

## **Post-War Children's Literature, Model of Manifestation of classical and non-traditional Features of Femininity**

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**Résumé :** *La littérature pour les enfants peut influencer la façon dont les modèles sociaux caractéristiques de la féminité ou de la masculinité sont acceptées ou rejetées. Actuellement, il y a de nombreux livres de contes qui essaient de redéfinir la féminité, en remplaçant les traits classiques par des éléments non-traditionnels, cherchant ainsi de modifier les stéréotypes de genre à partir de l'enfance.*

**Mots-clés:** *littérature pour les enfants, stéréotypes de genre, égalité de genre, féminité*

Over the years, the literature represented one of the main ways to hand down the cultural patterns promoted at the society level, taking part indirectly in the development and the psychosocial adaptation of the individual to the socio-cultural environment he lives in.

Regardless of the age, sex or social category all readers take actively part in discovering the literary content, each of the characters' features of the presented life situations or of the action first being filtered by its own filters and only after being processed, interpreted and interiorized. All previous knowledge, life experiences, beliefs or reader's values interact with the information offered by the author, the reading thus becoming a dynamic process by means of which changes at the individual's personality level can be initiated.

By means of behaviours, attitudes, values and social norms presented, literature becomes a way of manifesting and handing down the classical and/ or non-traditional features of the femininity, facilitating thus building up or developing some mental patterns which can be applied either to the literary characters or to the real ones.

Numberless studies of this genre, achieved mostly under the influence of the liberal feminism, highlighted the importance and the role of the neutral education, referring to the growth and the neutral development of a child in relation with the gender stereotypes existing at the society level, introducing thus the concept of gender-neutral child rearing. In this way, the feminist movement criticizes the content of girls' education, underlying the inequalities in their socialization, encouraging gender-neutral parenting for girls and boys. (Martin, K., 2005).

Still, the literature of specialty specifies the fact that a part of the traditional values and activities associated to the masculinity have been offered as characteristics of femininity, but limitedly (Grant, 2004) and only in particular circumstances so that it could not argue the gender stereotypes.

Most researches achieved up to the present on individual's psychosocial development underlined the role of mass-media in forming and developing the stereotype and non-stereotype like knowledge through the communication of some compatible or non-compatible information towards the femininity and masculinity traditional features accepted from a social point of view. Most times the stereotype like knowledge influence in a negative way the perception, the processing, the interpretation and the memorization of the information which opposes to the traditional norms and values and this fact determines a certain resistance in individual's psycho-social adaptation to the society's new conditions and demands (Katz, 1986).

Although at the theoretical level social equality is promoted, in reality the stereotype like attitudes and the behaviours didn't change too much. This situation is obvious in all social life's aspects, being promoted ever since the childhood. The education received in the first years of life make its marks on the child's social behaviours, influencing the adult's future conduct.

One of the main ways of transmitting information with social conduct is represented by the children's literature. The researchers have proved that most of the books for children illustrate femininity and masculinity by characters of whose behaviour and personality features respect the traditional gender roles, although it has been noticed a tendency of increasing the feminine characters' number.

Femininity is represented by the woman who manifests abilities only to unfold some domestic activities, mostly introverted and subjected to man, weak from the point of view of the physical abilities, requiring a permanent protection.

The books for children and especially the gender stereotypes presented by their content can negatively influence the girls' self esteem and the belief in their own forces; they are allowed to identify themselves only to helpless princesses, housewives or wives subjected to their husbands.

Mostly, the portrait of feminine characters presented within the stories for children actually underline the masculine characters' features by highlighting some events which exploit the masculinity to the detriment of the femininity. Within the already existing folk texts there are also some which try to instil in the literature of speciality the image of the intelligent courageous ambitious woman who has to undergo through certain situations which carry force the same traditional roles.

More often than not, the femininity's features are illustrated by features of exterior aspect and by behaviours which respect the stereotype gender, so that by identifying themselves to these characters girls create a certain mental pattern of the femininity that of the beautiful princess saved by a courageous prince who fights for her.

None the less that by their content these stories illustrate a fantastic world in which good fights against evil the latter being defeated, still the present socio-cultural conditions the child lives in and develops him impose other characteristics of femininity and masculinity. The modern literature for children tries to exploit them by presenting life circumstances which infringe on gender stereotypes promoted at society level, thus building up new representations and mental patterns which facilitate a better psychosocial adaptation of the future adult.

"William's doll" written by Charlotte Zolotov and illustrated by William Pene du Bois underlines the negative influence of the gender like stereotypes on certain behaviours wrongly considered to be characteristic to the opposite gender. This story presents a boy's will to play with a doll, unaccepted behaviour by father and friends but admitted by grandmother which explain the child's will of learning how to be a good father.

Leslea Newman presents in "A fire engine for Ruthie" the story of a little girl whose hobbies for toys infringe on those accepted at social level, the firemen's car being considered a toy specific to masculine gender; she has been offered one to develop the necessary abilities to fulfil the correspondent gender.

In the story „The paper bag princess" written by Robert Munsch and illustrated by Mihael Martchenko another example of femininity is presented whose features do not correspond to the traditional ones; talking about the idea of emancipation, of release from the old stereotypes, the author builds up a new feminine pattern, perfectly adapted to circumstances and situations she has to confront with. Even if the standard phrase specific to the end of folk stories „And they lived happily ever after" is replaced. Not only that the prince saves the princess but more she is the one who refuses the behaviours, the norms and the standards established by the other princesses in the books for children, thus becoming a symbol of the feminine character and why not of feminism.

Anthony Browne tries by means of his story "Piggybook" to influence the social perception towards the incongruent behaviours with non-gender-types behaviours. Although in most of the books for children femininity is described by reference to fulfilling the domestic tasks, Browne introduces the idea of involving the entire family in developing these activities considered specific only to feminine gender.

Each of these stories create a conflict with traditional concepts stereotypes of femininity and masculinity by means of which the authors try to underline the need of acknowledging the stereotypes and the change of the norms and cultural values for a better adaptation of the individual to the environment.

By their contents, by the ideas they hand down and the characters they represent, the stories for children are the best method children's stereotypical thinking can be influenced, listening to and reading some counter-stereotype stories offer them the possibility to understand and to learn new behaviours and attitudes.

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