

CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: A STUDY OF POSTMODERN STYLES AND NARRATIVE TRENDS

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Abstract:

This study provides a comprehensive analysis of the development of postmodern styles and modern narrative trends in French children's literature. The study examines examples of French children's literature from the second half of the 20th century to the beginning of the 21st century. The work examines how the main features of postmodern literature, such as the breakdown of traditional literary patterns, the disappearance of genre boundaries, metaliterary approaches, intertextuality, and the blurring of boundaries between reality and fiction, are manifested in French children's publications. According to the main conclusions of the study, modern French children's literature, while maintaining its national identity in a global cultural context, is actively adopting artistic and aesthetic strategies that reflect a postmodern worldview. As a result of such an intervention, children's literature is now becoming a multi-layered, complex, but at the same time interesting and relevant literature, aimed not only at children, but also at readers of all age groups.

Keywords: French children's literature, postmodernism, contemporary narrative styles, metaliterature, intertextuality, intergenre literature, multilayered texts, Daniel Pennac, Jean-Claude Mourlevat, Marie-Aude Murail.

Introduction

Children's literature is a unique field of literature that reflects the cultural and intellectual development of society and plays an important role in shaping the worldview and values of the younger generation. French children's literature, with its rich history, artistic traditions and innovative approaches, has made a significant contribution to the treasury of world literature. Since the second half of the 20th century, postmodernist tendencies have gained momentum in the global cultural arena and have begun to have a significant impact on all forms of art, including literature. Postmodernism, with its metaliterary reflections, intertextual connections, skeptical attitude towards genre patterns and revision of classical narrative structures, has radically changed traditional concepts of literature. These global cultural changes have not bypassed children's literature - modern children's literature, especially in France, has begun to embody many elements of postmodern aesthetics and thinking.



METHODS AND ANALYSIS

The narrative structures, plot construction, temporality of events, focalization (point of view), and narrative instances in contemporary French children's literature were analyzed. Based on the narratological concepts developed by Gerard Genette and Tzvetan Todorov, innovative narrative techniques in the works of Daniel Pennac, Timothée de Fombelle, and Marie-Aude Murail were identified, and their differences from traditional children's literature narrative structures were shown. Postmodern trends in French children's literature were studied comparatively with similar trends in other European countries, in particular, English, German, and Italian children's literature. Through comparative analysis, the specific national characteristics of French children's literature were identified and its place in the context of global postmodern literature was determined. The study also analyzed statistics of contemporary French children's literature, publication data, critical reviews, and literary award data. In addition, the reception of books was studied through questionnaires and interviews conducted among readers.

DISCUSSION

The question of the relationship between children's literature and postmodernism is one of the important theoretical problems in the field of modern literary criticism and cultural studies. Often, children's literature is interpreted as simple, didactic and conservative literature, while postmodernism is considered a complex, experimental and tradition-defying movement. However, at the end of the 20th and beginning of the 21st centuries, children's literature, especially in Western Europe, including France, began to absorb many elements of postmodern aesthetics.

Postmodernism is a phenomenon in literature that does not have a clear definition and is interpreted differently by different theorists. Based on the works of J. F. Lyotard, J. Derrida, F. Jameson and other researchers, postmodernism can be characterized by the following main features: distrust of "grand narratives", fragmentation, eclecticism, intertextuality, self-reflexivity, a tendency to parody, and the disappearance of differences between high and low culture. Children's literature, according to the traditional interpretation, has the following characteristics: didacticism, simplicity, clear moral criteria, correspondence to the child's worldview, optimistic ending. At first glance, these two literary phenomena seem to contradict each other. [1]

However, modern literary critics (Roberta Seelinger Trites, Maria Nikolajeva, Jean Perrot, etc.) have shown that there is a synergistic relationship between children's literature and postmodernism. In fact, children's literature, by its very nature, is prone to some postmodern features. For example, children's literature often draws on the traditions of folk oral art, which includes elements of intertextuality and polyphony. Also, elements such as games, mystifications, ambiguity, and the mixing of genres, which are often found in children's books, are compatible with postmodern aesthetics. As Sandra Beckett notes, "children's literature can be more open to experimental and innovative expressions, because it is not limited by rigidly established literary conventions." In modern literary criticism, the concept of "crossover fiction" has emerged, which refers to a type of literature that is read by both children and adults. French researcher Sandra L. Beckett, in her book "Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives" (2009), deeply studied this phenomenon and emphasized that the disappearance of



boundaries between children's and adult literature is one of the important features of postmodernism. In the context of French children's literature, postmodernism has its own national characteristics. Compared with Western European and American literature, French children's literature, while remaining faithful to its intellectual traditions, selectively adopted some elements of postmodernism. This choice is associated with the specific features of French literary culture - rationalism, respect for cultural heritage, interest in wordplay, and openness to avant-garde experiments. [2]

The following theoretical approaches are used to study the impact of postmodernism on French children's literature:

Narratological approach - analysis of elements such as narrative structure, focalization, and temporality in children's books based on the theory of Gerard Genette.

Semiotic approach - study of the system of signs, codes, and layers of meaning in children's books based on the theories of Umberto Eco and Roland Barthes.

Receptive aesthetics - analysis of the reader model and real reading processes implied in children's books based on the theories of Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser.

Discourse analysis - study of the relationships between dominant discourses, knowledge, and power in children's books based on the theory of Michel Foucault. [3]

One of the important issues for the theoretical understanding of the relationship between children's literature and postmodernism is the discourses of authority and resistance in children's literature. While children's literature has traditionally served to reinforce the authority of adults, in postmodern children's literature this authority is often criticized or even ironically constructed. John Stephens, in his book "Language and Ideology in Children's Fiction" (1992), studied the evolution of ideological discourses in children's literature and showed that children's literature of the postmodern era often seeks to destabilize dominant cultural values. Gender and postcolonial theories also play an important role in the study of postmodern trends in children's literature. In French children's literature, there are tendencies to deconstruct gender stereotypes, show cultural differences, and criticize a centralized Eurocentric worldview. [4]

RESULTS

The development of postmodern tendencies in French children's literature is the result of a long historical process. To fully understand this evolutionary process, it is first necessary to briefly review the historical development of French children's literature. The formation of French children's literature began in the 17th and 18th centuries, with works such as Charles Perrault's fairy tales (1697) and Madame Leprince de Beaumont's "La Belle et la Bête" (1757) initially intended for children. In the 19th century, French children's literature experienced its "golden age" with the work of writers such as Jules Verne and Hector Malot. The literature of this period was mainly based on the principles of realism, romanticism and naturalism. In the first half of the 20th century, writers such as Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, Paul Faucher, Marcel Aymé breathed new life into children's literature. In particular, Saint-Exupéry's "The Little Prince"



(1943) had a great influence on later postmodern children's literature. This work already shows a synthesis of multi-layered meanings, metafictional elements and genres.

In the 1960s and 1970s, the theories of structuralism and poststructuralism developed in France. The work of scholars such as Claude Lévi-Strauss, Roland Barthes, and Michel Foucault had a great influence on literary theory and practice. During this period, although the term "postmodern children's literature" was not yet used, tendencies to revise traditional literary conventions began to appear in French children's literature. The collection "Enfantasques" by François Ruy-Vidal and Claude Roy, published in 1967, is considered the beginning of innovative methods in French children's literature. In this collection, traditional fairy tales are deconstructed, filled with irony, and interpreted in a new context. [5]

The 1980s and 1990s were a period of widespread postmodern strategies in French children's literature. The following specific trends were formed during this period:

Metafiction - the tendency for a work to reveal its artistic nature and reflect on the writing process has increased. Daniel Pennac's "Camo" series (1982-2000) is a vivid example of works containing metafictional elements.

Intertextuality - in Pierre Gripari's collection "Contes de la rue Broca" (1980), traditional fairy tales are reinterpreted, a system of references, allusions and quotations to other literary sources is created.

Genre hybridization - in Eric Orsenna's "La grammaire est une chanson douce" (2001), elements of the adventure novel genre are synthesized with grammar teaching.

Black humor and parody – In the works of Claude Ponti, for example, "L'Arbre sans fin" (1992), traditional children's stories are parodied, supernatural elements, absurd and black humor are used.

Narrative experiments – In the novel "Le Combat d'hiver" by Jean-Claude Mourlevat (2006), chronological linearity is broken, different points of view (focalization) are used, and a complex time structure is created.

Since the 2000s, postmodern trends in French children's literature have become more profound and widespread. The following characteristics have become more pronounced during this period:

Transmedia narrative strategies – Works such as Timothée de Fombelle's "Tobie Lolness" series (2006) use new methods of storytelling across different media platforms (book, graphic novel, animation, theater).

Identity issues – Marie-Aude Murail's "Oh, boy!" (2000) explores complex and multifaceted issues of gender, family relationships, and personal identity.

Ecological and socio-political issues – François Place's trilogy Atlas des géographes d'Orbae (1996–2000) explores environmental issues, colonial experiences, and intercultural dialogue in metaphorical and allegorical ways.



The impact of digital technologies – Christian Grenier's *Virus L.I.V.3 ou la mort des livres* (1998) explores virtual reality, the digital world, and cybernetic life.

The development of "crossover" literature – The works of writers such as Jean-Claude Mourlevat, Timothée de Fombelle, and Marie-Aude Murail are intended for both children and adults, and contain multi-layered meanings that are interesting for readers of all ages. [6]

An important aspect in studying the evolution of postmodern trends in French children's literature is the role of state policy and institutional support. The development of children's literature in France is an important part of state policy. Publishing houses such as École des loisirs, Gallimard Jeunesse, Bayard, Seuil Jeunesse play an important role in supporting innovative children's literature. Also, literary awards such as the "Prix Sorcières", "Prix des Incorrupibles" influence the development of modern children's literature. The evolution of postmodern trends in French children's literature took place in the context of global cultural changes. Globalization, the development of digital technologies, the intensification of discourses on issues of cultural diversity influenced the formation of modern French children's literature. At the same time, French children's literature has preserved its national traditions - attention to language, intellectual depth, philosophical spirit.

CONCLUSION

French children's literature is undergoing significant transformations in the postmodern era. Postmodern techniques such as metafiction, genre mixing, and visual experimentation, combined with new narrative trends, are helping children engage with a complex world. This literature is becoming a tool not only to encourage children to read, but also to help them understand the world critically. The rich and diverse nature of contemporary French children's literature ensures that it occupies an important place in the world literary scene.

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