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# The Significance of Food In Children's Literature

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## **Introduction**

Food is the first social element that a child uses to connect with his mother and vice versa. This social, emotional and psychological connection starts in the womb when the fetus is introduced to his mother through the placenta. Through the placenta, the child receives not only nutrition but also receives his mother's food preferences. When the baby is born this connection takes another form yet has the same characteristics. It starts with breastfeeding through which the child identifies with his caregiver who provides him with food. As the child grows older this connection becomes more hidden than shown yet it's never gone. Early in a child's life he is called 'delicious' if he is beautiful, he is bitten when adored, and when his caregiver plays with him he usually plays the game where the caregiver runs after the baby to eat him. It is a game that children greatly enjoy.

One scholar, Carole Couniha, studied children's favorite stories and how children chose to recite them. She found that eating and food themes are "the second most common in their stories after themes of aggression and violence."<sup>1</sup> She also noted that children use food to mark time and to "introduce the

child's family and parental identification and sibling rivalry."<sup>2</sup> Yet the most shocking results she came up with were that many children use food to express aggression. Both, boys and girls, have some fear of not having enough food. Girls overcome this problem through cooking while boys use "hostility and violence by biting, chewing or eating others up"<sup>3</sup>

Another scholar, Kaj Von Fieadt, made extensive studies on children's perception and their sense of taste. Fieadt found that during the first ten years of life the child has more taste receptors than an adult and since the ability to taste sweet food depends to a great degree on the amount and function of taste receptors, children prefer sweets.<sup>4</sup> Hence children's literature is filled with sweet like cakes, tarts, jam and the like.

Children's literature is filled with food; magical food, poor food, rich food, religious food, healthy food, talking food etc. The aim of the research is to analyze the significance of food in the most famous books written for children. The books are arranged according to level of the children they address. Some books are written for children of the ages 3 – 6 years old while others for children of the ages 6 – 9 years old and 9 - 12 years old.

If we take Dr. Seuss's<sup>5</sup> **Green eggs and ham (1960)**, a book for readers of the ages 3 – 6 years old, we will find a book that mainly focuses on nutrition. It also embodies the typical attitude of a child to new food. The book starts with a character named Sam singing his name "I'm Sam – Sam I Am"<sup>6</sup> an old man was standing by looks at him and immediately states "I hate that Sam I Am."<sup>7</sup> Sam hears the old man and

instead of being angry with him he offers him healthy green food filled with iron in the shape of green eggs and ham. Yet the old man refuses with disgust saying "I do not like them, Sam-I-am.

I do not like green eggs and ham."<sup>8</sup> Sam tries to persuade him so he offers the old man green eggs and ham to be eaten in various places with various animals: Would you like them here or there? Would you like them in a house? with a mouse? in a box? with a fox? In a car? in a tree! on a train? With a goat! On a boat! The old person refuses to taste them till he gets tired of refusing and finally he tastes the green eggs and ham and says:<sup>9</sup>

Say!

I like green eggs and ham!/I do! I like them, Sam-I-am!  
And I would eat them in a boat./And I would eat them with a goat...  
And I will eat them in the rain./And in the dark. And on a train.  
And in a car. And in a tree/They are so good, so good, you see!  
So I will eat them in a box. /And I will eat them with a fox.  
And I will eat them in a house /And I will eat them with a mouse.  
And I will eat them here and there /Say! I will eat them  
ANYWHERE!

I do so like/green eggs and ham!

Thank you!

Thank you,

Sam-I-am!

Food preferences are not easy to change since they are determined very early in life. It is believed that the food the mother consumes during pregnancy and even during lactation defines the child's food preferences.<sup>10</sup> Pediatricians believe that "Eating is a learned behavior that is learned through exposure and repetition."<sup>11</sup> Sam is a young child and instead of being persuaded to eat green food he is the one who is persuading the old man. This shift is understandable because old people become more like children when they get old. Like old people, children are curious yet they are "neophobic"<sup>12</sup> which means they are very careful in tasting new food that they are not familiar with.<sup>13</sup> They both need to be familiar with what they eat. Notice Sam introduces green eggs and ham fourteen times and each time using a different kind of temptation. Experts found that two – year old children need 10 exposures to new food in order to establish food preference while children of 4 – 5 years old need 11 – 15 exposures to establish preference.<sup>14</sup> The old man not only tries the new food but ends up thanking Sam for introducing him to new delicious food that might not seem so delicious from its name and color.

Modern book like **Green Eggs and Ham** uses food in a completely different manner compared to classic books that address the same audience. Modern children books mainly concentrate upon nutrition thus, provide children with knowledge about food, where it comes from and how the body uses it. Classic children books, on the other hand, use food for different purposes usually as means for giving advice. The famous classic story of **Little Red Ridding hood**<sup>15</sup> (1679) is a

strong example. The main message that such stories send to children is that if you don't lesson to your parents the wolf will eat you or the dog will bite etc. Strangely enough, although human are on the top of the food chain and are accustomed to eat other creatures to survive, they have the fear of being eaten. Lions, tigers and wolves can find in a human being a nice meal just as humans find in a chicken or a fish. This fear is invested by parents for they usually prevent their children from going outside telling the "the dog will eat you" as if giving them the idea that they can also be food for other creatures. Since this idea is more believable to children than adults, many children's literature talks about humans being gobbled up by animals.

Little red ridding hood<sup>16</sup> is a young beautiful girl whose mother sends her to visit her sick grandmother. The girl obeys and goes to her grandmother yet in her way she meets the wolf who asks her where she is going in a gentle voice. Not knowing that this creature is a wolf and could easily eat her, she answers him and tells him where she is going. After the departure of the wolf the girl reaches her grandmother's house to find to her astonishment that the wolf has eaten her grandmother and in no time he "gobbled her up."<sup>17</sup> Perrault used a very aggressive image of a young innocent girl who was adored by her mother and grandmother who is eaten brutally by a wolf. He ends the story with a strikingly obvious moral; young beautiful and polite girls should not talk to strangers whom they find in the street because their words maybe gentle yet their actions are as harmful as that of a wolf. It is also a pre warning for girls who are coming of age and are starting to be curious about boys who look innocent yet take mischievous

forms to seduce a young girl. There are many levels to this story yet not all of them are accurate. Some critics sate that this story was originally a warning for adults as well as children against the man – eating wolves who roomed thick forests at the time of the story.<sup>18</sup>

Whether it was a warning against man - eating wolf or man in the shape of a wolf the advice is one; be aware of the wolf. The message is clear and straightforward that a reader can hardly miss. Yet as the child grows older, food starts representing deeper ideas and reflects difficult times. Let's take **Hansel and Gretel**(1857).<sup>19</sup> It is the story of two siblings left in the woods by their parents who "could no longer procure daily bread."<sup>20</sup> Lost in the woods for three days with no food or drink, they came up a house. The house was built of bread and covered with cake; the windows were of pure sugar. Driven by hunger they started eating the house up. The owner of the house was a human – eating witch, who was as famished as they were, she asked them to join her for more food and drink. After a while the witch took hold of Hansel and locked him up in a cage so as to fatten him for a big feast. Gretel, to save her brother and her self, shoved the witch into the stove where she burnt to death. The children took up all the witches jewels and gold and went back home where their father cried of happiness seeing his both children alive and carrying bags of gold that would last them for a life time.

The story projects how dangerous food can be. Food for poor children is "the barrier between existence and extension."<sup>21</sup> When a child is told that a certain family has no food for their children they will immediately understand that

they are poor. They will judge the entire family from the food they eat, where it is eaten, and how it is eaten.<sup>22</sup> For children, a mother is judged through her ability to cook food, while the father is judged through his ability to provide food. Hence he term 'bread winner.'<sup>23</sup> In this story both parents, the bread winner and the good mother, throw their children in the woods because they cannot feed them. The children are left with no food and shelter. When they finally find an eatable house it was like finding two basic needs in one thing, food and shelter. According to the American psychologist, Abraham Maslow<sup>24</sup> and his hierarchy of needs a person needs basically to eat and drink then to feel safe followed by other minor needs. Ironically the shelter turned against them just as their parents. The witch tried to eat them yet they cooked her in her own stove. The children were fully aware of the fact that they are a burden thus chose not go back home when they were first left in the woods. For three days they kept looking for a new shelter although they apparently knew their way back. Yet once they found the bags of gold they simply go back to their parents confident of being welcomed.

Difficult times in history can be easily comprehended if told by characters that children can identify with.<sup>25</sup> This story retells the history of the eighteenth century during famine, war and poverty. At that period peasants were suffering from the feudal system that forced people to do their best to survive and one of those means for surviving was "the abandonment of children."<sup>26</sup> Thus, the parents are representative of the poor peasants, the house made of cake is an "impoverished child's image of prosperity"<sup>27</sup> while the witch represented the entire

feudal system that drank the blood of poor people. By killing the witch the children killed their oppressor. The children were fully aware of the situation that they did not blame their parents for dumping the in the woods. The children came back loaded with gold and jewels to please their parents.<sup>28</sup>

Yet a deeper significance of food can be seen in longer stories for children of the ages 6 – 9 years old. The best example would be **Charlotte's Web** (1952)<sup>29</sup>. Charlotte's web is a story of a pig named Wilber who is saved from being slaughter at Christmas by Charlotte, his loyal spider friend. The owner of the pig decides to kill him and eat him at Christmas thus attempts to fatten him for a rich feast. Finding out that he is going to be eaten, Wilber seeks help. Charlotte, the spider, offered to save him by weaving words into her web like "some pig" "terrific" "radiant" and "humble" making people believe that the pig is a miracle. The owners of the pig wan a prize at the fair because of their extraordinary pig so they speared his life.

Throughout the story different animals are presented and each one has its own type of food and manner of eating. These differences are just like the differences between the eating habits of people coming from different cultures and religions. Wilber tries to understand these differences yet he cannot help judging them. Wilber is a pig, thus he feeds on leftovers that his owners fetch him. Charlotte, on the other hand, is a spider who feeds on the blood of other creatures to survive. On their first meeting Wilber sees how Charlotte traps a fly then wraps it up and prepares it for breakfast. Wilber was horrified and asks "you mean you eat flies?"<sup>30</sup> Upon which the spider



answers "certainly."<sup>31</sup> Wilber tries to understand his friend's strange eating habits so he asks "do they taste good?"<sup>32</sup> Charlotte answers "delicious. Of course, I don't really eat them. I drink them – drink their blood. I love blood"<sup>33</sup> Wilber could not stand this so he tries to stop her from continuing. He was sad that his new friend is "fierce, brutal, scheming, bloodthirsty"<sup>34</sup> Wilber ends up saying to himself that Charlotte is "everything I don't like. How can I learn to love her, even though she is pretty and, of course, clever?"<sup>35</sup> Yet he grew to love her and understand that if spiders do not eat flies and bugs the latter will increase and multiply and destroy the earth to which Wilber innocently says "really...I wouldn't want that to happen. Perhaps your web is a good thing after all."<sup>36</sup>

Ironically the moment Wilber condemns Charlotte for her brutality in killing insignificant insects, he is faced with human's brutality in wanting to kill him. Charlotte will die if she did not eat and her food is insects but humans can eat everything and they do not need to kill him to survive or save the world. He learned that humans kill animals for the fun of it and to have a feast at Christmas. But once the humans benefit from the pig they come to understand his significance so they keep him alive. Humans judge Wilber and Charlotte's eating habits and consider them inferior accordingly. Wilber is inferior because he eats their leftovers and Charlotte is inferior because she eats insignificant insects.

Food is also used in the story to show the differences in personalities among characters basically Charlotte, Wilber and Templeton, the rat. Charlotte eats food that she hunts herself thus her personality is defined as being strong, clever, sociable,

has the ability to gather all the animals in the barn and save her friend from being killed. Wilber, on the other hand, eats leftovers. He does not look for his food but his food comes right to him. When Wilber judges charlotte's eating habits she defends herself saying "well, you can't talk...you have your meals brought to you in a pail. Nobody feeds me."<sup>37</sup> As he is used to having his food always ready for him, he expects to find all things in life ready for him as well. He does not think of doing anything to save his own life but hands the task completely to Charlotte. Even when his best friend was dying he could not save her sac of eggs without the help of Templeton.

Templeton also eats leftovers yet of a different kind. His food is not brought to him instead he has to sneak, hide and steal to eat. He eats rotten food and leftovers that are the leftovers of another. He is described as a rat that has "no morals, no conscience, no scruple, no consideration. Do decency, no higher feeling, no friendliness, no anything. He would kill a gosling if he could get away with it – the goose knew that. Everybody knew it."<sup>38</sup> When he describes himself he says that he prefer to spend his time eating, gnawing, spying, and hiding and calls himself a glutton. He has no compassion to anyone and the only thing that drove him to help Wilber is he was afraid that he will lose his main source of food. Templeton is used to eating Wilber leftovers; if the pig is killed he will not find food. He saved Charlotte's egg sac only after Wilber promised him to let him eat from his own food before he does.

In a study conducted by Carole Counihan about the differences between boys and girls concerning body weight and food she found that although body size is not that important for children of the ages 3 – 9 yet most of the children show a great dislike to characters that are fat.<sup>39</sup> They preferred slim characters instead. They considered fat characters to be weak and negative while slim characters are thought to be strong, positive and clever.<sup>40</sup> In this story Templeton eats like there is no tomorrow. He is driven by his gluttony and food is his weak point. The only reason he goes to the fair is that he can eat all sorts of food. He left in the morning looking for food he came back at night "swollen to twice his normal size. His stomach was as big around as a jelly jar."<sup>41</sup> After saving Charlotte's egg sac, Wilbur let Templeton eat his meals three times a day. The rat grew bigger and fatter he became "gigantic" due to overeating and when the sheep tells him "you would live longer if you eat less"<sup>42</sup> he answers "who wants to live forever?"<sup>43</sup>

Although having enormous appetite is frowned upon in this story, it is marveled at in other longer stories like **Alice In Wonderland** (1865).<sup>44</sup> It is a Victorian novel for children of the ages 9 – 12 years. Alice is a young girl who follows a rabbit down a rabbit hole to find her wonderland. What makes this land so wonderful is the food and drink that can change her into so many sizes. In fact, the overall narration of the novel is built on her consumption of food; she is "eating and drinking, growing and shrinking and growing again."<sup>45</sup> Every time Alice eats or drinks there is a climax in the story when she doesn't there is a great anti climax. In fact food is the

center of Alice's universe. The narrator describes Alice as being a girl who loves food and "who always took a great interest in questions of eating and drinking."<sup>46</sup>

The novel was written in the Victorian era where literature for children was mainly concerned with body weight, beauty and ladylike behavior.<sup>47</sup> Victorian writers tried to teach young girls how to stay in shape by condemning large appetite in girls as something sinful after all gluttony is one of the seven deadly sins.<sup>48</sup> Thus, appetite was deeply linked with the desires of the flesh and being able to control it represents the ability of controlling one's desires. Carole Counihan found that girls of the ages 9 – 12 start to develop body weight awareness which is much earlier than boys.<sup>49</sup> Thus, it can be detected that all scene where Alice eats, something destructive happens since her appetite is connected with her aggression. All wonderland creatures are either food for her or for her pet. When she drank from the bottle and got large her tears drowned her and many other animals when she got smaller. Struggling to survive from her own pool of tears, she can't help finding in a mouse swimming near by a potential meal for her cat. When she is asked to distribute prizes she can't find anything better than sweets to give. Her aggressive appetite is condemned not only by the Victorian society but also by animals. When Alice grew too enormous that her neck became very tall a pigeon mistook her for serpent and accuses her of trying to eat her eggs. Alice, trying to defend herself, says that she is not a serpent but she does eat eggs. The pigeon condemn Alice saying that Alice and all girls like her are "a kind of a serpent : its all I can say"<sup>50</sup>. She is saved by the mushrooms, the party that she attended is a

tea party, she attends a trail about stolen Tarts and in one of her fancies she tries to classify people according the food they eat :

Maybe it's always pepper that makes people hot – tempered," she went on, very pleased at having found out a new kind of rule, "and vinegar that makes them sour – and camomile that makes them bitter – and – and barely sugar and such things that make children sweet – tempered. I only wish people knew that: then they wouldn't be so stingy about it, you know – "<sup>51</sup>

In order for a child to grow, he must eat and for a plot to grow Alice must eat. Food is the essential ingredient for growing and maturing. Alice is in the verge of childhood growing into adolescence; the age of uncertainty. Many critics believe that maturity is the most prevailing theme.<sup>52</sup> Alice wonderland is believed to be Alice puberty land where she has to discover many new things about her body. The first of these changes is her unpredicted size change. Maturity is portrayed as something devastating for a young girl for whenever Alice change her body size destruction occurs. When she is small she drowns in her own tears and unfortunately when she is large she destroys houses and courts. She is either overlooked because of her smallness or imprisoned in her largeness. This led to the conclusion that Alice's process of maturation is a type of imprisonment and "a sorrowful experience."<sup>53</sup> The process of maturation was hectic for Alice and she needed time to cope with it yet once she reaches her full maturation she frees herself from uncertainty, anxiety and imprisonments by

simply dismissing the off – heading queen as well as her guards by saying "who cares for you? You're nothing but a pack of cards!"<sup>54</sup> Upon her realization of her true maturation, to the ground came tumbling the cards and along with it her childhood wonderland. The first thing she does after dismissing her wonderland as a dream is drinking tea.

In psychology there is a concept called psychic size which is "an internal or shared experiences of relative size, dependant from standards of judgment and comparison."<sup>55</sup> In other words, our conception of our own size changes according to the situations and problems we face. When Alice started to get smaller she felt that she is shutting up as a telescope. She compared herself to an object that sees objects other than itself.<sup>56</sup> She defines herself as an observer rather than a participant. She observes attentively other creature in wonderland and tries to fit herself to suit them. She thinks size will do the trick thus she keeps shifting sizes with different situations and creatures till she loses her own identity.<sup>57</sup> When the caterpillar asks her who she was she simple answered "I – I hardly know."<sup>58</sup> Ironically she turns up an outsider in her own wonderland.

Yet once she decides to stop shifting according to creatures and situation her wonderland disappears. Instead of a telescope that invents a wonderland to observe instead of her sister's boring pictureless book, she simply takes an action by getting up and leaving to drink tea.

Food can also stand for knowledge whether bad, good or forbidden. In **Snow white** (1857)<sup>59</sup> <sup>60</sup> food is vital and very dangerous for the young lady. Unlike Alice, she can't just taste

everything she laid her hands upon for it might turn up to be poisonous. Snow white is a beautiful young princess who is as white as snow and whose lips are as red as blood. Her step mother got jealous of her beauty thus plotted to kill her. After many attempts she disguised herself as an old woman selling apples. One of the apples, that were white with red cheeks, was poisonous. Snow white, tempted by the shape of the apple, took a bite of it and fell immediately to the ground. The dwarfs, who saved her many times before, were unable to help her. Because she is very beautiful they placed her in a casket made of glass so that everybody could admire her beauty. A prince saw her and taken by her beauty he stopped, opened the casket and kissed her. Once he kissed the princess she came alive again and they all lived happily ever after.

Snow white chocks with the apple. In many cultures apples are associated with women's breasts.<sup>61</sup> It is ironical that her stepmother is the one who gives her the poisoned apple. The queen is the only mother that snow white has ever known. Instead of being a good mother to her and feed her her loving milk – filled breasts she gave her "poisonous hateful envious breast"<sup>62</sup>

In other culture apples are associated with domination because of its globe – like shape.<sup>63</sup> The queen wanted to dominate beauty itself personated in the shape of snow white and aimed at being its queen.<sup>64</sup>

The apple also is a biblical allusion to the forbidden fruit that Adam and Eve ate at Eden. Although the bible does not name the forbidden fruit, critics and interpreters have pointed out that apples were the forbidden fruit. Adam and Eve were

tempted by the devil in the shape of a serpent to eat from the tree of knowledge so as to be able to distinguish between right and wrong. Adam could not swallow the forbidden fruit thus it stuck in his throat.<sup>65</sup> The famous apple computer company also chose the logo of a beaten apple to represent their quest for the forbidden knowledge.<sup>66</sup>

The apple of snow white is the dividing line of knowledge. The apple was red and white a symbol of blood and purity as snow white herself. Snow white did not choose the white pure part of the apple instead she chose the red one. Thus she has bitten into "maturity, sexuality, menstruation, desire. Thought she chokes on it, she can't give it up"<sup>67</sup> and the only way to get her out of this state is with a mature act. Thus she comes back alive when a handsome prince kisses her.



### **Conclusion:**

Food in children's literature is used as a mean to an end rather than as an end. After surveying the most famous children's books, food is one of the most prominent themes in children's literature. The significance of food changes from one story to another depending on the age of the child they are addressing. The two first stories are for young children of the age 3 – 6 years. The significance of food is simple and straight forward so that a child can easily understand them in other words it is rather informational.

In the first story the child is tempted to try new types of food no matter how strange they look after all green eggs and ham can be good for your health. The second story warns girls from being deceived by appearances. A beautiful human girl, who eats other animals lower than her in the food chain, should be strong so as not to be eaten by an animal, thus descending in the food chain. Strength can be physical and it also can be moral. A girl should be morally strong otherwise she will be tempted and ruined by man wolves.

Yet as the child grows older the significance of food grow deeper. In **Hansel and Gretel** (1857) food represent the whole image of family and harmony among its members. It also reflects a critical historical era that could not be drawn better. In **Charlotte's Web** (1952) the child is introduced to different eating habits and preferences. The story is also tempered with a beautiful blend of animal personalities defined by the food they consume.

As a child reaches preadolescence the significance of food gets more intense. In **Alice Adventures In Wonderland** (1865), Alice places all her wishes on her food. When she wants to grow taller and look older she imagines magical food that will do the trick. When she is not comfortable in being older and taller she switches food. She wishes to live in all sizes and ages. She shifts from one size to another according to necessity. Yet when she gets fed up with this uncontrollable change she dismisses her wonderland and goes to drink tea. In **Snow White** (1857) we are introduced to psychological conflicts. The image of the mother is seen through the food she offers her children and the manner she offers it. In this case the poisonous apple.

Each writer and person has his own significance of food as we all do yet only eleven significances were stated in this research. Food is an essential part of every life thus it should not be taken for granted nor ignored because apparently children's early life roughly revolves around it.

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## المستخلص

ان ادب الاطفال يتركز معظمه حول الطعام والغذاء. قد يعود السبب في ذلك الى ان الطفل يتعرف على الحياة عن طريق الغذاء الذي يصل اليه عن طريق المشيئة في رحم الام. حيث عن طريق الغذاء يستلم الطفل مشاعر والدته ويستطعم غذائها المفضل. وعندما يولد تتوثق هذه الرابطة بين الام وطفلها عن طريق الرضاعة. ان الهدف من هذا البحث هو تسليط الضوء على عمق توغل الطعام في ادب الاطفال والابعاد المتعددة التي يمثلها والرموز التي يجسدها. لقد تم اختيار اشهر قصص الاطفال وتم ترتيبها حسب ثلاثة اعمار : العمر الاول من ٣ الى ٦ سنوات والثاني من ٦ الى ٩ سنوات والثالث من ٩ الى ١٢ سنة. حيث تم دراسة الطعام في اشهر قصص الاطفال لكل فئة عمرية على حدة.

نجد ان الطعام في ادب الاطفال للاعمار ٣ - ٦ سنوات ياخذ منحني تعليمي. ان القصص في هذه المرحلة تقدم الطعام كحقيقة علمية كي يعرف الطفل اي الطعام يعد صحيا او ليفهم الاختلافات في استذواق الطعام. كما ان بعض القصص تستخدم الطعام لاعطاء نصيحة ياخذ بها الطفل كما هو الحال في ليلى والذئب التي اكلها الذئب لانها وثقت بمن لايجدر الوثوق به.

اما ادب الاطفال للاعمار ٦ - ٩ سنوات فالطعام ابعاده اعمق. حيث ان الطعام هنا يجسد حالة الاهل المعيشية ومدى فقرهم والمراحل التاريخية الصعبة التي مرت على الشعوب التي اظطرت الاهالي على نبذ اطفالهم بسبب شحة الطعام. كما يمكن ان يعكس الطعام شخصية الفرد ومدى قوتها.

في حين ان ادب الاطفال للاعمار ٩ - ١٢ سنة يتسم ببعض صفات عمر المراهقة والبلوغ وكل الاضطرابات التي قد ترافق هذه الفترة. ان تناول الطعام يؤدي الى النضوج ولكن قد يكون هذا النضوج مفاجئا مما يجعل الشخص قلقا وغير متأكد من هويته الجديدة وهذا تماما ما حصل مع اليس حيث ان بتناولها للطعام كبر حجمها في بلاد العجائب الا ان مشكلتها كانت في عدم سيطرتها على حجمها وبالتالي نضجها. بقيت اليس تتخبط معظم القصة الى ان اكملت نضجها

وسيطرت عليه فرفضت مخلوقات بلاد العجائب فانهار العالم وصحت من نومها لتذهب وتشرب الشاي كاي شخص بالغ. اما في قصص اخرى فالطعام قد يرمز للام او للمعرفة المحرمة. ان بياض الثلج فقدت وعيها بسبب تفاحة مسمومة اطعمتها ايها زوجة ابيها كما غص ابانا الاول بالتفاحة التي اطعمها له ابليس واخرجه من الجنة.

ان رموز الطعام كثيرة بكثرة المؤلفين ولكل مؤلف عدة رموز للطعام في مؤلفاته وقد تختلف عن رموزنا نحن عن نفس الطعام. ادب الاطفال خصب بهذه الرموز ومن الضروري دراستها لمعرفة بعدها لنستطيع ارشاد الطفل اليها كي يستفاد منها افضل استفادة.

## Abstract

Children's literature mainly focuses upon food whether magical food, rich food, poor food, cultural food, religious food, animal food or any other type of food. The aim of this research is to explore the significance of food in the most popular books for children of the ages 3 – 6 years, 6 – 9 years and 9 – 12 years.

Food is introduced for children of the ages 3 – 6 years in two major methods. The first method is informational, in other words, simple straight forward information is given about specific food, or about a certain attitude towards food. In **Green Eggs and Ham** (1960) healthy food is presented to a person who refuses it without even tasting it because of its repelling color and unlikely combination. After some resistance he finally tastes the healthy food and ends up thanking Sam, the person who introduced this new type of food to him. The second method is educational in the sense that food is used as a means for giving advice. In **Little Red Ridding hood** (1679) the message is clear; if you trust a wolf he will simply eat you.

As a child grows older the significance of food grows along with him. Food starts representing family, social status and security. In **Hansel and Gretel** (1857) the two siblings are driven out of their own house because their family had no food to feed them. They lost security the moment they left home and even when they found an eatable shelter the owner of the shelter tried to eat them up. They had to murder her in order to escape yet they did not stop at murder they simply turned to



thieves by stealing all of her jewels and money and giving it to their parents. In **Charlotte's Web** (1952) personalities are defined and judged according to the food that the characters consume.

Books for older children of the ages 9 – 12 years old are tempered with the sense of maturity, psychological conflicts and knowledge. In **Alice's Adventures in Wonderland** (1865) Alice changes her size every time she eats or drinks something a matter that confuses her greatly till she get hold of it before her appetite get the best of her. While in **Snow white** (1857) food represents the mother who is supposed to provide her child with food. Instead, her mother feeds her a poisonous apple that she chocks upon.

As much as there is verity in food there are verities of significances for it in children's literature. Every significance should be explored to be able to guide a child through his reading so as to better understand what lies between the lines.

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## Foot Note

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- 3 Ibid
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- 13 Ibid
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- 39 Counihan, P.139
- 40Ibid
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- 64 Ibid
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