

Stylistic and Cultural Structure and Its Manifestations in Children's Literature

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Abstract

This study examines a range of stylistic dimensions in children's stories, or children's literature. The first section considers the linguistic space, focusing on how syntactic structures shape the story's artistic architecture. Particular attention is given to causal constructions, which connect the causes of narrative events to their consequences, and to circumstantial constructions, which reveal the characters' psychological fabric. The linguistic space also encompasses the effect of artistic imagery on the child reader's imaginative horizon, the artistic techniques used in dialogue, and the influence of popular expressions on the story's linguistic texture. The first section concludes by examining the semantic and psychological dimensions of body language. The second section is devoted to event space. It traces the construction of the clustered event along two paths: a sequential path, which accelerates and develops the event, and a generative path. It also examines imagistic events expressed through auditory, chromatic, and luminous imagery. The third section addresses character space by examining the relationship between characters' names and attributes, the combination of human and nonhuman characters, and the early and gradual disclosure of characters' psychological and behavioral composition. It concludes with an examination of the symbolic character. The fourth section investigates the story's temporal space, particularly the techniques of organized time and temporal leaps. The fifth section examines the stylistic techniques used to shape the story's ending. The sixth section connects the present text with the absent text by tracing the cultural references that link the narrative to its external context, especially religious and heritage-based intertextuality. The seventh section examines the visual configuration of the narrative text and the semantic interrelationship between the story's language and its accompanying illustrations. The eighth section reveals the cultural knowledge embedded in nature-related vocabulary through children's spring excursions, which are used to construct a lexicon of plant names. This concise botanical lexicon enriches children's knowledge in accordance with the educational level established by the story and lays the foundation for future awareness of plant life. The ninth section examines the cultural and educational dimension of children's stories to lay the foundations for biological knowledge, a field that writers of children's stories should not

overlook. The study concludes with a tenth section that examines the system of spiritual and social values in children's poetry.

Research Questions

What should we write for children? What subjects and literary forms are suited to their minds and modes of thinking? How can we foster literary creativity in our children? How has children's literature contributed to the development of children's educational capacities and moral values?

Keywords: children's literature; suspense; learning; imagination; imagery.

Introduction

Children's literature is widely recognized as an important educational medium. Through it, children can encounter rich and varied writing that teaches them the aesthetic techniques of storytelling and narration, coherence of thought, the effective organization of words and sentences, harmonious phrasing, expressive beauty, and elevated meaning. Children's literature therefore constitutes a fundamental basis for forming the child's personality and preparing the child to confront the challenges, changes, and developments of the modern age.

Children's literature is one of the continually evolving genres of world literature. Childhood is the seedbed from which the nation's future grows. The importance of children's literature therefore lies in the capacity of its narrative, poetic, and dramatic forms to develop children intellectually by instilling values and ideas in them.¹

1. Definition of Concepts

1.1 The Concept of Children's Literature

Children's literature is an artistic creation whose linguistic structure relies on accessible, standard, and non-obscure vocabulary suited to the child's linguistic repertoire, together with transparent, uncomplicated imagination and varied, purposeful content. These elements are employed through modes of address and orientation that accord with the child's mentality and perception, enabling the child to understand, experience, and appreciate the literary text and then explore it through imagination.²

"Quite simply, it signifies the future. Just as it is impossible for an individual, it is impossible for a nation to enter the gates of the future without caring for its children. A farmer cannot guarantee a harvest without carefully selecting, refining, and preparing the seeds. The optimal investment throughout human history has been, and remains, investment in minds: developing, educating, and preparing them to create the life we desire."³

Children's literature thus engages with children's behavior and attitudes, contributes to the formation of their personality and identity, and teaches them the arts of life and literature.

1.2 Children's Literature and Its Role in Developing Arabic-Language Skills

Language is the symbolic medium of innovative thought and the means by which such thought takes tangible literary form. Despite its central importance to creativity, most studies have

treated language as though it were secondary. This error should not be repeated; time and effort should instead be devoted to shaping the gifted child's linguistic experience in preparation for creative production later in life. Such cultivation is not limited to cognitive knowledge of grammar and morphology. Above all, it entails developing a sound linguistic sensibility that enables gifted children to select forms appropriate to meaning without sacrificing aesthetic quality or the capacity to influence, delight, and persuade. New methods are therefore required to enable gifted children to master Arabic rhetoric beyond school-based approaches that encourage rote verbalism through the memorization of definitions and the selection of corresponding examples. Rhetoric is the art of organizing and embellishing discourse in ways that enhance its beauty and effect on the reader; it is also the clearest embodiment of the skill of selecting words and structures. Closely related objectives include expanding gifted children's vocabulary and analyzing texts linguistically to identify their strengths, weaknesses, and methods of conveying meaning.⁴

It sought to "foster children's love of the Arabic language. In doing so, it proceeded gradually according to age, attempted to awaken their talents and aptitudes, strengthened their inclinations and aspirations, and ultimately led them to love reading and persevere in it."⁵

If education is one of the objectives of children's stories, educators and story writers should remember that education involves more than presenting information or enriching a system of values. It also encompasses children's modes of thought, their evaluation of events around them, and their adoption of positions on particular matters. One of the most important cognitive skills that children's literature, especially narrative, should cultivate is causal reasoning: the ability to connect causes with consequences. At the linguistic level, this skill is developed when writers employ causal constructions in narrating events. The story language that sustains the child's question, "Why?" is the language most likely to engage the child reader and cultivate causal reasoning. In the statement, "No student dared tell the teacher because Asi was a violent student whom all the students feared,"⁶ the causal construction reveals the problem of violence in schools or kindergartens, encourages the child reader to reflect on it, prompts a moral response to what occurred between Ghufraan and Asi during the drawing lesson, and identifies ways of addressing school violence. Causal construction therefore reveals an ethical issue and indicates how it may be addressed educationally. Likewise, in the statement, "They all loved her because she was peaceful and content with what God had given her,"⁷ causal reasoning moves beyond its linguistic function to an educational one: it identifies why people love one another and promotes social values and psychological dispositions, especially peace, refraining from harm, contentment, and satisfaction.

The message conveyed to children through their culture and literature seeks to draw them in a particular direction. Because of their psychological constitution, children respond to elements of attraction and to representations of suffering; written language therefore possesses an aesthetic dimension from every angle.⁸

2. Children's Literature and Its Role in Developing Vocabulary

Sound, images, colors, drawing, movement, and other media increase the precision, clarity, and concreteness of an idea. These media constitute a language distinct from conventional verbal language. Yet, their nonverbal character intensifies the effect of verbal language on human beings, depending on their formation and level of development. Children, in particular, need such media because of their age and cognitive development. These forms illuminate literature and its concerns, make concepts more accessible, and help refine and develop children's talents.⁹

Visual configuration reflects the realities of contemporary life, with its emphasis on materiality and sensory perception. It encompasses everything presented to sight within the space of the text and highlights the importance of visual elements in producing meaning in narrative or poetic works.¹⁰

The manner in which type is printed and its units are arranged can strongly stimulate the reader through visual configurations that establish a distinctive rhetoric and rhythmically support the poetic text. Each element of language accordingly forms part of a rich network of aesthetic relationships that requires a critical sensibility capable of identifying the sources of creativity and rhythm.¹¹

2.1 Using Stories to Develop Children's Reading Skills

In several stories, the writer relies on circumstantial constructions to reveal the psychological space of characters and events, thereby fostering emotional interaction between the child reader and the story. A linguistic construction that lacks circumstantial meaning is less affecting and engaging than one that contains it. The former requires greater effort and concentration from the child reader for emotional interaction with the text. In the latter, however, the circumstantial construction functions as a linguistic and semiotic sign that draws attention to the story's semantic junctures and points of emotional intensity. Consider the writer's statement, "Mahmoud slept that night sighing, and his mother slept sadly,"¹² in the story *Santa Claus and Little Mahmoud*. The sighing and sadness conveyed by the circumstantial constructions form the central juncture of a story that addresses religious duality in Palestinian society on Christmas Eve. Mahmoud represents a Muslim child who did not receive Santa Claus's gifts; he therefore falls asleep sighing as he awaits Santa Claus's arrival the following year. Mahmoud's sighs become those of the child reader who follows the event, while his mother sleeps sadly because her son must wait an entire year for a gift. The circumstantial constructions also embody the climax of the story's plot, which begins with Mahmoud's sadness and disappointment and ends with his joy and exuberance when he receives his gift from Santa Claus.

Children's literature favors accessible Standard Arabic because the national language is the vessel of thought and emotion and an embodiment of national identity, a central objective of literature for children. This commitment does not preclude colloquial words and popular expressions when they accord with the story's artistic structure and the characters' emotional space. In some contexts, colloquial language is more expressive than Standard Arabic,

particularly at moments of heightened emotion. Thus, the writer states, "It truly is Santa Claus in the flesh."¹³ This expression is preceded by the phrase "she could hardly believe it." The context is filled with surprise and astonishment because the mother can scarcely believe that Santa Claus has arrived with the gifts her child awaited for an entire year. The colloquial expression therefore confirms the reality of the long-awaited scene. Had the writer used the more neutral statement "It truly is Santa Claus himself," the expression would not have achieved the same harmony among the event's surprise, the mother's astonishment, and the joy of mother and child.

Some words are mistakenly assumed to be colloquial, such as *yatalaffa* ('wraps himself') in the statement, "He wraps himself in his black woolen shawl."¹⁴ The word is, however, standard Arabic. The related forms denote wrapping oneself in a garment until it covers the body.¹⁵ The use in children's stories of colloquial words that have standard Arabic origins serves two functions. First, child readers recognize that part of the story's language derives from the colloquial speech of daily life, thereby increasing their familiarity with the language. Second, literary texts revive colloquial words of standard origin. Some colloquial words also acquire metaphorical or comparative meanings. For example, *al-'alqa* means a severe beating in the statement, "warning him that the beating he would receive would be as black as his color."¹⁶ The word derives from *al-i'laq*, the entrapment of prey in a rope.¹⁷ A person subjected to a severe beating is thus likened to prey caught in a hunter's snare. Child readers may ask about the meanings of such words; parents should therefore examine their linguistic origins to enrich children's language and broaden their imaginative horizons.

Children acquire a language of bodily movement just as they acquire spoken language for expressing feelings and attitudes toward events. Bodily movements carry agreed meanings in the same way as spoken language; both are languages and instruments of communication. One is spoken and heard or written and read, while the other is kinetic and seen. In some situations, body language surpasses spoken and written language because people use it when they are unable or unwilling to express certain meanings verbally. Body language is also universal insofar as many movements and signs are recognized across cultures. In contrast, spoken language is national and restricted to those who master its pronunciation and linguistic and semantic systems.

2.2 The Effectiveness of Images in Children's Literature

We live in an age dominated by the visual image. Increasingly, experience is organized into visual worlds that engage sight, stimulate the reader, and communicate discourse through varied visual means. The visual image has therefore become one of the most effective and influential forms because of its capacity to combine multiple elements within a coherent context.¹⁸

Natali Bako argues that some bodily movements are acquired through imitation, including movements that express psychological states such as joy, sadness, disgust, fear, anger, and astonishment, which are known as the six universal emotions. Others are acquired through

training and practice, such as military salutes, winking, and signs used by people who are deaf.¹⁹

Imagistic events occur on three levels. The first is auditory imagery, which creates harmony between sound and emotional state, as in *Santa Claus and Little Mahmoud*: "As the ringing of the bells drew nearer, her heart pounded violently."²⁰ The sound of the church bells harmonizes with the mother's heartbeat. The bells announce the arrival of Santa Claus, whom Mahmoud has awaited for a year, while the mother's pounding heart expresses her long-deferred desire for her son's happiness. Auditory imagery is therefore a powerful means of involving the child reader in the story. The bells announce not only Santa Claus's arrival but also the resolution of the narrative crisis. Reception consequently moves beyond written language to the audible language of the bells and the emotional language conveyed by the mother's heartbeat.

The manner in which type is printed, and its units are arranged, can strongly stimulate the reader through visual configurations that establish a distinctive rhetoric and rhythmically support the poetic text. Each element of language accordingly forms part of a rich network of aesthetic relationships that requires a critical sensibility capable of identifying the sources of creativity and rhythm.²¹

Children generally love pets and birds. Story writers capitalize on this emotional affinity by combining human and nonhuman characters, as in the dialogue between Sa'id the woodcutter and the sparrows.²² This combination seeks to cultivate children's humane feelings toward birds. Dialogue with birds portrays them as emotional beings that rejoice, grieve, and suffer, thereby changing the child's view of the bird from a creature imprisoned in a cage or hunted for food to a being endowed with feelings. Human and animal emotions similarly merge in *The Good Shepherd*, when "the young shepherd approaches his sad goat, strokes its black hair with his hands, kisses it between the eyes, and says, 'Do not worry, do not worry. Despite the night, the rain, and the cold, I will go out to search for him.'"²³

Visual imagery helps bridge the gap created by the weakened connection between author and reader following the decline of oral performance, which once highlighted aesthetic values and the qualities of oral delivery. Visual configuration in narrative confirms that storytelling is no longer centered exclusively on language or on predetermined meaning; it is discourse addressed to the eye rather than the ear. It therefore represents a transition from the temporal to the spatial.

Visual configuration is a fundamental component of the story's structure through drawing in its various forms, the arrangement of narrative lines, the use of white space, visual separation, and punctuation.²⁴

Children can interpret and connect situations despite their limited life experience. Interpretation need not occur at the moment of reading; the text's content may remain in the child's memory until a similar situation prompts the recall of what the child has read or heard. Events that acquire symbolic significance, and characters that perform symbolic functions, therefore establish in the child's memory and cultural formation the habit of connecting symbols with their meanings.

Chronological order predominates in children's stories and helps child readers understand the plot, events, and purpose. Temporal fragmentation and flashback, by contrast, may not suit children's cognitive capacities because they can hinder the child's ability to follow events and may obscure the story's purpose and the system of educational and behavioral values pursued by the writer.

Modern printing technologies have enriched children's stories with drawings, images, and colors that increase enjoyment and suspense, enhance understanding, embody the narrative's intellectual vision, and represent the characters' emotions and reactions. When a narrative lacks illustrations, reception depends solely on the child reader's cognitive and imaginative capacities. When it is accompanied by images suited to the events and characters, reception becomes dual, divided between intellectual comprehension and visual perception. The text then takes two forms: a readable linguistic image and a visible visual image.

The visible image is etched into the child's memory like a tattoo more deeply than the spoken or written word because memory stores sensory images more readily than mental ones. Memory is also activated when a mental image is transformed into a sensory image.

A narrative text is no longer composed solely of words and ideas; it now includes elements that can be accessed only through sight and that contribute to understanding the story. This development reflects the linear and graphic organization selected by the writer. The reception of narrative has consequently shifted toward silent reading, creating a space in which texts acquire a visual identity. The manner in which a text is written therefore contributes to determining its meaning and framing its course.²⁵

Some scholars of children's literature maintain that linguistic structure should be clear and should avoid artistic imagery because imagery requires an imaginative capacity that child readers may not possess. They overlook the fact that a story devoid of artistic imagery can weaken children's interest in following events and may extinguish the spark of imagination. The world of childhood is founded on imagination.²⁶

Contemporary imagery has expanded through influential techniques associated with what is often called the "culture of the image," as writers embrace everything that nourishes visual perception and enriches the imagination. Amid the transformations and visual technologies of contemporary life, artistic vision and imagery naturally change, moving from stillness to motion and from extended scenes to rapid flashes. Narrative art is no longer merely linguistic play or ornament; it is an active engagement with feeling, knowledge, and thought.²⁷

If children's literature is a component of children's culture, producing a unified literature for Arab children cannot be achieved unless writers addressing later age groups adhere to the same system. Such continuity allows this literature, at every stage of childhood, to strengthen and develop a shared national character. Arabic literature as a whole would then move toward a single objective: establishing a unified literature for the Arab national character.²⁸

Conclusion

- Like adult literature, children's literature possesses artistic and structural qualities and is aesthetically rich. It is distinguished, however, by its attention to children's characteristics and capacities for comprehension, developing in accordance with the child's stages of

growth and ability to understand and perceive. Writers therefore employ simple images inspired by the worlds surrounding children, especially during the earliest stages of development, because complex images may exceed children's interpretive capacities. They likewise use a vocabulary suited to those capacities.

- Arab children's literature nevertheless suffers from two related tendencies: emphasis and neglect. It emphasizes certain values or groups of values while neglecting others. Whether these tendencies derive from writers' individual experiences and divergent subjective perspectives or from children's literature's identification with the environment in which it is produced and its allegiance to the values promoted by the governing system, the result is that Arab children's literature does not yet constitute a unified literature. Its varying patterns of emphasis and neglect do not lead to the formation of a shared national character among Arab children. An acceptable solution to the problem of values in children's literature is therefore required.
- Children's literature should be included in programs for training teachers and educational supervisors, and newspapers should devote regular space to it. The media should be encouraged to follow publications for children, and children's book exhibitions should be organized.
- Children's literature should address all ages, from the cradle to the grave, with sufficient flexibility to adapt to changing needs.
- It should engage with children's behavior and attitudes, contribute to the formation of their personality and identity, and teach them the arts of life and literature.
- Literature for children is among the most beautiful forms of creativity and writing because of its powerful effect on children's development in all fields, its encouragement of reading, writing, and creativity, and its response to the growing challenges of knowledge and technology.
- It should respond to the cultural needs of children and adolescents by balancing the culture prepared for them from heritage and contemporary life with the culture they will require in the future.
- Early-education institutions should establish library corners suited to young children and their needs, including low shelves that make children's stories readily accessible.

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Notes

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- ¹ Rafid Salim Sarhan Shihab, "Children's Literature in the Arab World: Its Concept, Emergence, Types, and Development," 20.
- ² Ahmad Zalat, *Children's Literature: Its Foundations and Concepts*, 25.
- ³ Hiba Muhammad Abd al-Hamid, *Children's Literature at the Primary Stage*, 11.
- ⁴ Samar Ruhi al-Faysal, *Children's Literature and Their Culture: A Critical Reading*, 36.
- ⁵ Muhammad Hasan Brighish, *Children's Literature: Its Objectives and Characteristics*, 85.
- ⁶ *Ghufran and Asi*, 9.
- ⁷ *The Kind Ghandoura*, 3.
- ⁸ Hadi Nu'man al-Hayti, *Children's Culture for Children*, 115.
- ⁹ Muhammad al-Safrani, *Visual Formation in Modern Arabic Poetry*, 22.
- ¹⁰ Issam Shartah, *The Seduction of Poetic Discourse*, 136.
- ¹¹ Alaa al-Din Alaa Nasir, "The Significations of Written Visual Formation in the Modern Poetic Text," 113.
- ¹² *Santa Claus and Little Mahmoud*, 9.
- ¹³ *Santa Claus and Little Mahmoud*, 21.
- ¹⁴ *The Good Shepherd*, 11.
- ¹⁵ Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, s.v. "l-f-'".
- ¹⁶ *Injustice Will Not Last*, 9.
- ¹⁷ Ibn Manzur, *Lisan al-Arab*, s.v. "l-q".

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- ¹⁸ Aisha Anwar Umar, "The Effectiveness and Aesthetics of Antithesis in Forming the Visual Image in Abu Tammam: His Ghazals as a Model," 108.
- ¹⁹ Natali Bako, *The Language of Gestures*, trans. Samir Shaykhani, 19.
- ²⁰ *Santa Claus and Little Mahmoud*, 17.
- ²¹ Issam Shartah, *Indicators of Aesthetic Skill in the Structure of the Contemporary Poem*, 123.
- ²² *Love Is Stronger*, 9 and following.
- ²³ *The Good Shepherd*, 9.
- ²⁴ Muhammad al-Safrani, *Visual Formation in Modern Arabic Poetry*, 165.
- ²⁵ Alaa al-Din Alaa Nasir, "The Significations of Written Visual Formation in the Modern Poetic Text," 113.
- ²⁶ Atiq Umar, "A Stylistic Study of Children's Stories by Zuhair Da'im," in *Encyclopedia of Research and Studies in Modern Palestinian Literature*, 16.
- ²⁷ Issam Shartah, *Indicators of Aesthetic Skill in the Structure of the Contemporary Poem*, 123.
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