Ministry of Education and Science of Ukraine

**«Theoretical aspects**

**of English children's**

**literature»**

Done by

Olya Andrusyshyn

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**Conception of children`s literature**

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. Sometimes they seem also to be written with adults in mind. 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 (Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels); 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 (Mark Twain’s Adventures of Huckleberry Finn, and Charles Perrault’s fairy tales); third, picture books and easy-to-read stories commonly subsumed under the label of literature but qualifying as such only by relaxed standards (though Beatrix Potter and several other writers do nonetheless qualify); fourth, first quality children’s versions of adult classics (Howard Pyle’s retellings of the Robin Hood ballads and tales); 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.

**Overview of English children`s literature**

The English have often confessed a certain reluctance to say good-bye to childhood. This curious national trait, baffling to their continental neighbours, may lie at the root of their supremacy in children’s literature. Yet it remains a mystery.

But, if it cannot be accounted for, it can be summed up. From the critic’s vantage point, the English (as well as the Scots and the Welsh) must be credited with having originated or triumphed in more children’s genres than any other country. They have excelled in the school story, two solid centuries of it, from Sarah Fielding’s The Governess; or, The Little Female Academy (1745) to, say, C. Day Lewis’ Otterbury Incident (1948) and including such milestones as Thomas Hughes’s Tom Brown’s School Days (1857) and Kipling’s Stalky & Co. (1899); and the boy’s adventure story, with one undebatable world masterpiece in Stevenson’s Treasure Island (1883), plus a solid line of talented practitioners, from the Victorian Robert Ballantyne (The Coral Island) to the contemporary Richard Church and Leon Garfield (Devil-in-the-Fog); the “girls’ book,” often trash but possessing in Charlotte M. Yonge at least one writer of exceptional vitality; historical fiction, from Marryat’s vigorous but simple Children of the New Forest (1847) to the even more vigorous but burnished novels of Rosemary Sutcliff; the “vacation story,” in which Arthur Ransome still remains unsurpassed; the doll story, from Margaret Gatty and Richard Henry Horne to the charming fancies of Rumer Godden and the remarkable serious development of this tiny genre in Pauline Clarke’s Return of the Twelves (1962); the realism-cum-fantasy novel, for which E. Nesbit provided a classic, and P.L. Travers a modern, formulation; high fantasy (Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald, C.S. Lewis, Alan Garner); nonsense (Carroll again, Lear, Belloc); and nursery rhymes. In Jonathan Swift’s Gulliver’s Travels and Daniel Defoe’s Robinson Crusoe, the English furnished two archetypal narratives that have bred progeny all over the world, and in Mary Norton’s Tom-Thumb-and-Gulliver-born The Borrowers (1952) a work of art. In Leslie Brooke (Johnny Crow’s Garden) and Beatrix Potter (e.g., The Tale of Peter Rabbit) they have two geniuses of children’s literature (and illustration) for very small children—probably the most difficult of all the genres. In poetry they begin at the top with William Blake and continue with Christina Rossetti, Robert Louis Stevenson, Eleanor Farjeon, Walter de la Mare, A.A. Milne, and James Reeves. In the mutation of fantasy called whimsy, Milne (Winnie-the-Pooh) reappears as a master. In the important field of the animal story, Kipling, with his Jungle Books (1894, 1895) and Just So Stories (1902), remains unsurpassed. Finally the English have produced a number of unclassifiable masterpieces such as Kenneth Grahame’s Wind in the Willows (which is surely more than an animal story) and several unclassifiable writers (Mayne and Lucy Boston, for example).

The social historian, surveying the same field from a different angle, would point out that the English were the first people in history to develop not only a self-conscious, independent children’s literature but also the commercial institutions capable of supporting and furthering it. He would note the striking creative swing between didacticism and delight. He would detect the sources in ballads, chapbooks, nurses’ rhymes, and street literature that have at critical moments prompted the imagination. What would perhaps interest him most is the way in which children’s literature reflects, over more than two centuries, the child’s constantly shifting position in society.

**The history of English children`s literature**

In 1865, Lewis Carroll wrote arguably one of the most important children's novels in the history of literature: Alice's Adventures in Wonderland. Even at the time of it's publication, the novel was considered a masterpiece. Imaginative and strange, the novel utilized tropes that were not new to writings for children, such as a lost child and magical animals, but presented them in a way that turned them on their head.

The novel plays with math, logic, and language in a way that was altogether new and remains an inspiration for modern writers. The scope of the world created in Carroll's novel changed the face of literature for children. Carlo Collodi published The Adventures of Pinocchio, L. Frank Baum wrote The Wizard of Oz and other stories featuring Dorothy and the magical land of Oz. J.M. Barrie wrote Peter and Wendy. Beatrix Potter began writing and drawing her captivating stories of the animals found in any British child's garden. Any one of these stories is easily recognized and readily loved by children today.

Adventure stories began to rise in popularity in the late 19th century, as well. Robert Louis Stevenson wrote his enduring story of piracy and betrayal, Treasure Island while Rudyard Kipling captured imaginations everywhere with The Jungle Book, set among the animals and forests of India. In the early 20th century, Frances Hodgson Burnett wrote the classics The Little Princess and The Secret Garden, adventure/mystery novels notable for their focus on girls as protagonists rather than boys.

In the United States, the coming-of-age novel was beginning to take hold. This type of novel is still popular today and focuses on the events that mark the transition of the protagonist from innocent and naïve to more aware and responsible. Mark Twain wrote Tom Sawyer and The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn while Louisa May Alcott penned Little Women, Little Men, and Jo's Boys.

In 1908, Kenneth Grahame wrote The Wind in the Willows, continuing one of the oldest traditions of children's literature: anthropomorphic animals. In 1926, A.A. Milne created one of the most popular children's book characters of all time: Winnie-the-Pooh. The four books starring Pooh have been published in dozens of languages and are one of the first children's stories to focus on the fleetingness of childhood and the bittersweet nature of growing up. Pooh continues to inspire today, featuring in songs, television shows, and movies.

Around the same time, Laura Ingalls Wilder began publishing her Little House on the Prairie series. Though the nine novels (one of which was published posthumously in 1971) are based on her own experiences growing up on the American frontier during the late 19th century, they are typically considered fiction and are shelved as such in libraries and bookstores across the country. This idea of the semi-autobiographical children's novels can be traced back to Louisa May Alcott's Little Women, which was loosely based on her own childhood experiences and those of her siblings.

Esteem for Wilder's books has spanned generations as children today are still picking up these books, and reruns of the popular '80s television series can be seen on numerous channels. They are enduring classics loved by both children and parents, and the idea of a series of children's books centered around the same character can be seen again and again throughout children's literature.

In 1937, Dr. Seuss published his debut book. Dr. Seuss's And to Think I Saw It on Mulberry Street was released to critical acclaim, capturing the imagination of not only children, but parents. His iconic illustrations and charming rhyme scheme make him a perennial favorite of young children, and his books have been adapted again and again into movies, television shows, and stage plays.

That same year, J.R.R. Tolkien published The Hobbit, the book that would become the prequel to his masterpiece, The Lord of the Rings, which inspired the tropes and conventions for the entire fantasy genre and which have been adapted into some of the most successful movies in modern film. The book was nominated for a Carnegie Medal and desire for a sequel was at a thrilling high. Tolkien brainstormed that sequel and the world of Middle Earth with good friend C.S. Lewis, who shared his own fantasy world with Tolkien during their decades-long friendship. Lewis published the first of his iconic Chronicles of Narnia: The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe in 1950. The entire series is considered a classic of children's literature, and like Tolkien's master works, has been adapted into film, TV, and radio.

The 1960s and '70s belonged to Roald Dahl, beloved British children's writer. He published his second children's book, James and the Giant Peach, in 1961 and followed it with classics like Charlie and the Chocolate Factory, Fantastic Mr. Fox, The Witches, and Matilda. These books cemented him as one of the English language's most important writers. Besides being enduring classics, his books have been adapted numerous times into film by such notable filmmakers as Tim Burton and Wes Anderson.

Also during this time, Susan Cooper published her Dark Is Rising Sequence. The Outsiders was published in 1967. S.E. Hinton's controversial book is partly credited with forging the young adult genre, which includes books geared for children aged twelve through eighteen.

A Modern-Day Golden Age in Children's Literature

Modern children's fiction has seen a surge of growth in the last thirty years. Books like The Giver by Lois Lowry, Holes by Louis Sachar, Philip Pullman's His Dark Materials trilogy, and the poetry collections of Shel Silverstein captivated readers in the 1990s.

The last twenty years have become known as the golden age of young adult literature, largely due to the popularity of J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series which sold so many copies that children's literature was given its own best sellers list, separate from the adult best sellers list. Since then, series have dominated the market with authors like Rick Riordan, Eoin Colfer, and Suzanne Collins publishing popular books that are loved as much by adults as they are by the children for whom they were written.

With more books for children being written then ever before, it's safe to say the world of children's literature has exploded. Who knows where it will take readers next!

**Conclusions**

English children's literature is a great way to learn about the art of imagination, especially from a child's point of view. They are perfect for boosting children's abilities to invent wonderful new worlds and creatures, as well as giving them a platform to go wild with ideas, preposterous as they may seem.

Fairy tales are often the main inspiration children use to encourage themselves and dream big. Although the elements of creativity and visualisation are brought out at this point in time, parents should keep a steady eye on their children. Eventually they will learn how to separate fantasy from reality, but remember not to rush this process.

Through story books, children are able to equip themselves with the necessary social skills to form relationships and understand emotions better. By relating instances in books with those of real life situations, they will start to identify wrong from right, and in future, use what they have learnt to make the right decisions.

Many English children's literature includes stories of animals or people with a number of characteristics, some good and others bad. These 'inappropriate' features of the characters are used to reveal values and morals such as the consequences of being selfish, rude, impatient, etc. Sometimes these stories are also used to explain why something is the way it is, for example, why spiders weave their webs in circles, why tortoises are slow or how the world came to be.

Keeping a vast selection of children's books helps to expand children's knowledge, and is the perfect object to replace the deadly culture of watching television all day, every day.

Children's literature is for enjoyment. It is an adventure into a new and unexplored world, a journey into a world that is hidden from those who are not exposed to the world you enter while reading.

**List of used literature**

1. <https://www.britannica.com/art/childrens>
2. [https://www.encyclopedia.com/literature](https://www.encyclopedia.com/literature-and)
3. <http://www.angelicum.net/classical-homeschooling>