

CHILD-CENTEREDNESS AS THE MAIN TRAJECTORY OF RESEARCH ON CHILDREN'S POETRY

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The contemporary world is marked by rapid social, cultural, and informational transformations. Under such conditions, the moral, civic, spiritual, social, and emotional development of children attracts global attention, as it determines the further formation of the individual. Childhood is a crucial stage in personality development, and literature, particularly poetry, plays a key role in the development of speech, thinking, attention, memory, imagination, and creativity, contributing to emotional maturation and the awareness of cultural values.

Research on children's literature began to consolidate in the academic sphere in the second half of the twentieth century, when the child was reconceptualized as a legitimate subject of scholarly inquiry. Children's books became a subject of interest across various fields of the humanities and social sciences. Scholars analyse the content and style of children's texts, compare them with literature for adults, study children's readership and their reception. Children's literature thus constitutes a space in which the child is constructed – both as a character and as an addressee.

The tradition of writing texts for children dates back several centuries, which explains the significant developmental trajectory of children's literature, reflecting changes in society and culture. M. Kennedy notes that in the seventeenth century, children's literature emerged as a distinct genre due to the recognition of the child as the center of action and object of attention. This development manifested in narratives carrying moral messages for children and in the expansion of illustrated books in the nineteenth century [6].

In the twentieth century, children's literary texts became increasingly diverse, though they retained a didactic character while being linguistically adapted to the child's developmental level [7]. In this context, researchers emphasize that children's literature, including children's poetry, should “speak about children” and employ “child-oriented language,” which constitutes the foundation of the principle of child-centeredness [1].

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Within scholarly discourse, the concepts “childism” [14] and “child-centeredness” [13] are widely used. “Childism” enables the reconstruction of age-inclusive research approaches and social imaginaries. Originating within childhood studies, it simultaneously extends the boundaries of the humanities and social sciences. In its methodological influence, “childism” is considered as analogous to feminism, although it contributes its own methodological framework. The concept provides a foundation for further developing child-centered approaches within academic research.

Recent studies demonstrate a convergence of “childism” and “child-centeredness” [16]. J. Deszcz-Tryhubczak applies a child-centered approach to defining the corpus of texts for reading in education, orienting the learning process toward the needs of learners [2]. Such an approach takes into account the cognitive, emotional, ethical, and social development of the child, as well as the cultural, social, and historical contexts shaping their lived experience.

The shift toward a child-centered approach in the analysis of children’s literature reflects changes in academic criticism. Earlier studies were grounded in adult perspectives, which failed to account for differences between adult and child reception of texts [8]. Contemporary research increasingly recognizes the child as an independent subject. This shift is explained by changes in the understanding of the social position of children and by the expansion of critical approaches across literature, cultural studies, and social theory [4].

Children’s literary texts, particularly poetry, demonstrate several distinguishing characteristics:

- shorter length;
- active, dynamic narrative;
- predominance of child characters;
- reliance on conventions and clear moral structures;
- optimistic tone;
- linguistic adaptation to the child’s level;
- imaginative simplicity of the plot;
- interplay of reality and imagination [10, p. 142–143; 5, p. 61-62; 11, p. 53-67].

Among these features, those that define the principle of child-centeredness in the study of children’s literature include:

- texts written specifically for children;
- a child as the central character;
- language oriented toward children and their experience.

The concept “child-centeredness” functions not only as a category for describing children’s literature but also as an approach to analyzing the identity of the author who writes for children. Scholars often explain the popularity of children’s authors by suggesting that they retain an “inner child.” Vasyľ

Sukhomlynsky emphasized that working effectively with children requires one to “become a child to some extent” (Sukhomlynsky, 2012) [12, p. 32].

The child-centered world in poetic discourse often appears as a compensatory fantasy in which children gain agency and control denied to them in real life. Roald Dahl highlighted this dynamic in his interview: “I generally write for children and in collusion with children against adults.” [15].

Since the primary recipient of children’s poetry is the child, such texts possess typical morphological, lexical-semantic, syntactic, and phonostylistic features. They must correspond to the child’s worldview and cognitive needs, considering the limited communicative and experiential background of young readers. A well-known example is Dr. Seuss’s “The Cat in the Hat”, written using 220 basic words appropriate for children of a certain age [3].

Children’s poets demonstrate a profound understanding of the needs and expectations of their audience by employing clear and accessible language, dynamic plots, engaging characters, moderate tension, humor and sincerity, imaginative figures, and the world of children’s desires. Ken Nesbitt affirms: “Poetry is perhaps the most playful of all exercises for building children’s growing brains and minds” [9].

Thus, child-centeredness is a leading idea in the study of children’s literature and children’s poetry. It enables the identification of three key analytical perspectives:

1. Texts intended for children.
2. Texts about children and the child’s world.
3. The language of the poetic text oriented toward children and their experience.

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