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STAGES OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: THE FORMATION OF A FANTASTIC DISCOURSE

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Abstract. This article deals with the discussion of the main stages of development of children's literature and the formation of a fantastic discourse. In most cases, early children's books were particularly educational and moralistic, aiming to teach discipline and values. However, as society began to view childhood as a unique and imaginative stage of life, literature shifted toward storytelling that included themes of creativity and fantasy. It analyses the formation of fantastic discourse through the works of the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, Lewis Carroll, L. Frank Baum, J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and Roald Dahl. In particular, Roald Dahl's novels, such as *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Matilda*, and *The BFG*, combined fantasy with real-world issues, creating a new direction in children's literature. The paper also explores the role of fantasy in contemporary children's literature and its importance in shaping young readers' imagination.

Keywords: stages of children's literature, formation of fantastic discourse, imagination, creativity, fairy tales, realism, fantasy, concept of childhood, literary evolution, moral lessons.

ЭТАПЫ РАЗВИТИЯ ДЕТСКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ: СТАНОВЛЕНИЕ ФАНТАСТИЧЕСКОГО ДИСКУРСА

Аннотация. Данная статья посвящена основным этапам развития детской литературы и формирования фантастического дискурса. В большинстве случаев ранние детские книги носили образовательный и нравоучительный характер, направленный на воспитание дисциплины и морали. Однако, когда общество стало воспринимать детство как уникальный и творческий этап жизни, литература начала включать в себя рассказы, наполненные воображением и фантазией. В статье анализируется формирование фантастического дискурса через произведения братьев Гримм, Ганса Кристиана Андерсена, Льюиса Кэрролла, Л. Фрэнка Баума, Дж. Р. Р. Толкина, К. С. Льюиса и Роальда Даля. В частности, романы Роальда Даля, такие как «Чарли и шоколадная фабрика», «Матильда» и «Большой и добрый великан», сочетая в себе элементы фантастики и реалистических проблем, создали новое направление в детской литературе. Также в статье рассматривается роль фантастики в современной детской литературе и её значение для развития воображения юных читателей.

Ключевые слова: Этапы развития детской литературы, формирование фантастического дискурса, воображение, креативность, сказки, реализм, фантастика, концепция детства, литературная эволюция, нравственные уроки.

BOLALAR ADABIYOTINI RIVOJLANISH BOSQIQCHILARI: FANTASTIK DISKURSNI SHAKLLANTIRISH

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqola bolalar adabiyoti rivojlanishining asosiy bosqichlari va fantastik nutq shakllanishini muhokama qilishga qaratilgan. Dastlabki bolalar kitoblari, asosan, tarbiyaviy va axloqiy mazmunga ega bo'lib, intizom va qadriyatlarni o'rgatishga qaratilgan edi. Biroq jamiyat bolalikni o'ziga xos va ijodiy bosqich sifatida qabul qila boshlagach, adabiyot ham tasavvur va fantaziyani o'z ichiga olgan hikoyalarga yo'naldi. Ushbu maqola aka-uka Grimmlar, Hans Kristian Andersen, Lyuis Kerroll, L. Frenk Baum, J.R.R. Tolkin, K.S. Lyuis va Roald Dahl asarlari orqali fantastik nutqning shakllanishini tahlil qiladi. Ayniqsa, Roald Dahlning *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, *Matilda* va *The BFG* kabi romanlari fantastika va real hayot muammolarini uyg'unlashtirib, bolalar adabiyotida yangi yo'nalish yaratgan. Shuningdek, maqolada zamonaviy bolalar adabiyotida fantastikaning o'rni va uning yosh kitobxonlarning tasavvurini shakllantirishdagi ahamiyati ham o'rganiladi.

Kalit so'zlar: Bolalar adabiyotining bosqichlari, fantastik nutq shakllanishi, tasavvur, ijodkorlik, etaklar, realizm, fantastika, bolalik tushunchasi, adabiy evolyutsiya, axloqiy saboqlar.

Introduction. Since the early 17th century, numerous changes have occurred in the publication children's literature, when the sole books available for children were educational texts aimed at teaching them the alphabet, spelling, as well as morals, etiquette, and religious teachings. During that period, the subject matter of textbooks was shaped by Puritan views that children had a natural tendency toward wrongdoing and required moral instruction. During this period, inexpensive books known as chapbooks featuring popular narratives and tales also started to be created and sold. Because these books lacked strictly moral narratives, they frequently faced criticism for straying from Puritan principles (Gangi, 2004). Puritanical thought ultimately caused to the Enlightenment principles exemplified by John Locke's philosophy, which signified a change in the perception of children as a «blank slate» ready to be shaped. Throughout this period, moral stories and fables continued to be published, yet more playful books incorporating word games, riddles, rhymes, and activities started to emerge in children's literature. Books for children have also drawn from tales originally crafted for adults, like Gulliver's Travels, Ivanhoe, and Robinson Crusoe.

Before the 17th century, in most cases, children were regarded as miniature adults who were expected to behave and reason like grown-ups. But, as society developed, during the Enlightenment and Romantic periods, a novice perspective came to light - childhood were seen as a unique and innocent stage of life, separate from adolescence and adulthood (Avery & Kinnell, 1995). This abrupt change in thinking created a demand for books written specifically for children, realising them as playful and imaginative youngsters. By the 18th century, John Newbery contributed to shape children's literature. He dedicated his literary career to write about children. It motivated him to establish his first publishing house which entirely produced children's books. He not only published his own works but also those of other authors and helped enormously strengthen the thought that literature for children was worth reading and deserving of its own space in the literary world (Gangi, 2004). As this idea about childhood never ceased to increase, the following century witnessed an even greater improvement in the field of children's literature. Books were mainly created for the sole aim of entertaining young readers, rather than just educating and giving moral lessons to them. That period also gave rise to the first books with colourful illustrations, written by Randolph Caldecott, marking a stepping stone in the evolution of children's storytelling.

Early children's book history makes it clear how changes in society promoted the publisher's and author's creation of books specifically for their young readers. While during the 18th and 19th centuries, children's literature commanded a healthy market, the content of books would change with the 20th century. As an illustration, during the war period, a wide range of novels with themes of adventure and idealism were widespread, such as Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House on the Prairie series, which was published between 1932 and 1943. The straightforward literary work by Margaret Wise Brown for the youngest readers described vividly the harsh realities of life in stories like Lois Lenski's Strawberry Girl (1945), which includes the issues of poor hardworking girl.

The emergence of more realistic stories contributed to the beginning of an important change towards realism alongside with the social and political revolution between 1960s and 1970s. However, in the years of 1930s and 1950s, most writers became more willing to cover topics in favour of societal issues and hardships, such as struggles associated with poverty; however, in the following years, a myriad of children's books produced which were centered on realism. Authors such as Beverly Cleary, Judy Blume and Paul Zindel wrote about growing up, death, obesity, and other issues, which made a shift in the boundaries of what was acceptable, and arguably, even necessary for children to understand. These earlier authors played a vital role for the writing of M. E. Kerr, Cynthia Voigt, and Robert Cormier, who wrote about homelessness, race and child exploitation. The realism of children's literature in the 1960s and 1970s represented a radical shift at that time, similar to many of the other shifts throughout history related to historical, political, and societal influences.

This shift laid the groundwork for the introduction of fantasy elements into children's literature. Although early children's books contained moralistic and educational themes, folklore and fairy tales—such as those collected by the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen—demonstrated the enduring appeal of imaginative storytelling. By the 19th century, authors like Lewis Carroll (Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, 1865) and L. Frank Baum (The Wizard of Oz, 1900) pioneered a purely fantastic discourse, crafting worlds where logic was suspended, and imagination thrived. These stories departed from didactic lessons, instead offering escapism, adventure, and symbolic representations of real-world struggles.

As fantasy literature became especially well known in the 20th century, it was used like a powerful tool for diving deeper into childhood emotions, fears, and aspirations. J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis, among others,

wanted to develop this genre through introducing influential fantasy literary works that mixed myth, adventure, and sometimes moral dilemmas. In modern literature, fantasy remains a dominant force, improving young readers' perspectives of reality while allowing them to involve with sophisticated in a metaphorical way.

Discussion. Children's literature has undergone numerous changes throughout centuries: from rigidly educative texts, it developed into an imaginative story aimed at the development of children's fantasies and emotions. Leading positions in the 17th and 18th centuries were occupied by moralistic and didactic literature, and only during the Enlightenment and Romantic movements, the view of childhood as a specific and important period in one's life began to develop. Up until this shift, there emerged books specifically written for children, culminating in the revolutionary contributions of John Newbery. Books for children were rare prior to the 17th century since childhood itself was not a distinct phase of life. The majority of available books for youngsters were religious in nature, educative, or instructive to reinforce moral values and social obedience. The Puritans especially viewed children as born with original sin and in need of moral education. Books such as *The New England Primer* of the 1680s included prayers, portions of the Bible, and maxims, whereas John Bunyan's *The Pilgrim's Progress* of 1678 was a very popular read among children since it was a moral allegory. These works inculcated discipline, obedience, and virtue, many times using fear as a pedagogical tool. However, small, inexpensive booklets called chapbooks began to circulate among lower-class children containing folk tales, ballads, and fairy tales that were entertaining but deviated from Puritan principles. In the Enlightenment (17th–18th centuries) and Romantic era (18th–19th centuries), views on childhood dramatically changed. Thinkers such as John Locke and Jean-Jacques Rousseau argued that children were not mini adults but rather individuals with their own needs, emotions, and potential. With his work *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* in 1693, Locke conceptualized children as being born a «tabula rasa» and argued that education should be gentle, enjoyable, and experience-oriented, rather than based on rigid punishment. This type of attitude gave way to the publication of books that produced curiosity, reasoning, and understanding, rather than simple memory. Similarly, the stress that Jean-Jacques Rousseau laid on childhood as a natural, innocent stage in life in his work *Émile, or On Education* (1762), and his advocacy of experience rather than discipline in children's learning, gave way to books that celebrated imagination, adventure, and exploration, works that could balance education and entertainment and thus appeal to a concept of learning through pleasure.

One of the greatest figures of early children's literature was John Newbery (1713–1767), English publisher and commonly known as the «Father of Children's Literature». He is regarded as the first publisher who exclusively produced books for children, realizing that children's literature has to be both instructive and entertaining for the children. He advertised books for specific age groups of young readers, turning children's literature into a financially successful business. Among his most influential works was *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book*, 1744, which included fables, rhymes, and games, both instructional and entertaining. It introduced the concept of «rewards» for good behavior. It was one of the first books completely designed to entertain children. Another influential publication was *The History of Little Goody Two-Shoes*, which came out in 1765. It was a moral story of a poor orphan girl who became well-to-do through hard work and virtue. This book popularized rags-to-riches narratives in children's literature and inspired future moral yet entertaining stories, such as those written by Charles Dickens.

Newbery's contribution to children's literature changed its face from just purely moralistic texts to interesting stories that both entertained and taught. His books thus paved the way for subsequent authors such as the Brothers Grimm, Hans Christian Andersen, and Lewis Carroll. The John Newbery Medal is given each year in the United States for outstanding work in children's literature—a proof of lasting impact. Such a shift in the development of children's literature—from the strictly moralistic religious text to imaginative storytelling—indeed is indicative of a broader societal shift in how childhood is perceived. Books for children were, throughout the 17th century, largely didactic, religious, and aimed at moral instruction. The 18th-century Enlightenment brought with it another point of view—that children were curious, capable learners who needed books that were far more engaging and interactive. John Newbery's innovations in the mid-18th century transformed children's literature from purely instructive into a combination of instruction and delight, thus paving the way for the fairy tales, adventure stories, and fantasy literature of the 19th and 20th centuries. This change paved the way for the rise of fantasy storytelling that would later be championed by authors like Lewis Carroll, L. Frank Baum, C.S. Lewis, and Roald Dahl.

Realism in children's literature during the 20th century was an immediate response to great social, political, and cultural changes. Where previously fantastic and fairy-tale narrative forms dominated, the brutal realities of war, economic hardship, and shifting societal norms created a growing demand for literature reflecting the real world with which children and families struggled. This transformation began gradually but accelerated with particular vigor in the wake of World War II, when writers began to depict the childhood experience with greater candor and emotional depth. Realism then turned out to be a defining feature of

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children's literature by the mid-20th century, encompassing various themes such as poverty, race, gender, mental health, and even family dynamics. The first of many influences that marked the emergence of realism was the Great Depression of the 1930s, during which families suffered from economic uncertainty and children grew up quickly. Literature captured this change through stories of young protagonists who battled hardship with resilience. Laura Ingalls Wilder's series, *Little House on the Prairie*, published from 1932 to 1943, imagined the struggles that connoted the life of pioneers, and the event of persistence, family unity, and adjustment to difficult circumstances. Around the same time, Margaret Wise Brown also started writing for younger children with simple words depicting everyday events of life in books like *Goodnight Moon*, 1947, considered to be among the first of those picture books capturing the quiet rhythms of childhood unobtrusively and sans moralization and fantasy elements. These very few early samples from both continents inaugurated an altogether new perspective different from mere escapism literature towards realism akin to the very living of a young reader's life. Even greater changes came with the post-war years as children's literature started to reflect social and political movements reshaping the world. The influence of the Civil Rights Movement, feminism, and the countercultural revolution in the 1960s and 1970s found their way into stories, enabling writers to consider complex themes previously viewed as inappropriate for young readers. Beverly Cleary's *Ramona* series, which began in 1955 and ended in 1999, followed the everyday difficulties of growing up middle-class: sibling rivalry, economic stressors, and childhood angst addressed in a manner that is humorous yet very real. Judy Blume tackled realism one step further and candidly addressed issues including puberty, bullying, and self-identity with novels like „ *Are You There God? It's Me*“, Margaret in 1970 and *Blubber* in 1974. Her work was innovative because it legitimized the actual thoughts and feelings of children and teenagers, opening the way for literature that did not avoid current and sensitive topics.

Realism in the 1960s and 1970s marked a radical break in children's literature, reflecting changes in society. Books were no longer just about adventure and morality; they became a means for young readers to understand the world around them. Paul Zindel's *The Pigman* (1968) battled loneliness, neglect, and the pursuit of meaning. M.E. Kerr and Robert Cormier took that concept even further with novels addressing homelessness, racial tension, and child abuse, showing that literature for teenagers could address real-world concerns without watering them down. Cormier's *The Chocolate War*, 1974, confronted power, corruption, and rebellion within a school setting and was one of the first children's books that did not have a happy ending. These authors extended the boundaries of what was considered acceptable in children's literature and proved that young readers were quite capable of sophisticated themes and complex moral dilemmas. With the rising prominence of realism, it wasn't a case of realism replacing fantasy but instead often coexisted. Even fantasy novels, though, tackled real-world concerns in metaphorical ways. Roald Dahl's novels, for instance, took humor and outrageous situations to comment on neglect, injustice, and survival. In *Matilda* (1988), an intelligent young girl overcomes viciously abusive authority figures; *The BFG* (1982) addressed loneliness and courage. Contemporary fantasy writers such as J.K. Rowling and Philip Pullman had loaded their works with themes of political oppression, discrimination, and identity struggles to show that fantastic literature, too, was a way of discussing real issues. The shift in children's literature from fantasy to realism wasn't just a shift in how stories were narrated; it was a reflection of the cultural landscape that kept changing. Whereas the 19th century idealized childhood as a time of innocence and magic, by the 20th century literature perceived that children suffered under hardship, fear, and uncertainty. Produced out of war, economic flux, and social justice movements was literature that depicted children not as passive recipients of morality but as agents in the real world. Authors began to trust young readers with more respect, believing that they could indeed handle difficult themes and complex emotions. This transformation set the stage for modern children's literature, which continues to balance realism and fantasy while addressing the challenges faced by contemporary youth.

Growth of fantasy in children's literature reflects a movement away from simplistic folktales and fairy tales—that were mainly aimed at moral lessons or caution in nature—to the complexly constructed escapist fantasies offering realist insights that are both reflective as well as critical of reality. Classic fairy tales or folklore, courtesy of Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen, were embedded deep in oral stories and mirrored civilization's mores and phobias. Tales by the Brothers Grimm, like *Hansel and Gretel* and *Snow White*, contained many dark and violent elements that were intended to teach children lessons about obedience, resilience, and justice. Their stories typically reinforced strict moral codes and portrayed characters in terms of stark good and evil. Similarly, even Andersen's tales, among which the most well-known are *The Little Mermaid* and *The Ugly Duckling*, which retain their moral dimension, came to acquire a more emotional and personal storytelling anchored in themes of suffering, transformation, and survival. As children's literature continued to evolve, fantasy storytelling began to move away from cautionary tales, built upon those folklores, to full-scale, imaginative worlds complete with their own logic. This change is perhaps nowhere as apparent as it is in the works of Lewis Carroll and L. Frank Baum. Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*,

published in 1865, dismissed Victorian moralism for absurdity, playfulness, and intellectual teasers that could allow children uninhibitedly to exploit the bounds of their imagination. His illogical story structure and characters, like the Mad Hatter and Cheshire Cat, were a break from instructive literature and signaled that children's literature could celebrate curiosity and exploration for its own sake. Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, published in 1900, created an entirely new world with magical creatures, challenges, and adventures. Unlike the more traditional fairy tales, which depended for their resolution on such forces as fate or supernatural intervention, Baum's heroine, Dorothy, forged her own destiny through bravery and wit. This shift reflected changing perceptions of childhood, recognizing children as capable of independent thought and problem-solving rather than merely absorbing moral instruction. By the time of the 20th century, fantasy literature reached new layers of complexity and literary sophistication by the works of J.R.R. Tolkien and C.S. Lewis. Thus, Tolkien unveiled Middle-earth—a world with a constructed history, languages, and mythological framework—through the pages of *The Hobbit* (1937) and the trilogy titled *The Lord of the Rings*, which was completed in 1954–1955. Drawing from his extensive work dealing with medieval literature and philology, Tolkien made fantasy an epic literary art, recording in his texts tussles of power, corruption, sacrifice, and heroism. Unlike the earlier fantasy, which usually remained childlike in its morality, Tolkien's works greeted his readers with characters faced by moral dilemmas, even carrying shades of ambiguity; for example, the struggle of Gollum and the burden of Frodo in carrying the One Ring. Similarly, C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* series from 1950–1956 combined Christian allegory with elements of mythology and fairy tale conventions. Lewis's stories, though popularly read as adventure, carried far deeper philosophical and theological meanings. Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, for instance, is a Christ-like figure who sacrifices himself for others, initiating young readers into themes of redemption and moral responsibility.

As fantasy literature continued to evolve, it became an increasingly powerful means of addressing real-world issues metaphorically while cultivating creativity and imagination. Many contemporary fantasy authors employ their worlds to explore complex issues such as oppression, identity, and social justice. For example, Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* series (1968–2001) is a coming-of-age study of power dynamics, self-discovery, and the consequences of ambition, while Ged struggles with his own pride and the dark forces he lets loose. Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1995–2000) speaks to institutional authority and challenges religious dogma in the first series installment, *The Golden Compass*, wherein Lyra's journey involves questioning and resisting oppressive structures. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007) also interlaces magical adventure with discourses of prejudice, authoritarianism, and resistance. A possible example could be *Harry Potter and the Order of the Phoenix*, in which a political acting upon through forbidden speech and the authority of Dolores Umbridge brings authoritarianism right onto the school premises. More recently, fantasy literature has continued to evolve to reflect diverse experiences and perspectives. Tomi Adeyemi's *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018) integrates Nigerian mythology into its fantasy world while addressing racial injustice and oppression, making the genre more inclusive and socially relevant. Similarly, Nnedi Okorafor's *Akata Witch* (2011) brings African cultural elements into the realm of fantasy while exploring themes of identity and belonging. Modern works of fantasy thus bear evidence that these books are not mere escapes but a medium for young readers through which they relate to contemporary problems in a symbolic and meaningful manner.

Fantasy literature has continued to evolve, always reflecting issues in society, yet nurturing creativity and imagination. Roald Dahl was a significant author in the reconfiguring of modern children's fantasy by melding lighthearted storytelling with dark humor and acerbic social commentary. His works have been quite contrary to the moralistic fairy tales of times past, depicting children as resilient, intelligent protagonists who confront corrupt authority figures. In *Matilda* (1988), the eponymous heroine, with her telekinetic powers and voracious love for reading, overcomes the totalitarianism of her vicious headmistress, Miss Trunchbull. This story, while entertaining the readers with fantastical elements, reinforces the belief that knowledge and resilience can always triumph over tyranny. Similarly, *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964) addresses greed, entitlement, and bad parenting through trials inside Willy Wonka's magical factory, showing how fantasy can be a vehicle for moral and social lessons. Dahl's approach influenced subsequent authors who expanded the fantasy genre's role in exploring complex themes. J.K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* series (1997–2007) follows an orphaned boy discovering his magical heritage while facing issues of discrimination, corruption, and destiny. The moment when Dumbledore tells Harry, "It is our choices, Harry, that show what we truly are, far more than our abilities," encapsulates a central theme of the series—personal responsibility and moral agency matter more than circumstances of birth. Rowling's complex world-building and multilayered characters raised children's fantasy to a sophisticated narrative about prejudice, tussles of power, and the impact of history on the present.

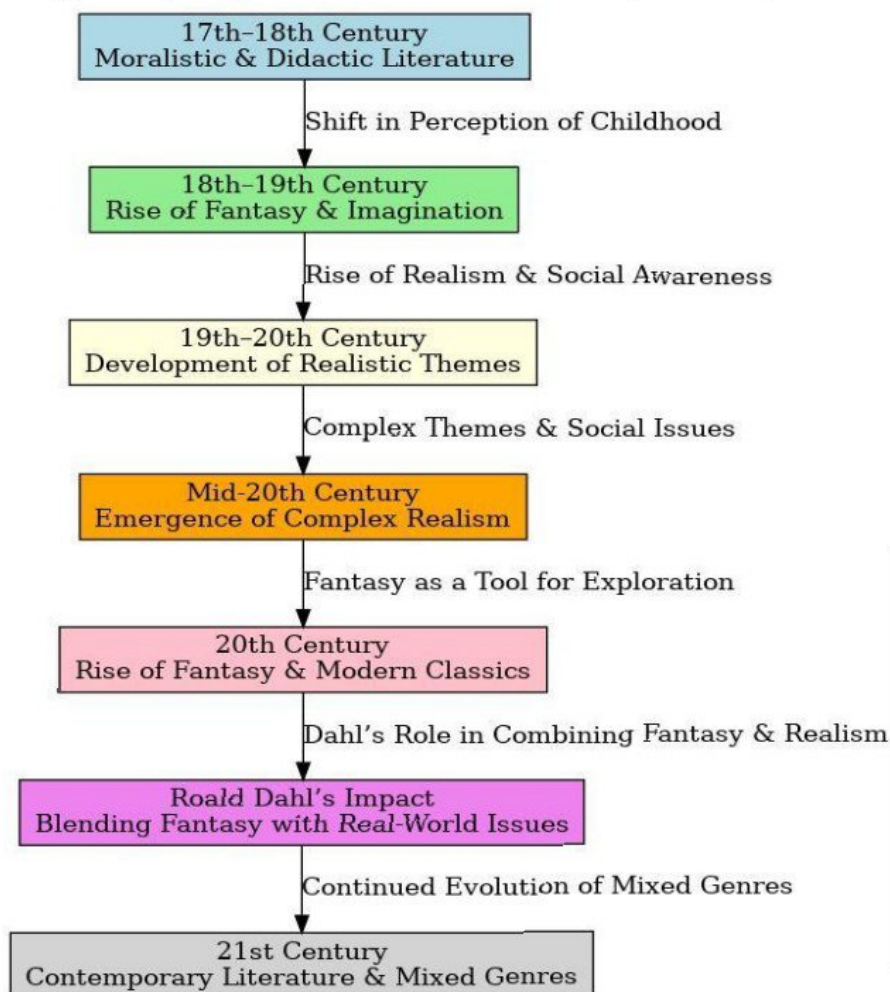
Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1995–2000) took fantasy literature into even more philosophical areas, questioning religious orthodoxy and the nature of free will. While C.S. Lewis' *The Chronicles of Narnia* cast Christian allegory in a traditional fantasy mold, Pullman's world is one of doubt and rebellion against authority. One immediately recognizable thread of Lyra Belacqua's story entails the idea of seeking knowledge as opposed to this being handed down; thus, this can relate to worldly struggles against the chains of authoritarian control. As such, when it is said, «We are all subject to the fates. But we act as if we are not, or die of despair, so the series implores one to fight for one's truths and not to go by some imposed narrative. As fantasy literature developed, authors such as Rick Riordan began using the genre to frame important discussions about inclusivity and personal identity struggles. Percy Jackson and the Olympians collapses Greek mythology onto modern storytelling (2005–2023), introducing Percy as a hero with ADHD and dyslexia-redefining heroism to include neurodiverse experiences. Similar to Charlie Bucket, Percy finds his success in an ability *not* related to strength but to finding his own difference and embracing his identity. Modern fantasy evolves even now to address contemporary problems in very ingenious ways. *Coraline* by Neil Gaiman (2002) explores the fears of childhood and emotional survival through a dark fantasy lens; *Coraline* actually travels into the eerie Other World, which metaphorically faces one's deepest anxieties. Tomi Adeyemi's *Children of Blood and Bone* (2018) weaves West African mythology into a narrative about racial oppression, using magic as an allegory for marginalized communities reclaiming their power. Suzanne Collins' *The Hunger Games* (2008–2010) blends dystopian and fantasy elements to critique government control, media influence, and the ethics of survival. The endurance of fantasy literature in modern storytelling proves that it is far more than escapism. It offers a medium whereby young readers can fathom personal emotions, societal dilemmas, and moral complexities in an accessible and engaging way. Roald Dahl's subversive storytelling laid the foundation for fantasy to be more than just a whimsical adventure-it became a tool for empowerment, critique, and emotional exploration. The ability of fantasy to transport the reader while having them contemplate the real world keeps it such that it will live long and thrive well into the generations to come within the realm of children's literature.

Results. Children's literature has transformed from strict moral instruction to imaginative storytelling, reflecting societal and philosophical changes. In the early stages, books aimed to teach discipline and morality, as seen in *A Token for Children* (1671). However, the Enlightenment and Romantic movements reshaped the perception of childhood, emphasizing creativity and joy. John Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* (1744) was a turning point, making literature enjoyable for children while maintaining educational value. Over time, storytelling became more engaging, leading to classics like *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865), which prioritized playful narratives over moral rigidity. The shift toward realism in the 20th century marked another major change. Literature started reflecting real-life struggles, with books like *Charlotte's Web* (1952) addressing themes of loss and friendship, while *The Snowy Day* (1962) introduced diversity in children's literature. The Civil Rights Movement and other social changes encouraged stories that represented different backgrounds and experiences. By the 1970s, books such as *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977) explored grief and emotional growth, while *The Machine Gunners* (1975) depicted the realities of war. These works expanded the boundaries of what was considered acceptable for children's literature, making stories more relatable and impactful.

Fantasy literature also evolved significantly. While early fairy tales by the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen often carried dark moral lessons, later works introduced richer, more imaginative worlds. *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* (1900) and *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* invited readers into magical landscapes that encouraged curiosity rather than fear. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* and C.S. Lewis's *The Chronicles of Narnia* elevated fantasy by integrating mythology, philosophy, and deep moral themes. Modern fantasy, such as *Harry Potter* (1997–2007), continues this tradition by addressing real-world issues like discrimination, power struggles, and identity through a magical lens. Roald Dahl played a crucial role in modern fantasy by combining humor, magic, and social commentary. Books like *Matilda* and *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* empower young readers by portraying children overcoming oppressive authority figures. This style influenced contemporary fantasy, seen in *Percy Jackson and the Olympians* and *Children of Blood and Bone*, which weave mythology and cultural identity into their narratives. Fantasy remains a dominant force in children's literature, allowing young readers to explore emotions, fears, and moral dilemmas through engaging stories.

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The future of children's literature will likely continue blending realism and fantasy, as seen in works like *Coraline* and *The Hunger Games*, which merge real-world anxieties with imaginative storytelling. Diversity and representation are becoming more central, ensuring that literature reflects a broader range of experiences. Unlike early didactic books that imposed moral lessons, modern children's literature encourages critical thinking, allowing young readers to form their own perspectives on right and wrong. Future research could examine how digital storytelling and cultural influences will shape literature, confirming that children's



books are more than just entertainment—they play a vital role in shaping young minds.

Conclusion. Children's literature has played a crucial role in shaping the intellectual, emotional, and moral development of young readers. Over time, it has transitioned from simple instructional texts to complex narratives that blend education with entertainment, realism with fantasy, and tradition with innovation. Through these stories, children have been introduced to diverse cultures, moral dilemmas, and imaginative worlds that help them navigate their own realities. The enduring power of children's literature lies in its ability to evolve with societal changes while maintaining its core purpose—to inspire curiosity, encourage critical thinking, and foster a lifelong love of reading. As technology and new media influence storytelling, the essence of children's literature will continue to adapt, ensuring that future generations remain engaged with stories that challenge, comfort, and empower them.

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