

Through the Looking Glass

Background

Early Children's Literature –

Until the mid-18th century, children's books mainly consisted of moralistic or enlightening stories propagating the religious and ethical view that hard work and diligence determines a person's life. Little consideration was given to children's reading pleasure.

Amid this trend, John Newbery (1713-1767), a London-based bookseller, took up full-fledged publication of books that were both "entertaining and useful" for children. *A Little Pretty Pocket-book*, published by Newbery in 1744, is said to be the first book that provided children with not only moral lessons but also entertainment. Newbery went on to publish numerous books for middle-class children in urban areas, whose number continued to increase. Newbery became well known in the United States as well; the most prestigious American award for children's literature is named after him—the John Newbery Medal, inaugurated in 1922.

The focus in children's books gradually shifted from simple moral lessons to entertainment, with techniques of expression employed specifically for that purpose. Books carrying witty illustrations or exploring children's inner life also began to appear. The mid-19th century saw the development of girls' novels and narratives of family life as exemplified by works by Juliana Horatia Ewing (1841-1885), Mary Louisa Molesworth (1839-1921), and Frances Hodgson Burnett (1849-1924), noted for her *Little Lord Fauntleroy*, originally a serial novel that appeared in the American children's magazine *St. Nicholas*, inaugurated in 1873.

In addition, a succession of books was published that were deeply rooted in children's daily activities, for example, books depicting school life, such as *Tom Brown's School-days* (1857) by Thomas Hughes (1822-1896), against the background of the spread of public schools.

Those stories filled with hopes and dreams for the future formed the beginnings of modern children's literature in which the image of ideal children was pursued.

Fairy Tales and Chapbooks -

In Great Britain, fairytales that recount unrealistic events set in the distant past used to be considered inappropriate for children for religious reasons. In the late 18th century, however, all kinds of stories were made available through chapbooks

(booklets featuring popular contents and cheaply distributed by peddlers), attracting and fascinating many children.

Behind the popularity of children's stories in chapbooks were the spread of reading by children in a wider social stratum through Sunday school and the growing desire of those children to read "their own stories" that had once been narrated orally. On the other hand, a movement condemning fairytales as unenlightened and superstitious from a religious, moral and educational perspective grew stronger during the same period, leading to the popularization of moralistic stories.

Nevertheless, fairytales continued spreading gradually, particularly after the publication by Newbery around 1768 of English translations of stories by Charles Perrault (1628-1703), who had been highly acclaimed in France. Other translations of children's stories and folktales from around the world followed, such as stories by Jacob Ludwig Karl Grimm (1785-1863) and Wilhelm Karl Grimm (1786-1859) in 1823 and Hans Christian Andersen (1805-1875) in the 1840s. The resulting revival of fairytales gave rise to a new literary trend of fantasy fueled by creativity and imagination.

The Dawn of the Age of Fantasy –

As the entertaining virtue of fairytales became widely recognized, children's literature entered the age of fantasy characterized by the absence of a moralistic tone, the use of humor and nonsense, and imagination. This trend is believed to have started with *The Complete Nonsense of Edward Lear* (1846) by Edward Lear (1812-1888).

The 1850s saw the appearance of numerous children's literature works that could be termed creative fairytales, that is, stories that retained something of the traditional moralistic tone but were also rich in imagination, such as *The King of the Golden River, or, The Black Brothers* (1851) by John Ruskin (1819-1900), *The Rose and the Ring* (1855) by William Makepeace Thackeray (1811-1863), and *The Water-babies* (1863) by Charles Kingsley (1819-1875).

In 1865, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* by Lewis Carroll (1832-1898) was published, catapulting children's literature into the peak of the fantasy era. Alice laughed at the overtly moralistic flavor traditionally found in children's books. With its original and absurd plot, *Alice* also suggested a new possibility in children's literature that could be fully exploited with an unbounded imagination, humor and nonsense.

During this period, traditional values were being challenged in British society, due to the aggravated economic situation and deepening social disorder, as well as the publication of the Evolution theory in *On the Origin of Species* (1859) by Charles Robert Darwin (1809-1882). Consequently, human nature and imagination were reevaluated, leading to further development of fantasies depicting idealized

imaginary times and places, in such works as *At the Back of the North Wind* (1871) and *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) by George MacDonald (1824-1905).

Fantasy as a genre in children's literature would reach its peak in the 20th century.

The Adventure Novels –

It is generally understood that adventure novels for boys began with *The life and Adventures of Robinson Crusoe* (1719) by Daniel Defoe (1661?-1731), which was followed by many other stories whose leitmotiv was survival in a remote area.

The success of adventure novels in the 19th century was backed by the idea that the exploration of the unknown would provide useful knowledge to children, the idea deriving from the philosophy behind knowledge-oriented enlightening books of the earlier years. In and after the 1840s, authors such as Frederick Marryat (1792-1848), Harriet Martineau (1802-1876), Robert Michael Ballantyne (1825-1894), George Alfred Henty (1832-1902), George Manville Fenn (1831-1909), and William Henry Giles Kingston (1814-1880), produced numerous adventure novels for boys, which as a literary genre became wildly popular and culminated in *Treasure Island* (1883) by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850-1894).

During the 70 years of the Victorian era, the British Empire nearly quadrupled its territory, exploring the interior of Africa and Pacific islands and colonizing Asian nations one after another. Against this backdrop, British people held an unprecedented strong interest in the world. The blossoming of adventure stories that responded to boys' longings for and interest in the unknown was inextricably linked to the extension of the British government's imperialist policy that bolstered hope and confidence in Great Britain as an invincible state.

On Lewis Carroll –

Lewis Carroll was the pseudonym of Reverend Charles Lutwidge Dodgson, a lecturer in mathematics at Oxford, who lived from 1832 to 1898. Carroll lived with physical deformities, partial deafness, and an irrepressible tamer. His unusual appearance caused him to behave awkwardly around other adults, and his students at Oxford saw him as a stuffy and boring teacher. He held strict religious beliefs, serving as a deacon in the Anglican Church for many years. Beneath Carroll's awkward exterior, however, dwelled a brilliant and imaginative artist. A gifted amateur photographer, he took numerous portraits of children throughout his adulthood. Carroll's keen grasp of mathematics and logic inspired the linguistic humor and witty wordplay in his stories. Additionally, his unique understanding of children's minds allowed him to compose imaginative fiction that appealed to young people.

Carroll felt shy and reserved around adults but became animated and lively around children. His crippling stammer melted away in the company of children as he told them his elaborately

nonsensical stories. Carroll discovered his gift for storytelling in his own youth, when he served as the unofficial family entertainer for his five younger sisters and three younger brothers. He staged performances and wrote the bulk of the fiction in the family magazine.

In 1856, Carroll became close with the Liddell children and met the girl who would become the inspiration for Alice, the protagonist of his two most famous books. It was in that year that Classics scholar Henry George Liddell accepted an appointment as Dean of Christ Church, one of the colleges that comprise Oxford University, and brought his three daughters to live with him at Oxford. Lorina, Alice, and Edith Liddell quickly became Carroll's favorite companions and photographic subjects. During their frequent afternoon boat trips on the river, Carroll told the Liddells fanciful tales. Alice quickly became Carroll's favorite of the three girls, and he made her the subject of the stories that would later become *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking-Glass*. Almost ten years after first meeting the Liddells, Carroll compiled the stories and submitted the completed manuscript for publication.

In 1881, Carroll resigned from his position as mathematics lecturer at Oxford to pursue writing full time. He composed numerous poems, several new works for children, and books of logic puzzles and games, but none of his later writings attained the success of the Alice books. Carroll died in 1898 at the age of sixty-six, soon after the publication of the *Sylvie and Bruno* books. He passed away in his family's home in Guildford, England.