

**PEDAGOGICAL FANTASY: A SURVEY OF
19TH-CENTURY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE IN SPAIN**

It has been suggested by Carmen Bravo-Villansante, one of the pioneers in the study of children's literature in Spain, that only by tracing the development of children's magazines can one find the beginnings of a children's literature in Spanish. This is not surprising given the fact in Spain the 19th century is considered to be the century of the Press, hailed in the December First 1853 issue of the newspaper *El Oriente*¹ as, "locomotora de la vida intelectual, telégrafo eléctrico del pensamiento escrito, ligera como el siglo, variable como la época, flexible como el tiempo..." ("locomotive of intellectual life, electrical telegraph of written thought, light as the century, changeable as the era, flexible as time...").² In 1860, with an illiteracy rate of 76% there were 154 newspapers and other periodical publications in print circulating in Madrid alone. A decade later, in 1870, the number of publications circulating in the capital city had climbed to 302 in comparison with only a slight drop in the illiteracy rate to 72%.³

The children's press, as Cazottes so aptly stated, were the "poor cousins" of their adult counterpart (122). From the numbers quoted above, in 1860 only 7% of publications were dedicated to children; by 1870 that number had declined to 4%. Most of these publications appeared in the form of a magazine and were only available through tri-monthly, half-a-year or yearly subscription; they were rarely, if ever, sold in loose numbers to the general public (Martínez, 4). It is only in the latter part of the century that we will find the emergence of a small but successful number of publishing houses dedicated exclusively to the publication and dissemination of works written exclusively for children in book form.

In terms of their content, at the outset and throughout the 19th century, most of the texts dedicated to children were often written by

¹Cited in Seoane, 12.

²All translations, unless otherwise noted, are mine.

³Raw data cited in Sinclair, xi. cf. with Cazottes study in "Presse Madrilene et Lecteurs" (pps 7-10), which quotes from another source the readership in Madrid: 7.18% of a population of 246,767, or almost 18 thousand readers during the year 1856 subscribed to a newspaper or magazine.

moralists and pedagogues⁴; when professional writers penned stories for children they would invariably assume the role of an educator. For example the motto of *La Aurora, Periódico de los niños*, a monthly publication that ran from January 1851 to December 1853, was “la virtud, la ciencia y el trabajo” (“virtue, science and work”). The contents of this magazine reflected this motto, it featured articles such as “La Obediencia” (“Obedience”), and “Ricardo ó la utilidad de la lectura” (“Ricardo or the usefulness of reading”); if tales were published they tended to be moral in nature or biblical stories. Another periodical similar in name, but published almost a decade later, *La Aurora de la vida, único periódico ilustrado Dedicado á los niños de Ambos Sexos*, promised in their introductory number that came out on November 10th, 1860 to “entertain as well as to instruct” and they included girls explicitly in their mission statement:

... a realizar el elevado pensamiento de instruir deleitando. Conociendo que la dificultad de instruir á los niños consiste en fijar su débil atencion en los objetos, procuraremos que estos estén al alcance de sus facultades intelectuales.

Aun cuando LA AURORA DE LA VIDA es un periódico dedicado á la educación é instruccion de los niños de ambos sexos, no tratará los asuntos tan vaga y sencillamente que no satisfagan las exigencias de los mayores: los padres, los preceptores, y en particular las madres, encontrarán en él un fondo de recreativa y pura distraccion, que contribuirá á endulzar la felicidad doméstica; sin poner en tortura su mente, hallarán en LA AURORA DE LA VIDA máximas que inculcar á los niños, ejemplos de virtud que exponer á las niñas; historias, leyendas, fábulas etc. con que distraerlos, así como consejos morales é higiénicos que en ciertos momentos de la vida son dulcísimo y reparador beleño de nuestros sufrimientos.

(“. . . to fulfil the elevated ideal of instruction and entertainment. With the knowledge that the difficulty involved in the instruction of children consists of fixing their weak attention upon an object, we shall ensure that this is within reach of their intellectual faculties.

Even when THE DAWN OF LIFE is a newspaper dedicated to the education and instruction of children of both sexes, it will not treat matters in such a vague and simple manner that it will not satisfy the demands of the adults: the parents, the preceptors, and in particular the mothers, will find in it a recreational and purely entertaining setting, that will contribute to sweeten domestic bliss; without torturing their minds, they will find in THE DAWN OF LIFE maxims to instil in the boys, examples of virtue to describe to the girls; stories, legends,

⁴This comment is also true of children’s literature produced outside Spain during the first half of the 19th century. cf. Geoffrey Summerfield, *Fantasy and Reason* (London: Methuen, 1984).

fables, etc. with which to entertain them, as well as moral and hygienic advice that at certain moments in life are the sweetest and restorative panacea of our suffering.”)

While the high moralizing content that so characterized the genre prevailed throughout the century, the latter half of it was characterized by the inclusion of more ludic elements, hence the title of this article: Pedagogical Fantasy. This slight shift in focus from one *Aurora* to the next is of great significance because it is an indication of the relaxation of certain precepts governing the era’s perception of what is a “child”, and although it does not open the door to the creation of the kind of children’s literature that we are used to nowadays in the 21st Century,⁵ it at least leaves the door ajar to new ideas on writing for children.

These children’s magazines were geared towards the rearing of the “well-bred” child, the parameter under which all being that dictated the way the ideal child ought to be and behave. In order to achieve that “model of perfection”, the child who should be carefully guarded and nourished in the privacy of their homes and under the careful supervision of their mother. This idea of “child” was not a universally applicable concept, bourgeois practices –at societal and institutional levels– were great determiners of who would fall under this golden category of “child”, social status and wealth being important and decisive factors⁶; after all the viability of these publications relied heavily upon the subscription of adults with purchasing power.

In general, when approaching the study of a text written for children, apart from the writer and the youthful reader, it is important to acknowledge the existence of a third party, one whose participation is never explicit but cannot be ignored: that of the parent, guardian, or teacher, because they select the reading material for the child. Efforts are usually made to strike a balance between what the child wants and what is considered to be appropriate reading, but ultimately, in case of conflict, the adult will almost always have the upper hand. Thus, what is being categorized in this study as “children’s literature” is a rather

⁵If we stray away from works which are part of the school curriculum, most of the children’s literature in Spanish available today are mostly translations of very popular foreign ones such as the *Harry Potter* series by Rowlings.

⁶These magazines were directed to children of the upper and middle classes, who had to be “persuaded” with “honey” and “sweets” to learn. The “other” children, the orphans, the children living under precarious economic conditions, were to learn a trade. In Spain, boys in orphanages would be sent to be apprentices in the army or the navy, girls were trained in all the gentle crafts “suitable” to their gender so that they could live their life as someone’s maid or presumably wife. (Fernández Vargas, “Los aspectos teóricos: El derecho y el aprendizaje”, 129-161)

highly politicized and manipulative discourse, designed to encourage the grooming of those “good qualities” that are supposedly innate to children, therefore guiding them to take the path of goodness qualifying “goodness” as meaning the ability to conform to the social order, whichever one that may be. As a result of this, a large number of the works published in the 19th century under the rubric of Children’s Literature consist mainly of thinly disguised moral or pedagogical tracts.

The moral concept of a “well-bred” child arose and took form in the 17th century, doubtlessly as a product of the reforming beliefs of an elite of thinkers and moralists who occupied positions of power (i.e. Church or State). The “well-bred” child was a creature who should be preserved from the roughness and immorality which that would become a special characteristic attributed to the lower classes (Aries, 328). Rousseau’s ideas concerning education, which he expounded in *Emile*, found favour beyond the borders of France, especially in Spain, where his writings on children and education were widely known.⁷ The French thinker conceived children as being naturally good and that the goal of education should be that of nurturing these innate qualities. Children should be guided and allowed to develop naturally into morally and intellectually self-reliant individuals, useful to their families and to society. Children should be provoked into learning useful and practical things. An ideal child should be some sort of a miniature Crusoe, someone who had learnt to survive through his wits, his resourcefulness and his innate talents. This all pervasive attitude towards childhood, explains the inextricable link that exists between children’s literature and children’s education; not in the sense of teaching the child an established curriculum, but in the sense of helping him/her assimilate and perceive the world as it should be perceived.

Didacticism and morality are the two predominant words that best characterize the bulk of writings dedicated to children in the 19th century. The fantastic and the marvellous, so in vogue today, were approached a hundred years ago with the utmost care, and accepted only as an afterthought; it was never accepted at face value, and it was mainly used to illustrate a didactic and/or moral point.

Whenever the word “fantasy” is mentioned within the context of children’s literature, fairy tales usually spring to the forefront. However, fairy tales were not created to address the specific needs of children; rather, their main function according to Max Lüthi in *Once Upon a Time: On the Nature of Fairy Tales*, was to present “the poetic vision of man and his relationship to the world ... Even though man

⁷Rousseau’s ideas on education were filtered into Spain mainly through the popularity amongst Spanish pedagogues of one of his admirers, M. Arnaud Berquin who was proprietor and editor of the periodical *L’ami des enfants*.

may feel outcast and abandoned in the world, like one groping in the dark ... The fairy tale, ... not only inspires trust and confidence; it also provides a sharply defined image of man: isolated yet capable of universal relationships." (Lüthi, 21) The Grimm Brothers also saw similar qualities in the fairy tales they compiled and published in 1812 under the title of *Kinder und Haüsmarchen* ("Children and Household Tales") They wished the tales to be educational, to teach those who read them to become more aware of their own nature. Fairy tales were already fashionable in the late 16th century, thanks to the publication in France of Charles Perrault's *Contes de ma Mere L'Oye* ("Mother Goose Tales") in 1697, a popularity that despite the censorship of educators and moralists, carried well into the 18th century, since the main followers were all members of the nobility. It was only with the publication of the Brothers Grimm's work that fairy tales were able to infiltrate into the strata of middle-class consciousness and become the bland staple they are today.

In the case of Spain, the work of the Grimm Brothers did not appear in full translation and in a book form until the establishment in 1876 of the Saturnino Calleja Publishing House. However, the stories were already well-known thanks to the efforts of an ever-increasing number of children's periodicals circulating in Spain and its overseas empire. For example, the popular Madrid periodical *Los Niños* devoted quite a lot of space to the publication of fairy tales in translation, the work of the Grimm Brothers were not the only ones included in the publication there were also translations of Mme D'Aumont, Perrault, etc. (Villasante, 121-131)

If we look at the first children's magazine to be published in Spain, we will find many examples that adhere very closely to the moralizing spirit so pervasive in the 18th century. The main purpose of the periodical, *Gazeta de los Niños, o principios generales de moral, ciencias y artes, acomodados a la inteligencia de la primera edad*, published in 1798 by Joseph and Bernabé Canga Argüelles, was to educate the child in a simple and pleasant manner:

Este es el objeto que en nuestros días se han propuesto algunos hombres célebres como Campe, Schummel, Weise, autores alemanes, y últimamente Berquin, a quien con razón se le puede llamar "El amante de la niñez". Este hombre bienhechor, últimamente persuadido a que los niños reciben la instrucción con más placer comunicada por la boca de otros niños, los ha hecho hablar en sus obras, esparciendo en ellas las semillas de todas las virtudes, en unos diálogos vivos y animados, al mismo paso que instructivos...Este rasgo fijó nuestra atención y nos obligó a pensar que sería más fácil infundir a los niños, por el mismo método de Berquin, las nociones más útiles, no sólo de la moral sino de todas las ciencias y artes compatibles con su capacidad por medio de un periódico.

Confesaremos que este pensamiento no es enteramente nuestro, y que en París se publica una obra muy semejante intitulada *Correo de los Niños* (Children's Herald), por Jauffret. Siguiendo, pues, este sistema, ofreceremos en nuestro periódico que se podría llamar la *Enciclopedia de los Niños*, los últimos resultados de las fatigas de los grandes sabios en todos los siglos que nos han precedido. Se inculcarán las máximas de la moral más pura, con toda la energía que puede inspirar un ardiente deseo de hacer bien no por medio de axiomas descarnados y estériles, sino presentando la moral en acción, en cuentos y anécdotas.

("This is the objective that was proposed in of our days by some worthy men like Campe, Schummel, Weise, German authors, and ultimately Berquin, whom with reason can be called the "Friend of Childhood". This benevolent figure of a man, ultimately persuaded that children are more receptive to instruction when this is communicated through the mouths of other children, has made them speak in his works, spreading with them the seeds of all virtues, with lively, animated and, at the same time instructive dialogues. This trait fixed our attention and made us think that it would be easier to infuse children, following Berquin's method, with the most useful notions not only of morality but of all the arts and sciences compatible with their faculties through a newspaper.

We have to confess that this idea is not entirely ours, and that in Paris a very similar work is published entitled *Correo de los Niños* (*Children's Herald*), by Jauffret. Following, thus, this system, we offer in our publication which could be called the *Enciclopedia de los Niños* (*Children's Encyclopaedia*), the latest results of the labour of the greatest geniuses in all the centuries that has preceded us. We shall instil maxims of the highest moral order, with all the energy that can be inspired from the ardent desire to do good not by way of withered and sterile axioms, but through the presentation of morality in action, in stories and anecdotes.")

About the notion of fantasy, "se desterrarán de la *Gazeta de los Niños* todos los ejemplos de engaños, de supercherías, de poca contingencia de las pasiones, como también los apólogos." ("We shall expel from the *Gazeta de los Niños* all examples of deceit, fraud and any eventuality of passion, as well as any apologues.") It is obvious that the editors shared their belief with many educational experts of the day that fairy tales confused children with notions of wonderful and supernatural events, brought about by imaginary beings; above all, they were perceived to be devoid of any apparent moral and were therefore not conducive to juvenile edification.

Here is a sampler of the magazine's offerings to their youthful readers:

*El Castaño: cuento para animar a los niños al estudio (The Chestnut: *A Story to Encourage Children to Study)

*El plátano: cuento moral (The Planteen: Moral Tale)

*La linterna mágica, o principios de cosmografía y geografía (The *Magic Lantern or The Principles of Cosmology and Geography)

*Mariana y Amadeo: diálogo sobre la electricidad (Mariana and Amadeo: Dialogue on Electricity)

*Los campos o la teoría de los abonos (The Country or Theory of Fertilizers)

When the fairy tale finally made an appearance in publications devoted to children, the beauty and the terror that characterized the form were completely changed and transformed into some kind of pedagogical fantasy, a thinly disguised moral tract or didactic tale suitable to the edification of the "Well-bred" child. An example of this is "Viaje al País de la Gramática" ("Voyage to the Land of Grammar"), an "adventure" story by J. Macé, a French educator, translated into Spanish and serialized in the magazine *Los Niños* in 1870. The story is about the travels of a child in the magical land of Grammar, where he meets all sorts of magical creatures which also happen to named after grammatical categories such as Mr. Adjective, etc.

Philippe Aries argues quite convincingly in *Centuries of Childhood* that the concept of childhood as we have it today originated sometime in the 18th century with the inception of a middle-class consciousness and the genesis of the modern family unit. Up to the 17th century, "the family fulfilled a function: it ensured the transmission of life, property and names; but it did not penetrate very far into human sensibility. Myths such as courtly and precious love denigrated marriage, while realities such as the apprenticeship of children loosened the emotional bond between parents and children." (Aries, 411) However, with the arrival of the Industrial Revolution and the quick propagation of a prosperous merchant middle-class, a new concern with education outside apprenticeships "would gradually install itself in the heart of society and transform it from top to bottom. The family ceased to be simply an institution for the transmission of a name and state... it assumed a moral and spiritual function to mould bodies and souls. Parents, in this case the mother particularly, were held responsible infor providing a training for life to all their children." (Aries, 412)

This new ethos was a direct result of the separation between public and private spheres, "The public sphere constituted the world of business and commerce, the market and the world of politics. The private on the other hand was constituted around the home and the family." It is also at this time that there is a clear demarcation in the status of women as "private citizens" (and thus excluded from public office and hence from power), whose major role in life was to provide solace for the "public man" and nurture his children.⁸

⁸In many writings the mother figure is often referred to as "el ángel del hogar".

Moreover, because of this new responsibility felt by parents in the rearing of their children, literature that was written explicitly for them was the most closely monitored and therefore the easiest to target for censorship (nowadays in the 21st century, this censorship has not lessened, we will find that the most censored books are those written for children). The editors and publishers that tried to mass market their creative wares were aware of this scrutiny. Spanish publishers were by no means impervious to this scrutiny. Competition for the patronage of the reading and buying public was fierce. The longest-lasting Spanish children's periodical, *El Amigo de la Infancia* (1874-1936), boasted at some point of having two thousand subscribers. By just sifting through some of the titles of the publications available in the 19th century we can see that the strong didactic and moralistic current established in Spain by the *Gazeta de los Niños* in 1798 was still to prevail until the beginning of the 20th century.

Unlike other European countries, which had the likes of a Dickens, Thackeray, Ruskin, Rossetti, Wilde, Lorenzini-Collodi, De Amicis or Verne, Spain did not foster any major mainstream writer interested enough to write a major work for children and thus participate in the creation of a "national" children's literature, as well as to elevate with their established status the general esteem in which the genre was held. This is not to say that important Spanish writers did not take an interest in children's literature. Indeed in the roster of some popular children's periodicals such as *Edad Dichosa*, included the pensworks of Eugenio Hartzenbush, Cecilia Böhl de Faber (sometimes under her pseudonym of Fernán Caballero), Antonio de Trueba, Ramón de Campoamor, Angela Grassi, etc. However, for these mainstream figures, writing for children was a marginal exercise, done usually at the request of some friend or acquaintance who happened to run a children's magazine or publish a children's supplement to the main newspaper. Such was the case of the relationship between Hartzenbusch and Carlos Frontaura. Frontaura was not only the proprietor and editor of the successful satirical paper *El Cascabel*, he also published the highly acclaimed children's magazine *Los Niños*, which won various prestigious international prizes. Both Zorrilla and Hartzenbusch contributed quite frequently in *Los Niños* with poems.

During the latter half of the century there was to be a surge in publishing houses dedicated exclusively to the publication and dissemination of children's literature in book form. Amongst the most well-known is Saturnino Calleja⁹ Publishing House, established in Madrid in

⁹The publishing activity of this house had spanned almost a century when it finally closed its doors in 1958. For many, Calleja was not only a pioneer in creating a market for children's books by targeting educators and their insti-

1876. Calleja published the works in translation of Perrault, Grimm and Andersen as well as his own series of children's stories called *Cuentos de Calleja*. It is also in the latter half of the century that we can see an interest on the part of professional writers to produce children's literature. In some cases, this was aided by the fact that some magazine proprietors, apart from having their regular periodicals for the general public, started to have a children's supplement published every so often; therefore it was logical for them to ask their staff writers to produce something for the children's supplement as well.

Overall, we can see a movement from a strictly didactic and moralistic set of writings for children at the beginning of the 19th century, influenced no doubt by the dominance of the Spanish "Ilustración", towards a more entertaining, less moralizing—although didactic tendencies were never to be completely eradicated—and even playful narratives in the latter half of the century. A set of writings in which the desire to educate or teach moral and ethical notions was still very much in evidence, but was preceded by a much higher desire to stimulate and to inspire the imagination, as opposed to dictating moral and ethical behaviour.

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tutions, he was also instrumental as an "agent of cultural and pedagogical modernization." cf. Ruiz Berrio, J. A. Martínez Navarro, C. Colmenar and M. Carreño, *La editorial Calleja, un agente de modernización educativa en la Restauración*. Madrid: UNED, 2002.