



Research on French Children’s Literature—Take Le Petit Nicolas as an Example

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Abstract. France has some excellent children’s literature books circulating in the world, After the Second World War, French children’s literature writers emerged in batches, and their works are of high quality and quantity. This work talks about French Children’s Literature, and will take Le Petit Nicolas as an example, to show the beauty of French Children’s Literature. Hope more attention will be paid to French Children’s Literature, and more wonderful stories will be produced.

Keywords: French Children’s Literature · Le Petit Nicolas · French Literature

1 Introduction

Because the rationalism and positivism of the philosophers suppressed the romantic and absurdity of fantasy, the achievements of children’s literature in France were slightly inferior to those of other European countries. Later. A more obvious phenomenon in the beginning of French children’s literature is that there are more absorptions, adaptations and transplants than fantasy creations [1]. France has some excellent children’s literature books circulating in the world, but not many written specifically for children. But in terms of the development process of children’s literature, it is similar to other European countries in the feudal society characterized by centralization, the development of children’s literature has also accelerated the process [2].

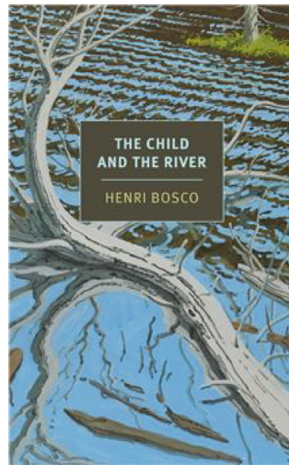
After the Second World War, French children’s literature writers emerged in batches, and their works were of high quality and quantity. s position. In this era, the world’s first unanimously recognized masterpiece is Maurice Druon’s fairy tale “Tistou les pouces verts” (Fig. 1), which describes the peculiarity of the boy Tistou’s thumb touching the seeds of flowers and trees, which can make them germinate and bloom. Function, the boy uses this special shaking function to turn the prison into a castle of flowers, making the land of suffering swell with fragrance, the weapons are entangled in the vines, and the cannon shoots flower bullets. It shows that morality stories can be intoxicating works of art once infused with humanitarian sensibilities and humor. The second is Henri Bosco, who wrote four books about a boy and his gipsy companions, a fox, and a dog in unpredictable realms, and “The Child And The River” (1955) (Fig. 2), “The Fox In The Island” (1956), etc., are all first-class works [3] (Fig. 3).

In this paper, The author will Take Le Petit Nicolas as an example to talk about French Children’s Literature. When Rene Goscinny was penning the stories of Nicolas,



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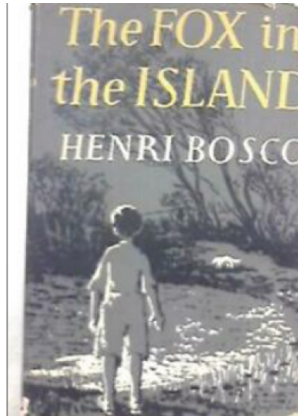
Fig. 1. Tistou les pouces verts



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Fig. 2. The Child And The River

starting from the year 1959, he was clearly having much fun with it. At that time he was already a successful humorist; the creation of Asterix, a glutinous Gaul who had many misadventures, had become very popular both home and abroad. But to me, his greatest accomplishment rests upon that one series: Le Petit Nicolas. It is a short stories series that was written in the view of a child, Nicolas, that humorously looks at contemporary lives and the mischief of children around him. By seeing the world as it is and in the eyes of a child, many interesting topics are explored humorously. It honestly should be one of the defining works in the field of French humor.



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Fig. 3. The Fox In The Island



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Fig. 4. The picture of Nicolas

2 About the Le Petit Nicolas

Our protagonist, named Nicolas (Fig. 4), is a primary school student in a male-only school in France. It should be pointed out that schools were male-only or female-only back then, and this means Nicolas plays with his buddies more than the occasional neighbor girl. Among these buddies, various archetypes are explored and innovated by the author, like the bookworm Agnan, the glutton Alceste, the hot-headed Eudes, and so on. Other recurring characters include the teacher, Nicolas' father and mother, and the Nicolas family's neighbour Bledurt [4].

One of the most interesting aspects of the stories is that their perspective is that of a young child. We all know that kids tend to misinterpret what the adults around them say; this was done many times by the author. For example, look at this particular sentence that opens a story:

I am very sad this morning, because Dad was very ill. He caught a cold. (Le Petit Nicolas, Book 8, Chapter 8) [5].

By exaggerating the extent of that cold, the reader will feel what Nicolas was feeling: he can't understand what exactly a cold is, but he surely worries about that. This is what called misinterpretation. Similar examples are here and there, and they convey an upbeat sense of humour.

Nicolas is depicted as level-headed but naive. His world is most certainly framed as very male-centred, because of the aforementioned male-only education he received. He likes watching cowboy movies, especially violent ones, like his classmates. He also enjoys playing football and dodgeball. These are ostensibly boys' interests. Once he was forced to take part in a girls' party, and he quickly became very uncomfortable [6].

A kind of specific and outstanding humour, which can be easily detected in the history of little Nicolas, results from the unique language and technique of story-telling. We should remember, that his quasi-memoir is a sort of parody of the story-telling habits typical of some little children. That is why René Goscinny uses very often some stylistic features such as wordy sentences with some frequently repeated elements. That is why also, all of Nicolas's adventures are reported in the first person by himself. Both descriptions were marked with repetition of some elements since first of all, it is the way to imitate the childish technique of story-telling. As we said, little Nicolas is the only narrator of his adventures at school and at home. To relate to them, he speaks with this characteristic of children emotional immersion. Obviously, Goscinny tries also to rebuild a childish and (ego-)centric point of view of little Nicolas, who exposes some flaws and misunderstandings (according to his little Nicolas) of adults and their "normal" world. We should also remind here, that one of the important characteristics of Goscinny's book is a distinct and clear emphasis on a child's experience [7].

Nicolas is an only child. His father teaches him how to study, and his mother tends to his daily life. This clever and mischievous kid really knows his parents very well. To play happily, he gladly kisses his mother and makes her happier by that. Sometimes he gets in a bad mood - like that one time when he would have lunch at school, he cried heartily (Book 1, Chapter 3). His cryings are sometimes real and often pretending, in order to glance at his mother's attitude. If his mother isn't paying much attention, he will only cry for a few minutes and let go of it. Nicolas' good nature, mischief, laughing and smiling, and even his threatening his parents with suicide or something similar - are all combined with childish innocence, and always prove to be funny to read [8].

Before the new term, Nicolas' mother buys him new stationery and a new bag, and his first thought is his classmates use bags to trap each other, and the stationery can make a fuss in class. And he breaks the plane-shaped sharpener with a mouse-shaped eraser. (Book 1, Chapter 1) He plays all the time, so he worries about his grades all the time. And he doesn't want to get the lowest grades if the guy who usually gets the lowest suddenly falls ill. This brief description is also fitting for a kid of Nicolas' age and will make the readers grin [8].

Nicolas also rejoices to hear his father's own mischievous doings when he was a student - which he knows from an old friend of his father. Examples are: pouring ink into one classmate's pockets and getting punished, and three zero points from a caricature of his teacher. Nicolas gets more and more excited just from hearing his dad's similar

doings as if he finally finds a person as naughty as himself, yet his father becomes more and more embarrassed as if he loses his dignity before his son. (Book 1, Chapter 4) This story doesn't aim to show the old-schooled proverb "like father like son", just to show Nicolas' naughtiness isn't too particular judging by his father. Children are often born to be mischievous. Nicolas and his partners' mischief is actually much more sophisticated and beneficial; after all, they don't bully others or say rude words, they just show pure teamwork spirit and the novel idea (for children of that age) of attacking the bad guys and helping the good guys.

The game they played in the wasteland called "Invincible Gang of Heroes" clearly shows Nicolas and his partners' esteem for heroes and, moreover, justice. They "fight the bad ones, protect the nice ones and catch the villains". (Book 1, Chapter 2) As imaginative and fictitious as this game setting can be, they show that the children are developing these precious ideas and concepts themselves. These playing, different from the children before them, and the deep ideas within, show the development of our society and civilization.

3 Conclusion

Looking at the development of French children's literature over the centuries, we can find that it has a distinct brand of the times and the characteristics of the century: it achieved the initial historical consciousness in the "controversy between ancient and modern" in the 17th century; the 18th century was accompanied by enlightenment. The dissemination of ideological trends has completed the construction of modern children's views; the 19th century has gone through a golden age against the background of the brilliant French literature of the same time; The century landscape with bright main colors in the past centuries has a very different century style. This intrinsic connection between the rhythm of the historical development of French children's literature and the natural sequence of the changing centuries may be a coincidence, but it does constitute a unique and interesting fact of historical development.

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