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# THE RAMIFICATION OF MOVEMENTS LEADING TO THE DAWN OF CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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## Abstract

*This paper deals with the development and the various remarkable movements taken place in British Literature and the impacts of other Language literature in English. The movements and growth of literature through the view of children were more vital than anyone could fathom. Romantic writers tranquilized societies with Children's literature and they did succeed in their attempt of winning readers. Amidst the rise and fall of revolts and trauma, literature on the remarkable category of 'children' was regarded as classy and considerate. The greatest literary movement of its earlier period was that of romanticism. Similarly, this paper also reflects the other important ages with the rise of Children's Literature and highlights the works of Kenneth Grahame.*

**Keywords:** Children, romanticism, Nationalism, movements, England

## INTRODUCTION

*"Don't just teach your children to read...*

*Teach them to question what they read.*

*Teach them to question everything."*

— George Carlin

British Literature of the nineteenth century was remarkable both for its high artistic achievement and the varieties it reflects on life as literature. It dawned in the violent economic and political turmoil marked in the late eighteenth and the first few decades of the nineteenth century. The Great French Revolution (1789) an outburst of political activity and the terrible wars of Napoleon in France almost ravaged twenty-five years of Europe with

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dominance in politics. The situation rife with class hatred gradually affected social life as a result of the Industrial and Agrarian Revolutions. The bloodshed chaos and confusion quenched the hope and fervor of people with numerous uprisings. The state of Europe was commendable to people finding reasons and holding hope for something peaceful and sensible enough. Later, the romantic distrust of reason, rationalism, emphasis on emotion, intuition, the instinctive wisdom of the heart, and nature began being expressed through literary works. Romantic writers dawned with the rise of emotions and witnessed painful events around them. This rise of the oeuvre was to bring hope and peace to the tainted traumatic life of people in England. They believed and did express the traumas they witnessed and those they wished that might have been good if had happened. A common feature that all romantics had was ‘hope’ and a mission to carry their emotions to others through creativity and words, presumable salvation to mankind.

## **OUTSET OF ROMANTICISM IN LITERATURE**

The term ‘romantic’ is generalized to treat all romantics of England as belonging to the same literary-associated school. In Literature, Romanticism is complex and further has provided answers to the revolutions and the pain behind the bloody wars and revolts. It involves the struggles of the past and the dreams of tomorrow with betterment and philosophical dominance in the age of enlightenment resulting in the idealistic trends of the early nineteenth century. Romantics differ from each other in answering all the questions of philosophies and differences in accepting the events that occurred, were overcome, and were forgotten. English contemporaries never preferred to call themselves “romantics” unlike the romantic writers of Germany or France since they never were ready to receive the public to call them romanticists. These works reflected the interdependence of man with the Universe that is ruled by historical changes made by humans and their partly intelligent abilities. They are all part of a historical change of interdependence of man and the universe ruled by semi-intelligent individuals, us.

## **APPROXIMATION OF LITERATURE IN THE VICTORIAN AGE**

The Victorian era followed Romanticism in London and nothing justifies it as Charles Dickens did in early Victorian London. Thackeray portrayed the high society or the upper stratum of London through his works of literature. Dickens replicated the differences between people from different places and their fascinating, terrifying, incomprehensible tragedies live, better than anyone could. The closest approximation of literature to social life is very marked in the Victorian era. Kingsley writes passionate social tracts in the guise of a story; cheap bread inspires the muse of Ebenezer Elliot; Elizabeth Barret voices *The Cry of Children*, and Thomas Hood immortalizes the weary seamstress and the despairing unfortunate. Carlyle has plunged into politics, discussing the political problems. His works were distinctive and remarkable after his continuous evaluations of German literature and European history. Similarly, Ruskin being a writer and a critic of art in painting is truly considered a genius, a man of words to manage insightful, and knowledgeable for his excellence in suggestiveness. The most iconic representatives of Victorian poetics were Tennyson, Elizabeth Barret Browning, Robert Browning, and George Meredith, and their effort on writing verses with rhythmic beauty, tone, and arguments seamlessly. If in keeping close to the earth, their Muses occasionally soil their wings, they do not, at any rate, lose themselves in the shy; while in prose; the Victorian age is second to none in its rich complexity and “veined humanity.”

Nominally, the Victorian era closes in 1900; actually, it came to an end during the eighties. The last ten years of the century saw a ferment of new ideas, gave birth to a fresh set of forces in literary life, and witnessed a reaction against many of the old Victorian ideals. Though the new movement had begun, there were similarities to the Romantic revival that highlighted the sensibilities at the end of the seventeenth century. It is entwined with Revolutionary ideas with democratic implications involving Nature and its beauty. In general, there are visible differences enhancing the distinctive character of its own. There is always a rhythmic ebb and flow in literary fashions and ideals, through historical conditions, and still differ. There are no two sunrises ever the same. It is with this flow of emotions and captivating scenarios authors began to portray literature through and for the children.

## **CHILDREN’S LITERATURE - ORIGIN AND GROWTH**

The trauma and the love emoted for the children through the work of arts and literature was the perfect start to children’s Literature. Kenneth Grahame is one of the British writers who made his mark in British children’s literature. Children’s literature is often dismissed as literature written by those who cannot write any better for those

who can't read any better. A great deal of children's literature is good literature that can withstand any kind of critical scrutiny. Children's literature is an essential phenomenon for several reasons. First, reading is inextricably bound up with language and language acquisition, and it is through language that we understand and construct the world. Through reading, young minds tend to learn new languages with respect to experimenting with different subjects and identifying the different ideologies about how and what the world feels like. Added to this, children's literature is regarded as the most welcomed in all societies because of its multi-culturalism and the likeliness of the majority of the population. School is the most obvious forum in which reading comes to the fore, and young readers are highly instructive. This means that what is being read is deeply implicated in the kind of values and ideas the child learns to hold about society. No literature is neutral, but children's literature is more concerned with shaping the readers' attitudes than most.

Children and their demands, desires, dreams, etc. are the icings on the cake to understanding that Children's Literature demands these to be fulfilled and accepting that 'children' are one of the major categories to have their distinct needs. It is this understanding that social philosophers like Rousseau paid frontal attention to handling and talking about the issues faced by children and demands nurturing them with social awareness. Sooner, this attention was equally shared by the Romantic writers Wordsworth, Coleridge, and Blake. Wordsworth's phrase 'The Child is the Father of Man' from the poem 'My Heart Leaps Up' is probably one of the most quoted lines of poetry ever written and has been interpreted and used not only by inquirers into all shades of child psychology but by anyone who wants to emphasize the importance of childhood in the formation of the adult.

## LITERATURE THROUGH FOLKTALES

The 'encyclopedie' or encircling the children with knowledge began commonly with a 'clean up' or relabeling and repackaging of folk tales being narrated to children through the parents, elders, etc. which turned out as reading material also. These Folk tales were created with ancient Folk traditions that had nationalism, morality, and its need to inculcate children within it. In these works, the child becomes the center of creating a new consciousness as a citizen of the country making these nostalgic works bring in air from the past and taking the readers aback to their good old days. These works also helped stimulate the values and morality in young minds that helped build a good nation, indeed. It also helped them analyze their past and to learn things like overcoming the struggle and insisting on the importance of learning history to get a better nation.

In the nineteenth century, with the growing interest in psychology in general, and child psychology in particular, the issue of what should constitute children's literature became more vexing. This idea of being taught through writing became obsessive and deteriorating when people had overwhelming ideas on what falls under children's literature and how to handle it.

*"The moment you doubt whether you can fly, you cease forever to be able to do it."* – **Peter Pan, J M Barrie**

There were books that frightened children and a few books that encouraged them to believe. One such playwright is James Mathew Barrie, a Scottish writer. His book "*Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens (1906)*" taught them to dream and believe in fairies and other magical creatures. It was a great turn to move on from the pinned painful trauma that literally frightened the children with adults who talked about adults and had a very meager say on the Children and their difficulties. It is true that the state of the child determines the nation's growth and these tales on magic changed the world of children entirely. In the Victorian period, we find children's literature being used consciously to disseminate desired values and ideologies in the minds of the impressionable young. It is evident that the emphasis on gender roles was dominant even in Children's literature with adventures and magazines written and framed for boys imprinting them as heroes and girls were taught to cook, care and nurture domestic needs. One of the examples of that pathetic differentiation is "*The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, (1876)*" Abhijit Gupta's study of the publishing history of Victorian children's periodicals gives one a glimpse of the actual role played by market forces as they responded to and determined the choice of reading material for children and young adults at this point in history. On the other hand, the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries saw a growth of interest in the exploration of the workings of the mind. The Victorian era more than any other time bought into the idea of the child as 'innocent'. Historically this was designed to rescue the child from the drudgery of manual labor, poverty, ignorance, and neglect, the keynote text here being Kingsley's *The Water Babies*, but the idea lies behind much of Charles Dickens's anger

at the state of childhood in his time. An innocent being ought to be shielded from these sordid realities so that he or she could develop faculties in a protected environment until the young person was ready to take on the world.

Many people write about children's literature and even the child who might be reading it, without thinking about the literary representation. In recent years attention has been focused on the relationship between the adult writer and the child reader. While this has been fruitful and certainly informs any study of literary childhood, it is essential to think about the real children who read books and the kinds of lives they are likely to lead. Children's literature as a label has always been problematic; not least because its intended audience is so large and varied.

*“Children's books are not a hiding place; they are a seeking place.”*

— *Katherine Rundell, Why You Should Read Children's Books, Even Though You Are So Old and Wise*

It is true that they knew what they seek in books. They easily get engaged in ideas and completeness of the work of literature and similarly easily get bored. They approach books with advantages and disadvantages. They have a strong belief in the story. There are two areas of concern and each interacts with the other. The first is the audience, the children who are the readers and who display their tastes so clearly. The second is the texts they choose and which seek to meet their tastes. What we seek to explore is the way that children become active readers and what makes them popular and what is the effect. Books are recognized as a formative influence but we cannot pretend that every book or every experience of reading, including magazines and newspapers, makes an indelible expression. What they do is reflect and extend the collective tastes of children by their accumulating impact. Childhood and children's literature are in a dialectical relationship; as childhood is prolonged through improvements in living conditions, medicine, and affluence, it takes on a new meaning for adult writers. When childhood was relatively brief and maturity full of uncertainty, many adults seem to have relived and renegotiated their own childhoods. As the boundaries between adult and child become more and more blurred, however, a number of writers have begun to use children's literature as a way of facilitating the maturing process and fostering independence. As Stephen Spielberg's 'Hook' proves, ambivalence in the relationship between adult and childish selves as well as between adult and child continues to dominate our thinking about children and children's literature.

The stylistic conservatism of children's literature seems to have been a consequence of two related factors. First was the splitting of children's literature from the mainstream of family fiction, making it a new and distinct genre. This separation was brought about through the conjunction of a variety of factors. Undoubtedly one of the most important of these was the impetus that came with the advent of universal, compulsory education in 1880. Children were now not only thought of as readers but they were also separated from the adult population more clearly than ever before. Governmental legislation which required young people to attend school between the ages of five and fourteen effectively created a physical stage of childhood that had not existed when children were expected to start contributing to the family income as soon as they were physically able to (often as early as four or five years of age). Whether they wanted it or not (and in the 1890s many working-class children especially boys found their enforced attendance at school financially punitive and socially demanding), the majority of the children had their childhoods extended and forever changed by the requirement to attend school.

Perhaps perversely, concern about what was suitable and useful for children was instrumental in the process of relegating children's literature to the bottom of the literary hierarchy. 'Suitable for children' came for many to be synonymous with anodyne and stylistically moribund. Among other factors, this resulted in the conscious exclusion of children from the audience for 'serious' fiction. The corollary to this was, as typified by Barrie, Grahame, and Milne, that writers who took themselves seriously were unhappy to be thought of as 'children's authors. While in many ways the result of this separation of adult and juvenile writing could also be said to have been a form of brake on the kind of work which could be written for young readers, especially at the end of the last century it also opened new opportunities for one body of writers.

Biographies of writers such as Kenneth Grahame and A.A. Milne provide considerable evidence to support the idea that Victorian/Edwardian parenting patterns could lead to problematic relations between the sexes. One of the most convincing readings of both “*The Wind in the Willows*” and “*the Pooh stories*” is provided by Humphrey Carpenter in “*Secret Gardens (London, 1985)*”. Carpenter stresses the problems both writers had in being married; their preference for all-male environments such as their private clubs, their difficulty in relating to their children, and their unhappiness that it was their writing for children which made them famous. Behind both writers’ work is the same fear of growing up and finding a place in the adult world, which Barrie captured so brilliantly in *Peter Pan*. In *The Wind in the Willows* and *Winnie the Pooh*, we can see Grahame and Milne attempting to capture and preserve childhood- not for generations of children to come, but for themselves.

In writing that was intended to include children in its audience, even Oscar Wilde felt it necessary to provide instruction and to write for and about the ideal (who like Christ, was to redeem the world) rather than the real child. The centrality of the childish ideal in Wilde’s work is nowhere clearer than in his most famous and successful story, *The Selfish Giant*. This story borrows motifs and metaphors from a few fairy tales and legends. It tells of an immensely rich giant who bans children from playing in his garden where, as a consequence, Spring never bloomed. A young boy, who on one level at least is intended to stand for the Christ child, is helped by the Giant; accordingly, the Giant is allowed to enter Paradise and the garden is brought back to life for the children who remain on earth.

### **KENNETH GRAHAME - A PIONEER**

Grahame, author of the classic children’s fantasy, *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) was the third of four children of a rather unsuccessful lawyer, reputedly descended from Robert the Bruce. When Grahame was five, his mother died of scarlet fever. Educated at St. Edward School, he had dreamed of an oxford education so that he might become a writer or educator but was sent by his unimaginative uncles to London to take a position as clerk in the Bank of England. Being deprived of Oxford was the great disappointment of his life, but he made the most of his London experience and was rapidly promoted through the ranks. He met Fredrick James Furnivall, the noted scholar, who introduced him to great literature and encouraged him to write. Grahame began by writing miscellaneous essays for journals, most notably for W.E. Henley’s *National Observer*. Henley exerted great influence on Grahame and encouraged him in those romantic writings eulogizing the simple life, the lure of the open road, and condemning dehumanized modern industrial society.

His early essays were collected as *Pagan Papers* (1893), and his first book *The Golden Age* (1895) was the next accumulation of Grahame’s stories, romantic reveries of childhood that attacked adult pretensions and sentimentalities. He used the term “Olympians” to refer to the adults, a satiric reference not lost on his readers. This work was enormously popular and established Grahame’s international reputation. It was followed by *Dream Days* (1898), a continuation of his story- essays, both evocative stories about perfect childhood in the British countryside. The books acted as escapism for Grahame and played on the contemporary fashion for celebrating a kind of eternal boyhood: an idyllic world full of boating, rambling, and nature- worship. All three of his collections went into numerous editions and were admired by such luminaries as Algernon Swinburne, the Prime Minister of Australia, Kaiser Wilhelm II, and President Theodore Roosevelt, who repeatedly invited him to the White House, an invitation Grahame never accepted. The books, although less well-known now, were to become massively influential in children’s writing for years to come. In 1898, Grahame became one of the youngest men ever appointed Secretary of the Bank of England, one of the three highest rankings posts in the institution.

Grahame’s only son, Alastair, nicknamed “Mouse”, suffered from blinding cataracts in one eye and impaired vision in the other. Grahame records that on Mouse’s birthday, May 12, 1904, to assuage the boy’s crying fit, he “had to tell him stories about moles, giraffes, and water rats”. This it is assumed was the genesis of *The Wind in the Willows*. Also, during this time, Grahame moved his family near the Thames to Cookham Dean, where he had spent much of his childhood. The environment likely inspired the direction of his writing. In 1907, Alastair spent the summer at the seaside with his mother and Grahame sent stories about Mr. Toad and his compatriots to him by mail, the result, *The Wind in the Willows*, was published in 1908, shortly after he had resigned from the Bank of England. It was his first work before his marriage, and it would be his last work, save for his editing of *The Cambridge Book of Poetry for Children* in 1916.

## CONCLUSION

The elevation of childhood typified by these stories is characteristic of a widespread tendency to look backward rather than forward at the end of the last century. This tendency was not unique to writing for or about childhood but manifested itself in a variety of ways throughout the last century, many of them post-Darwinian attempts to understand human development as organic and evolutionary rather than divinely determined. The search for a Golden Age had also preoccupied a number of artists and writers, among them Ruskin, Pater, William Morris, and the Pre-Raphaelites. The interpretations of the past and the connection between the past and present could be understood in several kinds. This became a most valid phase to have metaphoric value in late-Victorian Britain. As the children's book market flourished, several artists became involved in illustrating books for children, and they too seem to be attracted to the past. Two well-known figures in the field of children's literature who exemplify this dual fascination with childhood and the past are Kenneth Grahame (1859-1932) and Kate Greenaway (1846-1901).

Henceforth, the growth of Children's Literature flourished through the years with various classifications and understanding of life and reflection of children's thoughts and ideas. Fantasy has become a predominant genre in understanding the needs and desires of children where they felt free to express their magical worlds with portals, mystical creatures, supernaturalism, etc. Contemporary writers like, J K Rowling, G R R Martin, Neil Gaiman, etc. are keeping the spirit of children high and creative.

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