

# **Children's literature in Albania,its problematics and contemporary developments**

**Msc.Marina Prifti,University F.Noli ,Korce**

When trying to define the terms "children literature",the scholar encounters with a bipolarity of values that ensues from the very status of this literature,it is written for children,but not from children,it is literature,but a somewhat diminished representation of it,it is a "children's literature".How can one cope with these two opposing terms,a literature on one hand and a labelled literature on the other,a children aimed literature.

When it comes to terms about defining literature ,most scholars agree that what is defined as literature at some time, will change form and content at another time, according to differentiations of values proposed and admitted by different schools of literature criticism .Terry Eagleton states that literature transforms and intensifies ordinary language,it deviates systematically from every day speech.

"Literature is a kind of self-referential language,a language which talks about itself" <sup>1</sup>

Defining children's literature is not a less difficult and complicated task. P.Noddleman states at his book "The pleasures of children's literature",that children's literature is simple and straightforward,it focuses on action,it is about childhood,it expresses a child's point of view,it is optimistic as hope is a vital dimension in a child's world,it tends toward fantasy,it is a form of pastoral idyll,it views the world from the viewpoint of innocence,it is didactic,it tends to be repetitious and tends to balance the idyllic and the didactic.<sup>2</sup>

The same author finds a basic pattern in this kind of literature that follows the schemata home/away/home.(A character unhappy with life at home,seeks another way and returns home with new wisdom).

Characters are mostly depicted by pictures or in a pictographic form.They are children or child-like figures.Children's literature is in many ways didactic and stories are set up to highlight the opposing views and encourage the better way.

---

<sup>1</sup> Terry Eagleton,"Literary theory",pg 8

<sup>2</sup> Perry Nodelman"The pleasures of children's literature",1-st Longman,1992,pg 98

According to such definitions as what should we consider children's literature, is obviously striking the element of conscious attempt to enter into the world of a child mind and perception, to "forget" for a while all that we know and describe the world on very simplistic terms and ideas.

Every writer that writes for children puts himself in a child like mind set and tries to figure out the most intrinsic attributes that the world holds for a child, like his wonder and curiosity at everything new, his inner desire to figure out the surroundings and orient himself in it.

That's why children's literature is not only a literary domain, it is an intersection of different humanitarian disciplines, like sociology, psychology, anthropology, history and literary criticism.

At the very core of children's literature history, throughout the world, lies the need of humanity to preserve its values and morality, its essentiality and hereditary line, its unique code of survival.

Humanity itself has developed from a stage of infant like fantasy, where seasons were depicted as human moods of supernatural beings, where inorganic matter was as alive as the organic one, where everything could speak and act as a conscious unit of its own self-expression.

From this child like stage of development derive the different mythologies that try to explain the origin of the world, the creation of man and its position in the universe.

There are still available for the children of this millennium, the greek gods of Olimp, the Egyptian gods of the Nile, the fantastic histories of humanity compressed in myths adapted and printed for children.

One of such series of books edited and printed here, in Albania is the series of the greek gods of Olimp, where with a simplified and illustrated language are depicted the most "childish" and "adult-ish" histories. There is a central child figure in this mythology, Eros, who doesn't spare from his harassment anyone. He is funny, cheerful, bright and hits every one with love.

His love is so contagious, that no one can escape from it. He is the all-powerful child, who domineers over the adult world through his frivolity and unpredictedness. He is not teaching any one anything, he is existing as a "law in itself", self-contained and self-realized.

Who can discern whether this figure is a child archetype or an adult human archetype, here the boundaries dissolve into each other and we have a both child and adult presence.

This is exactly where the children's literature originates from, The Eros, the driving living force that appears infantile but pervades all creation.

That's why children's literature is at the same time literature for children and adults, because the living child within everyone, Eros or the living driving force that creates art from love is imminent in both worlds.

Children literature is composed of the body of fairy tales, the myths, stories, novels, poems, verses. This literature inherits from the tradition the national and international fairytales and myths and creates upon this base the stories and contemporary units of literature.

When it comes to prescribe the Albanian fairy tales according to the characteristics enlisted by Nodleman, we discern that these fairytales are not destined only for a child audience. Here the audience is thought to be a child as well as an adult one.

The hero of these fairy tales is rarely a child, he is an adult on a quest journey for self-realization or initiation rite. The child is sometimes depicted as a rare present to two old parents who can't have children on a natural way. The child appears magically as coming from a flower or another object. He owns magical attributions as well, makes his parents whole and rich after encountering a lot of obstacles and trials. This kind of child is mostly another model for the quest journey hero. The fairy tale describes the world on magical terms and unnatural surroundings and settings.

Another type of this fairy tale is the author created tale, where magical traditional elements are borrowed under similar schemes to create the grounding for the supernatural and the natural to coemerge.

Why is the fantastic element so predominant in children's literature. The supernatural appears both as promoting life (the good side) and prohibiting it (the negative side). The child learns to cooperate with two opposing forces which are beyond his control. He rather learns to resist negativity and enforce positivity in every form it takes. This multidimensionalism of appearance enriches the child's point of view, he can envisage good and bad under different disguises.

But when it comes to contemporary style of life, to the nowadays children, how does the magical or supernatural affects them. Do fairy tales serve a child to cope with the every day world and problems. There is not any such study as to what degree the fairy tales help a child to know the world, to distinguish between the fantastic and ordinary existence.

That's why the study of children's literature is not only a domain of literary scholars ,but acquires a composed study of psychologist and sociologists as well.Personally ,Itend to think that the supernatural books must be balanced by every day life books,where a child can find himself not under the disguise of a superman or a Cindarella,but as an Albanian citizen growing up in a certain community.

Here we come to another problem concerning the Albanian literature for children.While during the communist regime the children's literature was completely fabricated under very restrictive ideological values and norms,nowadays it tends to be unorganized and chaotic.

During the years of transition is totally apparent the fact that the Albanian literature reflects the problems that the Albanian society is undergoing.

There is a plethora of books,but the readers of Albanian writers are being diminished continually.This partly because of the curiosity of Albanian readers to read the forbidden books of world literature and partly because the Albanian literature like everything else in Albania was so much overloaded with problems of survival ,violence ,degration that the already anxious reader was not finding much relief from the pressure of every day life by reading such books.

This syptom of creating negativity by mirroring it,was present in the children's literature as well.The books of age group 11-14,were depicting a life that reflected the most sensitive wounds of Albanian culture,its violence towards the mostly weaks,the children and women.

Let's take for example the books of V.Canosinaj''Meriyll'' and ''The curse of women''.Very wisely Canosinaj mirrors a phenomenon that is not only linguistical,although it appears as such,the curse.

''The curse of the women'' shows a language that reflects back the negativity of the society towards women by studying the different forms that a curse takes through language and without language.

Many times the books concerning Albanian history are overloaded with murders and terror.Even the Albanian fairy tales are not less violent and unhuman ,

There are tales where the husband hits the wife to death only for a word,the wickedness is on the enemy side as well as on the defending side ,the violence depicted corresponds to a past as well as to a present,which is obvious in many aspects in every day life in modern Albania.

The question that arises here is whether such a naturalistic approach to such a very sensitive problem of Albanian's society is profitable or harmful.

The age group mostly affected by the exposition to such problems is the borderline group, the infants that are about to enter the adult world, the pre-adolescents or the age group of 12-15.

Just another question arises as to what age does a child end up being a child and is considered capable of reading an adult-oriented literature or which is the borderline between the two literatures, the children's literature and the adult literature.

The psychologists consider the threshold of maturity the age of fourteen. Taken this for the boundary that "separates" the literature for children from that of the adults, we recognize three bodies of literary books corresponding to three group ages, the first cluster of books written for children of 0-6 years old, the second for children of 6-11, the third for children of 11-14.

The first group consists of books that are mostly illustrated and introduce the child to the different sounds, forms, colours, shapes. This group of books has mostly tales with anthropomorphic animals, where human characteristics are depicted as animal attributes. In this group of books there is still a great need of books where the every day life of an average Albanian child may be depicted with realism and virtuosity so as to equip the child with the necessary psychologic mechanisms to understand the basic needs of life and cope with the most necessary adaptations acquired on his part to function as a responsible social being.

What is mostly observed in this group of books, is that the animals take all the roles of children and adults, the didactic intention of this kind of literature is openly expressed through questions at the end of the text, like what do you think is this fairy tale teaching you or what are you learning from this and so on.

On the second group of books is acquired a more subtle handling of idyllic and realistic representation of the world. The child at this stage of development is conscious of himself as a separate being and continues to develop its own body of judgement and evaluation. Since the child is incompetent to discern as to what values does a certain book offer, it's necessary the presence of a grown up reader or competent orienting reading from scientific evaluations of books which go beyond the boundaries of personal gains or interests of the publishing companies.

This accentuates a prominent problem in this reading orientation, the absence of children's literature criticism. Mostly the books appear only with an abstract that doesn't show the real values of them, but are

merely advertising .A very flourishing kind of book in this category is the horror fantasy or gothic book like that of M.P.Osborn that appear to postpone almost totally the healthy Albanian literature that creates a climate of trust and wellness for the child like “Cufoja dhe bubu kacurrel”.

For this category of children most of the books are translations. There are still successful books like that of G.Bushaka that can endure the overflow of information in this new era of globalization, but according to evaluations appearing on net the readers of this age prefer mostly foreign authors.

It is an evident fact that the children’s literature in Albania is undergoing a crisis. The publishing companies claim that they can’t afford to pay for books that don’t sell, the readers are mostly interested for foreign books, partly because of the good quality illustrations and partly because they cover a different range of interests and topics. During the year 2013, the best author prize for children literature was absent from the publishing companies.

The Albanian society is undergoing different and rapid changes . This has created a chaotic situation in literature as in other aspects of artistic expression and arts. Children’s literature is totally abandoned as something inexistent. There are very few authors who still write for children . Children themselves have changed, they are equipped with a tv screen that transmits films 24 hours a day and a computer screen where they can realize the virtual role of a certain character of a book or fairy tale.

They are open to so much information that is difficult to draw their attention and evaluation.

Moreover the textbooks are not always depicting the best Albanian literature written for children. The absence of studies and real criticism has created an absence of values.

We have what we have not and we don’t have what we have. This creates the urgent need for an evaluation of the children’s literature and certain strategies so as to encourage the albanian writers to write for children and the Albanian readers to read Albanian literature.

---

i  
ii