

## **THE DEFINITION OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

**Mahmud Firouzimoghaddam**

Children's literature is an expanding field of study, involving criticism, education, and psychology. Defining children's literature is unexpectedly tricky. Children's literature is now recognized as an important field of study, both in itself and for the insights it yields into literature as a whole as well as into the family life, society and thinking of any given period, and the minds of the many major authors influenced by it. On all counts, it is a fascinating and rewarding subject.

In the term children's literature, the more important word is literature. For the most part, the adjective imaginative is to be felt as preceding it. It comprises that vast, expanding territory recognizably staked out for a junior audience, which does not mean that it is not also intended for seniors. Adults admittedly make up part of its population: children's books are written, selected for publication, sold, bought, reviewed, and often read aloud by grown-ups. Nevertheless, by and large there is a sovereign republic of children's literature. To it may be added five

colonies or dependencies: first, “appropriated” adult books satisfying two conditions, they must generally be read by children and they must have sharply affected the course of children’s literature. The second, books the audiences of which seem not to have been clearly conceived by their creators (or their creators may have ignored, as irrelevant, such a consideration) but that are now fixed stars in the child’s literary firmament. The third, picture books and easy-to-read stories commonly subsumed under the label of literature but qualifying as such only by relaxed standards. The fourth: first quality children’s versions of adult classics. And the finally, the domain of once oral “folk” material that children have kept alive folktales and fairy tales; fables, sayings, riddles, charms, tongue twisters; folksongs, lullabies, hymns, carols, and other simple poetry; rhymes of the street, the playground, the nursery, and, supremely, Mother Goose and nonsense verse. Those five categories that are often considered children’s literature are excluded from this section.<sup>1</sup>

Though the case for a children’s literature must primarily rest on its major writers, it is based as well on other supports that bolster its claim to artistic stature. Children’s literature, while a tributary of the literary mainstream, offers its own identifiable, semidetached history. A self-aware literature flows from a recognition of its proper subject matter. The proper subject matter of children’s literature, apart from informational or didactic works, is children. The population of this world is made up not only of children themselves but of animated objects, plants, even grammatical and mathematical abstractions: toys, dolls, and puppets; real, chimerical, and invented animals; miniature or magnified humans, spirits or grotesques of wood, water, air, fire, and space; supernatural and fantasy creatures, figures of fairy tale, myth, and legend; imagined familiars and doppelganger, and grown-ups as seen through the child’s eyes.

Throughout the Middle Ages and far into the late Renaissance the child remained, as it were, terra incognita. A sharp sense of generation gap one of the motors of a children’s literature scarcely existed. The family, young and old, was a kind of homogenized mix. Children’s reading should be of a special order because children are not scaled-down adults. But the conscious, systematic, and

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<sup>1</sup>Hunt P., Butts D., Heins E., Kinnel M., Watkins T., *Children's Literature: An Illustrated History*, Oxford University press, 1995, P.71

successful exploitation of this insight was to wait for almost a century.<sup>1</sup>

It is generally felt that, both as a person worthy of special regard and as an idea worthy of serious contemplation, the child began to come into his own in the second half of the 18th century. His emergence, as well as that of a literature suited to his needs, is linked to many historical forces, among them the development of Enlightenment thought, the rise of the middle class, the beginnings of the emancipation of women (children's literature, unlike that for grown-ups, is in large measure a distaff product) and Romanticism, with its minor strands of the cult of the child and of genres making a special appeal to the young (folktales and fairy tales, myths, ballads). Yet, with all these forces working for the child, he still might not have emerged had it not been for a few unpredictable geniuses. But, once tentatively envisaged as an independent being, a literature proper to him could also be envisaged. And so in the mid-18th century what may be defined as children's literature was at last developing. Even after the child had been recognized, his literature on occasion persisted in viewing him as a diminutive adult. More characteristically, however, "realistic" (that is, nonfantastic) fiction in all countries regarded the discovered child in a mirror that provided only a partial reflection of him. There are fewer instances of attempts to present the child whole, in the round, than there are attempts to represent the whole adult. The rationale behind these shifting visions of childhood is akin to Renaissance theories of "humours" or "the ruling passion." Progress in children's literature depended partly on abandoning this mechanical, part-for-the-whole attitude. One encouraging note in realistic children's fiction of the second half of the 20th century in all advanced countries is the appearance of a more organic view.<sup>2</sup>

So, we can conclude that children's literature, both fiction and non-fiction books, written especially for children 0-12 years old. Young adult literature: both fiction and non-fiction books, written for people 13-18 years old. Although children's literature is intended primarily for children, it is more accurate to view such texts as having dual audiences of children and adults. Adults, particularly parents, teachers, and librarians, often function as gatekeepers who identify appropriate texts for children. Since children's literature has been marketed and purchased by adults who, in turn, present it to children, authors and publisher

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<sup>1</sup>Nikolajeva M., *Aspects and Issues in the History of Children's Literature*, Greenwood press, 1995, P.19

<sup>2</sup>Hunt, P.L., *Criticism Theory and Children's Literature*, 1991, P.96

have attempted to produce children's texts that appeal to the desires of the actual adult purchaser, if not the child reader of the text. In the picture book and chapter book genres especially, an adult reads to a child or children in a group. While folk and fairy tales were not originally intended for children, they have become a staple of children's literature since the early 19th century. On the other hand, many books written for and widely read by children during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are considered historical children's literature today and are read almost exclusively by adult scholars of children's literature. Children's literature has been written, illustrated, published, marketed, and purchased consistently by adults to be given to children for their edification and entertainment. Generally speaking, it is the intended audience rather than the producers of the texts who define the field.

As it is mentioned in Encyclopedia Britannica “Children's literature the body of written works and accompanying illustrations produced in order to entertain or instruct young people. The genre encompasses a wide range of works, including acknowledged classics of world literature, picture books and easy-to-read stories written exclusively for children, and fairy tales, lullabies, fables, folk songs, and other primarily orally transmitted materials. Children’s literature first clearly emerged as a distinct and independent form of literature in the second half of the 18th century, before which it had been at best only in an embryonic stage. During the 20th century, however, its growth has been so luxuriant as to make defensible its claim to be regarded with the respect though perhaps not the solemnity that is due to any other recognized branch of literature.”<sup>1</sup>

When we talk about the Children’s Literature, it seems that we are facing with a simple subject. Those outside the academic circles who are unfamiliar with the world of literature and other branches of human sciences, have a simplistic definition of Children’s Literature. However, Children’s Literature is a multidisciplinary subject with contrasting viewpoints and definitions. Different viewpoints have been presented on the specifications of Children’s literary works and their contrasts with adult literature. Up until the dawn of the 19th, information technology dedicated to children was scarce. With the advent of printing apparatus, more serious attention was directed at materials dedicated to children. In the 20th Century, along with population growth and acceleration of

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<sup>1</sup><http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/111289/childrens-literature>

information transfer among nations, modern educational centers emerged and attention to children heightened, to the point that this century was also coined as “The Children Century”. Naturally, the child segment of the society became the focus of attention by parents, teachers, writers, artists and theorists in other realms of science and creation of scientific, literal and artistic works for this segment of society exploded and resulted in inevitably variable and sometimes opposing views and definitions. The complexity in definition of children’s literature and the emergence of numerous opposing views about this subject has different causes. We believe that different branches of art and science enter into these realms because the children’s literature is a subject to different manipulations. We use children’s literature to develop creativity in children, to educate them, to comfort them, to entertain them and to communicate with them.

Just as other forms of literature, children's literature grew from stories passed down orally from generation to generation. The earliest of what came to be regarded as children's literature was first meant for adults. Among this ancient body of oral literature were myths and legends created to explain the natural phenomena of night and day and the changing seasons. Ballads, sagas, and epic tales were told by the fireside or in courts to an audience of adults and children eager to hear of the adventures of heroes. Many of these tales were later written down and are enjoyed by children today.

The Children’s literature, which has been defined as part of written and oral expressions, culminates many cultures and disciplines. Peter Hunt says: “Children’s literature is an amorphous, ambiguous creature; its relationship to its audience is difficult; its relationship to the rest of literature, problematic”<sup>1</sup>

Another scholar Perry Nodelman in his concepts about children’s literature, considers it a realm in which a wide array of arguments have been made. He states that the Children’s literature is not simple. The most rudimentary of baby books comes to exist and has meaning only within a complex context of assumptions about books, about babies, about books for babies, about language and visual imagery, about education, about pleasure, and about the economy and the marketplace. Children’s literature is a field within a field (the field of literary production) and is inextricably intertwined with other fields (particularly the fields

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<sup>1</sup>Hunt, P., *Literature for Children*, published in the Taylor & Francis e-Library, 2003, P.1

of education and librarianship).<sup>1</sup>

Children's and adolescents' literature can be viewed as the works that have been produced specifically for children, or as the literature that is read by children. We should mention also that the attention to literal and artistic aspect of a literary work for children is important, but the key element in production and translation of children's literature is a thorough understanding of the readers, their needs, their level of comprehension and absorption, their environment, and their interests.

We can conclude that like the concept of childhood, children's literature is very much a cultural construct that continues to evolve over time. Children's literature comprises those texts that have been written specifically for children and those texts that children have selected to read on their own, and the boundaries between children's literature and adult literature are surprisingly fluid. In a word, since the beginning of time, adults have entertained children with stories and fables. From these folktales developed an elaborate tapestry of children's literature. Today children's literature encompasses multiple genres and appeals to readers of every age. Children's literature is extremely valuable in both the school setting and at home. Teachers and parents should both be able to differentiate between quality and mediocre literature, in order to give children access to the best books to encourage these important values of literature and considering developmental domains. Children's literature is valuable in providing an opportunity to respond to literature, as well as cultural knowledge, emotional intelligence and creativity, social and personality development, and literature history to students across generations. Exposing children to quality literature can contribute to the creation of responsible, successful, and caring individuals.

### **Definition of Children's literature**

**Mahmud Firouzimoghaddam**

#### **SUMMARY**

Children's literature the body of written works and accompanying illustrations produced in order to entertain or instruct young people. The genre encompasses a wide range of works, including acknowledged classics of world literature, picture books and easy-to-read stories written exclusively for children, and fairy tales, lullabies, fables, folk songs, and other primarily orally transmitted materials.

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<sup>1</sup>Nodelman, P., *The hidden adult: defining children's literature*, published in the Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008, P.245

Children's literature first clearly emerged as a distinct and independent form of literature in the second half of the 18th century. During the 20th century its growth has been so luxuriant as to make defensible its claim to be regarded with the respect.

**Key words:** children's literature, children, genre, embryonic stage, independent form of literature, fairy tales, lullabies, fables, folk songs, primarily orally transmitted materials.

## Մանկական գրականության սահմանումը

Մահմուդ Ֆիրուզիմոգամ

### Ամփոփագիր

Մանկական գրականությունը գրավոր ստեղծագործությունների ամբողջականություն է, որն ուղեկցվում է նկարագարումներով՝ երեխաների զվարճացնելու և ուղղորդելու համար: Այս ժանրը ներառում է ստեղծագործությունների լայն շրջանակ, այդ թվում՝ համաշխարհային գրականության ճանաչված դասականները, պատկերագրող գրքերը, հեշտ ընթեռնելի պատմվածքները՝ գրված բացառապես մանուկների համար, հեքիաթները, օրորոցայինները, առակները, ժողովրդական երգերը, բանավոր կերպով փոխանցված նյութերը: Մանկական գրականությունը՝ որպես առանձին և անկախ գրականության ճյուղ, առաջին անգամ դրսևորվել է 18-րդ դարի երկրորդ կեսին: Արդեն 20-րդ դարի ընթացքում, նրա զարգացումն այնքան հարուստ ու բեղմնավոր էր, որ արդարացրեց վերջինիս պահանջը՝ ճանաչում և հարգանք ձեռք բերելու առումով:

**Բանալի բառեր:** մանկական գրականություն, մանուկներ, ժանր, գրականության անկախ ուղղություն, հեքիաթներ, օրորոցայիններ, առակներ, ժողովրդական երգեր, բանավոր կերպով փոխանցված նյութեր:

## Понятие детской литература

Махмуд Фирозимогадам

### Резюме

Произведения и иллюстрации детской литературы производятся в основном, чтобы развлечь или наставить молодых людей. Этот жанр включает в себя широкий спектр произведений, в том числе признанных классиков мировой литературы, иллюстрированных книг и легких для чтения рассказов, написанных специально для детей: сказки, колыбельные, басни, народные песни, и другие материалы, передаваемые, прежде всего, в устной форме. Детская литература, в качестве отдельного и независимого вида литературы, впервые возникла во второй половине 18-го века. Однако в 20-м веке, ее рост был настолько широким, чтобы оправдать ее претензии на признание и уважение.

**Ключевые слова:** детская литература, дети, жанр, независимый вид литературы, волшебные сказки, колыбельные, басни, народные песни, материалы, передаваемые в устной форме.