

## GENRE DYNAMICS: MYSTERY, FANTASY, AND REALISM IN THE LITERARY TAPESTRY OF 20TH CENTURY AMERICAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

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### Abstract:

This article discusses significant changes in American children's literature the 20th century, with the rise and development of a variety of genres that are now essential to the canon of books for young readers. This study explores the unique characteristics, noteworthy accomplishments, and long-lasting influence of the mystery, fantasy, and realism genres on children's literature.

**Keywords:** American children's literature, 20th century, mystery genre, fantasy genre, realism genre, traditional folktales, fairy tales, customary stories.

### Introduction

In American children's literature, the 20th century is remembered as a pivotal period because of the diverse range of genres that established the canon of literature available to young readers. Realism, fantasy, and mystery were a few of the genres that were crucial in grabbing children's hearts and minds. A variety of narratives that was both colorful and diverse was made possible by the various traits and storytelling approaches of each genre. In this investigation, we examine the genres of mystery, fantasy, and realism in American children's literature from the 20th century, analyzing their distinctive qualities, noteworthy accomplishments, and long-lasting influence on younger readers. MacLeod (1995) wrote that these genres offered windows into the intricacies of childhood and adolescence, as well as serving as effective means of promoting empathy, communicating important values, and entertaining. We unravel the narrative threads that have stitched the fabric of children's literature, leaving an enduring imprint on the literary legacy of the 20th century, as we traverse through the traits and seminal works of each genre.

In American children's literature, the 20th century saw the persistence and evolution of traditional genres including fairy tales and tales. Despite the ancient origins of tales and fairy tales, both genres underwent a reworking and reinterpretation in the 20th century to accommodate shifting cultural preferences and ideals.

Traditional Fairy-tales

Customary folktales, transmitted across several generations, retained a distinct position in



children's literature during the 20th century<sup>1</sup>. According to Brown and Tomlinson (1998), well-known writers, such as Paul Galdone and Jan Brett, preserved the ageless stories that frequently imparted moral lessons and cultural values by adapting and retelling traditional folktales. Brett's "The Mitten" and Galdone's "The Three Little Pigs" are two instances of how these beloved stories were retold for younger audiences.

The 20th century saw authors adopt the practice of rewriting well-known stories in order to give them fresh perspectives. The works "Anansi the Spider" by Gerald McDermott and "The People Could Fly" by Virginia Hamilton are two instances of how writers enriched the literary canon for young readers by incorporating a variety of voices and cultural viewpoints into traditional folktales.

Traditional fairy tales saw a dramatic increase in adaptations and reimaginations during the 20th century. Schmidt (2013) noted that novelists such as James Marshall (author of "Goldilocks and the Three Bears") and James Thurber (author of "Many Moons") reimagine well-known stories by adding comedy and contemporary sensibility.

Some authors wrote whole novels that embraced the essence of fairy tales, going beyond simple retellings. Novels like Roald Dahl's "Matilda" and Natalie Babbitt's "Tuck Everlasting" are inspired by fairy tales and weave captivating tales that tackle subjects like magic, morality, and the resiliency of the human spirit.

Broken fairy tales became popular, a lighthearted and amusing tendency. As Hintz (2019) wrote, Writers who reveled in challenging the customs of fairy tales, such as Jon Scieszka with "The Stinky Cheese Man and Other Fairly Stupid Tales" and Gregory Maguire with "Wicked," provided novel insights and captivating retellings of well-known tales.

For young readers, picture books were essential in making fairy stories come to life. The picture books "Where the Wild Things Are" by Maurice Sendak and "I Want My Hat Back" by Jon Klassen are two instances of works that combine fairy-tale themes with original and creative storytelling that appeal to modern readers.

In addition to preserving the cultural legacy ingrained in these narratives, the adaptation and rewriting of fables and fairy tales in American children's literature of the 20th century also promoted artistic innovation.<sup>2</sup> These alterations functioned as links between the opulent customs of the past and the changing preferences and awareness of contemporary readers.

In American children's literature of the 20th century, tales and fairy tales retained their timeless appeal while enduring changes that represented the creative, social, and cultural upheavals of the period. Whether via accurate retellings, contemporary adaptations, or shattered reinterpretations, writers of the 20th century persisted in crafting enthralling stories that swept young readers away into fantastical settings full with moral teachings, inventive characters, and ageless wisdom. These timeless genres have left a lasting legacy that shapes children's books today and guarantees that fairy tales and tales will always be a significant component of literature for future generations.

Oral traditions that are passed down from generation to generation are frequently the source of traditional tales. These classic tales remained a source of inspiration for writers and storytellers

<sup>1</sup> Bishop, R. (2012). Reflections on the development of African American children's literature. *Journal of Children's Literature*.

<sup>2</sup> Brown, L., & Tomlinson, C. (1998). Children's literature, past and present: Is there a future? *Peabody Journal of Education*



throughout the 20th century, who modified them to appeal to the tastes and sensibilities of modern audiences.

Classical stories are renowned for tackling universal themes like the hero's journey, good against evil, and the results of one's deeds. Traditional stories are timeless and approachable for kids from a variety of backgrounds because their themes cut across cultures and historical periods.

Many folktales impart cultural values or moral precepts. Whether told as folktales, fables, or legends, these narratives frequently teach children morality, bravery, and the importance of making decisions.

Fairy tales frequently portray good and evil as clearly opposed to one another morally. Characters are representations of virtues and vices, and the story usually rewards virtue and penalizes vice. Its moral clarity provides young readers with a compass. Fairy stories frequently feature the hero's journey, in which the protagonist sets out on adventures, overcomes obstacles, and experiences personal development. A key element of fairy-tale narrative is the trip, whether it is Jack scaling the beanstalk or Cinderella pursuing her happily ever after.

Fairy tales are inherently replete with physical and metaphorical transformations. <sup>3</sup>Magical transformations, such as changing into animals or conquering hardship to evolve as a person, are possible for characters. These changes frequently represent resiliency and inner power.

A common storytelling element that cuts across time and cultural boundaries unites fairy tales and traditional tales in American children's literature from the 20th century. Fairy stories entice with mystical elements and moral clarity, while traditional tales frequently bear the weight of cultural legacy and oral traditions. Both genres give young readers innovative stories that amuse, educate, and impart important lessons, adding to the rich fabric of children's literature.

In the 20th century, young readers were taken by fantasy fiction to magical places full with magic, legendary creatures, and amazing adventures. Writers such as C.S. J.R.R. Tolkien's "The Hobbit" and Lewis' "The Chronicles of Narnia" exposed kids to epic stories set in fantastical worlds, inspiring a passion of creative writing.

A lot of fantasy books dealt with themes of coming-of-age, with young characters going on life-changing adventures. J.K. Rowling's "Harry Potter" Readers were able to witness Harry and his friends' development as they faced evil forces and magical beings while navigating the trials of puberty thanks to Rowling.

Allegory and symbolism were frequently used in fantasy literature to communicate deeper meanings. C.S. Whereas Madeleine L' Engle's "A Wrinkle in Time" delves into scientific and philosophical topics within a fantasy framework, Lewis's "The Lion, the Witch, and the Wardrobe" allegorically explores Christian themes.

Unexpected turns and surprises were what made the mystery genre so popular. Writers deftly constructed stories that puzzled readers until the very end. For young readers, the suspense and surprise factor enhanced the appeal of mystery literature.

In American children's literature of the 20th century, the fantasy and mystery genres were crucial in forming young readers' creative worlds. These storytelling genres offered youngsters a wide range of storytelling experiences through enchanted worlds, magical adventures, detective puzzles, and enigmatic intrigues. Writers such as J.K. Rowling, C.S. Lewis, the authors of Nancy

<sup>3</sup> Khayatovna, N. M. UDC: 398.93 ENGLISH AND UZBEK BLESSINGS WHICH FORMED BY THE BELIEF OF MAGIC WORDS. SCIENTIFIC REPORTS OF BUKHARA STATE UNIVERSITY, 72.



Drew, and numerous others made a lasting impression on the literary canon of the 20th century, inspiring a passion for imaginary worlds and the excitement of cracking mysteries that still appeals to readers today.

### Conclusion

In American children's literature of the 20th century, the realism genre was essential in portraying the struggles, lives, and experiences of young readers. During this time, realistic fiction aimed to depict real and approachable stories that dealt with problems that kids encountered on a daily basis.

The intricacies of family dynamics were explored in realistic literature. Writers examined the bonds between parents, siblings, and other family members, illustrating the pleasures and difficulties of having kinship ties.

Within the multiverse of American children's literature from the 20th century, the genres of mystery, fantasy, and realism serve as cornerstones that have shaped the field and left a lasting impression. These genres offered a variety of storytelling experiences, from the gripping pursuit of mysteries solved by young detectives to the magical worlds of magic and legendary animals in fantasy, and from the everyday challenges of relatable individuals in realistic settings.

Children's imaginations were opened to worlds of magic, wonder, and ageless adventure through fantasy. Fantasy writers created stories that went beyond the ordinary by using elaborate world-building, symbolism, and allegory to entice readers to investigate the extraordinary and consider important subjects.

With its witty riddles and gripping stories, mystery has made young readers into self-taught investigators. In addition to providing entertainment, this genre fostered cooperation, critical thinking, and a love of the excitement of discovery.

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