

**The Three-Step Classification of Narratives in Children's and Adolescent's Literature Based on Maria Nikolajeva's Theory**

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**Introduction**

Writing for children is of course a difficult task but rereading the narrative structures of children's and adolescents' stories is also complicated since it requires both narratological skills and psychological knowledge of children and adolescents' minds.

Children's and adolescents' narrative literature would not find a suitable structure and theory if it is not theoretically and philosophically categorized and if its audience is not precisely defined. There is a general attitude toward children's literature that children can be easily addressed and talked to; however, there are many issues, such as the mental-psychological levels of the audience and the speed of changes and transitions of those levels in the process of children's

growth, that show the complexity of writing for children as well as the difficulties in creating a balance between the elements of the narrative with their level of understanding.

### **Methodology, Review of Literature and Purpose**

A useful theory in this case is Maria Nikolajeva's which can pave a new path for redefining the narratological system or poetics of children's stories. Nikolajeva believes that children's stories can be divided into three categories: prelapsarian, carnivalesque and postlapsarian.

This research aims to identify the subtleties in the narrative structures of successful children's stories based on the three categories in Nikolajeva's theory in order to find a narrative grammar or children's and adolescents' narrative poetics.

There is an extensive research literature on the subject of children's and adolescents' fiction. A number of them are more relevant to the aim of this research; for instance, Sadeghi (2018) in "Analyzing Fantasy Stories between 2001 and 2011 Based on the Maria Nikolajeva's Narrative Theory" focuses on the fantasy elements of Persian stories in that period and conclude that atmosphere, characters and conflicts are the most frequent fantasy elements in these stories; Hesampour and Arameshfard (2012) have studied the narrative elements discussed by Nikolajeva in *Three Magical Whistles* by Akbarpour and have identified the elements of setting, open plot and detailed descriptions as the most significant narrative elements of this work; Jamali and Qorbani (2018) have analyzed the narrative elements in *A Thousand and One Year* by Mandanipour and believe that special temporal techniques is used in this work to distinguish the narrative of

children's and adolescents' fiction from adults'; Asadian (2010) has studied the four elements of plot, character, sign and narrative in twenty adolescents' short stories.

### **Discussion**

The narrative structure of children's and adolescents' stories in the three-step categorization of Nikolajeva's theory is as follows:

1. The prelapsarian fictional world and its narrative structure

The prelapsarian stories have a definite beginning and ending; as such, one can identify two conditions of "before and after" in them. From the perspective of the structure of the plot, these stories can be categorized as a type of episodic stories. In other words, these stories can be considered as having two similar conditions in the beginning and in the ending.

From a psychological point of view, the child has grown enough to explain the phenomena around him/her; therefore, the child in this step has the same cognitive abilities as the child in Piaget's growth stage of objective operations (7-11 years of age). This period is concurrent with elementary school years in which children learn how to manipulate signs and solve problems and conduct objective and logical inferences. The characters in these stories are static. Sympathy with animals is frequent in the stories of this period.

2. The carnivalesque fictional world (first period of adolescence) and its narrative structure

Nikolajeva believes that the coordination between the mental and psychological conditions of adolescents and the narrative characteristics of stories is a gradual and complicated process

considering the growth of children and their knowledge. One can observe this complexity if one compares the plot structure and other narrative elements of the first period of adolescence to the second period.

The age groups D and E are in the carnivalesque period in which the child leaves the paradisaic stage and enters the stage of abstractions; therefore, we witness the expansion of worldviews and remarkable changes in the plot and temporal structures of the stories. In addition, with the increase of abstract ideas, we observe an increase in the size of stories and the number of episodes which is a kind of exercise for the transition from the world of childhood to that of adolescence.

In stories of the carnivalesque period, in contrast with those in the prelapsarian period, the beginning and the ending are not similar; they happen in the real world while the incidents are happening in the world of dreams and abstractions.

3. The postlapsarian fictional world (second period of adolescence) and its narrative structures

This is the last period in Nikolajeva's theory. While in the first two periods, paradisaic narratives had a unified subject in harmony with the world, in the narratives of the postlapsarian period there is no such harmony and unity; therefore, elements such as multilingualism, meaning-making, polyphony, internal subjectivism, unreliable narrators, and multiple layers of plot or parallel plots are the most significant characteristics of the stories in this period.

It is in this period of the readers' lives that we can analyze the structures of the stories for them and even teach them how to write fiction. In this period, in contrast to the previous periods, the audience

is not merely looking for the answer to the question “what happens next?” They actually learn that there is more than a moral teaching in every story, and they look at stories as mirrors that reflect the social conditions of their time.

### **Conclusion**

First: Children in the first levels of their growth understand stories which are compatible with their level of understanding and their cognitive growth. In this period, children understand the stories in the prelapsarian period which include the first years of elementary school. These stories show an idealistic world with a simple environment and always intend to teach a moral lesson or a life skill to the children. They have a linear time and a small knot in their plot. They also have similar beginning and ending. The narrators in these stories are the second self of the writer and the omniscient point of view who narrates the story by the use of an intimate language and a simple and childlike vocabulary, and creates limited and static characters. In all of these stories, we witness a happy ending and a pleasant denouement; and the main character achieves his/her goal or valuable object.

Second: When the child passes the age of five, he/she enters a new world of understanding of narratives. This is the carnivalesque period (including children between 7 to 12 years of age) in which stories with abstract atmosphere and mental elements are created which are different from the stories of the previous period both in their way of narration and the number of characters and episodes. In the stories of this period, we witness the appearance of children’s philosophy and their idealistic world with different questions. In a way, this period can

be identified as the period of identity-making in which the child gets free from the previous imaginary colorful world and gradually gets familiar with the realities of life.

Third: The last period of narratological growth (postlapsarian) is a period in which the individual's childhood is over and he/she has entered the period of adolescence. In this period, we witness the expansion of stories in their plots, their narrative techniques and their structural elements. The stories in this period are often symbolic; therefore, the adolescent audience needs to know that some moral, philosophical, cultural or social lessons are hidden inside them. The plot of these narratives has a five-step pattern including the initial condition, the destructive force, the middle condition, the organizing force, and the final condition.

**Keywords:** children's and adolescents' fiction, audience psychology, narratology, structure, Maria Nikolajeva

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