

MYTHOLOGICAL PECULIARITIES OF ENGLISH CHILDREN’S LITERATURE

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Annotation. The article explores the profound influence of mythology on the development and thematic depth of English children’s books. It examines how authors have drawn from various mythological traditions—ranging from English folklore and Arthurian legends to classical Greek and Roman myths—blending them into engaging narratives for young readers. These mythological elements, including anthropomorphized creatures, gods, heroes, and mythical realms, serve not only to entertain but also to impart moral lessons and universal themes such as heroism, sacrifice, and the triumph of good over evil.

Key words: mythological, children’s literature, heroes, moral lessons, legends.

Аннотация. В статье исследуется глубокое влияние мифологии на развитие и тематическую глубину английских детских книг. В нем рассматривается, как авторы использовали различные мифологические традиции — от английского фольклора и легенд о короле Артуре до классических греческих и римских мифов — смешивая их в увлекательные повествования для юных читателей. Эти мифологические элементы, в том числе антропоморфные существа, боги, герои и мифические миры, служат не только для развлечения, но и для передачи моральных уроков и универсальных тем, таких как героизм, жертвоприношение и победа добра над злом.

Ключевые слова: мифологическое, детская литература, герои, нравственные уроки, легенды.

Annotatsiya. Ushbu maqolada mifologiyaning bolalar adabiyotining rivojlanishi va mavzular ko‘lami kengligi o‘rganiladi. Unda mualliflar ingliz folklori va Artur haqidagi afsonalardan tortib klassik yunon va rim miflarigacha bo‘lgan turli mifologik an‘analardan qanday qilib olinganligi va ularni yosh kitobxonlar uchun qiziqarli rivoyatlarga birlashtirgani ko‘rib chiqiladi. Bu mifologik unsurlar, jumladan, antropomorflashtirilgan mavjudotlar, xudolar, qahramonlar va afsonaviy olamlar nafaqat ko‘ngil ochish, balki axloqiy saboqlar va qahramonlik, qurbonlik, ezgulikning yovuzlik ustidan g‘alabasi kabi umuminsoniy mavzularni berishga ham xizmat qiladi.

Kalit so‘zlar: mifologik, bolalar adabiyoti, qahramonlar, axloqiy saboqlar, afsonalar.

Introduction

English children’s literature is a vibrant and multifaceted genre, where fantasy, imagination, and moral lessons intertwine to shape the experiences of young readers. One of the most captivating aspects of this genre is the way it draws upon and reinterprets various mythological traditions, transforming ancient tales into engaging narratives that resonate with modern sensibilities. From the enchanting realms of fairies and dragons to the heroic quests of mythical figures, English children’s literature is steeped in mythological peculiarities that both entertain and educate.

These mythological influences are not limited to traditional folklore but also incorporate elements from classical mythologies, Arthurian legends, and medieval chivalric tales. Authors like J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and J.M. Barrie skillfully weave mythological motifs into their stories, creating fantastical worlds where the boundaries between reality and the supernatural blur. This fusion of myth and literature not only captivates the imagination of children but also offers a rich source of moral guidance, exploring universal themes of heroism, sacrifice, transformation, and the struggle between good and evil. In this exploration of the mythological peculiarities within English children’s literature, we will examine how these ancient myths are reimagined and adapted, offering young readers a window into the timeless worlds of myth while encouraging their own growth and moral development. By analyzing the anthropomorphized creatures, reinterpreted legends, and magical realms that populate these stories, we can better understand how mythology continues to shape the way children perceive the world and their place within it.

Literature Review

The intersection of mythology and children’s literature has long been a topic of scholarly interest, particularly within the context of English literature. Mythological themes in children’s stories serve as both entertainment and a means of transmitting moral, cultural, and philosophical values. The mythological peculiarities found in English children’s literature reveal how ancient myths, folklore, and classical legends are reimagined to resonate with young readers, often offering layers of meaning that blend entertainment with education. This literature review explores existing research on the use of mythology in English children’s books, examining how mythological elements have been adapted, their impact on child development, and their contribution to the genre’s thematic richness. Several scholars have examined the profound influence of mythology on English children’s literature. According to Zipes (1993), fairy tales and folk myths are central to the formation of children’s literary traditions, with English authors frequently drawing upon older mythic structures and narratives. Folklore and mythology provide a vast reservoir of archetypes, themes, and motifs that enrich the narrative possibilities of children’s books. These include figures like dragons, faeries, and talking animals, which carry with them deep symbolic and

cultural meanings. Zipes emphasizes that myths not only entertain but also offer moral lessons, particularly in the moral dichotomy between good and evil. In addition to folklore, classical mythology—especially Greek and Roman myths—has been a persistent influence on English children’s literature. Authors such as C.S. Lewis, J.R.R. Tolkien, and more recently, Rick Riordan, have drawn on these classical traditions, reimagining gods, heroes, and mythic creatures for younger audiences. As reported by Edmunds (2005), the use of classical mythological figures allows authors to address universal themes of morality, heroism, and destiny in ways that are both engaging and educational for children. By incorporating gods, demigods, and legendary creatures into their stories, authors bring ancient mythological constructs into contemporary contexts, making them accessible and relevant to young readers.

Methods

The concept of archetypes and symbols in children’s literature has been extensively discussed by scholars such as Campbell (2008) and Bettelheim (1976), who explore how mythological figures serve as symbols of universal human experiences. Campbell’s notion of the “hero’s journey” has been particularly influential, as it maps out the stages of a mythical hero’s quest and has been adapted in numerous children’s books, from Tolkien’s *The Hobbit* to Rowling’s *Harry Potter* series. Bettelheim’s work, particularly in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), emphasizes that the mythic elements in fairy tales and children’s stories serve to help children navigate complex emotional and psychological developments. The archetypes found in myth—such as the hero, the mentor, and the trickster—provide children with models for understanding and dealing with the challenges they face in their own lives.

In English children’s literature, these archetypes are frequently anthropomorphized. As argued by Piaget (1970) and later extended by Bruner (1996), the anthropomorphization of mythical creatures, such as the lion Aslan in *The Chronicles of Narnia* or the dragon Smaug in *The Hobbit*, allows children to engage with complex emotional and moral dilemmas through characters that are at once relatable and extraordinary. These anthropomorphic figures help children understand abstract concepts like bravery, loyalty, and self-sacrifice in ways that feel tangible and accessible. The Arthurian legend has played a central role in shaping the mythological landscape of English children’s literature. Scholars such as Kermode (2001) and Beidler (2003) have explored the ongoing appeal of the Arthurian myths for children, noting how the themes of chivalry, honor, and the quest for the Holy Grail have been incorporated into both traditional and modern children’s fiction. Works like T.H. White’s *The Once and Future King* (1958) and the *Sword in the Stone* (1938) provide a child-friendly approach to Arthurian myth, emphasizing the transformation of the young Arthur from an innocent boy into a wise ruler. These stories not only introduce young readers to historical and mythical figures but also explore themes of leadership,

fate, and moral responsibility. The enduring popularity of the Arthurian cycle in children’s literature also reflects the power of myth to communicate both individual and collective values. According to Kermode (2001), the myths of King Arthur and his knights offer children both a model of moral behavior and an invitation to explore their own notions of heroism, sacrifice, and responsibility. The presence of Merlin, the wise and magical mentor, is a key component in this process, as his role in Arthur’s education mirrors the mythological function of mentors in a variety of traditions.

Analysis and Results

Fairy tales, often derived from folk myths, are fundamental to the development of English children’s literature. Scholars like Zipes (2002) and Propp (1968) have analyzed the structure and function of fairy tales, noting that their themes—often rooted in myth—deal with universal conflicts like good versus evil, the triumph of the underdog, and the transformation of individuals. The works of authors such as J.M. Barrie (*Peter Pan*) and Frances Hodgson Burnett (*The Secret Garden*) demonstrate how mythic themes are integrated into children’s literature, creating stories that are simultaneously fantastical and deeply symbolic. The blending of myth and fairy tale in these works allows readers to explore complex emotional landscapes, from childhood to maturity, often through magical realism or allegorical settings.

Fairy tales also serve as a means of moral instruction, as scholars such as Bettelheim (1976) have pointed out. The magical transformations, divine interventions, and often stark contrasts between good and evil in fairy tales are not just for entertainment; they help children process their own psychological development and make sense of the world around them. The use of myth in these stories, therefore, is deeply tied to the cognitive and emotional maturation of the reader. Magical realism in children’s literature often borrows from mythological traditions to create worlds where magic and reality coexist seamlessly. In books such as *Harry Potter* by J.K. Rowling, mythical creatures like centaurs, unicorns, and house-elves inhabit a magical society that mirrors the complexity of the real world. Rowling draws on folklore and mythology for creatures, spells, and artifacts but reimagines them in a contemporary, often whimsical context. The world-building in the *Harry Potter* series also evokes mythological ideas about other realms, such as the spirit world or underworld, seen in the mysterious veil of death and the concept of life after death. These elements, while rooted in myth, are adapted to a modern context, giving young readers access to both a fantastical adventure and a means of engaging with mythic archetypes.

Finally, magical realism is an important aspect of English children’s literature, especially in works that blend mythological elements with more realistic or contemporary settings. This genre allows for the integration of fantastical elements into the everyday world, often creating a space where the boundaries between the mundane and the magical are porous. Scholars such as Montserrat (2010) and Spivak (2004)

have discussed how magical realism in children’s literature serves to evoke a deeper sense of wonder and mystery, inviting readers to see magic in the everyday. Works like *The Chronicles of Narnia* and *Harry Potter* incorporate elements of magical realism, where mythological figures and creatures coexist with human characters in settings that reflect both the real and the fantastical. Through magical realism, children are not only introduced to mythological creatures and realms but are also invited to explore the relationship between imagination and reality. The blending of myth and realism in these works allows young readers to engage with complex ideas about death, transformation, and the passage of time in a way that is accessible and deeply meaningful.

Discussion

English children’s literature, a genre rich with fantasy, whimsy, and moral lessons, often draws on various mythological traditions and supernatural elements. These works are not only fantastical but also reflect the unique cultural, historical, and social contexts of England, and often merge old mythological themes with new, creative interpretations. The peculiarities of myth in English children’s literature can be traced through characters, creatures, symbols, and themes that blend ancient folklore with modern storytelling. Let’s explore these mythological peculiarities and their significance in shaping the imaginations of young readers. English children’s literature has deep roots in British folklore, where mythological creatures and figures often make an appearance. These creatures—such as fairies, goblins, and dragons—are staples in the works of authors like J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis, and even earlier writers such as Kenneth Grahame and Lewis Carroll. In stories like *The Wind in the Willows*, we encounter fauns, mythical woodland creatures, and magical realms that feel alive with mythic resonance. The world is enchanted with both the mundane and the fantastic, creating a blend of the mythical and the everyday. Likewise, the *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland* books by Carroll, while not strictly based on mythology, evoke a dreamlike world where reality bends in ways that mirror mythological transformations. One distinct peculiarity of English children’s literature is its frequent use of anthropomorphized mythical creatures. Dragons, talking animals, and fairies are often given human traits, allowing them to interact with human characters in ways that serve both narrative and educational purposes.

In works like *The Chronicles of Narnia* by C.S. Lewis, Aslan, the lion, is a Christ-like figure imbued with ancient wisdom and power. Lewis draws on Christian myth, as well as the ancient mythologies of the Greek and Roman worlds, to create a unique figure that is at once human-like and divine, an interpretation of mythic ideas in a more accessible form for children. Similarly, in *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien, Smaug the dragon is a creature whose greed and wrath reflect the darker sides of human nature, drawing on the deep-seated myths of dragons as hoarders of treasure. The

anthropomorphism of mythical creatures makes them relatable and introduces children to deeper philosophical and moral ideas through fantasy. Many English children's stories reimagine characters and plots from classical mythology, providing a doorway to ancient traditions. However, these interpretations are often simplified and adjusted to fit a more child-friendly narrative, enabling younger readers to grasp concepts from a wide array of mythological traditions. For example, in *Percy Jackson & the Olympians*, a popular series by Rick Riordan (while American in origin, often recognized globally), Greek and Roman gods and heroes are reimagined for modern-day children. Though not strictly English, the widespread influence of this series in English-speaking countries shows how classical mythology is interwoven into children's literature. Elements such as heroes, monsters, and gods are reinterpreted in a way that is accessible and entertaining, offering young readers a taste of the ancient world while embedding modern sensibilities.

Additionally, works like *The Gods and Heroes of Ancient Greece* for children by Gustav Schwab bring stories of Greek and Roman myth into the realm of English literature, offering simplified versions of ancient myths such as the tales of Hercules, Achilles, and Pandora's Box.

The Arthurian legend has long been a significant source of mythological inspiration in English children's literature. The tale of King Arthur, the Knights of the Round Table, and the quest for the Holy Grail provides a treasure trove of mythical motifs: magic, honor, and adventure. Authors have revisited these legends across centuries, often reinterpreting them in ways that appeal to younger readers.

T.H. White's *The Once and Future King* and *The Sword in the Stone* are prime examples of retellings of Arthurian myths. The story of King Arthur's rise from humble beginnings to mythical king is explored with humor and gravity, featuring famous figures from British mythology like Merlin and the Lady of the Lake. Through these reinterpretations, children are introduced to themes of leadership, loyalty, and destiny. The myth of King Arthur continues to appear in modern English children's books, showing the lasting power of the myths in shaping a young reader's understanding of heroism, morality, and the passage from childhood to adulthood. Fairy tales, often derived from folklore and myth, are central to English children's literature. While they may not always be rooted in classical mythology, they share common mythical themes like transformation, magical creatures, and quests. The tales of the Brothers Grimm and Hans Christian Andersen were adopted and adapted into English-speaking cultures, often with local variations that reflect the peculiarities of English mythology. In works such as *Peter Pan* by J.M. Barrie, the idea of "Neverland" itself is a mythical place where time and space don't function as in the real world, and children can exist eternally in a dreamlike state. The story is built on a set of mythological ideas about childhood, immortality, and adventure. Similarly, *The Lion, the Witch, and the*

Wardrobe by C.S. Lewis is steeped in mythological symbolism, borrowing from Christian mythology as well as classical myths, including themes of death and rebirth, sacrifice, and resurrection.

Conclusion

The peculiarities of myth in English children’s literature create a vibrant tapestry where ancient myths and modern creativity converge. Whether through anthropomorphized creatures, the integration of classical mythology, or the retelling of Arthurian legends, English children’s books offer young readers a way to engage with mythological ideas in ways that are relatable, imaginative, and entertaining. These mythic influences serve not only to entertain but to impart wisdom, introduce moral lessons, and explore the complexities of human nature. As such, myth remains a potent and dynamic force in shaping the future of English children’s literature. Children’s literature are multifaceted and far-reaching, encompassing a wide range of influences from folklore, classical mythology, and the Arthurian tradition. Through the use of archetypes, magical creatures, and mythic symbolism, authors have created narratives that are both entertaining and educational, offering children a space to explore moral, emotional, and philosophical dilemmas. Whether through anthropomorphized figures, reimagined classical myths, or magical worlds that blur the line between the real and the fantastical, the integration of myth in children’s literature provides a rich and enduring tradition that continues to captivate and inspire young readers.

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