



Research Article

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Albanian Children's Literature and Its Missing Literary Criticism

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Abstract

The purpose of this research is to raise the awareness about authors of children's literature and about the essential needs of such creative profiles, particularly for schoolchildren in primary schooling. Indeed, the appeal of literature cannot endure or develop incessantly within the imaginary framework, without its function. Thus, this literature would not be stalwartly notable from the general literature, but in fact, exactly on account of its function, it is treated and remains as such, as entirely separate, special and inspiring, not only owing to its written nature, but also because of the message it provides, and that must continuously provide. Its function must head towards education, in the general sense of the word, i.e. towards morality, ethics and aesthetics, and thus stay away from moralizing and ideologies, since only by being as such and in this position, it could fulfil its educational and pedagogical mission. Albanian children's literature, though having a late tradition compared to such literatures outside the Albanian-speaking territories, has, nevertheless, had its own dawn of growth and cultural development. This tradition has been followed by generations of authors, with the only purpose so that children could keep up with the times and other historical and cultural developments. For this reason, our literature, no matter how beautiful it may be, no matter how inspiring it may be, is still being challenged, particularly in the new century. The rapid developments of the technology and information is taking its toll, and day by day children's literature seems to be losing its function, and there is an impression that it has been left behind by these advances. With the view to making this ingenuity attractive, literary criticism must work, and through its analytical efforts, it would make it understandable, because not all of the readers (or very few) manage to understand the messages, and analyse the meaning of figurative language of artistic writing, therefore interpretation, and mediation in this matter takes its true role. Literary criticism and its role is irreplaceable, not only as a theory, but also as a science in itself. It would make the literary art more acceptable and necessary in school books, especially with the acceptable psychological and pedagogical scientific suggestions. After all, children's literature itself has a goal, i.e. artistic and ethical education through acceptable literary forms.

Keywords: children's literature, history of children's literature, ethics and aesthetics, literary criticism

1. Introduction

Children's literature remains a vision, as long as there are creators and, as long as there is passionate art and written literature readers, which is both fascinating and challenging. Based on this principle, this literature remains undisturbed in its journey, notwithstanding all the dizzying developments of technology. An author remains deprived without the reader, and completely unfortunate without genuine literary criticism, which will give the latter the authority of being the right creator, at the right time, and with the right subject matter to write about (though art remains free as the creator and love, to be created as such, and to develop free and in the name of freedom of speech on its never-ending path). Fine arts differ from each other, because in them life is reflected in different ways. (Xoxa, 1970). Poetry and painting are diametrically opposed, and the reflection cannot be similar, i.e. in music, as the real or imaginary worlds are reflected in literature. Drawing and painting reproduce life by means of lines (ibid. J. Xoxa). Lines represent the static world, while music and literature are the soul and the living word in dozens of dimensional pieces, so similar to the truth, as even when it is not true, it gives the impression to be true.

These visions push the literary world towards ingenious inspiration, imagined differently and with completely diverse creativity, because literature is like that, distinct from adult literature, many times considered intentional literature, by the very fact that they write about others (in fact, adults write for the little ones, and the little ones are dependent on others, that is, on the endowment of literature by adults), according to the researcher Alimeko: Children's literature itself, in general, aims towards the educational function, so it calls for teaching them to like the good, the beautiful, the right (Alimeko, 2014). Given that the sensitive imaginary world of children is like that, imagination, desire, hope, the difficulties are even greater, especially in the interpretation of literary books for children. The basic effort remains, in some alternative ways, as an opportunity to produce more clarifications, in the first place, to discover invisible aspects, hidden not without a purpose, of stylistic figures of the specific language that children's literature actually contain, as well as syntactic construction, that gives meaning to the purpose of the literary text, not only as an illusion, but as an interweaving of the real world with the unreal, the interweaving of which produces or recreates imaginary art, though not always figuratively tangible, and indeed far from reality. Imbuing children with useful ideas about reality and everyday life, conveying beauty, emotional and rational awakening, as well as creating new ideas for life, is a tendency for emotional slackening of a child, while dealing with life phenomena and situations clad with adventure (Deva, 1977). Based on this attitude, this literature somehow, even when it is explained, always remains in the shadows, undefined in the secondary sense of the word, although the literary criticism that is lacking in this field, cannot always put forth its last word. Albanian children's literature is characterized by didacticism, moralization, and pedagogical and ethical tendencies, but at the same time it is also characterized by linguistic figurative scarcity, metrical and structural tautology (even though it is well known that the form is not only a technical performance, but also part of the general artistic performance), uniform stylistics, simple decipherable symbolism and all this occurs, mostly, owing to the age of the reader, to whom it is dedicated (but it can also happen as a consequence of limited creative capacities, according to scholars (Plakolli, 2015).

On the other hand, interpretation is nothing else but explanation, clarification, mediation to break down and clarify the text, although interpretation may not always reach its goal. Literary formats of this nature raise the obvious question of whether literary criticism is sufficiently playing its role in the face of the not-so-very-sensational developments of children's literature everywhere, where this literature is always valued, preserved and cultivated according to certain steps, and not in accordance with the desire to cultivate and highlight it with all its fragile particulars. The work of children's literature, is first of all, the art of speech, therefore if we deliberately leave this feature aside, we automatically deny its essence and uniqueness, namely the main purpose: artistic dimension and pleasure – and aesthetic impact (Berisha, 2022). The beginning of the new century has unwittingly challenged the latter, since one of the dilemmas faced today is whether we should write

children's literature, and why should we write children's literature?!

Foremost, the dizzying technological developments and the rapid circulation of information have brought about the Hamletian question: "to be or not to be". To be, means to exist, to exist wherever life breathes, even perhaps without yet "breathing", that is, from conception, when someone speaks to you, writes it for you, reads it for you!, "it is a multidimensional concept that covers the early childhood period from birth to 6 years old, and includes a series of coordinated services for young children and their families (Gjeli, 2014).

And, secondly, what should be that literature, genre or content, which would entice every reader, from the first steps of his life?! Based on these dilemmas, of course, the responsibility falls upon the creator and perhaps on the reader himself, that is, on us (who write and read) With the only question of who we are, and what we read, what is the general culture, what is our intellectual formation and morality, to demand responsibility from those who nevertheless dare to write and produce for us, remains a topic that does not always receive a clear answer from literary criticism itself, lacking in a sense. Children's literature (in Albanian) is traced in stories and songs, in oral traditions that adults shared with children, before there were publications for us Albanians. Therefore, the development of children's literature is of an earlier period, before the printed publications. So, this is how children's literature has been present since the 15th century, often with a moral or religious message. Whereas, the golden age of children's literature starts at the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century, where many children's books were published (according to a study in the Shqiptarja magazine, April: 2019).

History and such dilemmas erode each other, not clarifying the lines of priority, because history has not always provided the last word, exactly at the right time, therefore the dilemma continues its life without disturbance, because a period is not always put at the end of a sentence, with a view to close a path. Therefore, a criterion has been put forth that: if the child in his requests speaks on behalf of time, then the author must also create on behalf of children (Deva, 1982).

2. The Review of Literature

Children's literature is the special artistic creation, the spirit of which continues to follow the passionate reader throughout his life, who grows and develops under the influence of the beautiful word that is exclusively written for them. Of course, children's writings elaborate the imaginary world in various forms, starting from rhyming poems, that have the lyrical spirit, or life, family and love as their theme. Such literature encourages and motivates the new generation to understand the importance of living, the wonder of speech, the nobility and curiosity to enrich the soul through the art of free speech, as the German romantic G. Huff would put it: "Art must give what reality denies". Children's literature is undoubtedly an inseparable and important part of the art of speech, (Anton Nikë Berisha, 2020). The world would be impoverished and unimaginable without reading, especially without literature. Based on the ideas defining children's literature, such literature has been evaluated as literature that is simultaneously based on two systems: the literary system and the pedagogical system (Demiri, 2011).

The literary system plays the role of aesthetic education, compared to pedagogical literature, whose function is something else, that is, that of academic education. The function of children's literature is characterized by other systems, socialisation and culture, ethics and aesthetics, values through which the child reader is educated and made aware. Only with education and with knowledge, a person becomes more aware of the necessity of freedom in life, of the path through which it comes about, of the duties that everyone has towards the nation or his homeland (A. Bishqemi). According to scholar Anton Nikë Berisha (2020), no nation that does not have great literature for children, cannot have great literature for adults, so according to our scholar: "This is precisely why I say with conviction that a nation that had or has a great literature for children, had and has a great literature for adults. It is like this because building and raising the artistic spirit of a human being requires a lot of effort and a lot of time: it starts at a young age and continues

throughout life." (Quote from the book, "When smiles dance", p. 9, 2021). There is an undeniable truth that the perspective of any society depends first of all, on the care of adults towards the new generation, on the way and perfection of the organization of experience that is transmitted from one generation to another, on the condensation of educational effects and understanding and their right education, from the degree of dignity that the little ones have in the general social hierarchy and, finally, from the extent of trust we have in them. (Deva, 1982).

3. The Methodology

The drafting method is focused on several dimensions, to begin with, the cultural dimension, i.e. the cultural importance and the need to have good children's literature. In this view, the attitudes and reasons whether this literature should exist in the face of dizzying technological and other developments, how important children's literature is and what is its ethical and aesthetic function have been discussed. Without literature (when we say literature, we mean the arts in general), our human world would not be what it is now, because man is not a robotic being, without reason and conscience. The arts soften our minds and give meaning to the times we live in. In the other corner, this study presents the history and its development periods, challenged by centuries-old political circumstances, although without any marked tradition, the genesis of Albanian writing is already documented, and the other dimension, literary criticism, the science that made art live. Children's literature lacks genuine literary criticism, it does not lack creation as much as it lacks criticism, and we rather have creators and authors, and few if any interpreters of it.

4. The Documented Profile of the Albanian Language and Literature

Albanian literature, along with the early stages of literature and the written Albanian language in general, has its starting point in 1462, with the first document known as the "Baptism Formula", written by Pal Engjëlli (found by the Romanian historian Nicolae Jorga in 1915), which contains a short sentence with a religious appeal, "I baptize you with in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit". The dictionary of Arnold Von Harf (1497), "is another important document known as the Dictionary of Arnold von Harff (Arnold von Harff, c. 1471-1505), a German knight, traveller and writer, born into a noble family on the lower Rhine (at Harff on the Erft River, northwest of Cologne), and according to Robert Elsie ("History of Albanian literature", 1995) it is another important document of the culture and history of Albanian writing, including a third document, being as important as the first two, "The Periscope of the Easter Gospel" (the end of the XV-century and beginning of the XVI-century), and that these three documents constitute the crowned historical greatness that document the birth and journey of Albanian writing in the historical sense of the word.

4.1 Children's literature during the National Renaissance

Children's literature during the National Renaissance marked a qualitative step; it developed as fiction in short genres, however, it could not acquire the features of an independent branch in the trunk of general literature. So, "Just like adult literature, children's literature also commences in one of the brightest periods of Albanian life, that of the National Renaissance, where many authors, prominent personalities, created their art for children." (ibid. Alimeko, 2014). Although this literature grew many centuries later, especially during the National Renaissance, it had a completely special echo and growth, and was created by worthy, conscientious, and responsible authors of their mission." With the Ottoman conquest of the Balkans, early Albanian literature immediately withered and shrivelled and with that the first remarkable chapter in the history of this literature was finally sealed. Until the National Renaissance movement approached, in the second half of the nineteenth century, literature in Albania would not be able to regain its vital character, that it had in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (Elsie, 1995). However, the linear world of cultural developments

of children's literature had a different treatment, precisely during the Albanian effort for independence and freedom from the Ottoman Empire. Inspirational writings during this period gave a different direction to children's literature, orienting it towards accomplished artistic writings, and with a patriotic character.

During the era of the National Renaissance, literature had carefully chosen topics aimed at educating the younger generation, through moralizing examples. Education and patriotism were the alpha and omega of almost all writings of that period, and all such writings were created in that form, that even when they were created by authors they resembled or were close to oral literature. "This deep artistic wealth, with its cognitive, communicative, educational and artistic functions, has played a prodigious role over the centuries, imparting national culture and folk poetic inspiration to children" (ibid., Alimeko, 2014). This rhythm of writing is almost present even today, this sensitive literature, written with the same sensitivity, and chosen with the greatest care, prevails in all textbooks belonging to the lower pre-primary and primary cycles. The theme of the homeland is the central metaphor, which appears in several convincing and necessary dimensions for the little ones, then the language, as a symbol, sits at the top of every woven verse, especially these phenomena affect Albanian poetry and poems in a sensitive way, since poems and poetry, as in no other literary form, are closer to the reader, and play the communication role in an excellent way.

The function of communication through dialogue and artistic monologue, as a function of general communication, make this literature also liked by other generations of adults. "Well, this shows that art, in addition to the communicative function, fulfils another function, the hedonistic function" (Uçi, 1973). The moral function of the reading pleasure, takes another place in children's literature, whether in written or oral literature, whereby artistic tools are built as such and in good function, where you are filled with hope and joy, for life and the future. Albanian children's literature, throughout its journey, was interrupted many times for political and historical reasons, but was never separated from the spirit of optimism, love and happiness, for everything was beautiful and life-giving. This literature lacks despair as an artistic tool, hatred as an expression of feelings, or prejudice and denial of the other. According to author and researcher Astrit Bishqem: literary themes for children should always be within the moral frame, but not the moralizing one, and he raises this issue more as an advice and necessity of contemporary literature, than as a necessary obligation (because in the end, authors are free to write and decide what to write), he raises this as an issue and not as a dilemma, therefore this author (A. Bishqemi, 2004), always puts forth this version: "Well, the theme should include moral qualities (courage, bravery, love for friends), flora and fauna, love for work, for school, the feeling of patriotism, the feeling to appreciate the beauty in nature, the feeling of cleanliness, etc. ., etc. Attention should be paid to the theme that stimulates the creative thinking in young children, that encourages the child to reason, analyse and synthesize things, compare and draw conclusions." (Bishqemi, 2004).

4.2 *The modern Albanian literature for children*

First of all, the question of what is modern, ought to be asked, and how do we understand modernity in literature (especially in children's literature)? According to the dictionary of the Albanian language, the word "modern" has more than one meaning: first, something that is created "today", of today, or creations of the time or writings of a modern era, if we talk about creativity (if we can really decipher it more or less like this), and the second meaning is writings with advanced features of the time, or modern views, etc. This simple decoding of this word, paraphrased to be understood even more clearly, comes as a starting point towards the historical journey of the cultural developments of modern Albanian literature, and it's very difficult beginnings, particularly for children's literature. Modernity was born as a need of the times and historical and cultural developments, and on this basis, scholar Astrit Bishqemi sees the Albanian children's literature feel tangible and consolidated according to its periodization. The author himself perceives this literature in four main periods and chapters: 1) Sources of Albanian literature for children, folklore for children; 2) Didactic-religious

written literature for children; 3) Artistic literature written for children in its beginnings; 4) Modern Albanian literature for children (R. Alimeko, 2014).

4.3 *The modern notion*

Modernity as a notion, according to researcher Calinescu, is nothing else but awareness, a concept or disagreement, and as she puts it: "the idea of modernity can only be conceived within the framework of a certain awareness of time, that is, of historical, linear and irreversible time, which flows forward unstoppably. Modernity as a notion would be quite meaningless in a society which does not employ the concept of time—the orderly, successive flow of history that organizes the categories of time according to a mythic and overarching pattern..." (Calinescu, 2012). If this principle is followed, that is, the historical principle, all forms of literature may have experienced modernity as time, or period, or development (in the historical sense) even though frequently time was not in the literal favour of the latter. This historical principle of modernity will affect, and continue to follow children's literature today (not only this literature), which according to its historical fate has flowed and continues to flow as such in its journey in a general way, with a decreased uplift, but without ever getting tired. According to scholar Hamiti, "modern Albanian literature is a metaphorical literature" (2003), followed, of course, according to the principles of time, and development: "This shows that in the twentieth century, Albanian literary consciousness is finally created. In this view, literary consciousness does not mean only the display of great works, but also the birth of inner awareness of these values, literary resonance for phenomena" (ibid.,7). According to this logic, it is clearly understood that modern Albanian literature generally appears late, in the twenties and thirties of the last century, when this literature was considered individual literature, figuratively written and stylistically accomplished.

4.4 *Contemporary literature*

Just as modernity is considered as the starting point of the new, contemporary literature, on the other hand, continues to follow this journey, the direction of perfecting the new, but in a completely individual form, so it continues to be individualized in all its forms, whether from the choice of topics, whether from their treatment, as well as to write figuratively in a special way... Freed from many political and religious ideologies, it sees her own light, both artistically and as a realized objective, especially in the 20th century, where children's literature sees its growth without hindrance, even though the central themes remain the same, morality and moralizing (in an overwhelming part of them). However, these issues fall under the responsibility of the creators themselves (whether to write or not to write in these forms), although children's literature (within this structure) must definitely be an inspiring literature, both inspiring and a good example, with an ethical and cultural approach, since the young generation needs such an education, that in the first steps of their human and intellectual development, art and the artistic word remain one of the good emotional and romantic opportunities for life and work, ultimately because the word art itself has more than a linguistic understanding, which means that generations benefit from the latter, not only to have fun, but also to learn and create. "Just like science, art is a powerful tool to get to know life and advance society. The characteristic of art is that it reflects reality through artistic forms, which appeal not only to reasoning but also to our feelings. They touch our emotions, they excite us" (Timofejve L. I, 1963).

5. **Analysis**

5.1 *Literary criticism*

Considering the difficulties that arise especially in the interpretation of literary creations for children, the basic efforts remain in some alternative ways, as an opportunity to produce more clarifications, in

the first place to discover invisible aspects that are hidden behind stylistic and linguistic figures, literary rarities that make this literature distinct and very special from other literary formats. Qualified criticism has the task of discovering and recommending, or denying, the values and quality of the works, one by one, but not as a whole. The calls that are made for its empowerment are not related to the bitterness of the language, but to the good will to help and encourage anyone who can give value, however little, to society (<https://gazetadielli.com/>, 2015).

Interpretation remains a matter of mediation to clarify, or better understand, the dark and invisible sides of a literary text, with a view to reveal its invisible aspects. The first meaning of the word interpretation (an international word derived from the Latin word "interpretare"), is explanation, clarification, scrutiny, analysis of the text (according to researcher Bratoljub Klaić). And, if this mediation in non-literary texts, such as various laws and rules, is done to clarify incomprehensible points and elements, often even for some eventual benefit, such mediation, that is, the interpretation of literary production, has a very important higher and more noble purpose. First and foremost, this is done to reveal invisible aspects, often hidden by the author, which is not so easy to understand, as it should be, and more than once, it is possible to have several interpretations. According to A. Camys: "Sometimes there is a double possibility of interpretation, hence the necessity of two ways of reading" (The Myth of Sisyphus). And if we continue the analysis of this opinion, it turns out that, if each interpretation presupposes a truth, then, and if all truths are doubtful, according to Kordić (1988) and sometimes even the most analysed interpretations, then several interpretations of a literary work are made, but it does not mean that they will have come out exactly as they should. What gives soul to literature [...] is language, and everything is related to the way it is chosen and elaborated in the concrete text and from the multiple meanings that emerge from it (Zogaj, 2021). The literary and non-literary phenomena that contributed to the Albanian literature for children and young people, in the diagram of their development, occasionally enriched and sometimes impoverished the literary climate, as well as equally supplemented and depleted the dimension of Albanian literature for children and young people. Likewise, literary criticism in its existing position, has enriched and depleted the multidimensional space of children's literature (<https://shqiptarja.com/>).

5.2 *The missing literary criticism*

As we have pointed out above, the Albanian literature written for children, began a few centuries ago (XV), but indeed without being noticed (because time and centuries were such, that not many things have been brought out to light, to be studied and analysed in time). The key information we have, is that this literature was at first influenced by the religious spirit, and it dates back to 1592. As the first authorial poem found in the catechism of Lekë Matranga (1569-1619), "E mbsuame e krestëre" is simply not only an Albanian poem with a religious character, but also the initiator of Albanian poetry in general, and in particular the initiator of Albanian poetry for children. Literary criticism of Albanian literature had its ups and downs, depending on the circumstances and periods of its development... But children's literature continues to suffer from the latter. Although divided in periods and systematized according to the history of its development, it continues to suffer genuine literary criticism in particular. In terms of history, this literature has been prioritized, but not in terms of literary criticism. Attempts to divide literary criticism into periods, as this literature is divided in particular periods, leaves much to be desired. In the historical course of the creative and scholarly literary process, the multitude of phenomena that developed and are developing, in their linear and segmented way, have produced, over the years, values and anti-values, which have built their own paths, and these paths are connected with historical, psychological, sociological factors, i.e. with non-literary and literary realities. (ibid., 2019, <https://shqiptarja.com/>). Literary criticism had its greatest progress in the 70s/80s of the twentieth century, considered today as bright years as well as invisible because of the information that these theoretical books offered, that in terms of content their ideology did not offer much important specifics for children's literature. For people who think

critically, the basis of understanding information is the starting point. Developing critical thinking involves absorbing ideas and considering their impact... (Bardhyl, 2005). However, children's literature was steadfast, even though it was controlled until the 90s. The fall of dictatorial systems and the opening of our culture to world democracies, indeed revolutionized artistic writings in general. The classification of children's literature is guided by different and numerous criteria, often controversial, because its categorization is about a special audience, which is naturally not homogeneous, due to the fact that children can be different in terms of their maturity, emotional and educational preparation, and general family culture (Demiri, 2011).

6. Conclusions

Children's literature remains a hearth of fire, which remains unextinguished, and the light of which springs hope and gives meaning to life, culture and art in general. The world of children is echoed by adults, their dreams are made real by authors, with beautiful words and impressive writings (even when these dreams stay only on paper), because writers, poets, prose writers and dramatists of these formats create such situations through the events of the characters that make minds "fly" towards the unknown and new paths, with the idea of finding the imaginary unknown. In order to always bring the child to the fore, putting him in the focus of the action even when there was no need for such a thing, our writers organized almost all their interest and ideas in relation to a certain childish character, and in this way, its priority is established over other living factors that also participate in the configuration of different situations. Thus, the child is flooded by a series of real and non-real features, not missing in any of the action episodes, participates in most of the dialogues, and in this way, the tendency of the writer to exalt him at all costs does not agree with the natural. He will transform his character into a symbol of triumph of the future, where he plays the main role, into a symbol of his optimistic feeling, of his spiritual and intellectual progress, promoted ahead of time (Deva, 1977). While the theory of literature remains the science of researching these imaginary forms, it remains equally challenging for new or more experienced researchers. Children's literature seems like it cannot have a definition, in the historical sense, but certainly never in the literary sense, possibly because the created arts themselves cannot be really defined, due to their creative nature. Those who create art are searching it, just as their ancestors were. Man remains a being in search. Art travels as people search for it. This gives the impression of a myth, but in fact art and man live in time, but never in their exact time, and this inaccuracy makes them follow each other for centuries, without ending the unknown.

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