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Mehdi Hejvani. *Aesthetics of Children's Literature*

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Aesthetics of Children's Literature is a monograph derived from the author's Ph. D. dissertation. The book considers the aesthetics of children's literature from three different aspects in three chapters. In chapter one, Hejvani discusses this notion from a theoretical perspective, in chapter two, he surveys the historical evolution of children's literature; and in chapter three, he uses the theoretical paradigms mentioned in the previous chapters to criticize two well-known works of fiction within the domain of children's literature. In the Introduction, before putting forth the main discussion, he argues that "in children's literature--provided that it has an essence--aesthetics is the essence while instruction is a subsidiary and external element" (3).

In chapter one which consists of two parts, Hejvani tries to display theoretically the essentiality and priority of aesthetic features in children's literature. In the first part, after elucidating the approaches of several notable theorists, he discusses different definitions of art, its contradiction with instruction, and its similarity to playing. Then, Hejvani explains that from among author-oriented, text-oriented, and reader-oriented approaches, he would rather give significance to reader-oriented theory in his dissertation (25). In the second part, titled "proving the authenticity and priority of

aesthetics over instruction in children's literature", after explaining that literature is a kind of art and children's literature is a kind of literature, the author explains and criticizes the instruction-oriented approach. It can be said that this part is the author's review of Morteza Khosronejad's book, *Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to the Philosophy of Children's Literature*. In general, Hejvani asserts that Khosronejad's focus is on the instructional function of children's literature, and considers Khosronejad's statements contradictory. It seems that he does not fully appreciate Khosronejad's approach in *Innocence and Experience*. Hejvani holds that Khosronejad's attempt to link different notions and approaches to childhood ends in a contradiction between his words and his approach. After emphasizing that children's literature does not have an instructional nature and reasoning that children's literature is "aesthetics-oriented", Hejvani closes chapter one concluding that "children's literature is a kind of art, and art, rather than instruction, is its intrinsic feature" (64).

Chapter two is designated to expound the historical evolution of the concept of childhood and children's literature in the world (unsurprisingly Europe) and Iran. In this chapter, Hejvani studies the transition of children's literature from the instruction-oriented to the aesthetics-oriented approach in detail. Though, this extensive exposition indicates the vast knowledge of the author and his scholarly research, in some parts, the tedious load of materials is hardly justifiable. For instance, the author allots a part to children's literature in pre-Islamic era, while no literary work specially written for children is traceable in this period, nor are there any records in the post-Islamic era up to constitutional movement. The mentioned examples in this part belong to either adult literature or folklore, though, both of them are outside the domain of children's literature.

In chapter three, apparently the most appealing one, Hejvani examines two cases of world children's literature: *The Little Prince* by Antoine de Saint-Exupéry and *Harry Potter* by J. K. Rowling. Firstly, the author distinguishes the "literature-oriented" from the "reader-oriented" approach. In a book which is literature-oriented, literary aspects are of more importance than the readers' will, and in a work more apt to be reader-oriented, more attention is paid to the audience's inclinations and will (127). Considering *The Little Prince* as a literature-oriented and *Harry Potter* as an audience-oriented work, Hejvani offers an in-depth analysis of each: *The Little Prince* is explicated in terms of

its structure and aesthetics, as well as its audience; *Harry Potter* in terms of its aesthetics and literariness as well as its inherent thought and content. At the end, he concludes that *The Little Prince* and *Harry Potter*, which are both eminent and successful literary works in their own types, owe their value to their aesthetic aspects; though both of them have instructional features too. It is worth mentioning that to Hejvani, *The Little Prince* is "far from the world of the child" (147), and throughout the book, he repeats this idea several times.

On the whole, the book points to its author's insistence on the priority of literariness over instruction in children's literature. Though, in some parts, the reader may assume that the author's evaluation is due to his wrong perceptions, the book is quite an informative and academic study. Hejvani indeed offers a comprehensive and documented defense of his approach and point of view. Altogether, *Aesthetics of Children's Literature* by Mehdi Hejvani is filled with useful data and educational material, and it could be an appropriate textbook for students in the field of children and young adult literature.