STORYTELLING, TRIAL, AND TRANSFORMATION: THE MENTOR ARCHETYPE IN CONTEMPORARY UZBEK AND ENGLISH CHILDREN'S FICTION

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Annotation. These theses compare Luqmon Bo'rixon's novella Sirli muallim and Patrick Ness's A Monster Calls in order to show that contemporary children's prose, in cultures as distant as Uzbek and English, continues to perform spiritual education through one shared fairy-tale archetype: the enigmatic guide who imposes a trial and, through it, transforms the young protagonist's inner life. The shared structure and its national variations are briefly characterised.

Keywords: mentor archetype, fairy-tale motif, spiritual education, comparative literature, children's literature.

Across very different literary cultures, narratives written for the young tend to converge on a small repertoire of inherited fairy-tale forms. The most resilient of these is the figure that Vladimir Propp described morphologically as the donor or helper, that Carl Jung named the Wise Old Man or mana-personality, and that Joseph Campbell popularised as the mentor or "supernatural aid" [3; 2; 1]. The aim of the present theses is to demonstrate, through a focused comparison of two recent works – the Uzbek writer Luqmon Bo'rixon's novella Sirli muallim ("The Mysterious Teacher," 1991; collected 2006) and the English-language writer Patrick Ness's A Monster Calls (2011) – that this archetype remains the central instrument through which contemporary children's literature accomplishes the work of spiritual education.

In Sirli muallim, the enigmatic guide is a human teacher, Najot G'aybulla, whose geography lessons fall upon a remote desert classroom like a spell and whose calm, "enchanting" voice raises ordinary teaching to the level of the marvellous. The text reaches the reader through a riddling frame: a journalist investigates the rumours surrounding the teacher, and the narrative is partly assembled from the explanatory statements that the school staff are required to submit to an investigator after a criminal case is opened. This frame reproduces, in modern dress, the fairy-tale logic by which the helper is always approached indirectly and must be recognised for what he is. The "trial" is at once outward and inward: a society subjects the teacher to bureaucratic and legal ordeal, while the deeper subject on trial is a community whose children now dream of becoming feared officials or criminals. The teacher functions as the donor who, simply by embodying integrity, restores to those around him the lost sense that knowledge and the teacher's vocation are sacred; the epigraph from Abdulla Oripov, naming the teacher a "mirror" within human perfection, sets this didactic horizon from the outset [4].

In A Monster Calls, the same archetype appears in the register of overt fantasy. The thirteen-year-old Conor O'Malley, whose mother is dying of cancer, is visited – always at seven minutes past midnight – by the ancient yew tree of the churchyard, which rises as a vast, primal monster. The guide announces fairy-tale terms: it will tell three stories and demand a fourth, the true story Conor has hidden – his recurring nightmare. The three parable-tales unsettle every easy moral, doing the classic work of the fairy tale by giving symbolic shape to feelings the child cannot face directly [5]. The trial is the confession of the fourth truth: that part of Conor wishes the unbearable waiting to end, and that he is destroyed by guilt for the wish. The monster's gift is not power but permission – permission to grieve and to forgive himself – and the transformation it works is the movement from denial through honesty to acceptance.

The comparison yields a clear typological result. At the level of deep structure the two works are identical: an enigmatic guide crosses from another order of reality into the world of the young, sets a trial centred on a hidden truth, and through that trial precipitates a spiritual awakening, with story itself – teaching-as-enchantment in Bo'rixon, the monster's parables in Ness – as the decisive educative instrument. At the level of cultural realisation, however, they diverge along consistent lines. Bo'rixon's marvellous is moral rather than magical, his ordeal communal and outward, his aim the restoration of a shared ma'naviyat and respect for the teacher's calling; the model is didactic-communal. Ness's marvellous is openly fantastic, his ordeal private and inward, his aim the healing of one grieving child; the model is cathartic-individual. Genre follows suit: realist satire in the one, mythic elegy in the other.

The two models are complementary rather than opposed. The Eastern text insists that the forming of the self is never purely private – that conscience is owed to a community – while the Western text insists that no communal ideal is reached without attending to the truth of the single suffering heart. Their convergence on the archetype of the enigmatic guide suggests that the deep grammar of moral storytelling for the young is shared across the human family, even where its accent remains unmistakably national. Comparative archetypal analysis of children's literature thus reveals at once the universality of the forms through which the imagination educates the young and the irreducible particularity of the cultures that animate them – a finding that invites extension to a wider corpus of Uzbek and English children's prose.

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