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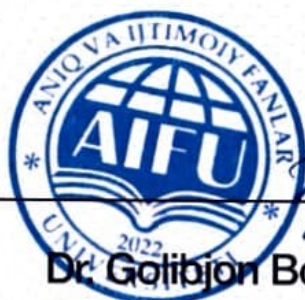
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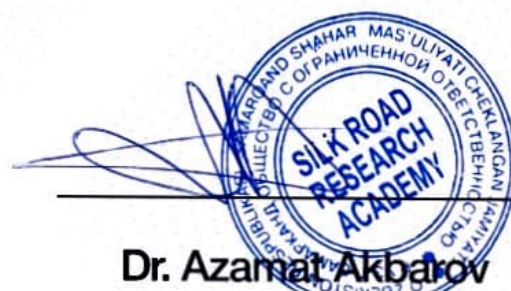
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The Role and Importance of Modern Fairy Tales in Education: Genre Features of Magical Characters and Digital Classification According to the ATU System

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Abstract

This paper explores the educational significance of modern fairy tales, with a particular focus on the genre-defining role of magical characters, known as spellonyms, and their classification through the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) system. Modern fairy tales not only entertain but also serve as effective tools for moral, linguistic, and cognitive development. Spellonyms—magical figures such as witches, wizards, or supernatural beings—carry symbolic, aesthetic, and ideological weight. Their names and attributes often reflect the underlying themes of the story and help determine its genre, whether it be fantasy, magical realism, or mythological fiction. Furthermore, these characters often act as catalysts for the protagonist's transformation, embodying moral trials or sources of guidance. To support structured analysis and educational use, this study also examines the digital classification of fairy tales according to the ATU system. The ATU framework categorizes tales based on recurring motifs and narrative structures, and modern digital databases enable educators and researchers to access, compare, and analyze stories more efficiently. By integrating

genre analysis with digital taxonomy, this paper highlights how modern fairy tales can enrich both literary study and classroom learning.

Keywords: *Modern fairy tales, spellonyms, magical characters, genre features, fantasy literature, magical realism, mythological fiction, Aarne-Thompson-Uther system (ATU), digital classification*

Article History

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Introduction

Modern fairy tales represent a unique blend of traditional folklore elements and contemporary literary innovation, serving both as a source of entertainment and a tool for moral, cultural, and intellectual development. Among the key features of these tales are magical characters, often referred to as spellonyms, who perform not only aesthetic, ideological, and symbolic functions but also play a crucial role in shaping the genre of the narrative. These characters enrich the thematic content of the story, reinforce its moral message, and help clarify its structural and generic identity.

The presence and nature of spellonyms often determine the genre classification of a fairy tale. If magical elements dominate the storyline and blur the boundaries between fantasy and reality, the work is typically classified as fantasy or science fiction. When magical characters are seamlessly integrated into realistic settings, the story leans towards magical realism. In contrast, if the narrative involves the reinterpretation or reconstruction of ancient myths or magical traditions, it takes on the form of an epic or mythological novel. Spellonyms also frequently act as agents of transformation, prompting the protagonist's growth and development through supernatural guidance, trials, or assistance.

enhanced this classification process, allowing for more efficient cross-referencing and analysis of tale types, including those featuring magical characters.

Results

The symbolic and ideological dimensions of magical characters, or spellonyms, have also been a focus of scholarly inquiry. Bruno Bettelheim's psychoanalytic interpretation (1976) emphasized fairy tales' role in helping children navigate internal conflicts and moral development through symbolic figures and challenges. Similarly, Jack Zipes (1999) highlighted the socio-political underpinnings of fairy tales and the ways magical characters reflect cultural anxieties and aspirations.

In terms of genre distinctions, scholars have explored how the presence and nature of magical characters influence classification into fantasy, magical realism, or mythological fiction. Tzvetan Todorov's theory of the fantastic (1975) offers a useful framework for understanding the interplay between reality and the supernatural in literature, which is critical when analyzing modern fairy tales that blur these boundaries.

The educational value of fairy tales has been widely recognized. Research in literacy and pedagogy shows that fairy tales foster imagination, moral reasoning, and language skills (Nikolajeva, 2012). The integration of magical characters into curriculum materials enhances student engagement and provides rich contexts for exploring complex themes such as identity, ethics, and transformation.

Discussion and Conclusion

The use of the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) classification system further enriches the academic study of these tales by providing a standardized method for categorizing motifs and narrative patterns. As digital resources become increasingly available, the ATU system allows educators and

researchers to trace the recurrence of certain character types and themes across cultures and time periods. This digital classification supports a more nuanced, comparative analysis of fairy tales and their narrative strategies, offering valuable insights into how magical figures function across literary traditions.

In conclusion, modern fairy tales continue to hold significant cultural, literary, and educational importance. At the heart of these narratives are spellonyms—magical characters that influence genre identity, advance the plot, and communicate deeper moral or symbolic meanings. Their function extends beyond fantasy; they shape the reader's interpretation of the story and serve as powerful teaching tools in the classroom.

Through figures like Queen Mab, spellonyms illustrate the complexities of character duality, transformation, and symbolic resonance. Their role in genre classification—as determined by the degree and nature of their magical influence—demonstrates how closely magic and narrative structure are intertwined in fairy tales.

By applying the ATU classification system in a digital context, educators and researchers gain structured access to a wide range of tale types, enabling comparative analysis and interdisciplinary learning. This blend of traditional narrative study and modern digital tools enhances the understanding and teaching of fairy tales in contemporary educational environments.

Ultimately, the inclusion of magical characters in modern fairy tales strengthens both the literary value and educational potential of these narratives, making them not only enduring forms of storytelling but also meaningful resources for intellectual and moral development.

Many of these magical characters are identified through two-part or compound names that include descriptive attributes, which help to build vivid mental images for the reader. For instance, Gandalf the Grey implies wisdom and neutrality through the adjective "Grey," while The White Witch evokes associations with power, coldness, and malevolence. The language used to describe magical beings often carries layered symbolic meanings, signifying good or evil intentions, transformative journeys, or internal moral struggles.

A compelling example of a complex spellonym is Queen Mab, a character rooted in folklore and literary tradition. Often depicted as a manipulative and dream-controlling figure, she represents the dual nature of magical beings—capable of both benevolence and malevolence. Her character has appeared in multiple literary contexts over the centuries. In William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* (1597), she is mentioned in Mercutio's famous monologue (Act I, Scene 4) as a mischievous dream-bringer who rides a tiny chariot made of insect parts, influencing human thoughts during sleep. In Michael Drummond's novel *Queen Mab: Queen of Shadows* (1997), she is portrayed as a dark and terrifying figure, while in Percy Bysshe Shelley's poem *Queen Mab* (1813), she appears as a philosophical spirit guiding humanity toward enlightenment and a better future.

These varying depictions highlight Queen Mab's rich symbolic complexity and demonstrate how spellonyms can adapt to different genres, themes, and ideological frameworks. Analyzing such characters allows for a deeper understanding of literary structure, genre affiliation, and the moral or symbolic dimensions of modern fairy tales.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore the genre-defining function of magical characters in modern fairy tales and examine their classification through the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) system, particularly focusing on their symbolic significance and transformative roles in educational and literary contexts. In addition to their literary

significance, modern fairy tales and their magical characters hold a vital place in education. They serve as powerful tools for teaching language, fostering imagination, and imparting ethical values. Through engaging narratives and symbolic figures, fairy tales encourage critical thinking, cultural awareness, and emotional intelligence among learners. The presence of spellonyms provides students with clear examples of character development and moral dilemmas, making these stories effective mediums for both formal and informal education.

Theoretical Background and Review of Previous Studies

The study of modern fairy tales and their magical characters draw upon a rich tradition of folklore scholarship, literary theory, and educational research. Fairy tales, as a genre, have been extensively analyzed for their structural, symbolic, and cultural functions since the foundational work of scholars such as Vladimir Propp, Bruno Bettelheim, and Jack Zipes. Vladimir Propp's morphological analysis of folk tales (1928) laid the groundwork for understanding recurring narrative functions and character roles, many of which correspond to what are now called spellonyms—magical characters embodying specific functions within the story. Propp's structural approach emphasizes the importance of characters as agents of transformation and narrative progression, which aligns with contemporary analyses of magical figures in modern fairy tales.

Building on structuralist theories, the Aarne-Thompson-Uther (ATU) classification system provides a comprehensive method for categorizing folk and fairy tales by their motifs and plot patterns. The ATU system has been widely adopted in both literary and folkloristic studies, enabling researchers to identify genre characteristics and trace the evolution of narratives across cultures and historical periods. Recent digital tools have

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