Environmental problems are seemingly much more catastrophic than figures indicate and they have negatively affected the lives of different species. In Iran, too, the environment faces a crisis. Anthropocentrism has been regarded as a normal behavior in both Western and Eastern human communities and, according to Huggan and Tiffin, it still is common to prioritize the desires of humankind over those of a large number of silent creatures.¹

Further, in their influential study of human–animal relations, Buel, Heise, and Torenber suggest that these so-called anthropocentric ideologies are followed by the devaluation of non-human animals while allotting a high value to humans and their culture.² There are also scholars who argue that humanity’s treatment of other species is too disturbing to be even termed a relationship. Drawing upon Berger’s argument, Bleakley, in his book The Animalizing Imagination, asserts that there is no real contact between humans and animals and that we are moving from engaging with animals to ignoring them in our life.³ Nevertheless, many critics still hope for the world’s biodiversity achieved through a nature-loving perspective because, suggests Mchugh, “animal agency can never simply oppose human identity, and … animal agents, in turn, are never entirely separable from human forms or Presence”⁴.

On the other hand, a closer look at environmental issues gives us an insight into the fact that such attitudes towards the natural world and animals are rooted in the way man defines nature. This image of nature is undoubtedly constructed by culture, history, politics, and, in simpler terms, by humans themselves. That is why Glotfelty (1996), in her book titled Ecocriticism Reader, states that today, if we as cultural experts “are not part of the solution, we are part of the problem.”⁵ As a revisionary approach, ecocriticism has been making efforts to play an essential role in “construct[ing] a new mode of understanding and perception that surpasses nature/culture dichotomy” and prepares the ground for a sustainable society.⁶

Children’s kindness to animals was touched upon in the eighteenth century by such thinkers as John Locke and Jean-Jaques Rousseau. In order to extend sympathy, Rousseau notes, a child needs to know “he has fellow-creatures who suffer as he has suffered, who feel the pains he has felt, and others which he can form some idea of, being capable of feeling them himself”,⁷ and Locke also defines empathy to animals as a fitting performance for the next generation.⁸

It was also in the same era that specific literature for children emerged and animals began to occupy a peculiarly central, though didactic, position in children’s books: a position it has maintained over the past two centuries. Children, as Ratelle argues, “are influenced by the literature and cinema they consume and an outstanding proportion of this material relies on representations of non-human animals.”⁹

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I Did Not Eat Your Mother: can the voice of animals be heard in Iranian picturebooks?

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**ABSTRACT**

This paper discusses different aspects of relations between human and animal characters in picturebooks by Seyed Ali Akbar and Alizadeh (2008), Ranjbar and Keshmiri (2005), and Khosronejad and Masoumian (2004) using the theoretical framework of ecocriticism. Ecocritical scholars demonstrate how nature and man are represented in various cultural contexts. The study focuses on how animals are characterized and positioned in confrontation with humans and maintain their voices within dominant anthropocentric structures. Reading the picturebooks from the perspective of “logic of domination”, consisting of alienation, hierarchy, and domination through a descriptive-interpretative approach, reveals that animal characters remain persistent in expressing themselves. It also shows they destabilize human patterns stemming from the objectification of non-human animals.

**KEYWORDS**

Human–animal relations; ecocriticism; domination; picturebooks

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The voice that animal characters have against anthropocentric patterns in these sample books resembles the point Zoe Jaques (2015) makes about the effect of giving plants a voice within the chapter entitled “Tree” in Children’s Literature and the Posthuman: Animal, Environment, Cyborg. She argues how specific children’s stories of trees, such as Fred’s Dream, Evenings at Home, The Giving Tree, etc. could play an effective role in eliminating or reaffirming the borders between man and nature.

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Accordingly, the great contribution of children’s literature to the unsettlement of man’s kingdom at the pinnacle of creation becomes more tangible, particularly in current times, with a devastating rate of extinction and nature destruction.

We can say ecocriticism as a coherent approach in world children’s literature was founded with the publication of *Wild Things: Children’s Culture and Ecocriticism* (2004) edited by Sidney I. Dobrin and Kenneth B. Kidd. The current paper can be considered as the first critical survey that has studied Iranian picturebooks from an ecocritical perspective, although we have recently seen some research on this critical approach. Given that ecocriticism contains a wide variety of topics, my focus here is to study human–animal relations based on the “logic of domination”.

Clarifying a number of ecocritical branches including ecofeminism, environmental justice and ecopedagogy, Greta Gaard states that the logic includes three steps: namely alienation, hierarchy and domination. In the first stage, a human being defines a separate identity as “I”, which puts him or her opposed to all other creatures labeled as others. Hierarchy is the second level where humans assume themselves to be in a superior position due to illusive distinctive features. In the last step, also known as subjectivity, they try to establish their domination which ends in the inexorable subordination of those others.

The aim of this article is to trace the logic of domination in three picture books focusing on whether the identity of animals is defined as interconnected or opposed to that of humankind. I am going to discuss whether these sample books offer a hierarchical view of humankind and nature, or simply put them on an equal level. Therefore, the question is whether animals are represented as powerless creatures or have the same subjectivity that human characters enjoy.

I will consider Seyed Navid Seyed Ali Akbar and Roja Alizadeh’s *I Did Not Eat Your Mother* (2008), Sheida Ranjbar and Masoud Keshmri’s *The Memorial Photo* (2005) and Mortezaz Khosronejad and Mehrnoush Mosamun’s *The Water Is Washing the World Away* (2004). The case studies form a small part of the samples covered in my thesis. The three picturebooks that directly or indirectly represent human–animal relationships were on the list of the best Iranian Picturebooks publicized by SUCCLSS in 2016.

In this article, I intend to focus on works that have enjoyed more diversity in terms of human characters and settings in order to study alienation, hierarchy and domination from different aspects. I begin with *I Did Not Eat Your Mother*, in which a child and a crocodile (her animal toy) are living in a modern setting. The issue of animal toys can be interpreted from different perspectives. Lois Rostow Kuznet, for example, considers them primarily as objects even though they might “come alive as . . . anthropomorphized animal[s]”.

In contrast to the view of toys as objects, there is the concept of animistic thinking. Children’s potential for animistic thinking toward their toys (including the crocodile character of the book) is the layer I intend to concentrate on in my analysis. In the 1970s, Piaget defined animistic thinking as “young children’s beliefs that inanimate objects are capable of actions and have life-like qualities”.

This could be attributed to the girl character in the story who thinks about the world from a very different viewpoint: the crocodile dolls more than just a stuffed animal for her, and she attributes life to the lifeless doll specifically because it has a face. Interestingly, in the text of the picturebook, this animal toy is not referred to as a toy but as a “crocodile”. Accordingly, I will refer to it as an “animal” or “crocodile” in the course of my analysis.

The next picturebook, which is about animals and a primitive man possessing a camera, all living in a jungle, juxtaposes primitive and modern times. Then lastly, I will discuss a story derived from a fairy tale featuring a rural setting, with a king and a bird as opposing characters. All three stories suggest multiple interpretive possibilities, but I study them based on the three stages outlined above.

### I Did Not Eat Your Mother: how life would be if seen only from the other’s point of view

In *I Did Not Eat Your Mother*, a crocodile is upset because it is not let into the game that its owner is playing. The doll frequently asks the girl to let it be her playmate but she rejects it and escapes from the crocodile, fearing that it might eat her up. The crocodile tries to prove it is not going to hurt her and so one day it wears the pink dress of the girl’s mother to draw a kind response from the girl; however, she mistakenly thinks it has eaten her mother and decides to tear its belly so as to save her. The final picture shows the little girl who deeply regrets her deed while waiting for the crocodile to be mended.

The cover image shows an angry little girl who is standing right beside the bloated-bellied crocodile on the ground, and the title concurrently represents the way the crocodile seeks acquittal from the girl’s charges in which it was found guilty (see Figure 1). Further, her style of standing over the crocodile’s body implies a top-down point of view from the beginning which foreshadows the child’s inclination to dominate the crocodile.

The story begins with the scene in which a little girl is encircled by all her dolls, but there is a small crocodile sitting at a farther distance with its back to the reader (see Figure 2). The point of view of the reader/viewer...
echoes that of the crocodile; thus, the reader/viewer is invited to share the doll’s loneliness and irritation on account of not having a playmate. The crocodile is presented as being indoors all the time, but it is forlorn and unattended by human characters. The way the doll is treated implies a delicate conflict in the behaviour of human characters; that is, on the one hand, there has been a sense of intimacy with this animal which leads them to buy it and bring it to their home; and, on the other hand, both the child and her family view the crocodile as different and thus keep away from it.

As the story develops, the crocodile decides to communicate with the little girl. Thus, it takes a step forward and says “Hi! I have come to play with you!” but the girl replies: “Go back! You are going to eat us!” Despite the animal’s efforts to persuade the little girl, her inner fears pose a perpetual obstacle to their intimacy. At this point, the narrator moves beyond the child’s point of view and speaks about the crocodile’s real intentions. All these sentences—“The little girl and her doll screamed”, “The crocodile looked at them surprisingly”, “The crocodile did not know why they are scared”, “The little girl was so frightened that her teeth were chattering”, “The crocodile was annoyed and sat in a corner”—illustrate that the crocodile toy is eager to befriend and please the child.

Alongside the words, pictorial signs such as the crocodile’s calm face and smile also make us understand that the child’s fear is uncalled for because the animal does not mean to eat her. All these points help us to realize the root cause of the girl’s fear: notwithstanding that she presumes the crocodile to be a “dangerous other”, this otherness is not due to the biological differences between her and the crocodile, but refers to her mentality about how this animal might be or what it may do.

Besides, playing is certainly a mutual interaction where two sides enjoy their subjectivities. Thus, it seems impossible for the crocodile and the girl to become playmates unless they overcome such an alienation at the very first level. In simpler terms, a reciprocal relationship initially necessitates a strong intimacy between them. That is why the child’s self-imposed isolation makes the crocodile doll understand that “we should make friends first, then we can play together”.

Further, it is noticeable that regardless of the crocodile’s frequent efforts to remove the otherness, the child threatens it with punishment by her mother. In fact, she does not consider the animal in the same position as herself and even gets help from an adult, a higher authority, to preserve the separation. This reaction may imply “how cultural currency seems to reproduce negative, anxious, fearful notions and therefore, emotional distancing about wild common and familiar animals.”

Such notions can be extended to animal toys provided that children take inanimate objects to be alive, due to their potential for animistic thinking. The picture also shows the confrontation of these two characters: the child is looking at the crocodile in fear while it gently tries to make a conversation (see Figure 3).

In addition, the body language of the animal, which raises its hand while talking, could suggest how insistent it is on persuading the little girl and establishing the communication. However, the endeavors are ineffectual and the mother exiles it to the kitchen in reply to her daughter’s request. Rather than adopting a neutral role and attempting to
eliminate the child’s fear, it seems that the mother prevents the formation of a close relationship between the two by exercising her power.

The crocodile continues to struggle and brings chocolate to the girl, although it faces her resistance again. As a matter of fact, every time it is the animal that steps forward to have a dialogue with the girl, only to be rejected. These kinds of advancing and receding between the two characters suggest a human/animal binary opposition and that endeavors are made to remove it. Moreover, the narrator describes the crocodile as an active participant in this exchange since it is able to question the little girl’s intellectual definition of a crocodile and argues that it does not aim to eat her. After all, it seems that both the little girl and her mother are heavily involved in their mental prejudices and cannot see the situation in its true light. They therefore impose their assumptions on the relationship.

The crocodile’s loneliness is another source of irritation but, as soon as it complains about the current situation, the child blames her father, who brought it here. As we see, the story reintroduces another higher authority who has contributed to the crocodile’s current discontent. In this way, the girl decides to find her father guilty rather than healing the relationship and bridging the distance.

This part is followed by another scene emphasizing the hierarchal authority: the crocodile’s playing with spoon and fork has given the little girl the horrors and she demands its punishment for the second time. The crocodile stares at the mother, just above its head, in fear and anxiety (see Figure 4). Interestingly enough, the crocodile raises its request again even when the mother arrives and the child, wearing the mother’s pink dress would make the girl delighted but she thinks it has eaten her mother and, hence, chooses to cut its belly, and this is just where the utter failure of this animal character comes bitterly into view. The illustration, depicted from the narrator’s point of view, shows the child cutting the animal while having laid it down, with the crocodile giving her a long stare (see Figure 5).

Figure 4. Seyed Ali Akbar and Alizadeh, I Did Not Eat Your Mother (2008). Reprinted with permission from Elmi Farhangi Publications.

In the verbal narrative of this spread, the crocodile is the focalizer since the girl and her mother are described from the crocodile’s point of view. In the visual narrative, however, the point of view seems to be omniscient since the viewer can see different characters from different angles and observe the angry face of the girl, the inquisitive face of the mother and the sad face of the crocodile. The crocodile is looked at by the girl, her mother, the little doll and the two little birds outside the window. Though the crocodile and the mother seem to have eye contact, the mother, with her top-down way of looking at the crocodile, does not seem to have understood the depth of its helplessness. Besides, the viewer can more easily identify with the crocodile because the contours of its body are fully depicted within the page, while the bodies of mother and the girl are cropped by the page frame. Thus, the crocodile is more apt to attract our sympathy.

Furthermore, human misunderstanding of animal behavior is a critical point which also is highlighted here. The narrative reminds us implicitly that the true meaning of an animals’ behavior does not exactly accord with our mental interpretations. This type of misreading is rooted in the fact that we do not or sometimes do not want to know their languages, which naturally leads to our anthropocentric attitudes to animals. Even so, if we begin to put aside our biased attitudes and set the stage for animals’ self-expression, then they undoubtedly will guide us to get their true meaning.21

As for such a misunderstanding, the climatic point is also a typical example: the crocodile thinks that wearing the mother’s pink dress would make the girl delighted but she thinks it has eaten her mother and, hence, chooses to cut its belly, and this is just where the utter failure of this animal character comes bitterly into view. The illustration, depicted from the narrator’s point of view, shows the child cutting the animal while having laid it down, with the crocodile giving her a long stare (see Figure 5).

This annoying act by a child may sound a bit far-fetched but, as Fawcett’s words illustrate, “it could be that children are thought very early on to forget what they felt morally in relation to other animals.”22 Interestingly enough, the crocodile raises its request again even when the mother arrives and the child, while regretting, hugs the animal this time. Accordingly, when we take a closer look at the plot, we obtain a detailed insight into the transition of two characters from alienation and dominance of “I” over “Other” to interdependency.

Likewise, we see the little girl is waiting with worried eyes as the mother sews the crocodile’s belly (see Figure 6). It can be said that within the last picture of the book, the girl plays the role of a healer. The healing child may fall into the category
put forth by Gaard; in her opinion, the child character can smooth over the unequal relationship between human and animal to create a sense of interactive intimacy between them. Consequently, by bringing the theme out, the illustration deeply encourages readers to stay by the animal’s side and stand up for its rights.

The Memorial Photo: the change before and after the shot

Regarding *The Memorial Photo*, Adam has assembled animals to take a photo of them, but they do not fit into the frame. Then, he asks the animals to move several times in order to make them fit into the picture frame, although it causes them much irritation. Finally, as Adam stands behind the camera and starts counting, all the animals shift again but they are happy now because, this time, everyone stands the way they prefer.

First, it is noteworthy that although the book does not intend to illustrate animal issues, it provides a general overview of the relation between human and animal characters. There is a picture describing animals gathering which is followed by the verbal text on the following pages: “Adam lined up all” to take a photo “but they would not fit into the frame”. The name of “Adam” and his clothing style in the pictures (if we disregard the camera next to him) elegantly point towards the time when animals and primitive humans coexisted and lived in harmony with each other. This choice of name also hints at the biblical connotation of Adam’s dominion over the other creatures, depicted in holy books.

In addition, only half of the bodies of the lion, elephant and giraffe are within the frame, and merely the tails of the monkey and squirrel can be seen in the picture; ironically enough, they all wear cheerful smiles (see *Figure 7*). However, Adam is not content and makes a serious attempt to fit them in. The camera as a machine represents the industrial world that stands in opposition to the world of animals. Further, the concept of framing indicates how the restrictive nature of industry determines the positionality of the animals. Hence, the presence of the primitive man and his camera shooting photographs of the animals suggest how strongly the advent of technology has impacted the human world and its treatment of animals.

Primitive humans, defined as savages, enjoyed an equal relationship with animals. Yes, they benefited from them: animals provided humans with food and a workforce, but it is highly unlikely that humans would have reduced them to objects. It seems that the binary of human as subject versus the animal as object is rooted in the modern logic that entitles humans to exploit animals. That is why the camera and the process of taking the photo in this specific story could symbolize the existence of the modern logic. Putting the animals into a limited frame and imposing the man’s desires on them reveals the extent of human agency upheld against all that is non-human.

Interestingly enough, when the animals fail to fit into Adam’s camera frame, textual clues unravel their peculiarities: “The giraffe was tall, the snake was long, the monkey was thin, the squirrel was small and the...
lion was short.” In fact, such a detailed description with the deliberate use of “to-be” verbs puts an emphasis on the narrator’s perspective that has independently identified each animal. We can see how the story sets the self-reliant identities of animals against Adam, who strongly wants to take his favourite photo. In broader terms, it appears that with the rise of modern technology, humans insist on redefining an identity for animals as well: a new definition which completely differs from being an animal in reality.

The presence of the lion in the book is another point of interest in the sense that it seems as if civilization and modernity have played their roles so powerfully that they take the lion’s kingdom in the jungle and dedicate it to the human species. In other words, the camera as a tool gratifies the human desire for power, giving Adam the chance to occupy an unprecedented position of prominence in his relation with animals. If we take a precise look at the verbal depiction, we perceive the author’s varied forms of address to convey the former high place of the lion when she says:

the giraffe was too tall, snake was too long . . . the lion’s majesty was a bit short . . . Adam took the giraffe back, he took the elephant forward . . . He asked the lion’s majesty to stand in the middle . . . Adam told the giraffe to bow its head . . . and begged the lion’s majesty to move a little to the right.

Basically, continuous confrontation and tension between Adam and the animals affirm that the more Adam insists on his desire, the more the animals feel annoyed. Even though they need to decide on a compromise to stop irritation, we do not notice any dialogue here, and Adam only “wanted to have this photo at any price”. Three words or phrases—namely “Adam”, “to have” and “at any price”—represent Adam’s anthropocentric thoughts in which animals have to repress their desires. In addition, giving particular attention to the illustrations, they verify that Adam has been constantly fixed at the corner without testing other possible perspectives (see Figure 8). He, instead, prefers to make the animals move so that they fit into that limited point of view. Indeed, we can agree with Manuela Rossini’s words that the culture of humankind refers to his technology and his way of thinking through which Adam also attempts to dominate nature. ‘His’ in ‘his technology and his ways of thinking’ refers to humankind and ‘he’ refers to Adam.24

Eventually, the perpetual moving leads all to be in the camera frame, though they have faced problems:

the elephant did not like to stand behind others. The giraffe did not like to bow its head. The lion did not like to change its place. The snake did not like to gather itself. The monkey did not like to stand in the left and the squirrel did not like to be in the front too much.

The text assembles sentences with animals in the subject positions expressing their likes and dislikes and, therefore, the reader is made aware of their feelings.

Furthermore, the keywords “did not like” reveal the alienation all animals may increasingly feel towards that type of “being” that is far from their true selves. To illustrate this point further, the real snake does not stand erect, but simply crawls on the ground, and a true giraffe has a long tall neck, not a bent one. Thus, the bent neck is a metaphor for the thwarted identity humans have imposed on the world of animals.

On the following page, Adam begins counting and we see an elephant from behind that covers the whole page (see Figure 9). The elephant is drawn too big so that some portion of it seems to be in the camera’s frame. The scene highlights the point that whenever Adam looks at animals through a camera from the modern technological period, this leads him to set out a new vision that is not necessarily in accord with the realities of the outside world. In other words, what Adam notices is not the whole of the animal who exists, and therefore, when he is not able to see the whole elephant, he has only perceived the animal as filtered through his own mentality.

At the end, as Adam is preparing to take his photo, a loud noise is heard. All the animals are standing in their

Figure 8. Ranjbar and Keshmiri, The Memorial Photo (2005). Reprinted with permission from Elmi Farhangi Publications.
favorite places and are happy again (see Figure 10): “the snake had stretched its body, the giraffe had straightened its neck, the monkey had embraced a banana tree, the lion and the squirrel had stood where they liked”. Both verbal and visual narrations seem to lay greater stress on the fact that no living creature could be quite content unless it retains its real self. In consequence, the conflict in the story ends in empowered animals, which nicely prepares the ground for understanding the story’s theme.

Interestingly, although in the last photo animals are not in the order Adam intended them to be in, due to their voluntary movements, all of them are visible within frame. This implies that getting along with nature is yet feasible if both human and animal rights could come into consideration. In her discussion of Laura Brown’s book on the analysis of changing relationships between human and non-human in literary texts, Jane Spencer points to a “human-associated” tradition which “postulates the potential for meaningful communication between animal and human”.

The return to such an old tradition requires human beings to set aside their anthropocentric perspective.

**The Water Is Washing the World Away: But I will Not Stop Singing**

In the third book, called *The Water Is Washing the World Away*, a sparrow playing a *tonbak* (goblet drum) happily flies everywhere and meets an ant, a bear, a leaf and a frog on its way. After listening to their words, it starts to play and sing about what it has heard. One day, a king hears the sparrow’s songs and commands it to sing to him from now on. The sparrow does not accept, and then the king orders its arrest. The sparrow flies away in fright, though leaving its *tonbak* behind. Despite losing the instrument, the sparrow flies everywhere and continues singing.

First and foremost, although the story derives from a fairy tale, we should note that it has not only been retold for children, but also contains active animal characters, and thus, it is more logical to interpret the book based on today’s discourse. The sparrow composes poetry about everyone it visits, and the first one is an ant being washed away by water. There are a little girl and a little boy in the pictorial narration, hiding around a corner, who listen to the ant shouting that water is washing the world away (see Figure 11). The sparrow watching the scene from the top of a tree begins singing that “the water is washing the ant away, the ant shouts: the water is washing the world away”.

The next day, the bird sees a bear who is getting ready for hibernation, and the children in the picture are going to sleep next to it. The sparrow plays the *tonbak* again and sings that “the bear is falling asleep, the bear shouts: the world is falling asleep”. Another day, the bird reaches an abandoned leaf on the wind...
and sings that the world is being removed by the wind. We see the girl’s hair flying in the wind and the boy delightedly running after his hat (see Figure 12).

The snow is falling on the fourth day and the sparrow notices a piece of coal under it and performs a song joyfully, singing that “[t]he snow is washing blackness away, blackness shouts: the snow is washing the world away.” The two children are sitting in the snow rejoicing too. A day later, the bird passes by a frog and sings that “the frog shouts: talk is washing the world away”, and then keeps going. Thus, we can completely perceive the bird’s feeling in playing its cheerful songs over the last five days, and the intimate relationship that exists between the sparrow and the child characters. In addition, the illustrations of clothing, houses, etc. show a rural setting where the king governs.

As the king hears the sparrow singing and playing, he orders a soldier to bring it to him. The bird, standing next to the children, begins singing and playing tonbak to the king, his wife and their child, all illustrated on the opposite page (see Figure 13). The king is pleased by the sound of the sparrow, and dictates that it is to be one of his possessions. This fundamental attitude, reflected in his authoritative tone, is reminiscent of Aristotle’s opinion on animals, that “they are put on earth for human use, and that this could not be seen as an injustice because animals themselves are incapable of defining justice”.26

The meeting of the sparrow and the king as the higher authority could be a climatic point when the tension between the bird and humans is strongly felt. The pictorial description of the king raising his index finger, to underline the given command, suggests the reality of his selfish demands. However, the king’s order is rejected by the sparrow, which is trying to defend its right. What is more, the imitation of the king’s child of his father’s body language (hand movement) can be viewed as an implied emphasis on the prominent role parents have always played in shaping their children’s attitude to the non-human world.

Another significant point is that the king conceives of his command as a source of pleasure to the sparrow. This attitude reminds us of what Bleakley says about humanity’s boast of uniqueness, justified in terms of the distinction he makes between himself and the other.27 Threatening the sparrow with death can be perceived as another form of human-centered behavior by the king. He has constructed a hierarchical system with himself at the top, in which all the “others” will die unless they obey his commands. However, the sparrow resists such a point of view and announces: “If I am someone’s property, I will forget my songs. I should travel all over the world.”

More importantly, although the sparrow has forgotten its tonbak while escaping from the king, it is yet making the children, the bear, the frog, the ant and the flowers feel happy, and keeps singing that “I am the sparrow, I sing, without tonbak or anything, I sing on a tree, on a roof, while I am flying.” Having put emphasis on the sparrow’s sustained happiness despite the absence of the tonbak, the narrator points out how persistent this bird is in expressing its subjectivity as a member of an interrelated world.

**Concluding remarks**

As mentioned earlier, the theoretical framework of this paper, built on Gaard’s classification, is the “logic of domination”, which brings attention to a three-level chain of events. As humans distinguish an isolated identity for themselves, they will unavoidably marginalize the “other”, which in turn gives rise to the second element, known as hierarchy. In the subsequent step, humans naturally proceed to a position of dominance and create an unjust subject–object relationship.
However, a more precise focus on the logic of domination reveals the fact that these stages have become inextricably intertwined with the issue of voice. As a matter of fact, they all point to the domineering position assigned to humankind by humanism, which seeks not only to silence the voice of animals, but also to relegate them to an inferior level.

This is specifically the attitude that we should now expect our careful scrutiny to correct. Additionally, I have also meant to emphasize the question of how well we can hear nature’s voice. The Persian picturebooks considered as examples in this paper demonstrate that children’s literature is looking for the way back, in order to help nature to be heard, and, in this way, supports the belief that human beings, just like nature and animals, are included in a huge interrelated environment where no living things are inherently superior to others.

The Water Is Washing the World Away is a clear-cut example. While the character of the king as well as the levels of power suggest that the author’s attention is drawn to social problems, the story can be also viewed from another angle because the fictional character that opposes the king is an animal: a sparrow who resists being silenced in spite of losing its tonbak. Besides, the reader is impressed by how the text gives personality to the sparrow and keeps its voice alive.

In terms of The Memorial Photo, the textual narration begins with a sentence referring to human subjectivity as a powerful ordering force: “Adam lined up all the animals.” In contrast, the same narrator tries to express the animals’ dissatisfaction with Adam’s desire by offering a voice that not only gets stronger in the course of time, but also manages to detract from human authority step by step. The gradual descent of the man effects the ascension of the animals’ voice to such an extent that they venture to say: “we are not objects for your camera’s frame; we are living animals”.

Furthermore, as for I Did Not Eat Your Mother, we may even suppose that the crocodile has been totally eliminated from the story mostly as a result of the child’s mistake. The pictorial imaginary ending, which describes the mother sewing (and so, reviving) the crocodile, has merely been the author’s scheme to heal the child. However, the child seems to have felt regret by the end of the story, and, as soon as regret is felt, the voice of the animal can be heard. Simply put, although the animal is physically removed at the end, its voice remains so strong that it invalidates all the steps of domination and substitutes them for interconnectedness; as though both the child character and the reader would not again accede to this form of intercourse. The issue of size is also of great importance in all three picturebooks. The verbal narratives do not point to any differences between the size of humans and that of animal characters.

The pictures in The Water is Washing the World Away show the sparrow the same size as the two child characters, and the pictures in I Did Not Eat Your Mother depict the crocodile as twice as big as other stuffed animals and nearly as big as the girl. In the Memorial Photo, the big size of the animals compared to the limited and limiting frame of the photos is a big tension throughout the story, which is resolved when the full size of the animals finally comes into view. In other words, the reconciliation between technology and nature occurs only when the animals are able to occupy the positions they like. The attention paid to the animals’ size in the visual perspective makes them more capable of maintaining their voice and, thus, their power in the world of human beings.

It is worth mentioning that the voice of nature and animals is established in the stories and will not be silenced, even despite oppressive human systems. Not only do animals never give up on their rights, but they also continue to articulate their identities over and over again. But will fact give way to fiction?

Notes

5. Glotfelty and Fromm, eds, Ecocriticism Reader, xxi.
9. Ibid., 17.
12. Akbar et al., [I did not eat my mother].
13. Ranjbar and Keshmiri, [The memorial photo].
14. Khosronejad and Masoumian, [The water is washing the world away].
16. The establishment of Shiraz University Centre for Children’s Literature Studies (SUCCLS) in 2005 has been regarded as a major step forward in children’s literature of Iran. The center’s activities have resulted in publishing a quarterly academic journal of children’s literature in 2009 and an MA program in 2010. The center has organized a biennial conference with a specific theme each time. The keynote speaker of the fifth conference in 2015 was John Stephens.
20. Bleakley, Animalizing Imagination, 82.
21. Ibid., 36.
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Bibliography