be the recent plan of Iran’s ministry of education for gender separation of the educational books. According to Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty², in March 2009 Mr. Bahram Mohammadian the administer of the Institute of Research and Planning of Ministry of Education proposed a plan for necessity of separating the educational books of school children based on their gender. In the same time, the head of the Educational Books section of the same ministry announced that the gender separation progress of the schoolbooks had just started.

However, since this decision by itself predictably could bring up many reactions and complains in Iran’s society –as it did indeed–, this ministry tried to camouflage their aim of publishing the new series of books. It seems that by mentioning different gender-based needs of children as a reason, and hiding it among other reasons such as differences in ethnical groups that children belong to, different languages, rituals and etc, they tried to justify that there is a real need to change the content of the books. However, many scholars, NGOs, and others have had negative reactions against this decision and condemned it. For example, Saeed Peyvandi professor of sociology in Paris says “woman is obviously a secondary citizen in these books, and man does everything in the patriarchal society. Despite this clear discrimination, which is reflected in all studies about schoolbooks in Iran, they still want to go towards more discrimination.”³

The authorities of this ministry never pointed exactly that which books and in what level of pre-university education are going to be the subject of these changes; but they noted that there is a necessity to include lessons in the books that “help the female students to do their maternal duties well in future”⁴. This evidence as well as

¹ Khalili Mahani.

² Faraj Sarkoohi, *تفکیک کتاب های درسی، آموزش مسایل جنسی یا تبعیض علیه زنان؟* [my translation: *separating the course books, teaching sexual issues, or discrimination against the women?*]. April 8, 2009, accessed April 6, 2010, <http://www.radiofarda.com/content/f35_School_Book_Iran/1604659.html>.

³ Maryam Afshang, ‘Gender separation of Iranina school books, my translation from Persian [تفکیک کتابهای جنسیتی ایران در درسی کتابهای جنسیتی].’ In *bbcpersian.com*. December 26, 2009, accessed March 25, 2010, <http://www.bbc.co.uk/persian/iran/2009/12/091226_maf_student_education.shtml>.

⁴ Sarkoohi.

the previous 30 years old experience of educating policies in patriarchal Iran can show the preferred direction of this gender separation of schoolbooks.

However, more than any influential phenomenon in Iran, *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance*, a governmental organization which is responsible for restricting access to any media, artwork, music, or in general any artistic-cultural publication of which the Islamic Regime in Iran does not approve; has been having effect on the representation of gender in the mentioned media. This is to such an extent that in most of the research with similar concerns, there are complains and critics about the influence of this ministry and its discriminative role for genders.

However, I would argue that the current status of concept of gender and gender discrimination is in a satisfying developing progress in today's Iran's society. Social movements such as a campaign, which was triggered after 'humiliation of a young political prisoner by showing him in women's costume in the governmental media'¹, that caused many men and young boys –who were social or political activists or ordinary people– put on scarves, veils, or chadors and take a picture of their own and publish it online through their weblogs or websites; for both showing their support with him, and also to criticize using the notion of being female to humiliate a human being.² This sort of evidence –ignoring its political aspects– can reflect the amount of socio-cultural development level, in contemporary Iran's society.

2.3 Illustrated children's books and gender

Fortunately recent research show positive developments in gender biased tradition of children literature: for example an increase can be noticed in females represented as the main character in children's literature; "Although female representation has greatly improved since the 70s, gender stereotypes are still prevalent in children's literature".³

As I mentioned previously, there are many studies about the children's books, but not much about the illustrations. Each time they speak about illustrations, there is not

¹ As it was considered by many Iranians, as the original intention of doing so

² Eve Bower, 'New protest statement builds in Iran -- men in head scarves.', In *CNN*. December 14, 2009, accessed May 17, 2010, <<http://edition.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/meast/12/14/iran.headscarf.protest/index.html>>.

³ Gooden and Gooden, p. 89.

any visual analysis about the illustrations itself. These studies¹ more or less discuss that women for example are most of the times depicted in the kitchen, or men are doing special jobs and things like that. The picture itself and symbolic meanings that it can have, or the way the artist thought about the situation that he or she is illustrating it and so on, seemingly are not important issues; while in some schools of visual analysis such as semiotics, the whole discussion is about how images signify messages to the beholders.

Through this section, the representation of gender in the Swedish and Iranian children's books will be studied. Moreover, there will be an account of the research that has been done in these countries about the mentioned subject.

2.3.1 Representation of gender in Swedish children's books

Breaking traditional structures of gender concepts and expectations from genders in Sweden seems to have old roots in the history of Swedish children's literature. Comparing to 1940s, when the Swedish girls' stories were still conservative in their approach towards the women's rights and did not have noticeable influence on Swedish juvenile literature², the newer children's books manifest a different approach. There are examples of books in Swedish publications that their author or illustrator has considered the issue of gender with a particular attention. This is testified by flourishing stories that successfully found their ways into animated movies and flowed to many other countries, such as Gunilla Bergström's *Alfie Atkins*³ that illustrates the life of a child with his single father who has a very kind, affectionate, and easygoing attitude which is almost what one can expect from a so-called real mom. I would count Alfie's dad as an example of normalization of gender roles that appeared in Swedish culture long ago, and is visually depicted through children's books. The interesting point is that Alfie's dad does almost all the other stereotypical things that an ordinary man or a father usually does, like sitting and reading newspapers or watching television alone, meanwhile his bald head and his appearance do not leave any place remaining for visual depiction of femininity.

¹ Theodore; Gooden and Gooden; Hamilton et al.

² Boel Westin, *Children's literature in Sweden*. Uddevalla: Swedish Institute, 1991, p. 22.

³ Original Swedish name: [*Alfons Åberg*]

Nevertheless, his behavior and his approach towards his son is –or maybe it is more correct to say, used to be– changed towards a more feminine way¹.

*The kids' own XYZ of love and sex*² published in Sweden 1971 is another example of a book challenging sex role stereotypes. Yet, maybe the most well known pioneer characters who challenged the gender stereotypes in Swedish children's literature was Pippi Longstocking³. Pippi Longstocking was an instant success in Sweden, the country that she was created by Astrid Lindgren in 1944. This success is considered as breaking fundamentally “the pattern of what up till then had been the accepted formula for little girl heroines.”⁴ However, this little independent and strongest girl in the world, –both physically, mentally and financially– also faced criticism. As an instance, Judith Stinton⁵ believes that Pippi is not a real person. What is understood from her discourse is that Pippi's friends Tommy and Annika are more tangible people that children can identify with. On the other hand, Stinton accuses Pippi's stories for containing other discriminative values, such as having a father who is the king of an island with black cannibal people, which can reflect racist values.⁶ Moreover, Pippi's mother is presented as an angel in the book, with passive characteristics. She argues that Pippi's behavior with her friends –such as giving them gender biased gifts–, and her friends' behavior also doesn't reflect that they have any development in their way of thinking about gender roles, or the way a boy or a girl should behave or seem. This gives an impression that Pippi was an exemption among the girls, and the characters in her books were not well-developed enough.

However, we witness appearance of other characters in Swedish children's books such as Jujja and Tomas Wieslander's *Mamma Mu and the Crow*⁷, which represent a special narration of females. I would describe Mamma Mu's character as a self-motivated, brave and happy female person who likes to experience new challenges

¹ There are 24 books published from Alfie Atkins series, by Rabén & Sjögren publication since 1972 till 2008.

² Original Swedish name: [*Mamma, pappa, barn : en bok för barn om kärleks- och sexuallivet*] Written by Siv Widerberg, Published in Gothenburg, by Göteborg Zinderman, 1971.

³ The original name in Swedish: [*Pippi Långstrump*]

⁴ Stinton, Judith. *Racism & Sexism in children's books*. London: Writes and readers publishin coperative, 1979, p. 112.

⁵ *ibid.*

⁶ *ibid.*, pp. 112-116

⁷ Original Swedish name: *Mamma Mu och Kråkan*

no matters how impossible and big they are. She also appears to have a kind character that makes her able to deal with her close friend the Crow, who is a nagging, conservative, and stuffy male character that always tries to remind her for the probable negative consequences of her actions.

Despite Mamma Mu is a courageous and adventurous female character, reflections of naïvity and immaturity can be felt in her behavior. She believes that nothing is impossible, but this belief sometimes causes her facing problems. Of course, both Mamma Mu and the Crow have immaturity in the way they behave, and it seems they both have mistakes; but she represents a character that when does mistakes, she still can accept the consequences, and tries to be responsible and fix the things. On the other hand her friend has difficulties for accepting his own faults and becomes angry instead of tending to be more receptive and responsible. My argument suggest that the characteristic shown for both gender in Mamma Mu series, worth consideration since the female has an active personality that challenges the clichés, but is still naïve; although male character portrays an unaccepted character stereotypical¹

However, much research is done with interest on gender and children's books in Sweden. According to Marie Nahnfeldt², an interesting instance is an essay published in 1998 at the Center for Women's Studies in Stockholm, in which Tove Carlsund examined illustrations of three known children's books. The study, which is far from being broad enough for a generalization, shows that the girls more often were illustrated with eyelashes than boys. Another finding was that girls rarely had eyelashes at the pictures when they were home, but if they went out with her mother was illustrated both with eyelashes.³ Still, this can highlight the possible existence of visual sexualization in children's books.

Moreover, according to Swedish children's institution⁴, which goes through all the newly released books each year, many more books was given out for girls than for boys in the year 2000; at least if we exclude sports books. Marie Nahnfeldt considers

¹ There are 11 books published from *Mamma Mu and the Crow* series, by Natur och Kultur publication since 1993 till 2008.

² Marie Nahnfeldt, and Lena Edlund. 'Könsroller i barnböcker.' In *Allt för föräldrar*. April 4, 2002, accessed April 24, 2010, <<http://www.alltforforaldrar.se/page/artikel/hellre-batman-an-madicken>>.

³ *ibid*.

⁴ Svenska barnboksintitutet

it as a probable reaction to the criticism that the previous years have been a lot more books about boys in circulation.¹

However, excessive focus on the importance of taking account of gender sensitivities when producing a book, is to an extent that can interestingly be reflected in the professional career of those who are involved with children's books publication in Sweden. This has outraged the authors and illustrators who believe that considering these sensitivities has limited their artistic freedom. Pija Lindenbaum expressed during a conference in 2008 with a focus on *gender perspectives and values in children's and youth literature in the world of books* that: "When I am done with my book, it is my job to have already thought of that." She also talked about her fear of all the focus on gender roles in her books, despite it is considered as "gender correctness", will affect and limit her creative work process and make the books less.²

2.3.2 Representation of gender in Iranian children's books

As far as I could find through my research, most of the studies done in this area has targeted schoolbooks. According to Elnaz Mohammadi³, some scholars believe that even currently many schoolbooks are written by gender bias, in a way that a glance over the statistics about Farsi literature books of primary school period shows that 67% of 185 illustrations in these books depict male characters, while only 14% represent females. For example in the mentioned book for grade 3, from 31 illustrations that show human images, 24 contain males and only 3 of them contain females. The 4 remaining images show both of the genders, yet they depict the a mother who is carrying food for the male members of the family who are working in the field, or the show a mother standing in the queue for buying bread from bakery. According to the same research, from the total 127 lessons that human exist in them in a way, 69% of the characters are men and 17% women.

However, what happens in the children's books market in Iran is different. Many foreign children's books enter Iran's publication, become translated and end up in

¹ *ibid.*

² Sanna Ulfspärre, 'Genus en het fråga i barnböcker.' In *Folkbladet.nu*. January 1, 2009, accessed April 5, 2010, <<http://www.folkbladet.nu/?p=132808>>.

³ Elnaz Mohammadi, 'This Disorganized Education, my translation from Persian [این آموزش و پرورش بی [سر و سامان]. In *Khabar online*. January 3, 2010, accessed April 7, 2010, <<http://www.khabaronline.ir/news-33912.aspx>>.

the people's houses. Even more evoking books such as *Pippi Longstocking* that challenge traditional expectations and values, or the more moderate ones such as *Alfie Atkins* and *Mamma mu*, are being read there. Whilst, it is less expected from the censorer character of the previously mentioned monitoring governmental organization to allow the so-called western culture and cultural products that might have aim of westernizing Iranian culture –an expression that they tend to term it Iranian national-religious identity–, or might lead to do so, easily penetrate to and influence the cultural milieu. Thus, it seems the sensitivities are more focused on the internal cultural productions than what is imported; at least in the children's books part.

However, based on personal observation, I would argue that as a result of prevailing noticeable tendencies in the contemporary Iran's art milieu¹ of seeking for the national identity –a concept which is far different from the governmental narration of it–, or going back to the original roots, and also because of having a rich amount of ancient literature, it is more probable to have illustrated stories in which the narration happens in former times. Thus, characters can represent more traditional manners, and be involved with more stereotypical gender related activities. This is a fact that should be considered doing research in this field.

¹ Especially reflected in Iran's fine arts and architecture

3. Case studies

3.1 Overview of Semiotic Analysis

Semiotic analysis is embedded in linguistics and scholars such as Saussure, Barthes, and Peirce have put their efforts on developing and discussing it. Generally, semiotic analysis is about a systematic assessment of the words and images of a text and their relationship together. This approach should not be considered as an impressionistic reading since it goes beyond that and engage an extremely thorough and complete examination of the literal aspects of a text which are termed “denotations”, in addition with the meanings or “connotations” that are linked with the entire text.

The plan used for this analysis of representation of gender in illustrated children’s books is based on the method of Gemma Penn¹. As she describes, a semiotic analysis studies how the complex interaction happen between the literal elements of a text which are called denotations, and how the production of connotations works via cultural understanding of the denotations. Connotations are considered as second level of a reader’s meaning perception of a linguistic, pictorial, or textual sign. This means for having a connotative understanding one needs a cultural knowledge, but in the same time this process produces cultural knowledge also. In other words, we need to possess cultural knowledge to understand meanings of a linguistic, pictorial, or textual sign, but in turn, through the act of our reading also produce a cultural knowledge.

Inside cultural knowledge, there are some series of signs and stories termed myth. A semiotic approach suggests that through myths, culture constructs a sort of natural understanding of ways of existence. Penn notes that “myth is the means by which a culture naturalizes, or renders invisible, its own norms and ideology”.²

By using the semiotic approach, this thesis tries to uncover the shared cultural meanings that are noticeable in the books of *The lover and Sanam* and *That’s what a princess does*, in order to find out the possible myths of gender. Furthermore, by questioning the signs and symbols of representation of gender that may exist in the mentioned children’s books, this study peruses a deeper analysis of how the existing or developing myths can in turn affect the cultural expectations of the gender.

¹ Penn.

² *ibid.*, p.231.

3.2 Analysis procedure

The data is analyzed by constructing a discourse comprising analysis of literal and pictorial elements of the books that are appropriate for the semiotic approach. The discussed semiotical elements are denotation, syntagm, connotation, and cultural knowledge or myth that could be found in the empirical material. Especial attention is paid to the literal descriptions of, and the context in which characters are illustrated; as well as the positions, size and general depictions of their bodies, the movements or activities that they are involved with. Facial and bodily emotional expressions, the arrangement of visual elements of the scene are other instances that tried to be considered in the analysis.

For a deeper analysis, I also notice any part of the text in which the illustrations are anchored to the text inasmuch as they could not be completely understood, unless they are connected to the concepts expressed through the words. Furthermore, any example in which the illustration and the text collaborate for making a meaning beyond the literal aspects and further than the mere image; a phenomenon which in semiotics is termed relay. In the analysis, I also tried to note wherever additional meanings are generated through the sequence of events in the storyline, or via relationship between the words and the sequence, which is termed syntagm¹. These notions are very important since they are extensively used in illustrated books.

Overall, through the interpretation of the images and texts, for each denotation I consider a connotation –or a meaning – connected with both of them. In addition, I emphasize on the needed cultural knowledge that helps constructing connotations and I try to interrogate the connotations and cultural knowledge to define the gender myths that are present or created in the books.

¹ See Penn, 2000, for further explanation of these terms in relation to semiotic analysis

3.3 *The lover and Sanam*

This book narrates the story of a wandering lover who is a good instrument player and even a better singer. He falls in love with Shah Sanam, who was the only daughter of a very rich merchant¹ in Tabriz, a city in north of Iran. He asks Sanam to speak with her father for giving him time to travel around the world for seven years to earn money so he would be able to marry her; and she also gives her word not to marry anybody else until the lover comes back. He travels to Aleppo and gets support by the governor there and becomes rich. However, after seven years while he has almost forgotten about the time for going back, he gets informed that Shah Sanam is going to get married soon. He tries to return home with the help of an unknown man; a horse rider who is actually an angel. Finally, he can marry his love.

Even though *The lover and Sanam* is published in the current decade, the story is reminiscent of the old classics in which the loyal female character who is in love with the protagonist passively waits for her love to come and get her; and the male protagonist is free as a bird to disappear and leave his loved one in expectancy and uncertainty.

A stereotypical dominancy of the male can be felt in the story line, as well as in illustrations. While having 25 frames of illustrated text² and a story that has at least three main female characters³ and four male ones⁴; only nine (36%) of the illustrations contain female characters; from which 6 (24%) depict the female protagonist (Sanam), two contain the second female character (lover's sister), and one of the female characters who is the Lover's mother does not visually appear in any illustration.

¹ She is daughter of a merchant, not an official princess; but because of the way she appears in the book context, and also according to the socio-historical context of Iranian society in which each city used to have a ruler who was always a rich man, a semi-king, I considered Sanam as a girl who potentially could be a representative of girl –maybe a semi-princess– belonging to this social class of the people.

² In addition with the book cover

³ Shah Sanam, the Lover's mother, the Lover's sister

⁴ The Lover, Shah Valad who is the antagonist, the ruler of Aleppo, and the hours rider angel. Of course Shah Sanam's father is also one of the male characters, but the narrator only points to him and there is no actual scene in the story that he takes any action or does something noticeable.

The first visual impression from the book is driven from the cover¹ which is representing the sad face of Shah Sanam in foreground and the singing and playing lover in the background of image.

Stereotypical visual characteristics of a passive female can easily be noticed in this image. Closed eyes, rosy cheeks, slightly curled strings of hair that cross over the face, tears, pouty lips, and emphasized breasts, all signal what one expects from a becoming outdated² stereotypical notion of a woman. Furthermore, I argue that her body language also represents a kind passivity. Opened arms, slightly turned backwards head and closed eyes, and her bare neck, jog the beholder's memory about the passive persons who is ready to accept the fate or a sad destiny.



Figure 1: *The lover and Sanam*, book cover.

Moreover, the female body is here depicted in a close relationship with the surrounding nature. This fusion happens in the floral ornamental patterns of the crown and the clothes, and the bird which is sitting on her hand. The appearance of

¹ Please note that Persian is one of the 'right to left' layout languages; thus, the left side of this image is the front cover.

² This notion of woman of course, is not completely outdated; and we can still witness many examples of such characters in other visual phenomena such as movies as well as books; where ever the creator of that character intends to emphasize femininity. For this reason, I call it 'becoming outdated', since my discussion argues about the disappearance of such characteristics for describing a woman, from contemporary visual culture.

the bird in this scene is reminiscent of stereotypical of female protagonists, as an instance the old Snow White or the more recent Shrek's Princess Fiona, that whenever the narration aims to emphasize on their smooth feminine characteristics, they appear to be, dance, or sing in the nature and usually duet with the birds. A cultural knowledge is needed here to understand this is a sign of 'femaleness' as in the tradition of fairytales. The cultural notion created is that there is a natural naïve and trustable character in women (or at least in women worthy to be loved by the male protagonist) that even other naïve and innocent creatures can easily trust in, and share their innocence with. Furthermore, Sanam's tears are illustrated in such way that enhance the feeling of connectedness to the nature. They have shape of cedar trees and imprinted on her face, as the face is a part of background nature.

Other considerable issue on the front cover is how the book title is converted to a more pattern like image, than a normal calligraphy. The word 'lover' (عاشق) –the first one in the right side¹– that points to the male protagonist has a bolder and stronger visual value than the word 'Sanam' (صنم) that denotes the girl's name. Furthermore, there is a little red heart placed on the feminine part of this title that belongs to Sanam. Heart is globally known as a visual symbol of love; and the placement of such a symbol on the feminine part of a text that connotes a mutual relationship which is created under the influence of love can mean, in such a relationship, love concerns the feminine side; and the masculine side has another state which has a distance from emotional values. This is while it was possible for the designer to place the heart on the word 'and' (و), which is both literally, metaphorically, and visually the connection between the masculine and feminine side of such a state of relationship.

However, to consider both back and front cover together as a single image, the visuals can connote other messages. The back cover shows a way surrounded by soldiers that goes probably towards Shah Sanam's city or father's house. Though, I believe that this was not originally intended by the illustrator that to this extent emphasize on the presence of the masculine power in this image; in a way that seems soldiers are blocking the way and preventing her to escape or go somewhere else, and direct her to the only possible or correct way that she has to go. It seems that it is a decision made in the publication process by the person responsible for the layout to

¹ Notice that Persian is a right to left language.

reduce the scale of the illustration, for having more space on front cover to layout the title of the book. That is why the right part of the back cover is exact symmetrical copy of the left part. In addition, this effect caused the appearance of the architectural complex in the horizon with a down to up perspective to look like an unbearable construction of power; a monster that guzzles everything in, which symbolically enhances the feeling of omnipresence of a greater power in this case Shah Sanam's Father (if we assume the architectural complex signifies the father's house), or the cultural context that she lives in (if the architectural complex is taken as a symbol for her city).

Yet, ignoring the extended part, this image still contains a pervasive masculine power. Despite existence of the playing male protagonist which seems to be different from the rest of males in his body expression, appearance, and his position in the image. The curvy lines beginning from his instrument and leading the eyes towards the city that represent the music or the song that he sings, give the impression that the concept which is transferred through his song has an inviting positive message which calls Sanam back to what she is escaping from.

In pages four and five, Sanam appears for the first time in the story line, and before this there is no human element in the illustrations, and the narrative is positively introducing the Lover's character as a kind man with excellent skills in music; and also the hierarchal position of the girl who belongs to a high-class family and is extremely loved by her father. In this scene, the narrative is describing the first time she finds out that the protagonist is in love with her. Despite the text denotes that Sanam becomes happy of hearing that, but images connote different message. She still seems with the same sad and passive expression and from her body expression one can feel she is whimpering. However, reader can soon understand that the problem is existence of a higher male position who has greater power and more right to decide or let the future marriage take place.

In the next page, text and illustration help to relay a clearer message; and that is where Sanam asks the lover to speak with her father for getting permission for marriage, and she explains that how much she is loved by the father and he will do anything for making her happy. Nevertheless, the lover does not comment about Sanam's suggestion and comes up with another idea that she should ask her father to

give him some time that he can enhance his financial situation to be able to marry her, and also compete with Shah Valad, the antagonist character of the story.



Figure 2: Sanam's father, from *The lover and Sanam*, pp. 6 and 7.

Fear or hatred against the tyrant fathers and their determinant position is one of the repetitive themes in Iranian literature and cinema. This is an instance of ‘relay’ in which the illustration and the text collaborate to make meaning beyond what mere image or text could express. This image depicts a stereotypical rigorous and strict father. A cultural knowledge is needed to decipher his clothes, and his way of laying on the chair. These visual elements refer to very old traditional clothing of Iranian men. In addition, his mustache symbolizes a stereotypical male power summoned in a man; since in today’s Iran, having a thick rich mustache still by some specific groups of people such as gangs or those men who are proud of being a so-called ‘real man’, is considered as a admired sign of masculinity. Meanwhile, the same thing by the young generation –not necessarily, but most of the times– deciphers as having a retro macho character, or a narrow minded way of thinking.

Thus, the cultural knowledge explains that a typical masculine father with a traditional way of thinking exists; praised and empowered by the dominant masculine system. This statement is driven from depiction of the other male

characters in the background which are praising him. Similar visual phenomenon is repeated on the book cover, where the lover is recalling Sanam while he is supported and accompanied by a strict military bunch of other men. Moreover, cultural information produced is that men/fathers and in general the patriarchal system is an existing reality that should/does determine the destiny.

However, story continues and it is the time for visual presentation of the lover who is depicted with a noticeable different appearance comparing to other male characters of the story, to an extent that beholder can find presence of allegedly female motifs in him. Long hair blowing in the wind, red cheeks, delicate face, slim body connote conventional ideas about femininity. In addition, his dress that represents a traditional Persian male costume is transformed to such an extent that makes it inclined to the way a contemporary women's dress might look like. Though, other visual elements such as his instrument and the bird which is singing with him, as well as a blue halo circling his head, give a stronger impression of a man with a smooth, affectionate, and lovely character. This is while that neither Sanam's father nor Shah Valad do not bear the halo in the pictures. Only once, Shah Valad is depicted with a square-shaped halo rather than a circular one, which for me stresses on having a more rational and masculine character, than an emotional one.

Nevertheless, the protagonist still keeps his maleness by having a saw-like sword that is visually well emphasized; meanwhile, the singing bird keeps the safe respectful distance with him and does not sit on him, but lies in a lower position that I consider it as accentuating this smoothified maleness. Moreover, intended consciously or unconsciously by the illustrator or not, there is an ornamental pattern in the lower part of the dress which reminds of the male genital organ.

However, from now in the narrative, until the time that the lover goes back to his city to prevent the upcoming marriage¹, despite the text provides possibilities for showing the female characters of the story such as the lover's mother and sister, it seems the illustrator avoids doing that. Throughout this period, illustrations show Sanam only once more, who appears to keep her typical sad and passive appearance with her 'bird friend'; and two other frames contain some female minor characters.

¹ That almost takes almost eleven frames

One of these frames seems to depict a celebration in which a man who has the same instrument as the lover's, is holding a girl in an erotic way, while three other girls in the frame are singing. This frame has no text, and in previous and next pages the text is narrating that the travelling merchant who is asked by Sanam to find the lover and send him back, is being told about the positive characteristics of the lover's personality which draws the impression of having a heroic manner. Further, the narration explains how the merchant plans to hold unpretentious and simple celebrations in every city –as instructed by Sanam– to get hold of the lover who always appreciates and attends celebrations of this kind.

Nonetheless, there is no text clarifying that the man with the instrument is the lover himself in another place, enjoying his new life style in the royal circle, and completely has forgotten about his promise to Sanam; or this is one of those simple celebrations held by the traveling merchant with the aim of finding the right musician that matches all the characteristics.

In practice, having a text describing what is happening in this particular image can potentially lead to censorship, which is always done by the *Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance*, or simply provoke the readers. Even so, the abstract nature of style of illustration used for this book is more probable to escape the censorship. Though, since there is no straightly supporting literal denotations for this image, drawing connotative meanings seems tricky. However, paranoidly assuming the first hypothesis to be true, the cultural knowledge that might be involved in interpreting this image notes that men can easily forget their loyalty and it may possibly happen that they do not keep their words, whilst their wife/fiancé usually never betrays them and innocently looks forward to achieve them again. The cultural knowledge constructed here can be that even if a man does a mistake, he is always welcome to remember his promise and try to recompense the faults.



Figure 3: Shah Valad and the lover, from *The lover and Sanam*, p. 41.

Later on, the narration provides possibility of running a visual comparison between the two main male characters. Stereotypical characteristics are noticeable. The protagonist bears more masculinity, which is reflected through his stubby fat body, short height, aggressive body language, his sword, and having shorter and rougher hair and his thicker mustache, comparing to the lover, while he still bears the described more feminine qualities. What adds more to this impression is the connection between the singing wolf, and the dark night, in addition to the toughly presented tower-

shaped building that does not seem to have a bright event going on inside, right over Shah Valad's head.

Here the illustration serves as a relay, inasmuch as the future life with Shah Valad as the text does not explain, can be as dark and regretting as the image explains. A fact that Sanam was aware of since she was intending to commit suicide before the lover enters the ceremony. The tower also, can be a metaphor for a phallus, used to represent masculine power of Sha Valad. Moreover, according to research done by Flannery Quinn¹, there is a symbolical father's association with night and in particular the moon, which is reflected in children's literature found in a variety of books for children². Thus, the presence of a moon in the next illustration can simply be a reflection of time of the day, or can connote the presence of a patriarchal theme,

¹ Flannery Quinn, Suzanne M. 'The Depictions of Fathers and Children in Best-Selling Picture Books in the United States: A Hybrid Semiotic Analysis.' *Fathering: A Journal of Theory, Research, & Practice about Men as Fathers*, 2009: 140-158.

² However, she does not describe any negative or emphasize on any necessarily positive symbolic meaning for this association.

related to and supporting unwanted or forced marriages, which are still possible to take place in some sub-cultural contexts of Iranian society.¹

Finally, Shah Valad seemingly sadly agrees to give up, whereas there is no text describing it; but text denotes later by the lover that tells him:

*“Listen! I am going to solace you. My sister is beautiful and in beauty has nothing less than Shah Sanam. Now I am a wealthy man and my sister has enough gold and silver. Choose her as your wife, and live happily and prosperously in her love, as I will do the same with my darling.”*²

The narrator says that he accepted, and they got married and everybody became happy and all started a good life together; and the illustration in the next page shows the marriage.

Once again, the reader is given the impression that the women are naïve and passive, and this is the dominant male whose decision determines destiny of the women; a theme that repeats and continues throughout the cultural context of Iran historically and today.

However, cultural knowledge is needed to decipher the lover’s proposal as a sportsmanship³, and what is connoted is visually symbolized by appearance of two huge male characters in the background, connected together in a way that represents a close brotherhood and friendship. The cultural knowledge that can be produced is that there is a more valuable concept between humans (or maybe men) than being nice and more feminine, which in accordance with the prevailing patriarchal system determines and shadows the relationships.

¹ However, it should be noticed that the moon has in many societies been associated with femininity also –for example, menstruation cycles connected to the moon, etc. thus, a slight contradiction in the symbolic meanings of the moon might exist with the findings of this particular research.

² Shams, Mohammad Reza. *The lover and Sanam*. Tehran: Shabaviz, 2003, p. 45, (My translation from Persian).

³ In Persian: مردانگی /mardanehgi/, that literally can be translated to ‘manship’, and refers to a moral behavior that is fair, honest, and polite in games or sports or other competitions and situations in life. Having this characteristic is highly praised all over the treasure of Persian literature. Despite this word is used for describing the mentioned manner for both of the genders, in challenged and debated to a huge extent by feminist activists in Iran, because of its gender biased connoted meaning.

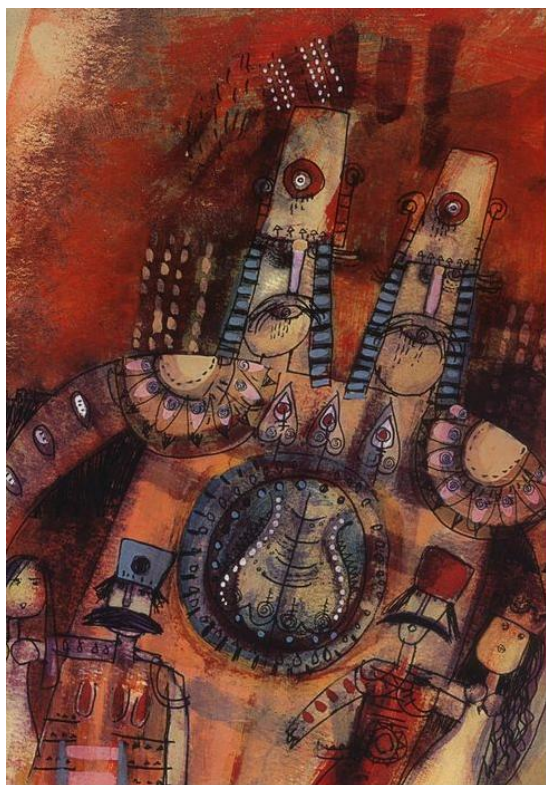


Figure 4: Marriage of the couples, from *The lover and Sanam*, p. 47.

In Semiotics, this is termed syntagm; a phenomenon that explains how the sequences of events in the story, as well as the sequence of the words and images, create additional meaning for the beholder. This explains how a perfect lover and an ideal man can commit the blamable action of proposing his sister to his competitor.

However, this can be considered as a reward for the other man for not making more troubles, and still respecting Sanam's promise, after seven years; and letting the lover speak in the wedding ceremony and tell to everyone who he is, while Shah Valad's brother tried to

stop him from doing that. Yet, this can establish a concept that women are commodities, and can reduce their value to this extent that the connection point of the giant masculine figures –intended or not– contains an erotic shape of a bare woman's back.

Moreover, there is much less attention and value given to women in this frame in a degree that their bodies unfairly are cropped by the frame border so that it connotes that they are not that important in the counter play between the men.

All in all, other interesting issues in terms of gender also exist in this book, which I am not going through and amplify them, but worth to be considered for further analysis. As an instance, a man appears to be an angel. That might have roots in religious beliefs in Iranian society, in which religious legends –in most cases Imams– mysteriously appear to assist the helpless people, and then disappear; that can suggest a different notation of what is accepted to be an angel. Furthermore, all females appear without hijab in this story; which can both point to the fact that the story takes place long ago in a traditional context –some time perceptibly before Iran's revolution, after which rules about compulsory hijab for women were issued since 1980–, or reflect another aspect of gender related issues in Iran that argues

compulsory hijab for women. Compulsory hijab for women is one of the important concerns of Iranian feminists. That is why Nima Naghibi argues “in contemporary Iran, the hijab is the site upon which issues of class, gender, and nationalism are continuously contested, negotiated, and thought.”¹

3.4 *That's What a Princess Does*

This book narrates the story of a very young princess who fights with robbers, can do hardest tackles in the hockey game, dupe dragons and saves a prince's life; all which are jobs that traditionally have been expected from a hero, not a heroine. The book has 26 illustrated pages, but since it is aimed for small children, there is not much text accompanying the images.

The book cover provides the reader with the first visual impression, which is showing the little smiling princess in a pink costume with two wings, on an intense pink color; in addition with a vignette-like small illustration of her chasing a huge scared dragon with a sword. The back cover also contains three small illustrations each of which depicts the princess in an exceptional situation for girls to appear in; one with a sword in the nature, one in the ice hockey field wearing ice hockey equipments, and the last one wearing boxing gloves in a boxing ring. Images on the back cover are accompanied with a text, explaining that:

“When the princesses wake up, they always eat breakfast in the bed. Then maybe they inaugurate some ships, or relax with a little ice hockey. Sometimes they are on a trip. Then it happens that they fence and scare away both robbers and dragons. Because, that's what a princess does!”²

This text almost summarizes the whole narrative and provides the reader with information about how gender stereotypes are represented in this book, but what is illustrated in the book shows more detailed evidences for how its creator has considered the gender stereotypes through the design process. However, the book cover signals two different stereotypical messages to the reader. The overemphasized

¹ Nima Naghibi, *Rethinking global sisterhood: western feminism and Iran*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007, p. 65.

² Per Gustavsson, *Så gör prinsessor*. Stockholm: Natur och kultur, 2003, p. back cover.

prevalence of pink color, in addition with the little cute girl, and the word princess connote that there is something really feminine about this book; while the smaller images explain about stereotypical masculine behaviors. Moreover, the book title and the abstract text clarify what all these mean; ‘that is what a princess does’. Since images are anchored to the words inasmuch as it is not possible to completely understand without help from them, I consider it as a ‘relay’.

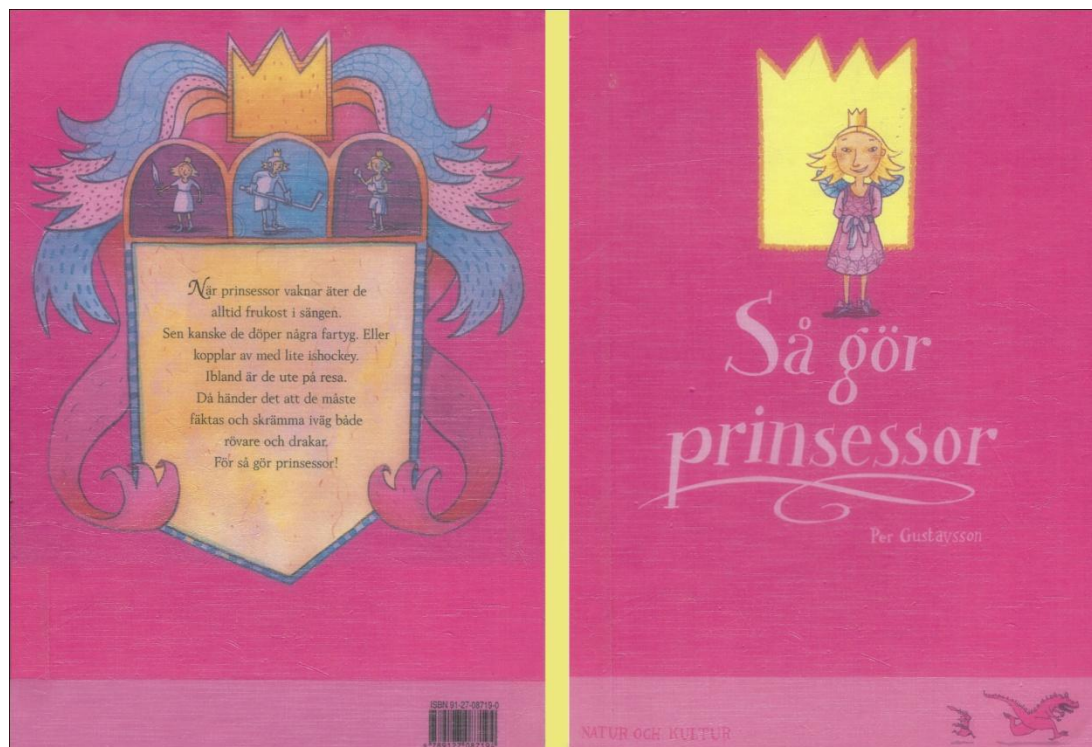


Figure 5: *That's what a princess does*, book cover.

Thus, a previous cultural knowledge is needed to explain that, the first and more noticeable visual motifs on the cover point to being a girl; and a kind of girl which is the best in terms of her manner, behavior, and appearance since she is a princess and belongs to the elite class. Moreover, her blondness probably involves with creating a national proud, and intensifies the mentioned characteristics. Even her body gesture reminds of the old standard Swedish female way of thanking and expressing gratefulness. In addition, the wings she has, gives her both a notion of being an angel-like, smooth female character, as well as having a more contemporary look; similar to girl clothes in masquerade parties.

Consequently, a cultural knowledge produced is that all the unusual images and explanations that are seen here, are what is expected from the modern notion of a

standard girl to do; to keep her previous praised values, but to act as an independent, brave, and self confident person who is able to do all the masculine things.

Further on in the book, narrator explains that when the princesses wake up, they always eat breakfast in the bed. This is reflected through three illustrations in which she is depicted lying in her pink bed and a pair of hands with an unknown owner¹ is bringing her breakfast, in the first one. This is followed by the second image that shows a big piece of cake accompanied with some berries and sweets, and her hand which is delicately aiming to pick up the first bit. And the third one that surprisingly shows she has just finished her breakfast and is licking the plate; while there are some strawberries and small pieces of the cake fallen on the blanket and floor, and her dog is watching her in a doubtful way. In this frame the text denotes the main slogan of the newly presented ideas in this book, that ‘because, that’s what a princess does’.

The cultural knowledge required for deciphering this is that having breakfast in the bed is a tradition of favoring children at special occasions when they deserve being treated and get more attention than usual, such as a birthdays. Moreover, eating a big slice of cake is not a stereotypical female action in today’s Western society, where slim figures are idealized and women are encouraged to watch their figure; likewise, the messy way of finishing the food. Thus the cultural knowledge created here –if we consider the princess, as a new notion for contemporary girls that the author is intending to depict– is that to be a girl means to be both respected and proud of yourself; and for being a girl you don’t need to behave as an old fashioned genteel way, since nowadays a bit of wildness is needed and also appreciated.

Moreover, the mentioned relationship between females and animals exists here; not with the birds this time, but with a dog, which is a kind of animal that gives the impression of obeying the orders and being submissive. Here also the dog appears obedient and in a lower position beside the bed. Of course dogs can connote protection also, but later in the narrative, where the princess is going to fight with a

¹ This is so difficult to determine the owner of the hand’s gender, since the body is not depicted. But due to the undulating style of the sleeves, and by referencing to the other clothes depicted in the illustrations for example clothes in princess’s wardrobe, there is a slight tendency to consider them as female hand. In this case, the servant, or the one who is bringing the breakfast, might be a female person, which can potentially connote that females do the housekeeping/ serving jobs. However, as the illustration does not determine any obvious gender, it is not impossible for the reader to assume they are male hands.

gang of robbers, the dog appears to be empowered and braved out by standing beside the princess in a way that is humiliating another angry bigger dog that belongs to the thieves.

Further, where the story depicts the princess choosing suitable jewelries, clothes and shoes among hundreds of pinkish ones –that there is no jeans, coats, or even shirts among them–, and brushing her hair with a feminine gesture in front of the mirror; the reader is given the impression that this kind of girl enjoys being what she is, while having the ability of choosing and deciding for herself, and independently doing her own works. This sequence is followed by a close-up of her face with a mischievous blink, which takes the reader to the next unexpected upcoming activities; such as inaugurating a new bridge and a new ship. This is where the narration starts to examine the notion of the girl in practice in the outer world.

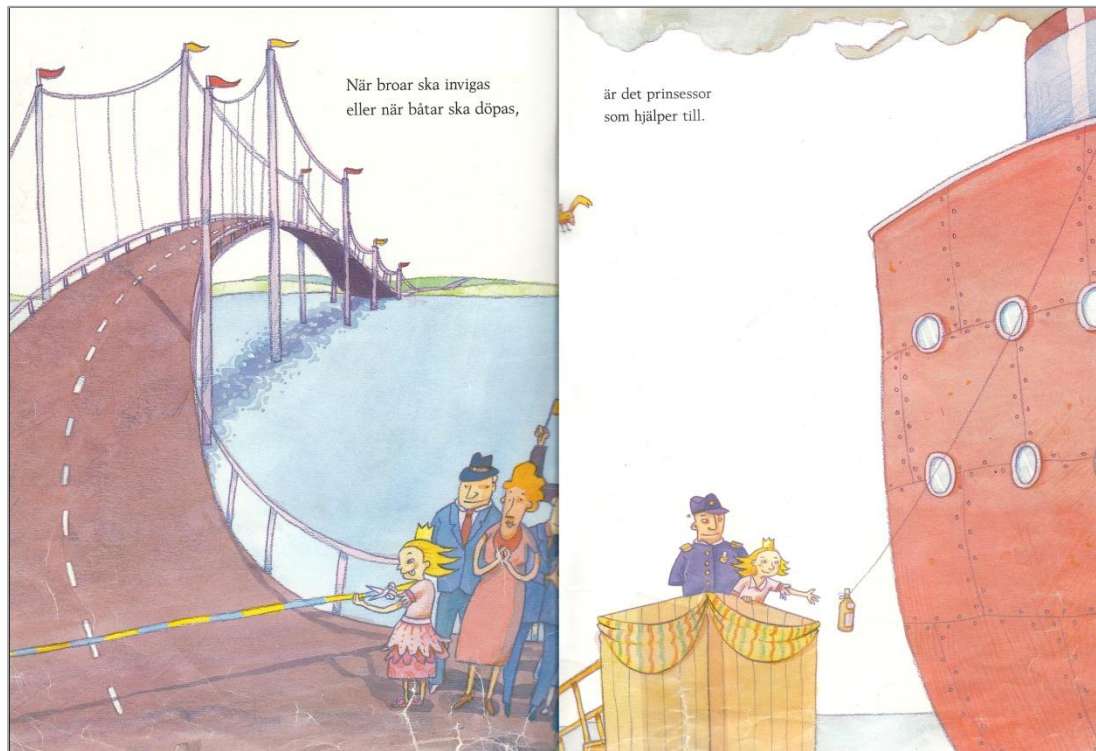


Figure 6: Inauguration ceremonies, from *That's what a princess does*, pp. 8 and 9.

In both of the images related to inauguration ceremonies, presence of male controlling dominant characters is noticeable, that seem appreciating her and in the same time carefully monitoring the process in a way that it seems they are ready to prevent possible mistakes. It can be felt that the men present in these frames are bosses or involved in high ranked formal positions. This fact reminds of one of the

findings in a recent study¹ done in 2006, that among a sample of 200 top-selling, both award winners and popular books, “the occupations of the predominant adult male and female characters would more often be gender traditional than gender nontraditional”². That is why we witness male bosses that exist in the pictures.

In general, amount of male presence in this book is more than the females, since the overall number of them is more in all of the illustrations; especially in those that both of the genders exist in the same time. Furthermore, in another illustration the priority is given to a man in a queue for getting autograph from her, and among the other two women who are standing behind him in the queue, one is carrying a baby and the other is taking care of a dog. Nevertheless, there is an interesting point in the bodily expression from the man who is very happy, which is not similar to the male stereotypical way of expressing happiness and looks in a way that in popular culture might be called a ‘sissy’ behavior. In addition, the other noticeable point is that the princess is writing the name Gunnar on the small ship that belongs to the happy man. Gunnar is a male name in Swedish language, and this is while traditionally ships and boats cannot get male names when they are being inaugurated.

The next activity that princess is involved with is playing ice hockey that is illustrated through three frames of which the first one shows a bunch of male ice hockey players who are standing beside the field, ridiculing and making fun of the princess who is practicing and warming up inside the field. With a text that explains that sometimes princesses relax by playing a little bit ice hockey. The second and third images show them in the game, that all men are badly hurt and fallen on the ground because of the hard tackles of princess. The settings of these scenes create a warrior-like image of the princess in a battle field, especially because of the dead-like men and fallen gloves on the ground that remind of a fight that led to injuries and chopped off hands. This is while the text denotes that such a thing is like a relaxation for the girl (princess) and that’s what they do.

However, that theme of one girl who can defeat a lot of men alone, which is intensified by the appearance of number ‘1’ printed on her hockey clothes and number ‘99’ on the last man who is strongly tackled and falling down, repeats again in the next section of story where she fences the dangerous robbers. Interestingly, all

¹ Hamilton, Anderson, Broaddus, and Young.

² *ibid.*, p.759.

of the ones who should be taken away from her way are male, as it was in the hockey game also. Thus, the needed cultural information explains that this is the masculine power in the society that brings up the unrest and also scorns the femininity. Consequently, the cultural knowledge produced here clarifies that as a female, you should not allow, and you are able to repress the negative masculine force.



Figure 7: Defeating the thieves, from *That's what a princess does*, pp. 14 and 15.

However, not as a criticism but as a point, I argue that relating all the negativities to masculinity or showing men as the bad force, is also a way of gender stereotyping that exists in this book. Thus, if there were some women between the thieves, the reader would not consider the concept of fighting against the badness equals with fighting against the masculinity; and surprisingly in a stereotypical masculine way with a sword.

Yet, other gender stereotypes also are noticeable in this book. For example in the next frame after defeating the thieves, a man is shaking hand with the princess to show his gratefulness, while a woman is treating her with a glass of fruit juice, that reminds of being a house wife. Additionally, in the next frame that a dragon is attacking the village which has already gotten rid of the thieves' gang, among the nine scared escaping people out of which three are female, there is a woman wearing an apron that connotes the same message again. Also, in the image that shows the

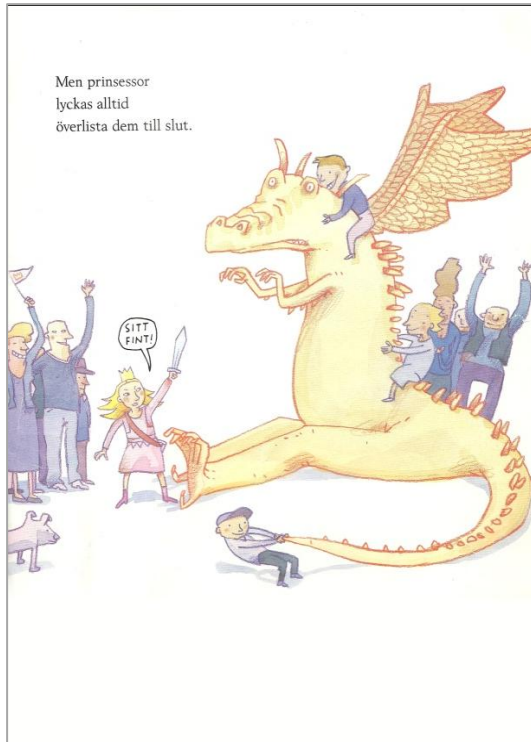


Figure 8: Taming the dragon, from *That's what a princess does*, p. 21.

dragon tamed by the princess, there are three kids, two boys and one girl that are playing with the dragon. Here, boys are depicted more active and braver because one of them is sitting up on the dragon's shoulders, and the other one is playing with and pulling its tail, while the girl is positioned in the safest place on the dragon's back, not in a potentially dangerous place or where that can provoke the dragon.

Moreover, throughout the book, female characters are depicted less active than

men, at least in terms of bodily movements. Male characters more appear to shake hands, clap, applause, attack, play sports, or in general move their bodies in a way, while female characters seem reflecting more neat and controlled emotions, excluding the main character herself. It is interesting to mention that the research findings¹ from 1980s show a bigger percentage of active males as main characters in the children's books; while research from 1990s² suggest that there may have been a positive change about equal percentages of male main characters and female ones to be portrayed as active. However, I put forward that despite they talk about the activeness of the main characters, other characters who have minor roles in the story might still reflect previous stereotypical state of activity.

Further, the narration shows another aspect of the newly presented notion of the girl, which is the ability of choosing her husband that is narrated and depicted by showing the princess, saving a prince from a dark cave in the mountains. The dragon,

¹ Judith R Kinman, and Darwin L. Henderson. 'An analysis of sexism in Newbery Medal Award books from 1977 to 1984', In *Reading*, vol. 38, 1985, pp. 885–889.

J. Allen Williams Jr., JoEtta Vernon, Martha C. Williams, and Karen Malecha. 'Sex role socialization in picture books: An update.', In *Social Science Quarterly*, vol. 68, 1987, pp. 148–156.

² S. Oskamp, K. Kaufman, and L. A. Wolterbeek. 'Gender role portrayals in preschool picture books', In *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, vol. 11, nr 5, 1996, pp. 27–39.

Hamilton.

skeletons, and traces of weapons in front of the cave reminds of the old fairytales in which always a prince saves a princess who is trapped in an inaccessible place protected by a dragon and marries her. Exactly the same thing happens here, but the gender role stereotypes are visa versa. The next image shows the princess and the prince, holding each other's hands in the middle of a romantic scene which is ornamented with elements such roses, flowers, heart-shaped clouds and animals, each of which can connote and emphasize on the feminineness.

A cultural knowledge is produced through these scenes, which reconsiders stereotypical male related gender roles in choosing a suitable mate and proposing a marriage request to her. The new knowledge describes that this act can also be done by a female character, and the passivity and submissiveness which is a part of feminine stereotypical behaviors is not appreciated anymore, while being able to love, be romantic and marry is appreciated and still expected. In addition, the prince who worth to be loved by the princess, also has pinkish colors in his clothes that can describe what are accepted characteristics for males in this new context, which connotes being more feminine. This is enhanced by placement of the dragon in the background behind the prince, that is influenced by watching this romantic scene and is crying; something that is not expected from that huge, strong, angry, and dangerous creature that usually symbolizes the masculine power.

Furthermore, I argue that the scene in which the princess has managed to tame and calm down the angry dragon connotes overcoming the masculine power, and the dragon can be a metaphor for masculinity.

4. Conclusion

This study analyzed the representation of gender in illustrated children's books in Iran and Sweden. The analysis procedure implicated a semiotic approach, involved with a literal-visual analysis of two illustrated children's books, one from Iran, and one from Sweden. The primary purpose was to identify books that feature gender in their visual and literal content that makes them suitable for my analysis that used a semiotic method to interpret the representations of gender-based notions in the illustrations and text. In the analysis of both books, I tried to figure out if there were any prevailing cultural myths of gender present in them. It is possible and probable that the connotational meanings I have interpreted can be biased, since it is in the nature of semiotic approach.

However, my study suggests that there is a tangible difference in the way that gender is visually depicted by the Iranian illustrator, comparing to the way the Swedish one has done. In the Iranian version, biased representations of gender are to a larger scale noticeable, and old gender stereotypes can be detected easier. Nevertheless, the Swedish book shows different notions of gender, which I would call contemporary stereotypes.

I argue that these differences in the representation of gender are emanated from the differences in the contemporary state of the gender discourses in the time and society that these books were produced. My argument suggests that the state of gender discourses in each society can potentially affect and be reflected on the way artists – and in this case, illustrators– represent gender in their artworks. Though, it should be noticed that images in illustrated books are always influenced by a narrative text which is itself a production of the culture that it belongs to. What makes this issue important is the conveyance of the social and ideological values through the text/image media to the children, and as a result to the next generation of the society.

However, the depiction of gender might either be driven from the collective unconscious of the society, a characteristic which I would more tend to relate to the artworks of Ali Namvar; or it can be generated more intentionally from an artist like Per Gustavsson, who's society has reached a level of awareness in its status of gender issues which they hardly can be ignored by its people. Nonetheless, my analysis suggests that in such a society still gender stereotypes are unconsciously working, even when the illustrator intends to escape them. Thus, they might have not

still reached to a satisfying level that unintentionally affect illustrations and find their way to the visual representation.

Furthermore, I put forward that if there are unwritten rules about representation of gender in the Swedish cultural context that limits the illustrators and those who are involved with production of artistic/cultural materials, even more suppressive unwritten and written rules exist in Iran, exerted by both society expectations and the governmental monitoring and censorship that restrict decisions of producers. Consequently, to some extent the qualities of representation of gender in the Iranian children's books should be considered not the mere result of social status of gender issues. In case of *the Lover and Sanam*, it could be possible for not achieving right to publish the book or difficulties in the publishing process, if the female characters were represented in a more extreme way. I do not know to what extent that could affect the actual production process in general or in this specific text, and I do not know if any strong concern existed while this book was under the creation process; but I assume it as a potential factor that unconsciously is capable of changing the way an illustrator decides for his/her artwork.

Considering all these facts, I would argue that the way in which the Iranian book depicts the genders, are yet fairly well driven from what is under debate in today's Iran. The notion of today's ideal Iranian man/husband resembles the represented character of the lover; a man who has less masculine characteristics, and is more affectionate, and respectful towards the women. However, as I previously emphasized, patriarchy has been condemned during the past decades in Iran's society but of course still exists to a large degree and we have much left yet to reach the ideal level of gender equalities. Yet, traces of condemning patriarchy exist in this book.

Additionally, based on personal observation, I would argue that the critics has suggested tangible models of being an ideal contemporary male who is much smoother and bears more feminine characteristics; an expression that I would prefer to call it 'more humanistic' or more 'anti-machoic' characteristics. There have always been lessons about what men should not be, and how they should not behave, for example in the movies that has criticized patriarchy¹. Nonetheless, they almost have never objectively proposed an ideal female character, in comparison with what

¹ See section 2.2

that happens in Swedish cultural context, and we witness appearance of strong female characters that can compete and overcome negative masculine force. In other words, there were less well-developed or at least debated female heroines or characters presented in Iranian visual culture that provides the possibility for female members of the society to identify with and shape their personalities by inspirations from hers; or provide people with information about the developed contemporary narration of women. Most of the times, where the machoism was reprehended in a relationship between the two genders, there was only sympathy with the poor discriminated woman. In addition, exaggerated stereotypical feminine behaviors were usually ridiculed¹ not correctly criticized.

I would assume this as a reason, explaining why in *The lover and Sanam* book, there is an emphasized visual difference between the male protagonist and antagonist, while there is no noticeable visual variation between the female characters in the story.

However, representation of gender in *That's what a princess does* seems to be based on more carefully considered thoughts from beforehand. The illustrator who is also author of the book, had earlier ideas of creating a book that features a specific kind of girl who goes beyond the blamed stereotypical feminine passivity. Despite the author says² that the idea of the princess's character was triggered on the day that his daughter Kate came to him and said that princesses only marry and give birth to children; I would argue that this needed a geared up mind, prepared by integration with the social discourse about gender issues in Swedish society, to grasp these words and convert to an idea for creation of a princess that does not only do so. Nonetheless, the fact that Kate expressed such an idea can still show the existence of gender stereotypes in the very same society that has affected her way of thinking about princesses.

However, the interesting point in Gustavsson's book is that the protagonist has managed to keep some stereotypical female qualities in her character while she appears to have other characteristics that are much less expected from a person with those stereotypical qualities. I would connect this to the idea that "feminists in both

¹ As an instance in Mehran Modiri's TV series such as *Shabhave Barareh (Nights of Barareh)*, which have always a comic theme, and usually criticize socio-cultural issues of Iran's society.

² Gustavsson, Per. 'idé.' In *prinsessor.nu*. accessed May 5, 2010, <http://www.prinsessor.nu/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=13&Itemid=30>.

America and Sweden are beginning to feel there are a great many so-called female values that need appreciation as well”¹. Besides, I argue that comparing to her predecessors such as Pippi Longstocking, whose overemphasized none-feminine characteristics made her a less achievable or less imaginable personality, and almost an exception in the real world; Gustavsson’s princess has a more real and tangible character to identify with. This can also be considered to be a result of the parallel procedures of sexualization and normalization or equalization of notions of gender in the western societies that I have gone through before.

However, despite Gustavsson’s princess still doing fine in her society, and the book is intended to introduce another narration of femininity, gender stereotypes are still noticeable in the book. The reason might be insensible influence of existing stereotypical gender-related concepts in the author’s mind that are visualized through images; or –looked via an optimistic perspective– a deliberate decision for providing place for simultaneous appearance of the new and old gender stereotypes, and as a result creating opportunities for the reader to contest, compare, and evaluate them.

Finally, my study discusses that the flow of socio-cultural debates in each society, can consciously or unconsciously affect the representation of gender in illustrations of children’s books. However, findings of this study should not be treated as decisive facts for generalizing. Furthermore, it should be noticed that the empirical materials used for this thesis belong to a certain era, and might reflect the state of gender debates that each society had been involved with in that particular time.

All in all, I am looking forward to seeing a time that a more balanced portrayal of notion of gender appear into the visual culture of every society, through which masculinity and femininity are not determinant criteria of personalities, rather humanistic values that are positive qualities existing in both masculine and feminine features, define people’s identity.

¹ Stinton, p. 116.

5. Notes on the limitations of the study

5.1 Difficulties and hitches

One of the most critical issues of the current thesis was choosing correct empirical materials that could help having a good analysis. For such a choice, the most ideal situation is that both of books should have the same story; a neutral internationally famous story in which the gender related issues are not already a part of story line itself. Another concern for choosing the books is to have a story that is flexible enough for generating images in different styles with more freedom for illustrators, not a story that forces the illustrators to think in a specific way to visually depict the story's scenes. Meanwhile, having two books which are published in the same era in both of the countries makes another important factor that simplifies it to compare the state of gender issues in both of them.

While the idea of having two books with the mentioned conditions seemed like a good plan, but in practice there were many problems finding them; because of shortage of Persian books here in Sweden and inaccessibility to all of the choices. However, since taking into account all the mentioned characteristics was not feasible for me, considering the existing limitations; thus, the final decision was the theoretically closest options that I could choose.

The same problem accrued for getting hold of the bibliography and literature. Naturally, having access to enough academic resources in Persian language was a problem during the research process. On the other hand, shortage of the advanced skills in Swedish language caused a slower progress in that part of the work which was dealing with Swedish materials.

Furthermore, in some places throughout my discussion that I was giving account of representation of gender in other visual phenomena that illustrated children's books – such as the examples about Iranian cinema–, despite I tried to create a fairly brief introducing abstract, due to the limitations of the current project I could not provide an elaborated set of academic evidences and discussions for amplifying all those concepts. In addition, the purpose of my research was not to analyze them, and I tried to take them as supporting evidences to strengthen my debates.

5.1 Suggestions for further research

Concerning the previously mentioned difficulties for finding the ideal empirical materials, for future research with the same subject of interest, I would suggest trying to applying the mentioned factors to have a better comparison and analysis in the next studies.

Moreover, due to the influence of feminist theories and gender studies, and application of them on children's literature, the major focus of the research in the past quarter of a century has been about the female representation, and understanding and modifying the female bodies and behavior. Though, the matter of how the same patriarchal culture shaped and structured male representation seems less important and "has only very recently emerged as an issue".¹ In my research also the focus was slightly more inclined towards female representation, but I would strongly suggest further studies with a spotlight on masculinity and the visual representation of men.

¹ John Stephens, *Ways of being male: representing masculinities in children's literature and film*. New York: Routledge, 2002, p. x.

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