

## **An overall look at children's literature**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

The history of *Children's Literature*, we can say with certainty that it is fairly new. It is with regret that we admit that not enough has been done for Albanian children's literature and this fact is a concern. Definitions of this literature are countless and yet again, researchers are accustomed to the idea that a precise definition of it is quite difficult. It is defined as, 'made for children', because it is accepted by children or adults, they offer it to the youngest readers. The criteria for the classification of *Children's Literature* are among the most numerous and diverse, and it has often been the subject of debates among researchers. Regarded as literature that is based on two systems simultaneously, more specifically: the literary and the pedagogical, most theorists strongly rely on the socialization values that this art should have, as well as on the cultural and educational values which they attribute to this genre of literature. Children's and young people's literature includes works with stories and extraordinary events, mythical and fantastic, legendary, as well as fantastic and scientific. Indeed, its purpose is the child recipient, but it does not exclude the adult reader. However, its classification is often guided by many and different criteria, often the subject of discussions. The corpus of its study is quite extensive and should be studied under the lens of free criticism.

**Keywords:** Literature, children, study, character, tale, fable, author, criticism.

### **1. Introduction**

The history of *Children's Literature*, we can honestly say that it is new, even though the well-known researcher Astrit Bishqemi, with the zeal of an elite researcher, has listed about 830 names. Its periodization is a challenge for researchers, especially after the fall of the dictatorship. Much has been done and there is still much to be done about it, and a serious institutional support for this literature would stimulate both its creativity and the studies about it. Although art has no homeland and time, a number of works written in the period of the dictatorship, when read by us today, appear to have no relationship whatsoever with art. However, its classification is guided by numerous and different criteria, often becoming the subject of discussions. The corpus of its study is quite extensive and should be studied under the lens of free criticism.

#### **1.1 Albanian authors and their contribution**

We can regretfully say that not enough has been done for Albanian children's literature and this fact is a concern. Among the iconic authors of this literature in poetry and prose, we can mention: A. Mamaqi, A. Bishqemi, B. Dedja, G. Bushaka, I. Nelaj, O. Grillo, T. Gjokutaj, Rr, Dedaj, R. Kukaj, I. Kadare, M. Krasniqi, Y. Elshani, Z. Halili. Definitions about this

literature are countless and again researchers are accustomed to the idea that a precise definition of it is quite difficult. It is classified for children, because it is accepted by children, or adults offer it to the little ones. The criteria for the classification of *Children's Literature* are among the most numerous and diverse, and it has often been the subject of debates among researchers. Regarded as literature that is based on two systems parallelly: the literary and the pedagogical, most theorists strongly rely on the socialization values that this art should have, as well as on the cultural and educational values that they attribute to this genre of literature.

Children's and young people's literature includes works with stories and mystical events, mythical and fantastic, legendary, as well as fantastic and scientific. Indeed, its target is the child recipient, but it does not exclude the adult reader, who may be a parent, teacher, researcher, or educator. Like adult literature, children's literature is divided into genres judged by content, length of work or writing techniques.

The first author in Albanian literature who wrote for this literature category is Naim Frashëri. Some of his works in this genre would be: *Vjersha për mësonjëtorët e para (Poetry for the first grades)*, Drita, Bucharest, 1886; *E këndimit çunavet këndonjëtorëja (Reader for Boys)*, first part dhe *E këndimit çunavet këndonjëtorëja* second part, published in the same year, by the company "Drita". The most prominent fables, highly influenced by the father of fables Aesop, such as: *The Raven and the Fox*, *The Wolf and the Lamb*, *The Bird and the Boy*, have a strong moralizing and didactic content. Similar would be two poems by Naum Veqilharxhi published in *Alfabetarin e gjuhës shqipe (The Albanian alphabet)* in 1844, *Abetar shqip (Albanian alphabet guide textbook)* of Konstandin Kristoforidhi, the poem "Dy dhitë" (*The Two Goats*) (1866), as well as some translations of religious nature translated by him. Children's literature for the first Albanian schools would then go on to be built on didactic creations, fables, adaptations, translations and proses of patriotism and knowledge. Although its first steps are slow, authors like Sami Frashëri, Thimi Mitko, Zef Jubani and others would make serious efforts to create an authentic literature.

Even though these writers lived and were educated in different countries of the world, with their enlightenment ideas and their pedagogy, they laid the foundations of *Children's Literature*. They intertwined texts of physics, geography and biology with didactic poems. The fable has always been tempting for the authors of *Letërsisë Shqipe për Fëmijë (Albanian Literature for Children)*. As short works with a deep moralizing didactic content, in prose and poetry, this work had its own indisputable importance. As an adaptor of over 100 fables by Aesop and other authors, Antonio Santori made his efforts but unfortunately, they remained only in manuscript. In 1886, Naim Frashëri in his work *Vjersha për mësonjëtorët e para* published La Fontaine's fables, adapting them for children, such as: "Duhet të rronç i vërtetë/ pa të lësh emër përjetë/ me të liq mos u përzejë"<sup>1</sup> (You have to live fairly/ without staining your name forever/ do not mingle with bad people). Ndre Mjeda also, following the example of Naim, would bring a more elaborate form of the fable, such as: "Mos thuj rrena kurr, o fmi/ E gjithmonë, t'i kesh mëni."<sup>2</sup> (Never tell lies, child/ And always, despise them.) Papa Kristo Negovani would also adapt about 45 fables, which he would publish in *Vjershëshkresëtorja*, in 1899. Andon Zako Çajupi, in the well-known work *Baba Tomorri* (1902), would also

publish 6 fables of La Fontaine. 18 years later, he would take another 112 fables from La Fontaine and will publish them in the work *Përralla të zgjedhura* (*Selected Fairy Tales*), adapting and embellishing them. Nonda Bulka would then successfully cultivate this genre, as well as Ferit Lamaj.

## 2. The ratio between tale and reality in children's literature

Astrit Bishqemi, one of the most popular writers and researchers in literature for children and young people, says that: "...*qilimi fluturues nuk është zëvendësuar aspak me aeroplan*"<sup>3</sup> (the flying carpet has not been replaced by an airplane at all), assigning the main role to the tale notion. Or in the scientific tale "*Maçoku me celular*" (The Cat with the Cellphone), 2004, with a remarkable mastery, he combines tale with science, keeping pace with the rhythm of time. In the same way, Bedri Dedja in his science fiction novels, does not diminish the function of the fairy tale, but uses it as a founding material and complements it with other data.

In the literature written for children there are many authors who use the tale element as a raw essential material. From it they borrowed the characters, the fantasy, the structure, the flora and the fauna, beautifully interweaving tale with realism. The visualization is provided through a language realized with dialogue, which enables the animal or bird characters to give the child a special experience while reading. Therefore, through this depiction, the children develop their thinking and reflecting abilities (relationships between good and devil, truth and deception, betrayal and lies).

Fox, wolf, lamb, turtle, eagle, frog become part of the fauna of these creations. The world where the fabulous characters live and act is personified as a whole. Many of the creations of M. Krasniqi, R. Kukaj, Z. Halil, have folk literature as their source. They come naturally, interwoven as a symbiosis of oral and written. Personifications, proverbs, charming anecdotes and subtle folk humor characterize their creations.

## 3. A short briefing on history of Children's Literature in the world

The first creations of this literature are fables created by a slave from Phrygia named Aesop. According to Myzafer Xhaxhiu: "*Many researchers think that the cycle of fables related to the traditional name of Aesop do not belong to a single author: they are the fruit of a long elaboration of popular thought and wisdom. Aesop may be one of the most skilled narrators of fables, who may have elaborated and enriched them with the element of his own creativity.*"<sup>4</sup> (translated from Albanian, see reference) The Roman fabulist, Phaedrus, made Greek fables known by processing it, leaving the baton to: "...*La Fontaine, Lessing and they then leave it to Krylov, Çajup and others*"<sup>5</sup> (translated from Albanian). Some of Aesop's fables were published in 1484 in the form of a woodcut by the Englishman W. Caxton.

La Fontaine, who knew and studied the previous fabulists, introduced into his fables the political spirit of the period of the monarchy of Louis XIV. He dealt with their processing and the same language was used by our renaissance people to reflect the historical reality of their time. Although they were stories of adult literature, the Robin Hood stories dating from

year 1450 of the fifteenth century and some of the stories titled “*The Death of Arthur*” by T. Malori, had two roles, circulating as literature for children and adults. This tradition was also followed by our researchers.

In Russia, the creator of the fable is considered to be Ivan Krylov, who published more than 10 works in children's literature. The fairy tales known as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Cinderella* or *Sleeping Beauty*, which over time come in different versions, published and reprinted in the first original version, were published in the children's book of the French writer Charles Perrault titled “*The Tales of Mother Goose*” in the year 1697. In the Middle Ages, the texts of this literature were served in Latin. They mainly had moralizing and religious content.

In its beginnings, this literature had a didactic character and with the publications of the Englishman Newbery during the years 1713-1767, it developed an entertaining notion. Mary Cooper published in 1744, a pocket book with a very interesting inscription, which she dedicated to little ladies and gentlemen, for their nannies to sing it to them until they grew up and could read it themselves. This edition was also followed by a guide with 163 rules of etiquette. The 18th century will also mark the publication of magazines for children, which will give impetus to the development of this literature.

The novel *Robinson Crusoe* by Daniel Defoe was published in 1719. The hero's efforts to survive, the exotic descriptions of the island, make it quite interesting even for the reader of our days. The creations of the Danish writer Hans Christian Andersen are also considered real treasures. The characters of his stories are mythological beings such as fairies or animals, which transmit meaningful messages and ideas. It is even said that the fame of his stories' is compared to Shakespearean heroes, such as Hamlet or King Lear. The fairy tales *The Ugly Duckling*, *The Little Match Girl*, *The Little Mermaid*, *The Emperor's New Clothes* saw the light of publication in millions of copies and were translated into over 150 languages.

Quite popular at the beginning of the 19th century, became the Grimm brothers, who became the first collectors in Europe. They collected and wrote the fairy tales, traveling all over Germany, with the aim of preserving German folk literature. The fairy tales collected by them, such as *Little Red Riding Hood*, *Snow White* and many others, also saw the light of publication in over 160 languages, having a great impact on European literature as well as on the world literature for children.

Another work filled with fantasy that is read by readers of any age is the novel *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll, published in 1865. In 1880, Johanna Spyri published the work *Heidi*, which through Heidi's adventures and descriptions of alpine life in Switzerland, captured the hearts of young and adult readers.

Carlo Collodi would publish in 1892 the first novel in Italian children's literature titled *Pinocchio*, a character as comic as it is moralizing. From the same period is Rudyard Kipling's *The Jungle Book*, a collection of stories that tell the young reader how people live

among animals in the jungle. Another masterpiece of world literature for children, would be Astrid Lindgren's work, *Pippi Longstocking*, published in more than 100 languages worldwide. The heroine and protagonist of this work promotes self-confidence and positive thinking. Another novel, also part of the children's literary world is *Harry Potter* by J. K. Rowling. As the most popular and widely read novel in the world, it is read with great interest even by adult readers. In addition to forms of magic, the child's imagination is also fed by myths, fantasy interwoven with science stories and many other forms of expression.

## References

<sup>1</sup>Naim Frashëri, *Vepra 2*, 1978, p. 59.

<sup>2</sup>Ndre Mjeda, *Guxo* [Dare], Pristina, 1980, p. 40.

<sup>3</sup>A. Bishqemi, " *Histori e letërsisë shqiptare për fëmijë*" [History of Albanian Literature for Children], 2004, p. 20.

<sup>4</sup>M. Xhaxhiu, *Letërsia antike greke* [Antique Greek Literature], Tirana, 2004, p.18.

<sup>5</sup>M.Xhaxhiu, *Letërsia antike greke* [Antique Greek Literature], Tirana, 2004, p.18.