

Genres are Categorized and Reinvented in Children's Literature

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ABSTRACT

After it became established, children's literature swiftly branched out into several subcategories. The transition was prompted by fundamental differences in personal preferences, diverse demographics, shifting reader profiles, and even pressure from the publishers. As reader preferences shifted and the borders blurred, constant churning ensured that ever-newer genres formed. Given the lack of established genres and the imaginative writers who went against the grain in India, this was much more apparent.

The engagement between pedagogy and aesthetics provided the greatest impetus in outlining the characteristics and modes of children's literature as well as the theoretical underpinnings that determine the criticism- ever since their emergence. It also forms the background to the choices in publishing as well as the production of and reflection on literature for children at the turn of the twentieth century. The conflict influenced the choice of critical methodologies and created a creative dialogue with two theoretical approaches decisive for the emerging criticism of children's literature (Julia Mickenberg, 2006).

It has become clear that the symbiotic relationship between "Ideologiekritik," or the critique of ideologies, and Cultural Studies is essential for starting any journey into children's literature. Additionally, perceptions of infancy point to educational or artistic impulses and have an impact on the standards of assessment in primary and secondary literature (1983, Harry Raphael Garvin). While the Romantic and Enlightenment left their marks as well, their combined influence are incomparable.

The "Ideologiekritik" has revolutionized the efforts to reflect on and characteristics of children's literature from the late 1970's onward (Heuß, 1985) Critical studies often take it into consideration highlighting its continued significance in the analysis of children's literature. Moreover, it has proved to be an ideal tool as an analytic instrument for marginalized forms of cultural expression, such as children's literature as it created a free dialogue.

Both approaches began as a counterweight to the more significant approaches prevailing then that lacked political orientation and shunned social issues. The birth of "Ideologiekritik" reacted against these orientations and rejected formalist deconstruction. While accepting basic continuities with some post-structuralism's premises—such as the ubiquity of textual structures in any cultural expression—the approach decided to coopt the political dimension in criticism. "Ideologiekritik" and Cultural Studies accept the inevitability of "seeing politics" even in the domain of children's literature (Roters, 1990).

The engagement between these two approaches impelled gradual widening of gap between strands in the field of critical analysis. While one starts out from the basic premise of sincere humanist conviction that children's literature will engender a better society and hence advocates a stringent following of criticism of ideology, others

choose to focus on the participation of marginalized cultural expression in the unmasking of any heteronomous representation. In the process, the disruptive influence of the less radical “Ideologiekritik” is cracked open by the subversive approach of Cultural Studies and both gain symbiotically (Harry Raphael Garvin, 1983).

The very formulation of “Ideologiekritik” presupposes the need for criteria to define what can be termed as “literature”—criteria that are always at the risk of being overturned by the decisive juxtaposition of any norms. The strength that “Ideologiekritik” imparts, on the other hand, is a higher degree of self-reflection leading to a necessary questioning of any criticism ideology that arrogates to itself the “right” position in the analysis of children's literature. (Roters, 1990) The theoretical bases are incorporated in the emerging genres of children literature that are path breaking and create new grounds while redefining genres, often characterizing what children should read.

The interaction between these ideologies is engendering a slew of children's literature that defy easy categorization. Any effort to understand this can be possible only if the historical evolution and background to the creation of children's literature is understood.

The Evolution of Genres

As is obvious, there was largely a blurring of boundaries in the beginning and what eventually was termed as the children's literature began life as literature for grown-ups. These included oral literature comprising myths and legends created to gain an understanding of wondrous natural phenomena like thunder, lightning, and the utilitarian like the rains and the changing seasons. These Ballads, sagas, and epic tales were usually recited in gatherings around the fireside for mixed audiences comprising both adults and children straining to hear the latest exploits of bravery, chivalry, sacrifice and a spectrum of human emotions (Egoff, 1981). Some of these forms our legacy and are still being relished by the children- after being written down over the ages.

The first literature in English was perhaps written to widen the ambit of teaching agents and were expressly used to instruct children. During the Middle Ages- school texts in Latin were written by the Venerable Bede, Aelfric, St. Aldhelm, and St. Anselm that formed an admirable aid to the teachers in the rudimentary educational institutions in schools in England and colonial America. The books became more significant and perhaps more palatable -even interesting- after William Caxton, England's first printer, published Aesop's Fables and Sir Thomas Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* in the fifteenth century (Horne, 1985). The all-purpose Hornbook were the first books specifically targeted at children, teaching the 3 R's and the Lord's Prayer. Similarly, *The New England Primer* (c.1691) enabled children to learn the alphabet along with prayers and religious conduct & catechisms (Julia Mickenberg, 2006).

The first-ever literature definitely for children and young adults in England and the United States were mainly cold and stark tales warning of the perils of lack of piety and illustrated it by recounting the resultant deaths by being sanctimonious children. These were extensively used for the purposes of edification of Puritan boys and girls. However, the light of John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1678) managed to shine through even in this era of doom and gloom and quickly established itself as the classic for both children and adults. Later masterpieces -originally written for adults but adopted as children literature included Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (1726) (Horne, 1985).

In 1729, an English translation of Charles Perrault's Tales of Mother Goose took England by storm - defining the contours of an emergent publishing industry for children. John Newbery, an English author and bookseller, imparted a new direction when he published a collection of Mother Goose Rhymes in 1765. In actual fact, Newbery became the first publisher devoted to children's publishing. Among his publications were A Pretty Little Pocket Book (1744) and The Renowned History of Little Goody Two Shoes (1765). The popularity even prompted a deluge- perhaps the earliest -of pirated editions of Newbery's works by Isaiah Thomas and others- especially in the United States (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2006).

By the end of the 18th century, juvenile literature, again returned to didactic themes, possibly moved by Locke and Rousseau. Ironically despite the latter's exhortations, the intellectual and moralistic themes predominated, concretized in the writings of Thomas Day, Mary Sherwood, and Maria Edgeworth in England and of Peter Parley (Samuel Goodrich) and Martha Farquarson (Martha Finley) in the United States (Egoff, 1981).

Alice's Chant: Flowering of Classics for All Times in Children's Literature

The 19th-century saw the birth of romanticism leading to a body of works that can be termed as authentic children's literature. The children's books began to encompass fantasy and realism, fun and adventure, and many books created in the genre retain their popularity even today. These created classics that transcend all groups and categories, cuts across all linear demarcations, and have among them some books with enduring qualities like excellence in style, characterization or significant themes and universality of appeal. The folk tales collected in Germany by the enterprising duo of brothers Grimm saw an English rendition in 1823. Similarly, the evergreen Hans Christian Andersen fairy tales were published in England during the period. Joseph Jacobs compiled a slew of English folk tales at the turn of the century while Andrew Lang, a folklorist, created series of fairy tales. A kind of a template for the poetry written for children was established by Edward Lear's Book of Nonsense (1846) and Robert Louis Stevenson's Child's Garden of Verses (1885) setting the writing style (Horne, 1985). Tom Sawyer (1876), Alice's Adventures in the Wonderland (1865) and Charlotte's Web (1952) remain perennial favorites.

The most popular still remain Lewis Carroll's twin masterpieces Alice's Adventures in Wonderland (1865) and Through the Looking Glass (1872) - the epitome of the times combining lunacy and fantasy with satire and word games. The Victorian family life is quite realistically depicted in the children's literature of Louisa May Alcott's Little Women (1868), whereas adventure predominates in Mark Twain's Adventures of Tom Sawyer (1876) and Robert Louis Stevenson's Treasure Island (1880), with perfect characterization and well-crafted situations. At the turn of the century several children's magazines also came into vogue with a mix of tales, do - it yourself activities - the most important being the St. Nicholas Magazine (1887-1943) (Julia Mickenberg, 2006).

Meanwhile, translations widened the world of the English-speaking children from the 19th century onwards ; popular translated works include J. D. Wyss's Swiss Family Robinson (tr. from the German, 1814); Carlo Collodi's Pinocchio (tr. from the Italian, 1892); Felix Salten's Bambi (tr. from the German, 1928); Antoine de Saint-Exupéry's Little Prince (tr. from the French, 1943); Astrid Lindgren's Pippi Long stocking (translated from the Swedish, 1950); and Herta von Gebhardt's The Girl from Nowhere (translated from the German, 1959) (Meigs, 1953).

The realism in children's literature is now becoming many-and varied. While it is must mirror the reality of today's world; a counter argument about the need to protect the children from controversial topics which they cannot comprehend is gaining ground. However, it is questionable as new awareness of the realities of the world is being created by the mass media right within the confines of the homes.

In a multilingual nation like India, social reality included the hardships faced by the rural poor, tribals, particularly women and children. Ecology and conservation of wildlife are issues fast gaining importance handled deftly by modern writers. Ruskin Bond, is outstanding in transforming the mundane and the ordinary into the wondrous. Sigrun Srivatsava also depicts realism with imagination (Archana Garodia Gupta, 2004).

The new reality of loneliness, nuclear families, the ghettoism of concrete jungles, disappearance of playfield and the overburdening of the monotonous routine have given rise to a new breed of novels.

These are giving rise to children's literature that is blurring the distinction between children's and grown-up literature.

Inchoate Boundaries-Birthing of the Young Adult Literature

Emily Neville's *It is Like This Cat* (1963) reflects the upheaval of values and society structure as the-14-year-old protagonist's alienation from home soon faded into oblivion. Paul Zindel 's *My Darling My Hamburger*, boldly invades into adult territories of pre-marital sex and adult disregard for the problems of young people, alienation and teenage angst. the American 'problem novels' which dominated books for children reflect the baby boomer's generation - insecure and unsure, ambiguous and engendering conflicts within the harmony. Authors like Paula Fox, Ivan Southall, Phillippa Pearce, Leon Garfield, Alan Garner and others however, wrote substantial books to expand the horizon for children. Youngsters, however have refused to be bogged down by a specific genre and freely choose between Asimov, Buchanan, Dick Francis, Danielle Steele and Jeffrey Archer (Harry Raphael Garvin, 1983). Indian -teenagers also subscribe to this reading list and feel the lack of indigenously produced books written exclusively for them.

Young adult novels now explore critical issues like premarital romance, drug abuse, rebellion against adult authority, gang warfare, etc. The overpowering of cultural assumptions including class concepts are absent that diverges into novel explorations in content and techniques . Traditional narrative sequence disrupted and fragmented reality or pastiche abounds like in Aidan Chamber's *Break Time* (1978). Surrealistic journeys into the past to delve into the causes for the young heroine's insufferable present is utilized in Virginia Hamilton's Newbery Honor Award winning book *Sweet Whippers, Brother Rush* (1992). Adopting an extraordinarily powerful tone to span cultures and generations the author, has skipped his own identity as a black American and the attendant racism to present a powerful novel (Egoff, 1981).

Environmental Issues - The Indian Experience

India is a sub-continent: there are endless amazing facts about this country and its land, our landscape includes coastal sand dunes; pristine rain-forest; one of the most glorious, teeming-with-wildlife national parks in the world; and sometimes snow-covered Himalayan regions and deserts. In all of these environments there is unique

plant and animal life that can be found nowhere else in the world. Every state and territory include some exploration of the Indian environment in its curriculum, which varies according to grade level. Education publishers have published children's books that explore all of India's wonderful natural environment in many genres, and a number of these titles are available internationally. The wonder of the Indian environment has inspired a slew of Indian's picture book creators. Some titles even push the imagination to ruminate over what the environment should be while others ponder a maimed, disrupted and , even ruined natural environment (Anjaria, 2011).

Educational publishers extensively cover themes such as Natural Disasters, protecting Indian's wildlife, Wonders of the Sea, Indian Animals, the Ecosystem, and seek to present in a format of interest to the young readers. The qualities that make Camels the ship of the desert and the exploration of their arrival and impact in India is explored in CAMELS. Award-winning non-fiction titles have been created that examine the 'real world. A book examines the homes that animals create in their shells, nests and lodges in words and pictures. These wonderful books are exquisitely illustrated and filled with excellently researched facts and accomplish their objective of revealing, exploring and explaining India's eco-richness to all. A number of books also deal with the onrushing Climate Change often establishing the awaiting disaster with very well-researched facts ensuring each to be a worthy read (Superle).

India's foremost writer-scientist and thinker in environmental science, Salvi and Tishal for example extend an all-embracing and updated picture of climate change by exploring its history and future impact. They subtly exhort the young people to contribute to, its alleviation while laying bare the environmental problems. By lucid examples and easily identifiable situations, they utilize a wealth of facts, figures and images to open our eyes to "what happens locally has worldwide consequences" enabling young adults to find for themselves how for example, to reduce the carbon footprint.

Racial Awareness

Many multicultural novels delve into subterranean themes like racism as either they themselves are African-Americans, or are deeply concerned about the twin issues of justice and race. In *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1971), Virginia Hamilton questions the iniquitous universe as a homeless boy Buddy Clark meanders on a voyage through New York streets of experiencing perceiving injustice as imbalance. He strikes up an interracial friendship and is convoluted twist they had to take shelter in an abandoned building where Buddy and a community of homeless boys have learned to "live for each other". in what they call the "planet of Tomorrow Billy" Hamilton's New York makes invisible its poor or its children, especially if one is on the wrong side of the color line. It overlooks black people, except as people to fear, criminalize and proactively exploit (Gilton, 2007).

Laurence Yep's *Dragonwings* (1975) on the other hand depicts the lives of Chinese immigrants to America. The two protagonists: a father, Windrider, with deep rooted integrity and his son, Moonshadow, swim against the corruption of the culture amidst which they dwell Windrider the elder statesman comes to embrace the limitations of being human. Moonshadow on the other hand experiences extreme racism being bullied by white children who call him names and throw rotten vegetables at him (Julia Mickenberg, 2006).

While the narrative purports to deplore racism of any type, the book still suffers from the same inherent flaw that troubles Huckleberry Finn: at the end of the day, the narrator still believes that his race is superior to any other, even though the overt ideology is anti-racist. Maleeka Madison is the narrator of Sharon G. Flake's 'The Skin I'm in'. Maleeka writes an assumed slave narrative about a girl on a slave-ship under the pen name Akeelma derived by rearranging the letters of her own name. She begins to learn from her own assumed character Akeelma, and fights off attacks by the bullies at her school before becoming proud and not diffident of her intelligence (Maria José Botelho, 2006).

Gender Identity

Jennifer Donnelly addresses the issues of feminism; gender identity inequality is more directly. Her *A Northern Light* is a "Künstlerroman" about a young writer, Mattie Gokey, who is confronted with a life choice between work and art. She is depicted to work in a hotel where Grace Brown—a girl murdered in the news story on which a new anchor Theodore Dreiser based *An American Tragedy*—had been staying before being forcibly submerged and killed by her boyfriend, after finding out she's pregnant. Mattie confronts Grace's story—and identifies with her completely till she finds commonality with feminine stories all around—and the stories of the women who surround her (Egoff, 1981). She identifies with the pain that her neighbor undergoes at being repeatedly impregnated and kept in abject poverty by the adulterous attentions of a married man. She comes to admire a poet named Emily Baxter, who is tortured by an abusive husband and who buries ever more in her writings. After realizing that her relationship is stifling her intrinsic feminine identity, Mattie breaks off their engagement and joins college. She finally seriously determines to be a writer (Lesnik-Oberstein, 2006).

In Katherine Paterson's *Jacob Have I Loved* (1980), confronts the deep rooted negative feminine emotions as the Jo-prototype and the Amy-models coalesce into twins named Louise and Caroline. Louise's "Apollyon," jealousy, overwhelms her: she cannot perceive that her blonde, blue-eyed, artistic sister is not a threat to her. A tomboy Louise is attracted to male occupations—crabbing and medicine. Caroline, like Amy, wins all the prizes including the choicest education, artistic success, and a husband that both girls were once attracted to. But Louise (like Jo) ultimately transcends her antipathy for her sister by rejecting her anger and decides to leave the repressive culture look for fortune elsewhere.

Political Awareness and Empowerment

More openly ideological novels take on address government politics but authors need to be subtle and utilize metaphors and other literary devices to drive home their point without ruffling feathers. Garbing these in children literature forms seems a way out. In Julia Alvarez's *Before We Were Free* (2002), an adolescent girl, Anita, in the Dominican Republic during the revolution that toppled the dictator General Trujillo in 1961 writes her story in the Latin American tradition of the "testimonio," a text commemorating those who died fighting for freedom (Egoff, 1981). Anita is also a writer who comes to terms with her art by keeping a diary while she is in hiding with her mother. In the face of the growing horrors that she is confronted with, including her father and brother being imprisoned and eventually killed by the secret police, Anita grows progressively silent, even though her family

once nicknamed her "Cotorrita," little parrot, because she talked "too much". (Gilton, 2007) Once she begins to write about her pain, her speaking voice and her sense of self are reinstated.

Anita is unequivocally a metaphor for freedom and her nation is filled with many honorable people. Anita the first-person narrator's whose genuine disingenuousness makes believe stories about assumes women revolutionaries that her father calls "the butterflies" -inevitably get involved in car accidents. Along with her, the readers discover that they have been murdered by the fascist regime. She also innocently believes her father and her nanny when they both tell her that she can fly along with butterflies, moths, kites, and birds as a subtle subterfuge. The little but significant messages abound as when we come across the fact that Anita, her family, and the other revolutionaries are superior to Trujillo's supporters The message is explicitly political and clear: people can resist injustice and repression (Harry Raphael Garvin, 1983).

Poetry Written by Children

An emerging trend has been Poetry books written by children are assuming greater importance and becoming enormously popular. Instances include Richard Lewis's *Miracles* (1966), a collection of poems written by children of many countries. Recent collections of tales rediscover the oral roots of literature originating in Europe, Asia, Africa, and the Caribbean. International folktales are gaining prominence especially those by Verna Aardema who compiled African folktales and Yoko Kawashima Watkins who studied Asian oral traditions (Sue Dymoke, 2008).

Diasporic Writings

Written by a young Indian American, Tanuja Desai Hidier, *Born Confused* is categorized as "young adult fiction". Its twin themes of Feminism and the strength of girls, both at an individual and societal level, serve to give form to an inspiring novel that caught the attention of the great telecaster Larry King. Its primary protagonist Dimple Lala, a 'desi born in USA' undergoes serious identity crisis and makes every effort to fit in. Dimple moves up the high school with a typical set of over protective parents—a mother who smelled of spices and a father besotted with Lata Mangeshkar's voice. Dimple's best friend Gwyn, pretends to be Marilyn Monroe of her generation. Dimple secretly envies and wants to equal Gwyn for her beauty, her boldness and ease. In a modern twist to *Pride & Prejudice*, trouble floats along in the form of Karsh Kapoor, who Dimple dismisses at first. Of course, Karsh does a Mr. Darcy and captures her heart as the Mr. Sensitive. She appears even more captivating when an opportunity to one up her best friend Gwyn occurs as she loses her heart to him. Like a nice Indian movie, everything turns out perfect in the end.

In *Aruna's Journey* (Smooth Stone Press, 1997) an eleven-year-old Indian-American girl - Aruna -the protagonist is compelled to accompany her parents to spend her summer vacation in India where she undergoes all the struggles that children of immigrants go through. Humor and easy identification rivets attention that retains its interest as her situation wins sympathy. While as a young immigrant wants to imitate her friends, her parents are well settled in their ways and united in thwarting her. Her parents make her reject make-up, do not allow her to watch television shows with sex or violence, compel her to attend an Indian dance and culture classes. The novel also ideally portrays the struggle that the desi children undergo while on a visit to their native land-India. Each

page is loaded with an insight that sheds that brings to light the glaring differences as seen through the eyes of an Indian-American child. The novel is ideal reading equally for adults as it tackles the question of identity (Indian or American) very effectively posing questions to be by the children themselves with heartfelt answers in their language. It also imparts the vocabulary to begin questioning the established norms.

The reverse question of disruption in the idyllic lives is found in *A Group of One* by Rachna Gilmore (Henry Holt and Co., 2001). When the grandmother (Naniji) visits from India, the quotidian daily life of an Indian-Canadian family undergoes upheaval. Tara, a well-adjusted 15-year-old, "regular" Canadian is initially resentful of her visiting grandmother because she encounters a conflict when the grandmother disapproves of her mother's Westernized ways. In turn she despises her for being ignorant of Hindi, Diwali or even sitting on the floor. They are considered uncivilized as they don't know how to play the sitar and, they have not been informed of their family's glorious role and sacrifice during the Indian Independence movement.

Tara becomes confused and exclaims that she cannot fit in both the sides. However, as her proximity increases, Tara gradually discovers Naniji, and bonds with her. In her History class, she becomes the hero when she describes how her Naniji's family was arrested by the British, during the freedom struggle. She acquires a new found glow of popularity and she also finds her identity when she stood up to her teacher for implying that she is not a "regular Canadian" (Gilton, 2007).

As is clear from a perusal of the evolution of children's literature, though the establishment of children's literature as a genre organically led to the categorization, it was never water tight. The fluidity was ensured by an array of multifaceted writers who traversed the various categories and realms effortlessly. It was also contributed by the readers who devoured anything and everything in the early days. However, the attack on fossilized classification is under attack like never before. The onslaught of newer categories if not the new media and versatile writer's adept in writing across trends and categories has meant constant redefinitions. The trends of breaking the boundaries have only intensified with the onset of multidimensional children's literature in the modern times.

A working definition of children's literature can be those books intentionally written for children. Nancy Anderson, associate professor in the College of Education at the University of South Florida in Tampa, sees children's literature as all books written specifically for children, "excluding works such as comic books, joke books, cartoon books, and nonfiction works that are not intended to be read from front to back, such as dictionaries, encyclopedias, and other reference material (Anderson, 2013). However, some of these is standard fare and eagerly devoured by adults. J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series comes readily to mind. The New York Times created a separate bestseller list since had so many grown up readers.

Nowadays, multicultural approach to children's literature, is the norm creating a commonality for both adult and young readers to rethink power equations by acknowledging class into the critical dialogue along with race and gender. Classifying stories about children of marginalized sections under the literary category of multicultural children's literature ignores the socioeconomic circumstances of the families, as well as power relations (Harry Raphael Garvin, 1983). Hence, today's classification needs to take into account these factors that transcend natural classifications as children's books veer off into uncharted territories.

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