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Children's Literature: Our New Superhero

Megha Dhania

Research Scholar

Department of English

Indira Gandhi University, Meerpur, Rewari.

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Abstract:

Children's literature is a term generally used to cover all literature for children and adolescents, including oral literature such as fairy tales, graphic narratives, and young literature.

Children's Literature can be meaningful and compelling to us. One of the reasons we read these stories to our children is to prepare their minds to receive the truth. It is important that these stories have the moral truths of goodness. And the moral imagination is not just being formed in children, it's being formed in all of us. CS Lewis and many other great writers argue that good children's literature is also really good for adults. Adults not only should remember their childhood, but they should also keep it.

Children are naturally wondrous. Things they see are new. Things we see are new too, we just don't see them as better as children can. Children's Literature can help you recover your childhood.

Keywords: Children's Literature, Narrative Cinema, Defamiliarization, Stereotype, Binary Opposition.

Introduction

John Locke (1693)- "Gentler ways of raising children "

He discussed that society should talk about childhood in a more protected way, where instead of dressing, speaking, and assuming that children can work as adults, children should be treated more gently. He suggested that children's books should be made easier and pleasant to read.

Back then books were meant only for upper-class children and the lower-class children got to know about stories and fables through oral narratives, fairy tales, myths, ballads, and epics passed down from generation to generation through storytellers.

This research paper will disentangle you from the stereotypes that are being created against children's literature and will convey how it can shape society more fittingly and desirably by putting some of the most head-scratching questions and answering them through different lenses of literary criticism.

We all know that children's literature is a flush of entertainment and knowledge. It's a very feasible path of enlightenment, enlightenment leads to empathy. Empathy further leads to engagement, and engagement makes us better human beings.

Objectives:

- Why should we read children's literature, even when we are old and wise enough?
- To study the vital role of children's literature and narrative cinema in shaping a society.
- How dire it will be to have a world without stories?
- Can children's literature change the world?

Background:

Hornbooks or lesson Paddles (15th-century. - 17th-century.)

Children's book was made of words in a small paddle, consisting of verses from the Bible, moral stories of good and evil, and had a religious and pious talent to teach children how they should behave.

The religious and preachy nature of early children's literature, in 17th century, published a book called *Orbis Pictus* (1657)- "The World in Pictures", is the 1st children's picture book. Charles Perrault (1697), started collecting French Fairy tales, and published the tales of "Mother Goose", which included, "Adam Bede", "Cinderella".

In 1888, French scientist Charles-Emile Reynaud invented a device called the Theatre Optique. It could project a strip of pictures onto a screen. Reynaud would paint individual images onto flexible strips of gel (gelatine), with perforations on the edge to run through the projection system. He made three animated shorts to show off his invention. The first was a 12–15-minute feature called "Pauvre Pierrot," which debuted in 1892. Some consider this to be the first animated movie.

Now let's dissect the basic structure of narratives and find out how they can bring about transformation, through the use of different critical theories. For this I have divided the paper into 6 parts, parts 1-3 will depict how narratives are being created, and parts 4-6 will depict how narratives can turn around the human psyche.

1. **Morphology of stories:**

Vladimir Propp talks about the basic structure of any Mythological folk tale in one of his books. He gave the concept of:

31 narratemes and 8 characters:

He analyses the folk tales of his own country (Russia) to find the basic theme underlying the structure.

31 Narratemes: a pattern or chain of narration that happens in all the folk tales, including a starting moment, then something will happen, then climax. This pattern is divided into 31 parts, which can be seen in all folk tales.

8 Characters: it includes - 1. Hero, 2. Helper, 3. Villain, 4. False Hero, 5. Donor (Power), 6. Dispatcher (sends the hero on a mission), 7. Princess, 8. Princess's Father.

Children's Literature is a part of our tradition, it's a part of our heritage. If you hear a particular title, please don't just read the story, immerse yourself in that story, get into that world. Children's Literature is real-world but conditioned by delight. We live in a wonderful world, and I think there is beauty around us. And one of the real virtues of Children's Literature is to get us to see these things again. Children's Literature with the help of beautiful narratives and a variety of characters persuades us to perceive timeless truth and lets us fall in love with virtue.

Actants:

Algirdas Julien Greimas gave the concept of Actants, according to him, the different roles, actions, and functions that are used in storytelling are called actants. All stories have some common actions. In "Actantial Model", he divided 6 stages, which he called Actants: 1. Subject, 2. Object, 3. Helper, 4. Opponent, 5. Sender, 6. Receiver.

In any narrative, we have 6 main characters who get the show on the road. There must be a subject (protagonist) who is given some Nobel work by the sender, the opponent will stop him in achieving his goal, then the helper will help the subject in approaching the object, then climax will be there and at the end, the subject will be able to pull through and meet the receiver. And the relationship between the subject and the object is called Junction.

He divides Actants into 3 axes:

The axis of Desire: Subject and Object

The Axis of Power: Helper and Opponent

The axis of Transmission or Knowledge: Sender and Receiver

2. *How ideas are ingrained in our minds:*

Interpellation

Louis Althusser gave the concept of Interpellation in which she discussed how ideas get into our heads and affect our life so much that the cultural ideas feel as if they are our own, and not that the society has ingrained them. She said there is no inherent identity of an individual and all the traits, cultural values, and societal behavior is ingrained in them even before they are born. The best example is 'gender' interpellation, notice how from childhood itself boys and girls are conditioned in a certain way, boys are always given a car to play with, whereas girls are given dolls to play with. Girls are said to like pink colour and boys are associated with blue colour. Parents ask girls to be quiet, to be soft, sentimental whereas boys are always asked to be strong, not to cry, and behave like a protector. These ideas appear to be very natural because society has interpellated those ideas so much that we accept these ideas to be true. These ideas are presented in such a manner that we start thinking that these ideas are going to benefit us.

Archetypes

Carl Jung defines Archetypes as universal archaic symbols and images that derive from the collective unconscious. It refers to the idea that a segment of the deepest unconscious mind is genetically inherited, and is not shaped by personal experience.

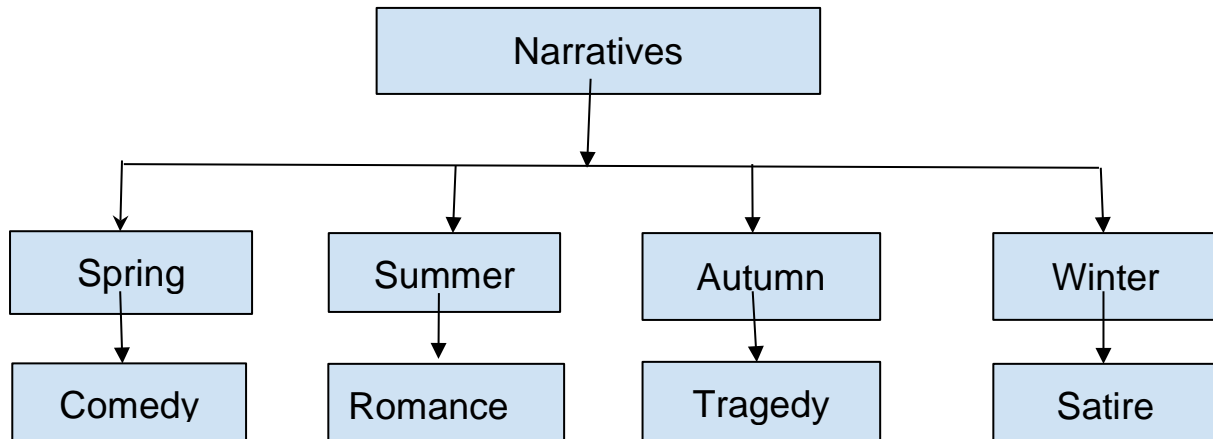
'Arc' means 'old' or 'original' and 'type' means 'form' and together it means 'original form'.

Any idea, image, character, setting, or theme that we see in a film or literature is based upon some patterns. These kinds of patterns show universal meanings and basic truth about the human situation regardless of where and when they live.

Archetypes can be categorized through characters, religion. Seasons, feelings, symbols, etc.

According to Jung, there are 12 brand archetypes: The innocent, Everyman, Hero, Outlaw, Ruler, Magician, Lover, Caregiver, Jester, and Sage.

Northrop Frye: In his book 'Anatomy of Criticism' (1957) he asserts that all narratives fall into one of four mythologies, which are Spring signifies Comedy, Summer signifies Romance, Autumn signifies Tragedy, and Winter signifies Satire.



Now let's consider what impact these narratives have on us and why even adults should read Children's Narrative. The answer is if it's excellent, the stories are great, then one can learn from them and love them irrespective of their age.

Children's Literature is almost always stories. The question is why do we like stories? Why is it easier to learn something if it is being narrated as a part of any tale? There are many reasons for that, but one of them is that our life is like a tale. That's how we live. We're living a story. A thing happens, and another thing happens, then the next thing happens and they affect and cause each other. And so, we like to see life in that way. Children's Literature is a profound way for human beings to learn beyond their experiences, it's very powerful and gives us a chance to see life differently.

Winston Churchill said "All of life is not crime and cowardice and greed. And those things exist, sure, but we know them because we know them in comparison to better things." "Cowardice is a corruption of courage and greed is a corruption of generosity and justice". So, children's stories can have darkness in them because they have to represent some reality in them that we can recognize, or else they are not effective.

3. **Fabrications of narratives:**

Visual Narratives

It can be defined as a story told primarily through the use of visual media. The story may be told using photographs, illustration, or video and can be enhanced with graphics, music, voice, and other audios.

Through Visual Narrative, we can calculate the influence Children's Literature has on any individual or the general public.

Some of the characteristics of Children Narrative are:

- An influential story with a standpoint.
- Addition of moving or still visuals.
- Subject matter with some kind of social, religious, or moral values.
- A plea for amendment of behavior or attitude.

Victor Schlovosky: Defamiliarization

The technique of presenting common things in an unfamiliar or strong way enhances the perception of the familiar.

While producing a work of art we are transforming fantasy into reality. The purpose is to force us to notice and make us more active and less passive. We only see or get what we want out of certain situations or things. We have become so ignorant of the things that not only serve our basic needs but also form a crucial part of the environment we live in. So basically, through defamiliarization in children's literature, ordinary things are presented in such a way that it forces us to slow down the continuous whirl of life, leisure and appreciate the beauty and essence of that thing.

A World Without Narratives

Once, children live in multi generous homes which were the source of wondrous, fantastical, and exaggerated tales, but now because of the jobs, busy lifestyles, and other personal reasons, it takes them far away from their parents and grandparents, and that's how their birthright of having a great story experience get snatched.

It is not the absence of a story that we fear, it is not that one day we don't know how to tell a story, it's that we no longer know how to listen to one.

We never listen to anyone carefully when they tend to share their story instead, we search for a place where we can fit our own story, and reference ourselves. Every moment of

our life we are infected with an influx of information via text, alerts, messages, phones, etc. It has become a curse for us, natural anxiety, and mental restlessness. You can feel a story only when you stop, listen, and must be present there. When the mind of the speaker and the listener synchronize, it's called "neuron coupling", the listener empathizes with the story and starts feeling it.

4. **Inculcate real ethos of life:**

Real Vs Ideal

Real refers to values, norms, and beliefs that are implemented by society.

Ideal refers to the values, norms, and beliefs that a society desires to achieve.

Habermas gave the concept of art and beauty, according to him "Art is equal to Realism, Realism is equal to Beauty, and therefore Art is equal to Beauty".

But many authors (like Lyotard) condemn this relation. According to them, " when a work attempts to present realism in art, it gets stuck between academicism and kitch".

Sigmund Freud: "Three-part system of the human psyche"

In his book he explains how our mind works in three main dimensions, namely:

Id: The primitive and unconscious part of our personality. Need immediate pleasure or satisfaction.

Superego: Do morally right things.

Ego: A balance between Id and Superego. Compromising satisfaction and balancing superego.

It's in today's education system to think that education is something that is done to children. And because of this today's children's books or movies are more educational, boring, and preachy. They show them a distorted image of reality, which astray children from reality. Children have strong desires to learn everything about the world, about nature, and everything that they perceive or listen to. Children's Literature provides them the medium that allows them to learn it more entertainingly and imaginatively. It's a raw source of cultivating honesty, sincerity, brotherhood, and fearlessness while enjoying wonderful stories.

Binary Opposition

Levi Strauss: "Structural Anthropology"

In this book, he studied the origin and social relation of human beings. The concept comes from linguistics. He says that to understand the language you can only understand it by the way of binary opposition. Similarly, every human being thinks through binaries or opposites to understand the culture and these binary structures are universal. We have divided this world in good-bad or black-white, but we need to look beyond this good-evil or black-white relation. Children's Literature is doing that groundwork for us, it considers the in-betweens of these oppositions or in other words, we can say that it embraces the greys too!

5. **Change our lenses of perception:**

Diversity

Stories define us, they help us to connect to the outside world and we need more stories to be published about all the diversities in our communities.

Children deserve to imagine themselves having the same range of ordinary and extraordinary experiences. Children don't deserve the stereotypes that we hand down to them, they deserve to start fresh. Most of us don't notice who is not there until someone comes and tells us about it. Literature should reflect diversity in religion, family structure, mental and physical abilities so that every child can relate to the character of the book.

Feminine Roles

Jacques Lacan: On Feminine Sexuality

He gave the concept of 'Gaze' (how people look at something). Gazing signifies a psychological relationship of power. The gazer is superior and the object of the gaze is inferior.

Laura Mulvey: Narrative Cinema and Visual Pleasure

Mulvey uses Lacan's concept of Gazing to unmask the reality of patriarchal society. She shows how patriarchy greatly influences our cinema and other forms of media.

According to her women are constituted in our language as an exception. Women are always expressed as, what she lacks or what she is not. Man is the main figure and woman is the opposite to it. In her essay, she talks about the male gaze, in all movies or advertisements women become the object of the gaze and that is how our industry gains money.

Sandra And Susan Gilbert:" Anxiety of Authorship"

Sandra And Susan Gilbert wrote a work called “Madwoman in the attic: Women writer and the 19th-century literary imagination”. They took the title from Charlotte Bronte’s ‘Jane Eyre’. They present an analysis of 19th-century literature. Said that all female characters in authorized novels can be categorized either as an ‘angel’ or a ‘monster’. The female writers carry a lot of rage and frustration about the world they live in and predominately the literary tradition. They wanted to be a part of that convention so they made a figure of a madwoman. Women writers lack legitimate female role models so because of this anxiety they were unable to produce good literature or cinema.

Before the 19th century, we had a low ratio of the female protagonist in children's literature or cinema. We will always have a prince or hero that will save the girl or take her out of any trouble. We lack credible female proponents, but now because of female equality, and awareness we saw an exclusive change in our literature and cinema. Now we have a lot of female protagonists who not only fight with the villains but also prove to be a good ruler.

The Windows and Mirrors of Your Child

Children’s books or cinema serve as a mirror for the kids, but they must need them to be windows too. Kids always see themselves in them, but they need to see things from other viewpoints also. How can we long children to see and empathize and share if they have never seen outside of themselves?

The best books or movies for a child are neither, which is completely a window or a mirror but a combination of both, because it will set a path for empathy and self-worth, and that is a brick road worth following.

6. *Unveiling an ethereal world:*

Music

Music plays a vital role in teaching morals and inspiring people in a very innovative and melodious way. Usually, we forget the songs as soon as we listen to them and we never just wait, relax and taste the essence of that song. But in reality, if you listen to them, you will see a brand-new world in just a few lines. For example; the song

“I Am Gonna Fly: Kiki’s Delivery Service”

Lyrics

When I was small there were gods

And they granted my wishes in mysterious ways
On mornings when you wake up feeling at ease
Miracles happen even when you grow up.
Open the curtain wide let faint sunbeams shine through
Let their gentleness engulf you I'm sure
All that appears before your eyes is a message.

"Circle Of Life: Lion King"

Lyrics

From the day we arrive on the planet
And blinking, step into the sun
There's more to be seen than can ever be seen
More to do than can ever be done
In the circle of life
It's the wheel of fortune
It's the leap of faith
It's the band of hope
'til we find our place
On the path unwinding
In the circle, the circle of life.

"To The Fairies, They Draw Near: Tinkerbell"

Lyrics

Oh, gather ye now one and all
No matter what all ye may do
Let the stars fill your soul
When the moon cradles all
So to yourself be true
The blanket of snow is overcome
Each flower waits for the sun
And the whisper of the tears of the rain
Holds promise for everyone
Then come away with me, friends

No matter where you call your home
With a light in our hearts, we will never part
No matter how far we roam

Utopia

It comes out of a Greek word called 'ou-topos' meaning, 'no place' or 'nowhere'. A Utopia is an imagined community or society that possesses highly desirable or nearly perfect qualities for its citizens. But the thing is, why utopia is still a desire for us, and why can't we create a utopian world that is shown in our books or cinema!

Children's Literature can create another world, you can go to another place, to another time, you can see things that happened in history or the things that never happened or could never happen. Children have the gift of wonder and we adults don't, and that is a failing we should correct. Some many books and movies inspire us to have that utopian world. For example

Zootopia: " Anyone can be anything irrespective of who they are and what the society wants them to be."

Peter Pan: "Neverland: A fairy is born whenever a baby laughs".

The Grinch Stole Christmas: The town name was "Who Ville" and everybody in town has the same surname "who" so that nobody can differentiate based on caste and creed.

Conclusion

People have stopped believing in miracles and hope, but I believe if you still believe in them, then the world's miracles are more powerful than the chaos. Life isn't fair, and we all need the practice to face the unfairness with both grace and gratitude. Children's Literature or provides practice and life, it tells how people face unfairness in another hundred ways. It teaches us to face it with hope, determination, and a righteous way. We didn't learn them for teaching, but by immersing ourselves in the stories, which become a part of us, and to find ourselves in that book or movie, first, we have to lose ourselves in them. If Literature has the power to help us find ourselves, then Children's Literature has superpowers

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