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### Evil Crystallizing in Children's Fiction as Cultural Echoes of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century

*Cristalización del mal en la ficción infantil como ecos culturales del siglo XX*

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#### ABSTRACT

The study examines the etiology of the Evil theme in the children's literature of the late 20<sup>th</sup> — early 21<sup>st</sup> century from the sociocultural perspective. The paper outlines some of the sociocultural effects of the children's horror literature, feeding on infantilism as an emerging subculture. The study's particular emphasis is meant on key focus areas of the children's literature, like genre peculiarities and stylistics, which need to be "sanitized", upon the authors's point of view. The governing role of the State in the regulation of the publishing industry is given special consideration.

**Keywords:** Child-friendly books, children's horror literature, crystallizing evil, subculture of infantilism.

#### RESUMEN

El estudio examina la etiología del tema del Mal en la literatura infantil de finales del siglo XX y principios del XXI desde la perspectiva sociocultural. El documento describe algunos de los efectos socioculturales de la literatura de terror infantil, alimentándose del infantilismo como una subcultura emergente. El énfasis particular del estudio está destinado a áreas clave de enfoque de la literatura infantil, como las peculiaridades del género y la estilística, que deben ser "saneadas", según el punto de vista de los autores. Se presta especial atención al papel rector del Estado en la regulación de la industria editorial.

**Palabras clave:** Cristalización del mal, libros para niños, literatura infantil de terror, subcultura del infantilismo.

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## INTRODUCTION

In the twentieth century, the control over the public mind through the popular culture was so aggressive that an individual had virtually no chance of being left out of the picture. The content of the mass literature entailed a re-shaping of the moral canons of modern society towards nihilism and contempt for the core ethical standards. With that, the literature should be regarded as one of the major drivers of the Evil crystallization phenomenon featuring the society in the modern era. Children's books absorbed the whole spectrum of plots abundant in vulgarity and cynicism of adult horror-styled literature, with all ensuing effects (Machan: 2017, pp.104-135).

Many of today's thinkers, philosophers, and scholars point out the global crisis in the humanities (Nikitin: 2018, pp.32-46) against the background of mass commodification of culture. In Russia, this crisis primarily stems from the moral and spiritual decline caused by denial of traditional values (Murashov: 2016, pp.9-15). Scientists explain this by the loss of life prospects, expansion of social exclusion, and other social risks (Wickrama&Mulford: 1996, pp.375-390). Sociologists attribute the loss of moral regulators in society to low-quality products, which pierce and reconfigure the cultural context (Machan: 2017, pp.104-135). That spiritual and cultural disproportion reflects in modern literature.

The Evil, with its wide-ranging coverage and influence, took on cultural-philosophical dimensions. The very fact of the Good and Evil dialectics (Machan: 2017, pp.104-135) staying the core issue of philosophic debates since Ancient Greece, or the German new humanism followers (Suslov: 2013, pp.39-45), in no way justifies that the modern society took the Evil for its spiritual bonds. The concept of Evil was found to be particularly persistent in children's literature (Cai: 2002; Connell et al.: 2015, pp.5-21). Scientists believe that such a wide distribution inevitably leads to fading, dehumanizing generations (Nikitin: 2018, pp.32-46). Mental archetypes of different nations are merely perceptible to some measure. If the Americans are still open to this concept (Thacker: 2015), in Russian society certain selectivity is observed up to denying/forbidding entirely, in many cases.

Nowadays, the Evil crystallizes in the superiority of its elitism on the pages of children's publications, visual content, and game industry. Children's genres, with prevailing nominative units of Evil, softly turned into behavioral stereotypes of the young people. Thus, it is worth pointing out an emergence of a new social group, which may be referred to as the "subculture of infantilism". Upon analysis of major societal aspects of extensive horror fiction dissemination among children and teenagers (Machan: 2017, pp.104-135), the total adaptation to Evil theme should be claimed (Hood: 2018). The mass nature of horror reading went beyond the limits of the "chosen" target audience (Clark: 2011, pp.173-189). The adults support this passion in every possible way and generate communication with no respect for age (Connell et al.: 2015, pp.5-21). In other words, everything that comes into the sight of children is made by adults. In this case, the matter does not concern the commercial side of the issue, but merely the "adult"- approved product, its implementation, and scalability (Wickrama&Mulford: 1996, pp.375-390). The moral paradigm of parents transformed towards approving in some natural, almost imperceptible but steady way, the children's worldview converging with the Evil theme (Nikitin: 2018, pp.32-46). Actually, the fiction products are not distinguished by readers' audience. Consequently, the moral and ethical macrosegment was ignored by those who were to become the catalyst themselves. By encouraging children's fascination with new trendy genres (Cai: 2002), the community unnoticeably influenced the evolution of child/youth infantilism, which became a challenge to modern society. Since the late 20th century, the genre of children's horror literature explicitly emerged (Murashov: 2016, pp.9-15; McCort: 2016; Chumakov&Stychinskiy: 2018, pp.3-14), which was fed on the education liberalization and simplification, as well as "nihilation" of moral and ethical rules (Connell et al.: 2015, pp.5-21).

While the State is a pillar of social protection, the cultural safeguard is assured by the educated and civilized society (Kolin: 2018). This paradigm is a common quintessence for all developed states. The canon of the literature impact on society (Posukhova&Serikov: 2015, pp.146-152) certainly weakened, but it is undeniable with reference to the so-called false culture. Children's literature was subject to the self-reflexive

civilizational canons of time. The accusations of the public (Nikitin: 2018, pp.32-46), its plasticity in terms of demoralization and deprivation are structured and justified. However, the responsibility also lies with the State, governance, and politics, which were aimed at economic, not spiritual concepts (Wickrama&Mulford: 1996, pp.375-390). Social poverty took us after the rapid stream of stereotypical trends in general (Murashov: 2016, pp.9-15), and in particular, as applied to literature (Abdullaeva&Nagoy: 2018, pp.137-140).

This research intends to conduct a sociocultural analysis of the horror style children's literature published over the past decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> - early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries as a specific domain of humanities, and the prospects for implementing a model of universal humanization of social institutions, with consequent educational and ethical implications.

The following objectives were set to achieve the goal:

- 1). Turn the spotlight on the need to eradicate hostility from children's books as providing a damaging impact on children's minds.
- 2). Design a pilot program that could refocus the humanitarian vector to stop the Evil, and remove it from the children's books, at least partially.
- 3). Hypothetically anticipate a positive solution to these concerns, that is possible but with the ultimate focus of state institutions on natural spiritual needs, true interpretations of the moral and ethical canons of each society; control of the hostility in children's books, which is possible but through the vigorous coercion of the humanitarian community.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The present study investigates the causes and societal perspectives of the extensive reliance of the children's horror fiction on the Evil in the last decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. It also attempts to highlight the plasticity of that style undergoing conversion into the sociocultural phenomenon. Considering that the American children's thriller books are the most readable worldwide, the study provides references on the pioneers of this genre in the American and Russian literature (Steinberg: 2017).

The sociocultural analysis of the Evil theme in the children's literature covered a number of specific issues, and first of all, the general commodification of the pop culture industry which imposes plot lines of children's horror fiction that harm the children's mindset. The plasticity of the readers' perception of the traditional archetypes in both American and Russian culture in their new interpretation as characters of the scary stories was on the focus as well as the stylistic peculiarities and the literary value of the texts, which are not less important. Finally, attention was also given the psychedelic effects of the horror fiction caused by fear on children's mental structures and the overall issue of infantilism as a consequence of the horror literature expansion and a global concern of the developed societies which were also under close investigation as well as the.

The study suggests solutions to "sanitizing" the literature intended for younger readers that appears to be an issue of the ultimate sociocultural importance. The present paper provides new insights on a way of putting under control the damaging effects on a child's mental health by means of the relevant regulatory action.

## **RESULTS**

The start of the children's horror fiction boom was given in America. The children's "book mania" was a competitive segment in the literary choices of the 1990s and 2000s. The Point Horror books series are small scary stories, which make part of the Goosebumps Library (Karolides: 2002), written by the American writer Robert Lawrence Stine, the iconic author of children's thrillers. Here are just a few figures showing the degree of interest in the horror genre: English language print run is 350 mln copies; translation to 32 foreign

languages; 63 book items published in Russia; the screen version of 43 novels from the Goosebumps library was made and released in 1995 as a Canadian-American television series (4 seasons, 74 episodes). The publishing industry in Russia proved itself empathic to the American horror fiction for children, by releasing the translated versions of Stine's stuff ("Rosmen" and "Eksmo" Publishing Houses). The series Goosebumps and Goosebumps series 2000 in the Russian version were merged within a single one made in the uniform design. Out of 63 novels of the Goosebumps Library, 49 were released in Russian, whereas out of 25 items of the Goosebumps series 2000 released were 14. In all, 175 books of the writer were translated to Russian. In the 90s, the Russian horror fiction grew in popularity, and lightning-fast sales not only supported the interest of younger readers but also prompted multiple reissues. In the Russian literature context, the story "Red hand, black bedsheet, green fingers" written by E. Uspenskiy (with A. Usachev as co-author) is considered to be a pioneer in the horror fiction for children. It was released by parts in the magazine for children called Pioneer in 1990. Then, in 1998 all stories by these authors were published in the Horror Children's Folklore Anthology of the Rosmen Publishing House (Tran & Phan: 2019, pp.146-156).

Plasticity of the folklore forms. Interestingly, research shows that readers in Russia were prepared mentally to the horror aesthetic way back in the time of kind-hearted fairytales. The supremacy of Good, with inherent heroism, piety, aspiration to rescue — these qualities were attributed to positive fairytale characters who dominated Evil. Mythical heroes appeared as monstrous incarnations in the unnatural guise, which were defeated by virtue of being Good. Though there is no sense to recount all Evil entities available, the shortlist of the folklore pantheon (like house spirits called "domovoy", witches called "ved'ma", wood-spirits called "leshyy", turnskins called "oboroten") are a mere witness to the Russian readers being ready and accustomed to such characters.

The essence of the plotline is always the same – battle between Good and Evil with anticipation of the former's inevitable victory, which consequently was rather inspiring than terrifying. Additionally, these fairytales embodied the concept of moral and chaste Good. Was not it due to their ethnic origin that those archetypes were perceived by a young reader as the "good old" characters made familiar to them (even in their contemporized, updated guise)? The literary analysis implicitly revealed the substitution of that folklore component: the dead, killer robots, killer dolls, a sort of "It", zombie moms, and even zombie grannies, instead of the old-school wood-spirits, mermaids and house spirits. If in the Soviet era plots, children's characters turned to be in the deep forest or the swampland, and other back of beyond (surely, frightful in a child's mind), the modern "masterpieces" depict the routine everyday scenes, thus, stimulating children's habituation to the possible or expectable everyday occurrence of the Evil (Ross & Gray: 2006, pp.798-822).

Popular culture reproduces the Evil theme trying to cash in on the anxiety. The modern publishing industry persistently fuels the young readers' fears by horror-style fiction which is capable of holding the attention of a child, sympathizing and feeling for the main character, eager to see but the happy end. However, that would not be the happy end of the whole story in the battle of Good and Evil, as in earlier times, yet the rescue of a hero, tormented and exhausted, just like the child reader is. Engaging drop-scenes, often unpredictable in terms of the happy ends, are intended to call a mix of anger, dissatisfaction, and suspense as a pledge of resumption. Obviously, the falseness of the end scenes forced readers to seek for the sequels with the expected happier ending. The seriation principle, normally complemented by a visual rendering of texts, is attributed to the modern children's horror fiction as absolutely indispensable. With the benefit of dynamism, the literary text is reconstructable to other forms within the cultural field. Today, the modern children's literature is as interactive as never before — screen adaption, virtual games development, replication of favorite characters in games and comics are only a few applications which became multicultural phenomena. The visual industry is regarded as a proxy for the Evil theme adaptation by society, while its very concept seeks to dehumanize the idea of Good.

Stylistic attributes of the horror genre appeal. The simplicity of the narration is one of the reasons for the horror fiction popularity. The discourse, in most cases unpretentious, with no complex lexical and morphological constructs, made the texts easy-to-read, which responded to choices of the children's audience,

looking for smooth and effortless reading. On the other hand, often meaningless, irrational, blatant, even somewhat sensual/spicy and low-tolerant, the horror fiction has a fancy for younger readers, whose fear is indemnified by sort of aesthetical catharsis, or feeling grown-up at least in thoughts.

Infantilism as a societal effect. The strong expansion, huge coverage, and commodification of popular culture had a clear-cut aggressive nature. The total enchantment by civilizational achievements in the technical sphere led the global community to mass deprivation, followed with natural consequences in moral standards decay. It is fair to say about the shift in Evil perception, mostly due to the immature attitudes of the community to the information flow. Mutation of the stereotypical views in terms of personal beliefs and the life stance attributed to the internet and media resulted in the societal cataclysm, particularly relating the mainstream interpretation of the Good and Evil constructs. Development and scaling of the social-collective manipulation techniques did not escape the children's literature domain. Actually, the patterns of the "adult" mass literature were applied to the children's books, and this may have the logical explanation. Literature as an impactful tool of societal education encapsulates certain stereotyped social behaviors. The generation educated on the horror stories found its psychophysical identity turned into infantilism. A new social group is argued to getting shaped, which could be referred to as the "Infantilists' Subculture." A set of common traits in their behavior witnesses of this generation to be game-driven rather than fond of learning. It can be explained by their emotions being inhibited under exposure to popular culture products, including the literature, the game, and visual content, in most cases riddled with aggression. A child's departure into a dream world at decreased personal standards and self-discipline, and poor adaptability to social settings, is a challenge of moral nature, by significance equally proportional to the issues like bullying, increase in statistics of childhood psychoses, suicides, and growing infantilism.

The frameworks for the children's book market regulations. In view of the above-mentioned challenges, the approach to the children's literature content considers revising. Clear-cut standards should enhance societal responses. In the author's opinion, incentives for authors, which should be secured in state legislation, are of prime importance. The government grants are worth consideration to get the publishers interested in new products with adjusted content (any new book or an unheard author may not ensure the commercial success, thus, putting at risk the profits, especially, if compared to bestsellers). The reforms of the children's literature domain have to be initiated by education authorities, which not only can harness the teaching and literary communities to enhance their creative capacity, but develop new approaches to teaching literature in school.

Those approaches might be a way to "stir" the curriculum, fit it to changes in younger audience's attitudes and behaviors. In other words, given the school curriculum excites the interest of the modern generation, the young readers' choices will not be on the side of the alien bestsellers. The writing contests, especially among young authors of the children's books (with explicitly censored violence, murders, sadism, and terrifying scenes) may be another area for public awareness and support, with the unaffiliated international judges from various humanities and social sciences like writers of fiction, literature theorists, scholars in Culture and Arts, sociologists). The specified actions are suggested as a pilot option for the streamlined implementation of the Law on Protecting Children from Information Harmful to Their Health and Development passed in the Russian Federation. The reform planning will ensure the quality of socio-humanistic programs to cure children's literature of the fear-based philosophy impact on the child's state of mind. New books, authors, programs opposing the creepy aesthetics will come out as a result of the efficient planning for a sound alternative to the best-selling horror.

## DISCUSSION

The sociocultural heritage of different ethnic groups on the national map of the USA, their historical ties, cross-cultural influence, religious oddness are translated into the literature at large. Consequently, the segment of literature which targets the children audience, also bears the stamp of multiculturalism, underpinned by mental specificity of multiple nationalities (Cai: 2002). The genetic affinity of the American literature with specific autochthonous traditions or culture, historical traditions, and underlying archetypes is not comparable with the Russian literature (Larionova et al.: 2017, pp.2315-2318), because of its global multicultural coverage.

If the Russian literature is deeply rooted in the rich history and traditions and populated with worldly-wise and mentally mature archetypes (Larionova et al.: 2017, pp.2315-2318), the American fiction is relatively young (just like its national history is) even compared with the Europe's one (Machan: 2017, pp.104-135). The phenomenon of American society resides in the plasticity and mobility of the national mind, ease of assimilation, and lightning-fast replication. There is no doubt that the USA, as a strong and powerful nation owes to these specific features of the collective mind. The largest mass-culture industry in the world (Abdullaeva&Nagoy: 2018, pp.137-140) originated from the nation-specific pragmatism and successfully embodied and fostered Evil in an economic paradigm (Wickrama&Mulford: 1996, pp.375-390). The fact of being empathically absorbed by other nations makes this paradigm phenomenal too (Murashov: 2016, pp.9-15). The proclaimed new landmarks the postmodernist era with the Evil kept under wraps, seems to test the society for the strength of the intrinsic spiritual truths. In the long run, The Evil crystallized as a baseline power of the universe, spectacularly emphasized as being proactive and superior to the true significance of the Good (McCort: 2016; Suslov: 2013, pp.39-45).

The resilience of society depends directly on its mental health, which is shaped out in childhood. Children are known by keen sensibilities of the beautiful and Good, innocent susceptibility of romance in the context of humor, kindness, and adventure. Purity and naivety, chastity and romance a known as immanent to children's literature. This is what is expected to drive the Muse of Writing for children. Harnessing his creative capacity, the children's writer has to follow the very nature of the child's mind rather than perverted, fictionally based scenarios.

The Evil crystallized by going through all evolutionary stages. The cultural domain is claimed to survive the mental re-arrangement, realizing that the Evil theme in literature echoes the shift in the moral landscape of human society. This change in morality swept the society at all levels from the state policy to individual consumers.

The State, which normally does not consider interfering with the publishing business, in a case with the Law on Protecting Children from Information Harmful to Their Health and Development, not only commits itself to intervene, but also to directly impact the publishing business approach, as follows from the very title of the Law. The society expects the State to strongly support the societal aspirations in this domain. The optional approach displayed in this article may be an option for practical steps (by joining efforts of stakeholders in public, educational, and private institutions) rather than mere reasoning.

Apparently, in the not so distant future, the global community's focus will turn from popular fiction towards the quality reading, offering the new vision of the world and humanity rather than twisted apocalyptic genres, especially, in the children's literature domain.

## CONCLUSION

The Western horror fiction genre was widely promoted among the Russian readers' community, which merged with the mainstream of Western popular culture. Such appeal of the long-rumored bestsellers and trendy books were induced by the social situation. Furthermore, the moral and ethical strand of the new bestsellers turned to be so minor that it made the challenging spiritual quest hardly possible for readers. The entertaining nature of certain genres, a kind of cosmogony, and mysticism aroused the readers' satisfaction and psychological compensation.

The author draws attention to the "subculture of infantilism" as a large-scale social problem. The solution to this is possible but through the extensive involvement of parents, teachers, and the public. The parental influence on the child's choices can hardly be overestimated. The education by "conscious" parents implies the fear to be entirely rejected even under the guise of the triumphant victory over the Evil. The use of the literary products has to be conscious, guided by thinking public following the sound moral principles.

Formulation of the model for the overall humanization of the societal institutions is an issue of paramount importance. Cross-country political doctrines of the leading world powers were formulated on the humanistic ideals, democratic freedoms, and individual rights. The issue of handling cruelty, hostility, and vulgarity, especially when it comes to educating young people, has to be in the focus of the internal policy of the States.

The study suggests a set of measures to streamline government support to the production of books for children, in conformity with the Law on the Protection of Children from Information Harmful to their Health and Development adopted in the Russian Federation. Public institutions and programs to put under control the literary and visual content that impacts a child's mind, will potentially support Russian society in countering this global challenge. State subsidies to young writers, publishers, teachers, and new literary projects is only one way of stimulating the production of quality fiction, conform to the Russian mindset dominated by humanist traditions.

The need for cultural renaissance demanded by the global community cannot be measured by profits. It most likely will launch fundamental changes in the popular culture trends. Human society is on the verge of the mental paradigm transformation on a global scale. Primary changes will occur in a way of thinking with the concept of Good to take over in essence rather than solely in name.

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