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Didacticism and Morality in Azerbaijan Children's Literature

Introduction

The origin of children's literature dates back to the 18th century, which initially emerged in Britain. The first writer whose books for children were successfully commercialised was John Newberry. Interestingly, the first children's books taught readers how to behave in aristocratic households². However, those instructional children's books did not entertain them. The first novel that did not instruct readers is *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* written by Charles Dodgson in 1865. The main feature distinguishing this book from the previous children's literature is that it does not touch upon religious matters or teach children manners. Modern children's literature which began with *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, did not make morals insignificant. While entertaining readers, these books also taught them moral values³.

Unlike adult literature, writing children's literature appears challenging as different factors should be considered to ensure that it can contribute to society. The major factor in children's literature is the age at which writers determine whether the work was written for a three-year-old child or a bit older. Additionally, the plot in children's literature should be clear and simple, meaning that psychological and cognitive development in children's brains is not at the same level as in adults. The purpose of this is to nurture children

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² M.O. Grenby, A. Immel, *The Cambridge Companion to Children's Literature*, Cambridge 2009; P. Hunt, *Understanding Children's Literature*, https://khidiglibrary.weebly.com/uploads/7/0/5/6/7056479/understanding_childres_literature.pdf [accessed: 27.09.2019].

³ M.R. Marshall, *An Introduction to the World of Children's Books*, Gower 1988.

and should have educational significance for the further development of their brains⁴.

The topics in children's literature are as diverse as in adult literature. Respect for culture and moral values are instilled in children through literature. However, as time changes, culture and morals also shift gradually, and because of this, children are believed to lose interest in the previous children's literature. Environmental issues, technological innovations, etc., attract their attention. Considering that poetic feeling in children is higher and can be compared with writers' and poets' creativity, reading children's books contributes to creativity, cognitive ability, and critical thinking⁵. Hunt also claimed that children's literature differs from time to time and in different geographical areas⁶. In particular, he highlighted that children's literature is complex and excessively essential for children's further development.

Literature Review

Children's literature is considerably powerful in that it does not simply shape children's perception of the world, and those books also help children enrich their vocabulary and knowledge and educate them with cultural values specific to a certain country. When compiling children's books considering essential factors such as time, place, cultural values, religion, scientific development, economic issues, etc., is vital to connect with time and readers. Although some traditions and values are being kept in children's literature, those sources focus on the existing social trends and realities⁷. In his book, Hunt also emphasised that children's literature is important from social, cultural, historical, educational, and commercial perspectives⁸. According to Grenby and Immel, who discussed the history of children's literature in their research, the emergence and origin of children's literature are associated with three factors as follows:

- Commercial product;
- Culture that is being passed down to generations;
- Biographical accounts⁹.

⁴ Z. Khalil, A. Fuzuli, *Children's Literature*, http://anl.az/el/x/zx&ef_ua.pdf [accessed: 30.07.2022].

⁵ R. Yusifoglu, *Children's Literature*, Baku 2006.

⁶ P. Hunt, *Understanding Children's Literature*, op.cit.

⁷ K. Reynolds, *Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction*, New York 2011.

⁸ P. Hunt, *Understanding Children's Literature*, op.cit.

⁹ M.O. Grenby, A. Immel, op.cit.

Children's literature has turned out to be a commercial product because of the invention of printing media. Until that time, fables, stories, etc., were transmitted orally. That is to say, folklore was the initial source and tool for interacting with children in the past time. As biographical sources, books for children were written based on life stories and experiences.

Genres in Children's Literature

Genres in children's literature vary from adults' literature in some way. Children's books are categorised as fiction and non-fiction books. Fiction is classified in itself as follows:

- Poetry
- Modern fantasy
- Historical fiction
- Folklore
- Contemporary realistic fiction
- Picture book

Non-fiction includes the followings:

- Biography
- Multicultural books
- Information books
- International literature¹⁰.

Fairy-tale is a genre which has an unknown history as this genre was transmitted from generation to generation orally until the creation of writing systems. Fairy tales do not simply depict unreal events but also teach readers valuable lessons. Even though fairy tales are diverse in terms of content, the scheme is simple and homogenous. Fairy tales are included in children's literature, although they were intended for illiterate adults in the past. Fairy tales are essential in terms of enriching children's imagination and creativity¹¹.

As given in the *Historical Dictionary of Children's Literature* (2010), fables are narratives in prose which majorly intend for children. Characters in fables are both humans and animals, such as fairy tales. However, most fable characters are animals that denote a specific type of people or behaviour. It is said that the origin of a fable is related to folk tale tradition, and they are mainly compiled for children. The centre of interest in fables is to nurture morals and exemplary behaviour¹².

The origin of fantasy included in children's literature dates back to XVII and continues to develop until now. The fantasy genre gained popularity in the XIX

¹⁰ Marwiyah, *Children and Young Adult Literature*, "Perpustakaan Digital UIN Sunan Kalijaga Yogyakarta", <http://digilib.uin-suka.ac.id/id/eprint/339/1/CHILDREN%20AND%20YOUNG%20ADULT%20LITERATURE.pdf> [accessed: 3.07.2022].

¹¹ K. Sikharulidze, *Fairy-Tale as a Genre*, "Journal of Education" 2012, No. 1 (2), pp. 91–94.

¹² M. Grenby, *Children's Literature*, Edinburgh 2008.

century, and this genre was not only evaluated as a didactic form of literature, but fantasy also entertained children with different characters¹³.

Historical View of Azerbaijan Children's Literature and Genres

Azerbaijan is a multicultural and multireligious country, and this diversity can be found in children's literature. Children's literature in Azerbaijan is diverse and rich, meaning that this richness reflects in different genres ranging from folklore to stories written for children. The main issue in Azerbaijan children's literature is to instil cultural and moral values in children and create values such as kindness, honesty, sincerity, etc. In terms of this, folklore, as an integral part of children's literature, plays a crucial role in teaching moral values and preserving cultural and artistic treasures. Folklore has an ancient history, and the variety of genres show how old Azerbaijan folklore is.

When National Children's prose began to stand on its feet, Azerbaijani prose had already achieved joyful achievements. No matter how educational Azerbaijani prose is, children's literature has its own specifics, its own ideas, concerns, subject area, the world of images, expression, ideas and points. Children's prose had a lot to learn from Russian and European literature, from the works and theoretical ideas of famous educators and artists, from folklore and classical literature. Special attention was paid to the delivery of advanced ideas here. It is because promoting these ideas is the perfect field for turning children into useful beings as members of society, meaning life activity and path. One of the most beautiful aspects of our national children's prose is its colourfulness and richness. The world of images in children's prose is diverse in its social position, origin and spirituality, level and age characteristics, convictions and character. Writers strengthened the spirit of diligence by giving special freshness and charm to the language of works, using the abundance of allegories and epithets, means of artistic description, and folk expressions in an interesting way.

Children's literature in Azerbaijan entered a specific path of development in the 1970s and the 1980s. During this period, the struggle for a new school coincided with the struggle for children's literature. Effective results were achieved by developing both areas in parallel and interaction. During these years, printed textbooks and collections were considered more satisfactory. The struggle for the purity and mass development of the native language,

¹³ W.S. Mahmood, *Fantasy in Children Literature*, "Journal of Arts, Literature, Humanities and Social Sciences" 2020, Vol. 59, pp. 452-465.

which arose from the 80s of the XIX century in connection with the issues of press education, and textbooks, bore fruit precisely in the first decade of the XX century.

The emergence and development of Azerbaijan children's literature are directly linked to the occurrence of a national enlightenment ideology. Preserving the mother tongue and the nation's spiritual need for education conditioned this literature's necessity. The triggering factor which encouraged enlightened writers to write children's books in the second half of the twentieth century was the need for national poetry books and native language textbooks. Since children's literature did not exist as an independent branch of literary heritage until a certain time, the textbook created the wing of the folklore of many children's literature, consisting of fairy tales, epics, legends, and classical artists. One of the significant tendencies in children's literature is that the world's classical children's literature was also translated into the Azerbaijan language. The main themes in children's literature comprise scientific development, the importance of education, love for the motherland and people and other cultural values¹⁴.

Regarding this, the riddle is one of the widely spread genres in folklore which contribute to children's cognitive ability development, drawing the right conclusions from the issues relating to different aspects of life and the environment¹⁵.

Ağaca çıxdım adamla,	I climbed the tree with a person,
Bir nəlbəki badamla, And a plate of almonds.	
Nə dili var, nə ağzı,	What is it that has neither tongue nor
mouth,	
Hey danışar adamla. But talks to you all the time?	

Cavab: Kitab

Answer: Book

(Azerbaijan International: Just for Kids).

Riddles are rich in content, which covers thoughts and ideas of existing things around us. Riddles about plants and animals which belong to Azerbaijan nature are often found in Azerbaijan literature. One specific characteristic or trait is keeping things secret in riddles, and the more difficult the statement is, the more challenging finding an answer is. Another folklore genre is proverbs which help people understand the realities surrounding them. Proverbs

¹⁴ Kh. Mustafayeva, *Azerbaijan Children's Literature*, <http://www.anl.az/el/Kitab/Ar20111-941.pdf> [accessed: 11.09.2019].

¹⁵ V. Ahmad, *Azerbaijan Children's Literature*, Baku 2006, <http://vuqar-ahmed.com/pdf/Azerbaijan-us-aq-edebiyati.pdf> [accessed: 19.10.2021].

are the generalised essence of historical experiences pertaining to social and historical realities¹⁶.

Nümunə: Çox bilən az danışar. Example: The more you know, the less you should talk.

Dəmir sürtüldükcə parıldar. Practice makes perfect.

Öz gözündə tiri görmür, başqasının gözündə qıl seçir.

He cannot see the beam on his own, but he's looking for an eyelash in someone else's.

One of the popular genres in children's literature is funny stories, also named anecdotes. Funny stories or anecdotes differ in the sense of humour from other genres. The main funny characters in Azerbaijan literature are Mulla Nasruddin, Bahlul Dananda, and so on¹⁷.

In Azerbaijan children's literature, tales are very popular and included in prose. Tales in Azerbaijan literature are classified as fairy-tale, everyday realistic fairy tales related to the nation's traditions and daily life, and animal tales. Fairy-tales is about mythical issues, and unrealistic characters are specific to this type of tales. A good example from Azerbaijan folklore is the "Malikmammad fairy tale", one of the famous tales among children. In this fairy tale, the apple tree bears fruit every three days and those who eat the fruit of this tree rejuvenate quickly. One of the most famous children's tales is titled *Jirtan*, which means tiny boy. Although the main character in the tale is physically smaller than his peers, he is very intelligent and easily deals with problems. This tiny boy fights against "Div" (monster), which symbolises the negative character in the tale¹⁸. The main point in this tale is that an individual can cope with any problems if he or she thinks logically. As regards this, there is also a proverb in Azerbaijan literature.

Nümunə: Ağıl yaşda deyil başdadır. Example: Age is no guarantee of wisdom¹⁹.

Believing in celestial bodies is often found in fairy tales, as this is connected with the ancient history of nations in the world. Unlike fairy tales, everyday realistic fairy tales mirror realities such as inequality in society. The main characters in these tales are hard-working and industrious people who deal with challenging issues and tend to make smart decisions in difficult cir-

¹⁶ Z. Khalil, A. Fuzuli, op.cit.

¹⁷ R. Yusifoglu, op.cit.; Z. Khalil, A. Fuzuli, op.cit.

¹⁸ *Azerbaijan International: Just for Kids*, https://www.azer.com/aiweb/categories/magazine/ai111_folder/111_graphics/poems_riddle.pdf [accessed: 7.12.2021].

¹⁹ A. Gurbanoghly, *English-Azerbaijani Proverbial Dictionary*, Bloomington 2013.

cumstances. The important issue relating to animal tales should be considered because they are associated with people's ancient beliefs and totems. In animal tales, human characters sometimes shift to animals, or the reverse happens²⁰. In addition, legends are tremendously popular in Azerbaijan children's literature. Moral legends instil humane characteristics in human beings, such as generosity, kindness, etc. Legends are thematically divided into three categories. Toponymic legends depict the formation of different natural objects such as mountains, rivers, lakes, etc. There is a toponymic legend about the "Beşbarmaq" mountain. The religious legends are about the prominent people in Islam. Azerbaijan has the largest Muslim population. Another kind of legends concerns flora and fauna of Azerbaijan. The legend about celestial objects is excessively popular in Azerbaijan literature, as it narrates the creation of different celestial objects in the universe. The legends about historical figures are called ethnonymic legends, which denote respect for them. "Noah's storm" is a great example of ethnonymic legend²¹.

Conclusion

Literature plays a key role in developing imagination and creativity and keeping culture and traditions alive. In this regard, literature is considered a major source for instilling cultural and moral values in children at an early age. The swift development of children's literature dates back to XIX-XX when different genres spread all around the world. Although similarities are found in almost all children's literature, literature reflects national experiences and country-specific values. Azerbaijan children's literature differs from other nations' literature and is diverse in genres and themes. Children are taught multicultural values through folklore, which is an integral part of literature, contributing to cultural diversity in Azerbaijan.

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Azerbaijans. https://www.azerbaijans.com/content_118_az.html.

²⁰ Z. Khalil, A. Fuzuli, op.cit.

²¹ *Azerbaijans*, https://www.azerbaijans.com/content_118_az.html [accessed: 22.09.2021].

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Summary

The development of children's literature dates back to the 18th century in England. The distinctive feature of children's literature is that it benefits from the folklore of nations. Children's literature is diverse in content and how to properly express different concepts. Regarding this, writing and criticising children's literature appear challenging as they have a distinctive nature. The purpose of writing children's literature is to educate them early and nurture good values since all of them shape their characters. Although there are many significant factors to evaluate in children's literature, age and plot are always the centres of discussion. Age is considered essential in children's literature, meaning that it determines the way of transmitting information, the word choice, and the theme for the suitable age. When it comes to the plot, different nuances, ranging from the writer's insight and approach and the period in the written material is produced, affect topics in children's literature. Considering that poetic feeling in children is higher and can be compared with writers' and poets' creativity, reading children's books contributes to creativity, cognitive ability, and critical thinking. Therefore, children's literature is rich in diverse topics and genres. However, as time changes, culture and morals also shift gradually, and because of this, children are believed to lose interest in the previous children's literature. Environmental issues,

technological innovations, etc., attract their attention.

The emergence and development of Azerbaijan children's literature are directly linked to the occurrence of a national enlightenment ideology. Preserving the mother tongue and the nation's spiritual need for education conditioned this literature's necessity. Azerbaijan children's literature is also rich and diverse in terms of the mentioned factors. The triggering factor which encouraged enlightened writers to write children's books in the second half of the twentieth century was the need for national poetry books and native language textbooks. Azerbaijan children's literature has distinctive features because Azerbaijan is a multicultural and multireligious country, leading to cultural diversity and tolerance development. In Azerbaijan children's literature, the importance of cultural and moral values such as kindness, honesty, sincerity, etc., is depicted uniquely. In terms of this, folklore, as an integral part of children's literature, plays a crucial role in teaching moral values and preserving cultural and artistic treasures. Different genres in children's literature instil humane characteristics in human beings, such as generosity, kindness, etc.

Keywords: literature, genres, culture, morals, education

Дидактизм и нравственность в азербайджанской детской литературе

Резюме

Развитие детской литературы восходит к 18 веку в Англии. Отличительной особенностью детской литературы является то, что она опирается на фольклор народов. Детская литература разнообразна по содержанию и способу правильного выражения различных понятий. В связи с этим написание и критика детской литературы представляются сложной задачей, поскольку она имеет своеобразный характер. Цель написания детской литературы состоит в том, чтобы обучить их в раннем возрасте и воспитать хорошие ценности, поскольку все они формируют детский характер. Хотя в детской литературе есть ряд важных факторов, которые следует оценивать, возраст и сюжет всегда находятся в центре внимания. Возраст считается важным в детской литературе, а это означает, что он определяет способ передачи информации, выбор слов и темы для соответствующего возраста. Когда дело доходит до сюжета, на темы детской литературы влияют различные нюансы, начиная от собственной проницательности и подхода писателя и заканчивая периодом создания написанного материала. Учитывая тот факт, что поэтическое чувство у детей выше и его можно сравнить с творчеством писателей и поэтов, чтение детских книг способствует творчеству, познавательным способностям, критическому мышлению. Поэтому детская литература богата разнообразными темами и жанра-

ми. Однако с течением времени культура и нравы также постепенно меняются, и из-за этого считается, что дети теряют интерес к прежней детской литературе. В настоящее время вопросы экологии, технологические новшества и т.д. также значительно привлекают их внимание.

Возникновение и развитие азербайджанской детской литературы напрямую связано с возникновением национальной просветительской идеологии. Сохранение родного языка и духовная потребность нации в образовании обусловили необходимость этой литературы. Азербайджанская детская литература также богата и разнообразна по вышеперечисленным факторам. Основным фактором, подтолкнувшим просвещенных писателей второй половины XX века к написанию детских книг, является потребность в книгах национальной поэзии и учебниках родного языка. Причина, по которой азербайджанская детская литература имеет отличительные черты, заключается в том, что Азербайджан является многокультурной и многоконфессиональной страной, что привело к развитию культурного разнообразия и толерантности. В азербайджанской детской литературе особым образом раскрывается значение таких культурных и нравственных ценностей, как доброта, честность, искренность и т.д. В связи с этим фольклор как неотъемлемая часть детской литературы играет важнейшую роль в воспитании нравственных ценностей, которые также сохраняют в себе культурные и художественные ценности. Различные жанры детской литературы воспитывают в человеке такие гуманные качества, как великодушные, доброта и др.

Ключевые слова: литература, жанры, культура, мораль, образование