



MODERN PROBLEMS IN EDUCATION AND THEIR SCIENTIFIC
SOLUTIONS

THE REPRESENTATION OF CHILDREN'S CHARACTERS IN
ENGLISH DRAMA OF THE 20TH AND 21ST CENTURIES

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Abstract. The representation of children's characters occupies an important place in English drama of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. During this period, the dramatic portrayal of children underwent significant transformation from idealized and symbolic representations toward psychologically complex and socially conscious characters. Children are presented not only as innocent and vulnerable figures but also as active participants who reflect social conflicts, family problems, cultural changes, and moral dilemmas. This thesis examines the development of children's characters in English drama and focuses on their social, psychological, symbolic, and dramaturgical functions. Particular attention is given to the representation of childhood, family relationships, identity, social inequality, and the relationship between children and the adult world. The study demonstrates that children's characters provide dramatists with an effective means of exploring broader social and cultural issues.

Keywords: English drama, children's characters, childhood, dramaturgy, identity, social issues, psychological representation.

Introduction. The representation of children has occupied a significant position in English literature and drama, particularly throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. The image of the child in dramatic works reflects changing cultural attitudes toward childhood, family, education, social responsibility, and individual identity. As English drama developed from traditional forms toward modern, realistic, psychological, and socially oriented modes of expression, children's characters also acquired more complex and diverse functions. In earlier dramatic representations, children were often associated with innocence, purity, imagination, and hope. However, twentieth-century dramatists increasingly portrayed children as independent personalities whose experiences are influenced by family relationships, social conditions, economic circumstances, and cultural expectations. As a result, the child character became an important means of exploring broader social and psychological problems. The development of realism and social drama contributed significantly to this transformation. Children and adolescents began to appear as characters affected by poverty, social inequality, family conflict, loneliness, and generational tensions. At the same time, psychological approaches to characterization enabled dramatists to explore children's emotions, fears, desires, and perceptions of the adult world in greater depth. In twenty-first-century English drama, the





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representation of children has become even more multidimensional. Contemporary playwrights address issues such as identity, multiculturalism, migration, social inclusion, education, family transformation, and the influence of modern technology. Children are increasingly represented not simply as passive recipients of adult decisions but as individuals capable of expressing their own perspectives and participating actively in dramatic conflicts. The study of children's characters is therefore important for understanding the evolution of English drama and changing cultural concepts of childhood. This thesis aims to examine the artistic, social, psychological, and dramaturgical characteristics of children's representation in English drama of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries and to identify the major transformations in their literary interpretation.

Main Part. The representation of children in twentieth-century English drama is characterized by considerable diversity. One of the important tendencies is the transition from the idealized image of the child toward a more realistic and psychologically complex representation. In earlier dramatic traditions, children were frequently associated with innocence, purity, imagination, and hope. However, twentieth-century drama increasingly presented childhood as a complex period affected by social and psychological circumstances. Children could experience loneliness, family conflicts, poverty, discrimination, and difficulties in communication with adults. A notable example of the symbolic representation of childhood can be found in J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. Peter represents eternal childhood, imagination, freedom, and resistance to the responsibilities associated with adulthood. The dramatic conflict between childhood and adulthood is therefore expressed through the contrast between Peter's world and the adult world. At the same time, social realism introduced a different approach to children and young people. In plays dealing with working-class life and social inequality, young characters often become representatives of particular social environments. Their experiences demonstrate how economic and cultural conditions influence individual development. Another important aspect is the psychological representation of children. Modern drama pays increasing attention to children's emotions, fears, desires, conflicts, and relationships with parents. The child is not simply an object of adult protection but an individual with an independent psychological world. In the twenty-first century, the representation of children has become even more complex. Contemporary dramatists increasingly focus on identity, migration, multiculturalism, family transformation, technological change, education, and social inclusion. Children and adolescents are frequently represented as individuals who actively negotiate their identities within changing social environments. The contemporary child character can therefore be understood as a multidimensional figure. Such characters may simultaneously represent personal experience and broader social concerns. Their relationships with adults often reveal differences between generations, while their reactions to social circumstances provide an alternative perspective on contemporary society. Another significant feature is the increasing attention to the voice and agency of children. Modern and contemporary drama gives young characters opportunities to express their





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opinions and participate actively in conflicts. This development demonstrates a broader cultural shift toward recognizing children as individuals with their own perspectives and experiences.

The analysis demonstrates several major tendencies in the representation of children in twentieth- and twenty-first-century English drama. First, the image of the child has become increasingly individualized. Children are no longer presented exclusively as symbols of innocence but as psychologically complex characters with contradictory emotions and motivations. Second, children's characters have acquired an important social function. Through their experiences, dramatists explore issues such as family instability, economic inequality, education, social exclusion, and generational conflict. Third, the relationship between childhood and adulthood has become an important dramatic theme. Children frequently provide an alternative perspective from which adult behavior and social structures can be examined. Fourth, contemporary drama increasingly emphasizes children's agency and individual identity. This tendency distinguishes many modern representations from traditional models in which children primarily served symbolic or secondary dramatic purposes. Overall, the development of children's characters corresponds to broader changes in English dramatic aesthetics. The movement from symbolic and idealized representations toward realistic, psychological, and socially engaged portrayals demonstrates the changing understanding of childhood in English culture and literature.

Conclusion. The analysis of children's characters in English drama of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries demonstrates significant changes in the literary representation of childhood. During this period, children gradually developed from primarily symbolic figures associated with innocence, purity, and hope into complex dramatic personalities with individual psychological and social identities. The study shows that children's characters perform several important functions in English drama. They contribute to the development of dramatic conflicts, reveal family and social problems, express psychological experiences, and provide an alternative perspective on the adult world. Through children's experiences, playwrights address issues such as social inequality, family relationships, loneliness, identity, education, cultural change, and generational conflict. Another important tendency is the growing emphasis on children's individuality and agency. In contemporary English drama, young characters are increasingly presented as active participants in social and interpersonal relationships rather than merely passive objects of adult influence. Their voices and experiences contribute to a deeper understanding of contemporary society. Therefore, the evolution of children's representation reflects broader changes in English dramatic thought and cultural attitudes toward childhood. The study of these characters provides valuable insight into the relationship between literary representation, social reality, and changing concepts of childhood in twentieth- and twenty-first-century English drama.





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