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Antoine de Saint-Exupery in his fairy tale story “The Little Prince” reflected an extremely touching connection between two living beings, and many people are probably able to learn from this connection in our time. When the Little Prince met the Fox, he told him about his rose, which he loved very much. Then the Fox answered him: "People have forgotten this truth. However, you must not forget her. We will always be responsible for those who have been tamed. And you are responsible for your rose..." These words run like a red line through the whole story, which I would like to analyze.

The title of this literary work is “Little Benjamin”. Its author is Laura Elizabeth Richards. She was an American poet, biographer, and children's essayist. She composed more than 90 books including stories, verse, and a few literary works for children. One well-known children's sonnet is her scholarly drivel verse Eletelephony. The Encyclopedia Britannica, in its overview of “Children's writing”, alludes to “the topflight drivel verses of Laura E. Richards, whose collected rhymes in *Tirra Lirra* (1932) will nearly bear comparison with those of Edward Lear.” The most famous verses of Laura E. Richards are “The Hurdy-Gurdy”, “Merry-Go-Round”. One of the most striking features of Laura Richards' work is the use of expressive, emotional language. Her poems are filled with energy and passion, which allow her to convey complex emotional states and experiences. She often uses vivid and imaginative metaphors to describe her thoughts and feelings. No less vivid stories are “Snow-White, or The House in the Wood”, “Harry in England: Being the Partly-true Adventures of H.R. in the Year 1857”. It is impossible to name the exact date of creation of “Little Benjamin”, since there is no data, but it could be assumed that it was released in the turn of the late 19th - early 20th century. It is worth noting that the work of Laura Elizabeth Richards is of great importance for literature and art. Combining bright language and emotionality, she addresses important topics and makes her voice audible. Her works continue to inspire and excite readers around the world, despite the fact that she is not listed in the circles of world-famous writers of her time.

Therefore, I propose to start our analysis with the title of this text, since it, heading the narrative, sets the tone for the whole work. On the one hand, it can be called predictable, since it is obvious that we are talking about a little child named by this name. However, on the other hand, nothing prevents you from labeling the title as metaphorical. It is hardly possible to guess in advance, what the story will be about. Perhaps about a child or, after all, about an older person with such a curious and strange nickname, or maybe not about a person at all. In addition, the text is divided into two parts, which also have their own names. The first chapter is titled "Then is little Benjamin their ruler." This is unusual, considering that even here there are some contradictions. There is a lack of accuracy, which incredibly attracts the reader to get acquainted with this story. We can only guess what this chapter is about before reading it. Maybe it's about a small child, unruly, disobedient, ill-mannered, spoiled, nimble. Alternatively, maybe not about a child, but some real ruler. The second part, by the way, has no naming, which seems incomprehensible, but this also has its own explanation - the theme of the first part continues in the second, but to prove this point of view, it is necessary to consider the plot as a whole.

In my opinion, the story takes place in England, around the end of the nineteenth century. This period of time is indicated not only by the years of the writer's life, but also by the fact that the female character of "Little Benjamin" had the right to work as a dressmaker. If you look into the history of the United Kingdom, you can find a wonderful fact that legally women could work in textile factories since 1833, but the legal status was regulated towards the end of the nineteenth century, which justifies Golden's words in relation to his daughter: "Ruth will make a first-rate dressmaker, I am told by those who know". Up until then, a «Glass Ceiling» policy prevented women from moving up the career ladder, and therefore achieving success in one area or another. It is also worth noting that the bundle in which the child was placed under the door was a flannel machine-embedded blanket. The fact that the story takes place within the framework of England is also indicated by the surname of the whole family, as well as their way of life. The surname Golden appeared in England in the XI century and comes from the English word "gold", which means "gold".

In addition, I draw your attention to the religion of family members. According to all the canons, this is Catholicism. This story could not have happened, for example, in the United States, since at that time the states did not share a love for this religion. The Catholic Church was accused of theological inconsistency and hostility to the state values of the country. Protestant leaders identified the Catholic Church with the whore of Babylon described in the Book of Revelation. Anti-Catholicism manifested itself in a very strange way: Catholics were robbed, killed, and their churches burned. And in Britain, on the contrary, many measures were taken that could correct the attitudes of the population to various religions. I admit that the story is set at the end of the 19th - the beginning of the 20th century, also because there is not a single mention of modern

appliances, the Internet, or, conversely, things characteristic of everyday life of more distant centuries.

The subject of the story may be defined as one day, a child was abandoned and adopted by the Golden family. Time passed and the child, who was named Benjamin, grew up into an insidious and exceptionally dynamic holy terror. Each elder child repeatedly complained to his father, hinting that it was time to send Benjamin to an orphanage, but the father, who sincerely loved his foster son, began to appeal to the conscience of his offspring, explaining that after his death everyone would find a place in the world, except Benjamin, who has nothing else but the Golden family. Touched by his words, the children beamed with genuine affection towards their younger brother and finally accepted him into their hearts.

The message of the literary work runs as self-sacrifice and faith not only in a miracle, but also in human kindness. It was not for nothing that at the beginning of the analysis I remembered the "Little Prince" and the words of the Fox that we are responsible for those whom we have tamed. This story is not only about the softness of the human soul. It teaches readers to be careful about other people, especially those who see them as protection and support, as well as to be responsible for their decisions concerning the lives of loved ones.

In my opinion, the plot of this story is quite complicated, but gripping. The main plot of the story is slowly developing in the direction of a violently dramatic incident and a touching, capable of "enveloping" the warmth of the readers' hearts with the end. The story is devoid of minor details and full of philosophical digressions. At first glance, it seems like a typical tender story, but if you dig deeper, you can trace the special meaning in every word written by the author. The charm of the story lies in its interesting plot and exciting situation. At the same time, he conveys deep thought, keen observation and sharpness of characterization. The plot structure of the story is closed, because it contains all the necessary elements: the exposition, the plot, the climax and the denouement.

The exposition takes place traditionally at the beginning of the story, where the author grabs our attention from the very first line. The author also introduces into the story the main characters. Laura E. Richards does not focus on the description of the house in which the Goldenes lived; she immediately gives each character for consideration, without singling out anyone. Although it is obvious that in the beginning the focus is on Adam, who finds the baby on the threshold.

Later the narration gains momentum and we get to know that the family consists of seven members: a mother, a father and their five children. After they found the child, they realize that now they have power over his life and they will have to make an important decision whether to take him to their family or still

refuse. Anyway, they accept the child and name him Benjamin. Anyway, they accept the child and name him Benjamin.

The climax of the story is rather vivid and quite unexpected; there is a jump in time. A whole decade flashes before my eyes, during which the life of the family changes in many ways. We learn that the mother has died, and the children have grown up enough to help their father maintain the house. However, living in the idyll established by the parents, the heirs are not able to agree with the pranks of the youngest. They are always complaining to their father about Benjamin's mischief, noting that he will smear the door handles, then break the glass, then trample the geraniums, and this is only a small part of his atrocities.

The denouement is quite unpredictable; an external conflict arises in relation to a small child, which is surprising, because it is so strange when adults cannot try to re-educate a tiny man and try to correct his uncontrollable character. There is also an internal conflict: it is impossible to predict what the reflections of each family member will lead to, because there are many thoughts swarming in everyone's minds. It seems to them that Benjamin is a true dissonance that has brought discord into their family. But it is difficult for them to imagine their existence without this "curly rose, dirty, ragged, laughing, painting, little Benjamin".

The story is told in the third person narration. It allows us to regard each character's point of view. The composition of the literary work is level, because all the elements are given in their logical and chronological sequence. Narrative forms, used in the story, are the following: the exposition, the narration, the description and the dialogue.

The protagonist is Benjamin; the antagonist is the Golden family. It is difficult to single out minor characters here, since each of them undergoes some spiritual development when faced with internal experiences. In the beginning, Benjamin, who is the main character, since his existence within the framework of the plot is extremely necessary, is represented as an ordinary baby. He is described as «the rosy, dimpled creature, the yellow floss ruffled all over his head, his absurd little mouth open in a beaming smile». Moreover, admittedly, he does not lose his natural sweetness after ten years. He, on the contrary, only blossoms, turning into a playful boy full of vital energy and strength. His foster mother in the first part looks modest, but attracts with her openness and warmth. Perhaps this is an obese woman, since after so many births she could gain weight and become rounded. The author notes her «strong arms», which became such as a result of the fact that she did a lot of housework. She is religious, sensitive, affectionate and caring. Father Golden is her complete opposite. There is a strong core inside him, as well as a strong spirit and self-confidence. He is able to stand up for his family, being a full-fledged breadwinner. He probably has the last word in all family aspects. But he also truly loves all his children, including the foundling. The female half of the kids are funny and frivolous, with the exception of the elder sister, Mary,

who is distinguished by seriousness and meekness, but she is the one who is closer to Benjamin. Their brothers are responsible, because according to all the old English generally accepted traditions, the father paid great attention to the upbringing of boys, trying to make decent men out of them.

There is a scarcely perceptible detail related specifically to nurturing. The children offer to flog Benjamin. Just like that, this thought could not appear in their minds. Therefore, we can assume that this method of calling for discipline is very characteristic of a typical family of the late 19th century, which once again brings us back to the setting and indicates the correctness of the designated period.

In general, I think that for all these ten years, the vast majority of children simply could not accept the fact that they were forced to live with a non-native brother. There is such a proverb as "Faults are thick where love is thin". If they really appreciated their foundling, they would strive to avoid noticing his pranks and would forgive him a lot, indirectly trying to accustom him to order. I dare assume that there is some fault of the parents in this. They probably paid a lot of attention to Benjamin, which caused the jealousy of his sisters and brothers. Moreover, this appeal of the father to the children at the end of the story saves the children from anger, as they understand that they are also loved and dear to their parent. It is impossible to define clear villains or heroes, although the father's words make him sublime. That is, he seems to become a link between his children and breaks the ice.

The story is full of emotionally colored words, which show the author's knowledge for a deep psychological analysis of his characters: jubilation, splendor, grieve, abominable, guilty, bashfully, complain, scarifying, reverence, bitter, eerily, etc. For example, this is used when father Golden is considering taking care of the abandoned child and mother was already taking care of Benjamin with might and main: «Father Golden's mind moved slowly, and while he was meditating a reply, his wife issued various commands, and went through some intricate feminine manoeuvres, with the effect of increased fluffiness on the baby's part. In five minutes she was feeding the child with warm milk from a spoon, and proclaiming that he ate "like a Major!"». The use of intricate vocabulary demonstrates differences not only in the character of the spouses, but also in their behavior, through which gender stereotypes manifest themselves. A man is busy with serious problems, leading the whole family, while a woman devotes herself to children. This is also in the moment when his offspring come to the father with complaints. After listening to everyone, he also expresses his opinion, while no one dares to interrupt him; everyone listens to him carefully and cautiously.

There are some international words: pause, plaintive, son, machine-embroidered, perceptibly, Major, Bible, geraniums, etc. I have found such phrasal verbs, as look down, come forward, go on, and turn round and so on. I would also like to mention the proper names Mary, Father Golden, Mother Golden, Adam,

Benjamin, Maltese, Lemuel, Ruth, Joseph, Bill, Richard, Arthur, Charlie, Reginald, Judah, Zebulun and Nephtali. In addition, the text is full of many topics related to religion (the Bible, Amen, names taken from Holy Scripture, for Christ's sake), children (baby's clothes, boys, girls, twelve-year-old, child, "A-goo!", baby, a winning gurgle, kid, new kite's a buster, etc.), and so on.

The story is replete with means of artistic depiction, which gives it colorfulness and attractiveness. The following stylistic devices are used in the text: allusion («Zabulon and Naphtali are outlandish-sounding names," said Mother Golden»), anaphora («"No one can live a day in peace!" said Lemuel», «No dumb creature's life is safe!" said Joe»), cacophony («Bro'rer-Adam-an'-Lem»), epithets («beaming», «outlandish-sounding», «rollicking», etc.), onomatopoeia («A-goo!»), simile («like pink shells», «like a sunflower»), aposiopesis («"Well, but, father--", "Father dear, about little Benny--", "Yes, sir--poor little Ben!"»), and much more.

This story is written in a way that it makes readers see in it a hidden meaning close to true symbolism. It is this current in the literature that permeates the lines of this text. It all starts with the name – the name of the sixth child of the Golden family. Therefore, his name is Benjamin. The name was chosen randomly through the Bible. It is of Jewish origin and means "son of my right hand" or "my right hand". This in itself indicates the role of Benjamin in the biblical story: he was the beloved son of the prolific patriarch Jacob, who was born to him last and from his beloved wife Rachel. The symbolism here consists of such components as the fate of the biblical character, similar to the fate of the hero of the story by Laura E. Richards, and his attitude to the world. Being the last child, Benjamin also serves as the personification of the fullness of the family in Being. Nevertheless, as soon as he was born, and the family was finally formed, it immediately began to disintegrate with the death of his mother. The same situation can be seen in "Little Benjamin". As soon as the mother died, discord began, the children began to quarrel and swear more often.

Based on the compatibility of biblical names with the characters of children, it is also possible to explain why Adam finds the baby at the door. He is the first to encounter the future brother, because his name allows him to be the first. Adam, according to the Bible, was the first man on earth. Mary and Joseph, being one of the oldest children, according to traditional principles, are able to take responsibility for their younger brothers and sisters.

If we turn to the Bible, we can recall that Mary and Joseph are the parents of Jesus Christ, with whom the characters of Laura E. Richards are quite comparable. Joseph is stricter towards Benjamin, performing a certain function of a father, Mary, on the contrary, is extremely kind and loyal to her brother, forgives him everything and gently instructs him. It is also not surprising why the mother always somehow protects her son Lemuel and gives him advice on how to behave when he starts to resist and argue in every possible way. This face of the biblical

king is mentioned in Holy Scripture only once, but from a small passage one can understand how his mother interrupts his vision with her call for chastity, justice, mercy and abstinence.

The name Ruth is also endowed with a magnificent meaning. By nature, she is quite a hardworking girl. There was a separate story in the Bible about a girl named Ruth, who worked tirelessly in the fields.

Another curious fact is the number of members of the Golden family. At the beginning of the story, there are eight or six children and two parents. Eight people survived the World Flood. On the one hand, here the number eight symbolizes a new beginning – the beginning of a new era for humanity. On the other hand, it means that only by falling in love with each other and maintaining strong family ties, each of the Golden Ones is able to live happily. Despite the fact that in the second part the mother dies and they become like seven, their mother continues to be their family. Memory about her is preserved in the hearts of her children and her husband.

Returning to the discussion about the name of Benjamin, it seems that both personalities from both the Old and New Testaments are used in the text. At least, I want to believe it, because there is a special moment in the Bible. It's about how Jesus Christ met a woman with a young son named Benjamin. The boy was disobedient and constantly interrupted the Savior, which offended his mother. Then Christ tells two parables and at the end teaches the child to be a generous and open person. He says, "Be kind. Live in peace with each other. Do not grumble. Do not judge. Then God will be with you. As a blessing and gratitude for the faith that you have in Me, I give you My peace." Probably, the Golden family members learned such a lesson from what happened. And when they agreed to fly a kite with Benjamin, their voices merged into a single exclamation", only because they realized the important thing. The children realized that they were connected to each other regardless of blood and flesh. They were raised by the same parents who would like their heirs to be cheerful, successful, good-natured.

In conclusion, we should say that the story is full of burning issues. It urges us to be sensitive and attentive to our loved ones, to appreciate every minute spent with them. Family is a place where we know that we will be loved and accepted regardless of our shortcomings and mistakes. This unconditional love helps us to develop, be more confident in ourselves and achieve great success. Family also helps us develop and strengthen our values and beliefs. They teach us moral principles, ethics and much more. Thanks to this exchange of values, we become better versions of ourselves. In addition, this story teaches us to be responsible for our words and actions, and forces us to take into account their consequences and try not to harm others.

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“Bababadalgharaghtakamminarronkonnbronntonneronntuonnthunntrova
rrhounawnskawntooohooordenenthurnuk!” One would say this is a sheer
nonsense, and indeed it is, literary nonsense, to be more precise. This quotation
belongs to the illustrious Irish writer, James Joyce. However, long before him, at
the end of the 19th century, an American children’s writer, undeservedly forgotten
now, became the popularizer of this genre. Her name was Laura Elizabeth
Richards.

Laura E. Richards is regarded as the first poet of nonsense literature for
children to achieve prominence. Certainly, one should admit it sounds ironic,
considering the fact that you will hardly ever see her on the same list with Lewis
Carroll, or for example Edward Lear, whose “American Sister” she is often called.
Inspired by Lear, Richards created her own, unique works with a completely
different subject matter, which appealed to many children and adults of that time.
Nevertheless, it did not prevent her from sinking into oblivion after death, just as
many women writers of the 19th century, remaining not a “sister” of Lear, but
rather a black sheep of the literary family, not so brilliant or, basically, somehow
not good enough. And even though the name of Laura Elizabeth Richards scarcely
rings a bell among today’s readers, it does not make her contribution to literature,
not only the children’s one, any less significant, and her works, both poems and
short stories, like “Little Benjamin”, less worthy of attention. It is this story, which
is not large in size, but in conceptual content, that I would like to analyze further.

“Little Benjamin” is a short story narrated from the third point of view. The
reader gets acquainted with the Golden’s – the family of two spouses and their
five children, on whose doorstep a basket with an infant appears. The family
decides to keep the baby and bring him up as their own. Ten years later, when
Mother Golden is already dead, the five elder children come to their father to
discuss their foster sibling’s mischievous behaviour. When they decide that the
kid should stay in the family no matter what, it turns out that the younger one’s
naughty actions were just an April Fool’s prank. So, they end up rejoicing and
flying a kite together.

Basically, the plot of the story is rather uncomplicated. It’s chronological
for there are no any flashbacks, and equally rich both in events and emotions. The
exposition introduces the setting and the main characters, though in very little
detail. From the beginning we happen to learn that we are going to deal with a
large family, all members of which, I tend to think, can rightfully be considered
the major characters, since they play the same role in the development of the plot.

This is especially clearly seen in the dialogues, in which both all the siblings and the two spouses take part (*"What is the matter, my son?" asked Father Golden. "Is Kitty hurt?" asked Mother Golden, anxiously. "Was it that dog of Jackson's?" cried Lemuel, Mary, Ruth and Joseph. "The cat isn't there!" said Adam*). Besides, considering the fact that the only obstacle for the Golden's to keep the child is a pressing responsibility (*"Father, what do you say?" "It's for you to say, mother;" said Father Golden. "It's to you the child was sent", "...and you've got care enough, as it is, mother, without taking on any more", "It's a great responsibility!" said Father Golden*), I can assume that the family is financially secured, being able to raise another child, and quite likely it belongs to the middle class. This is also confirmed by the future, prepared for the sons – the elder ones work in the office, and the younger one is going to enter college, which was not really common and available to everyone in the USA of that time (*"Adam and Lemuel, you are settled in the business, and looking forward to making homes of your own with worthy young women. Joseph is going to college, which is a new thing in our family, but one I approve"*). The girls, as expected, remain engaged in women's affairs – dressmaking and keeping the house. In general, this is all the information about the Golden family given to the reader, at least directly.

It would seem that this is only a background for what is happening, which does not, in fact, play a significant role in the story itself and exists only to make the narration a little brighter and more detailed. Reasoning about whether this indeed is the case leads to a key thought concerning the story: "Little Benjamin" can be viewed from two perspectives, at different levels of depth of analysis. On the one hand, Laura E. Richards is primarily a children's writer, and from this point of view, the story has a simple moral lying on the surface: do not rush to judge a person without knowing the motives of their actions, or at least without checking the calendar just in case. On the other hand, Richards is a product of her time in a way, a writer at the turn of the century, largely influenced by the Industrial Revolution, European literature, including the English one affected by the crisis of faith, and of course the main literary sentiments reflecting crucial changes in society of that time. After all, not every children's writer alludes to the Bible five times per page. That is why I cannot help but dig a little deeper into the text, and I would like to start with the literary means Richards resorts to in order to bring the main issue of the story home to the reader, then moving consistently to these ideas themselves.

The most vivid stylistic device used by the author is intertextuality presented by numerous allusions to the Bible. What is interesting about it is that Laura Richards alludes to Scripture on various levels. So, I am going to describe these references from the most superficial to the less obvious ones. First of all, the symbolism manifests itself in the family name – Golden, which we know from the very first line of the story (*"I think the kitty wants to come in," said Mother Golden*). Contrary to stereotypes, "golden" means not only earthly riches in literature, but also knowledge, wisdom and faith. A hint of religious theme is

confirmed in the same line when the reader is presented with the eldest son, Adam (*“Won’t you go and let him in, Adam?”*). A little later, with the appearance of the baby in the house, to whom the family is trying to come up with a name, we find out that all the Golden children – Adam, Lemuel, Joseph, Mary and Ruth – are purposefully called by biblical names. Therefore, for a better understanding of the characters, it is necessary to refer to the description of their namesakes in Scripture. Adam, the first human and the one who was condemned by God to labour on the Earth, is described in the Bible as a strong, intelligent and rational man. Lemuel is a biblical king of uncertain identity, quite known for meek temper and following the advice of his wise mother. Joseph is his father’s favourite son sold by the jealous brothers into slavery in Egypt, where he rises second-in-command. He is faithful, hard-working and fair, but he is also said to bring the reports of his siblings’ mischief to their father. Mary, the mother of Jesus, can be characterized by divine purity, heroic patience and even blind obedience. Ruth, one of the five women mentioned in the genealogy of Jesus, demonstrates kindness, loyalty to her family. Finally, Benjamin, after whom the infant is named in the end, is the youngest of Jacob’s twelve sons, and he is referred to as a ravenous wolf by his father. Taking into account this information, it becomes obvious that little Benjamin in the second part of the story contrasts with his siblings as much as Benjamin with the others in the Bible. Moreover, all the Golden brothers and sisters are a mirror image of their biblical namesakes: rational, clever Adam (*“Adam, who was sixteen, and knew most things”, “Adam is too strict”*); meek, close to the mother Lemuel (*“...Lemuel, who was sensitive, and suffered under his cognomen”*); Joseph, receiving leniency as the youngest (*“Bring the Bible, and let us see what it opens at. Joseph, you are the youngest, you shall open it”*); gentle, obedient Mary and Ruth (*“I do love the child so, I’m not strict enough”, “...and you all, except Mary, come to me with complaints of him”, “She always said the youngest was nearest heaven”*); and surely completely different from all of them Benjamin (*“He is turning out wild and mischievous”, “He is the torment of the whole family”*), who, by the way, “trampled all over Mary’s geraniums” – flowers that commonly symbolize happiness, protection and love. Thus, the writer one more time emphasizes the kid’s malicious nature contrasting with his siblings’ gentle and cordial one.

However, intertextuality is manifested not only in the names of the major characters. The allusion to religion is quite distinguishable in the episode describing in great detail the atmosphere in the house with the appearance of the baby. This paragraph stands out sharply against the background of the rest of the text, which mostly has a dialogical composition. The passage describes the Golden’s gathered together, and here the selection of the epithets used is especially noteworthy: *“a beaming smile”, “beaming above him”, “faces lighted up with unusual excitement”, “all the light in the room seemed to centre on the yellow flossy curls against her breath”*. At the same time, the writer speaks of the faces of those sitting around as being *“placid”, “honest”, “sober”*. In addition,

the author mentions a “*cabinet organ*”, which was, I dare to say, not the most common instrument in an ordinary American family, but rather an attribute of a church. The very beginning of the paragraph is worthy of attention too: “*it was a pretty picture*”, and then “*a pleasant, homelike picture*”. All this helps the reader understand that what seems to be no more than a family description, in fact is a metaphor of the icon, which is often characterized by both beams of light and calm, peaceful faces. The presence of a church theme is, besides, proved by the cabinet organ and the position of Benjamin on the mother’s lap, identical to the pose of Christ pictured on Theotokos (“*All eyes were fixed on the baby, who, now full of warm milk, sat throned on Mother Golden’s knee, blinking content*”). The same thought is referred to by the mention of a photograph of Mother Golden after her death, which stands like an icon on the father’s desk, and to which he mentally turns in a difficult moment (*He looked at a portrait that stood on his desk, a framed photograph of Mother Golden. Glancing once more at the portrait of Mother Golden, he turned and faced his children with grave looks. “Any harm done, Joseph?” asked Father Golden, glancing at the portrait on his desk*).

Undoubtedly, “Little Benjamin” is rather abundant in biblical allusions, though Laura Richards resorts to this stylistic device in a way atypical of most pieces of literature. Most authors usually draw examples of morality and virtuous behaviour from Scripture. So does Richards, but there is a certain nuance – she adds irony, the evil and almost comical one. An attentive reader notices this even in the first part of the story, when the family chooses a name for the infant. Deeply religious people, at first glance, almost take the word “waif”, which means a thin person who looks as if they do not have enough food, for a Christian name (“*It said his father is a Waif; but I don’t take that to be a Christian name. Surname, more likely, shouldn’t you say, father?*”). The children themselves are not proud of having biblical names, but rather the opposite – consider them hideous (“*But Bible names are so ugly!*” objected Lemuel). Mother Golden calls the right to bear such a name a privilege (“*All our own children have Bible names, father; don’t let us cut the little stranger off from his privilege*”), but chooses it by asking her son to open a random page and trying to find the least strange-sounding one (“*Zebulun and Nephtali are outlandish-sounding names,*” said Mother Golden. “*I never knew but one Nephtali*”, and he squinted. “*Benjamin shall be this child’s name*”). It is even more ironic that there is an expression “the Benjamin of the family”, which literally means the youngest child. The obvious irony is also felt in the fact that the infant is mistaken for a kitty (“*I think the kitty wants to come in*”, “*Is Kitty hurt?*”), which is usually associated with innocence, helplessness. On the other hand, a few lines below Benjamin is referred to as a Maltese cat (*the whole family looked up cheerfully, expecting to see Aladdin, the great Maltese cat, enter with his stately port*). A cat itself often symbolizes evil, mysticism, independence. It becomes a hint to the reader what the child is going to be like when he grows up. Besides, it is rather remarkable that the cat’s name is Aladdin, which means “excellence, nobility of faith”. So, it is impossible not to notice in

this fact both another reference to religion in the story, and a witty usage of irony, given that in the course of the text Benjamin will show qualities quite opposite to nobility and what is praised by faith. The second part of the story appears to be more mundane. The main characters, already adult, correspond less and less to the traits of their Scripture namesakes. They complain about their adopted brother, not showing sufficient understanding, love and patience for the little child, but when they face the necessity to take on responsibility, they hypocritically renounce their words (*"I guess, if Benny went, I'd go after him pretty quick!"* said Joseph, who had been loudest in his complaint against the child). These piety and virtue turn out to be powerless against the disobedient ten-year-old kid.

One may wonder why the author saturates the short story with such an incredible amount of direct and indirect references to the Bible and religion in general, especially in a fairly ironic form. I quoted James Joyce at the beginning of the essay for a reason. He is considered one of the most famous representatives of modernism and literary nonsense in particular. Modernism, accompanying the rapid Industrial Revolution, emerged as a response to the conversion to rational thinking. In the USA the process of modernism development was affected by the fact that American society, influenced by technological process, found itself caught between the growing doubt about what is written in the book of Genesis, unreliability of religion as a way of explaining the world on the one hand, and the increasing religious movements in reaction on the other. At the same time, craving for renewal affected men of letters as well, who were looking for new, experimental, sometimes absurd ways to reflect the changes taking place in society. The adherents of nonsense literature, which appeared a little earlier than modernism, had similar motives and the way of thinking. Being a fundamentally new way of writing, it balances elements which make sense with the ones that do not by an excess of meaning, rather than the lack of it. Therefore, in my opinion, Laura Richard's text reveals the features of a gradually emerging modernism. The exaggerated number of her allusions to the Bible is an intentional device, reminding that she is first of all a nonsensical writer (though it should be noted, that "Little Benjamin" is not a piece of nonsense literature, but rather the text that has some elements characteristic of it). To some extent, it reflects the pressure of religious groups and their influence on middle class at the end of the 19th and at the beginning of the 20th centuries. Along with that, it makes it possible to ironically show the inconsistency of religious ideas in secular, everyday life, their isolation from reality. Apart from that, perhaps Benjamin himself, being almost Christ-like at the beginning of the story, personifies the path of religion in the USA at that time. At first, he was warmly welcomed as a family member, giving some hope for a beaming future. Then he ceases to meet expectations and requirements of the family, or society. Nevertheless, like faith, Benjamin cannot just be left and rejected. Eventually the Goldens realize their mistake, and he becomes a part of their life again. I assume the kite they decide to fly together at

the end symbolizes innocence, freedom and the newfound hope that patience, religion may give.

Against the background of such a vividly expressed intertextuality, it may seem that the idea of the contradictory place of religion in the life of the middle class of American society is the only one in the story. However, this is not quite true. As I have mentioned earlier, Richards, like many women writers of that time, although she achieved recognition, was not taken seriously by many contemporaries, and was evaluated only in comparison with male writers. At the same time, in her own family she had an example of a strong, intelligent woman – her mother was a social activist, suffragette and a writer too – and of a no less worthy man – Richards' father was a doctor who had founded the Perkins School for the Blind. Such an instance to follow from both sides influenced the formation of Laura's sturdy character and life position. Therefore, feeling a special pressure on herself as a female writer who was forced to put three times more effort than men, she could not help but touch on the aspect of gender stereotypes in her works, without fear of being judged.

Turning specifically to "Little Benjamin", I would like to note that I find it quite exceptional that Laura Richards considers this issue not only from the point of view of women, but also from the point of view of men, showing the manifestation of socially imposed roles that everyone is forced to perform. Thus, she presents their burdensomeness for both sexes, and this idea seems to me quite progressive for the beginning of the 20th century. Firstly, the reader clearly sees that the father is an authority in the Golden family. This is evident both from his condescending, indulgent treatment of children (*"Your mother's smarter than any of you to-day. Go and help her, some of you!"*), and from the fact that the sons behave mainly in such a way as to meet his expectations (*He came forward, the boys edging forward too, encouraged by another masculine presence. The boys, gaining more and more confidence, were now close at her knee, and watched the process with eager eyes. Adam and Lemuel exchanged a glance of grave inquiry... and both gave something like a sigh of relief*). For them, the father is a key figure, indisputably right in everything (*The young people obeyed, wondering, but not questioning. Father Golden was head of the house. The brothers and sisters uttered an exclamation, half surprised, half acquiescent.*). The theme of masculinity is expressed in the fact that the sons, having matured, take the image of an authoritative figure with the qualities inherent in a real man – they are stern, serious, even grave (*...looked earnestly at their father. Adam turned round; his face was very grave. The serious young faces were all intent upon him; in some, the intentness seemed deepening into trouble, but no one spoke or moved... quiet-looking men, with grave, "set" faces; the hair already beginning to edge away from their temples*). Secondly, Laura Richards naturally reflects the role of women in the family, including the attitude to motherhood and children. Thus, the latter are considered exclusively women's affairs, in which a man does not interfere (*The girls pressed forward eagerly; the boys hung back, and glanced at their*

father; these were women's matters). Although the appearance of the new child affects the whole family, Father Golden prefers to delegate this responsibility to the mother (*"It's for you to say, mother;" said Father Golden. "It's to you the child was sent"*). The attitude to motherhood is especially pronounced in how the spouses react to the idea of keeping the child for upbringing. If Father Golden slowly thinks about the decision, without much insight into what is happening, then Mother Golden actively takes action, immediately starting to take care of the baby (*Father Golden's mind moved slowly, and while he was meditating a reply, his wife issued various commands, and went through some intricate feminine manoeuvres, with the effect of increased fluffiness on the baby's part. In five minutes she was feeding the child with warm milk from a spoon, and proclaiming that he ate "like a Major!"*). Just like their mother, in the future, when the girls grow up, they are expected not to go to work like brothers, but to be keepers of the hearth (*Mary, the dear eldest daughter, now a woman grown, grave and mild, trying hard to fill the place left empty these two years, since Mother Golden went smiling out of life. "Mary, you are the home-maker," the old man went on. "I hope that when I am gone this home will still be here, with you at the head of it. You are your mother's own daughter; there is no more to say."*). Finally, the clear separation between male and female is emphasized by the fact that the only reference to parents in the text is "Father Golden" and "Mother Golden". So, I assume that in the story Richards not only describes the gender stereotypes of that time, the contrast between the sexes and the expectations and requirements imposed on them, but also demonstrates that such a system is onerous, inconvenient for all members of society.

Summing up, I believe it is unquestionable that Laura Elizabeth Richards is an outstanding writer of her time, in whose literature the main trends of American society of the late 19th century are reflected. In her works full of sparkling irony, she manages to skillfully combine the intricacies of allusions, symbolism and metaphors, building a complex picture that is accessible to perception on many levels by both children and adults. "Little Benjamin" is an illustrative example of the fact that the works of children's writers are not necessarily simple and superficial. And it goes without saying – the fact that Laura Richards, a great writer and a bright representative of literary nonsense, was unfairly forgotten shortly after death, is literally nonsense that needs to be obviated.

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Have you ever wondered what way one should go through to learn what a challenge acceptance can be? We all tend to claim that there is a faculty for kindness and understanding towards any living creature in us but facing a situation when we have to show the promised approval and care not every person can open their heart for others without a qualm. The main characters of Laura E. Richards' fictional work "Little Benjamin" manage to find an answer to this difficult question.

The exposition of the story tells us about a striking event that happens in an ordinary Christian family of the Goldens. One day the eldest son of the family, Adam, finds a basket with a plaintive crying baby left all alone at the Goldens' house threshold. There is also a note of appeal for taking care of the poor orphan. All the family hesitates if they should take care of the foundling or send him to some institution where the boy will get the necessary upbringing. Father Golden and the boys feel sceptical about the new possible member of the family. The author shows us that these characters don't dive headlong but take the happenings not without common sense, their way of speaking is a little bit sardonic and it strengthens the impression the reader gets. The weight of responsibility that baby adoption brings about is more argumentative to them than personal sympathy. However, the mother and the girls are in rapture at the baby's prettiness and are full of compassion for the lonely creature. Looking after the little boy seems to be a great but still undoubtedly pleasant responsibility for them. The female part of the family is shown as more merciful and affectionate. They can't pass over one's grief. So Mother Golden insists on keeping the precious child for a spell and going to this theme when he ends up with his teeth and stomach troubles. The orphan is named after the Bible character like the other Goldens' children. And it hints to us that it's destined for Benjamin to stay in the family a little longer.

The conflict of the story takes place ten years after the boy's adoption. Benjamin is an active mischievous boy that constantly causes trouble to his elder siblings. The endurance of the Goldens' children who are already young men and women who are going to take charge of the house in the near future is almost over. They come to their father complaining of little Benjamin's behavior and Father Golden again raises the question of the boy's future. His proposal of sending the boy away appears to be a climax of Laura E. Richards' story as it makes the Goldens' children think about their attitude toward Little Benjamin. They remember all the boy's pampering but also all his best intentions. And how can it be: after some deliberation all the people come to the idea that the orphan often

teasing them and making them mad has touched all their hearts. Their love for him is much stronger than the irritation they have felt from time to time so the final decision of the family is to keep the boy in the family forever.

Their hope for goodness is not a mistake. The resolution of the story happens when the little boy comes to his foster family telling them his point of view on all the mischiefs that have made his siblings so furious. Benjamin didn't mean to do any harm, on the contrary, he wished to help his closest ones.

The narrator of the story takes the position of an objective observer who only tells what he sees and hears without expressing any personal feelings to the characters. To my mind, it serves to keep the reader intrigued by Little Benjamin's fate. It seems that the question of keeping the foundling was exhausted in the first part of the story. Further development is an absolute surprise that keeps us empathizing with the character.

But can we claim that Laura E. Richards doesn't give us a ground to make a surmise that the boy will stay with the Goldens? All the hints are hidden behind the literary means that the author uses.

We see a lot of contractions, for instance, when Father Golden supposes that his wife is the woman "with the kind eyes" that can take care of the orphan, she responds "Do you suppose 'twas me that was meant?" Also, there are a lot of informal words and phrases in the dialogues, especially in the boys' ones. For example, "Joe, you chuckle-head!" said Adam, who was sixteen, and knew most things. "How can he talk, when he hasn't got any teeth?" The author uses colloquialisms to make the speech of the characters more realistic and to bring them closer to the readers.

Talking about the tropes we can't avoid the symbolism of the central characters' descriptions and even names. It is said in the story that all the Goldens' children are named after biblical heroes and when the orphan is found left on the doorstep Mother Golden says: "It (a Bible name) gives a child a good start, so to say, and makes him think when he hears himself named, or ought so to do. All our own children have Bible names, father; don't let us cut the little stranger off from his privilege". We see the allegory to the Bible in the children's descriptions: Adam, who is the eldest son, is named after the first man on the Earth according to the Holy Scripture, Mary, a "grave and mild" young woman, as it is stated in the text, get named after the Holy Virgin so she is the tenderest and the most forgiving to her little mischief brother and she is promised the role of the homemaker of the Goldens, and Little Benjamin's story is similar to the story of the Bible ruler, whose mother Rachel died at his birth.

The means of simile make the character descriptions vivid. For example, talking about Little Benjamin's attractiveness she says that the boy is "so good laughing like a sunflower". And in her phrase "It's a boy, and a beauty! I never see a prettier child" we can also notice a metaphor and a hyperbole.

Going back to the hints about the boy's good intentions and positive family decision to keep him are placed in the similes of the family members with good and pleasant things. It was already mentioned that Little Benjamin is compared to a sunflower but we can also say that his appearance, a rosy dimpled face and golden flossy curls, reminds us of angels' appearance. According to this, the reader can suppose that under the veil of a naughty mischievous boy a kind soul and virtuous intentions are hidden. The characters who bear the names of the Bible characters can't act callously, so there is no possibility for the young men and women to send the boy away. Last but not least is the surname that Laura E. Richards gives her characters. They are called the Goldens since they are prudent and sympathetic as if their hearts were made of gold.

"Little Benjamin" is a story of acceptance. The main characters have to go a long way in forgiving and understanding to realize the profoundness of their love for a young boy once left at the doorstep of their house. Not regretting all the tricks played and all the harm they caused, the Goldens admit that Benjamin's soul is not deficient in decency and they decide to see the best in their foster brother. The hopes for the best get rewarded. And here lies the lesson that the author wants to teach us. Understanding may be really hard, but, despite all the offenses our closest ones can cause us, we should always see the kindness in others as it's the only way to well-being. So after reading the last line of Laura E. Richards' story, look around and ponder: do you really value the people around you?

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A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches,

Loving favor rather than silver and gold.

Proverbs 22:1

English literature has long been fascinated with the portrayal of childhood and has used it as a way to explore moral lessons and the end of innocence. From Charles Dickens' 'Oliver Twist' to Yann Martel's 'Life of Pi', these works offer insights into the challenges and complexities of growing up. Nevertheless, the history of children's literature is much older and the theme of the little man (in the literal sense) is actually productive. Laura E. Richards' 'Little Benjamin' is a masterpiece which can be counted among such works. The very title of the short story speaks for itself; it is devoted to a little person named Benjamin.

The story written by the author is nothing more than the question of accepting a stranger into one's family and having compassion for someone who is not a blood neighbour. As the multiple examples of literary works around the globe about orphans and the disadvantaged show, the issue of adopting someone has long been an acute social problem. A perfect example of this difficult situation is the analysed story, in which the events unfold in the house of the Golden family, when a strange crying was heard on their porch. Thinking that something could have happened to the cat, the eldest son is sent to examine the cause of the strange sound and therefore he discovers a basket with a baby and a note. The message was to leave the boy whose mother died to another woman with kind eyes. The strange case and the unusual beauty of the child at once make them take pity on the poor man and keep him in the family, in favour of which Mother Golden, Mary, Lemuel, Ruth, Joseph, Adam and finally Father Golden unanimously agree. Since no information is known except for an unhappy past life, it is suggested that the family council choose a name for the boy, whose age is about half a year. For this, according to the family tradition, the name should have a connection with the Bible, which this time turns out to be Benjamin. Like many biblical names, this name is popular among Jewish, Christian and Muslim denominations, given the fact that on the note left behind the child's father is called 'a waif' the name Benjamin is ideal for a baby whose ancestry is unknown. It seems interesting that the choice of name was a random and unintentional move, yet Benjamin fits the

theme of the piece as a divine message to the faithful followers, namely, the Golden family. For example, the phrase 'Benjamin of the family' is used in some languages to refer to the youngest son, especially when he is much younger than his brothers.

However, life has its own pace and after ten years and the death of his foster mother, the boy attracts the attention of his family with tricks that cannot be ignored. So one day the head of the family is visited in turn by all the grown-up children to complain about the behaviour of little Benjamin.

From the very first lines, the divine atmosphere of the house is conveyed with the help of a large number of epithets such as '*cheerfully, eagerly, only soft, carefully, brightening perceptibly*'. Such an atmosphere does not lose its growth in the middle of the work and even when the older relatives came to complain to their father about the youngest brother, for instance, '*eager, kissed it passionately, a healthy, hearty child, the lovinest little soul, a lively whistle, shrilling out a rollicking tune*'.

Notwithstanding, the subtle line between the choice of adopting a child into the family occurs twice, in the baby's basket (at the beginning of the narrative) and near the father's table (at the end of the narrative). And both positive reactions of all the voting participants are followed by scenes of little Benny's exclusivity and pleasant emotions: '<...>*the rosy, dimpled creature, the yellow floss ruffled all over his head, his absurd little mouth open in a beaming smile; beaming above him, Mother Golden's placid face in its frame of silver hair; fronting them, Father Golden in his big leather chair, solid, comfortable, benevolent; and the five children, their honest, sober faces lighted up with unusual excitement. A pleasant, homelike picture*' and '*Curly, rosy, dirty, ragged, laughing, panting, little Benjamin stood still and looked round on all the earnest, serious faces <...> did you forget it was April Fool's Day? Didn't I fool you good?*'.

Nevertheless, I consider it necessary to tell a few words not only about the plot, but also about how this story is built. The reader can guess about the place, time and social environment only from small fragments of information inside the stories of the narrator.

First of all, the novelist's storytelling of the events that are taking place. In this category of verbal expression of the author's idea, the reader is informed about the location of the house, weather conditions, and a little about the acting characters. It is noteworthy that from the very first lines before the eyes of the person who opened the book, a background of knowledge is required. Let me back up my words with the following quotation from the original text: '*A baby! echoed Mary, Lemuel, Ruth, and Joseph. Well, I knew it was a baby, protested Adam; but I didn't like to say so*'. All the children's names are biblical and each of them has its own meaning and story told in the pages of the Holy Scriptures. For example, the name Adam is the name of the first person to be expelled from paradise, and

the name Lemuel is mentioned in the Bible in Genesis, where it refers to one of Cain's sons. Perhaps such detail is unnecessary for the child-reader, but an adult reading of the story largely obliges the audience to know such things in order to better understand the main characters, and who are little portrayed in the terms of appearance or character.

Of course, attention is drawn to the structure of the narrative with constant parallels, where the white curls of the foundling fits perfectly into the last name of the Golden family. That is way the disclosure of history inevitably entails the deployment of another conflict, which is expressed in different behavior of children. Blood children describe themselves as meek and obedient, while Benny, at the age of 10, has already provided a lot of problems with his restless character.

Finally, the third feature which parallels the red thread in the work is the timing frame of the work. In the narrative category, it is worth noting that the story covers a 10-year span and begins as well as ends on the same day – April 1st. According to the Holy Scriptures, Jesus Christ was crucified on Friday, March 30th and rose again on the third day, i.e. April 1st. Now I think we can come back to the question of the adult reading of the story. For example, if children understand that all that the younger son did was a prank in honour of the holiday, then adults can again link this date directly to the Bible.

In return, the given characters are not divided into positive or negative, therefore this gives the reader the opportunity to independently reflect in those moments where it is appropriate. Moreover, they are constantly in motion and advance the plot as they are involved, for example, *'The children tumbled headlong toward the door, but were met by Mother Golden returning, bearing in her strong arms a long basket, in which was indeed something white and fluffy that cried', 'Father Golden's mind moved slowly, and while he was meditating a reply, his wife issued various commands, and went through some intricate feminine manoeuvres, with the effect of increased fluffiness on the baby's part. In five minutes she was feeding the child with warm milk from a spoon', 'Mary took his hand and kissed it passionately; a sob broke from her, and she turned her face away from the brothers and sister who loved but did not understand her'* etc.

This short novel, with its characters, resembles one of the most famous examples of childhood-themed literature, namely, Charles Dickens' 'Oliver Twist'. The novel tells the story of a young orphan boy who is brought up in a workhouse and later falls in with a gang of thieves. Throughout the book, Oliver is constantly faced with cruelty and hardship, but he manages to maintain his innocence and goodness. His character acts as a moral compass in the novel, highlighting the corruption and injustice of society. Though the outcome of the compared stories are different-and not entirely due to the timing of the two juxtaposed works-but the theme of accepting the child and testing the inner benefactor remains unified.

Finally, it is important to highlight the author's usage of a number of devices while making out the linguistic construction of the work such as metaphor which is a figure of speech that makes an implicit, implied, or hidden comparison between two things that are unrelated but share some common characteristics 'encouraged by another masculine presence', simile '<...> and proclaiming that he ate "like a Major!"', 'and he talks like a buzz-saw', 'And he so good, and laughing like a sunflower', repetition which is a literary device that repeats the same words or phrases a few times to make an idea clearer and more memorable 'Mother! real hair, and it curls; see it curl!', "'I was only thinking of the care 'twould be to you, mother," he said. <...> "That's what I was thinking!" said Mother Golden, eagerly. "I was thinking anyway, Joel, 'twould be best to keep him through his teething and stomach troubles<...>', 'detachment that describes details within a sentences to continue the logical flow of the author 'Adam laid down his book and went out; the whole family looked up cheerfully, expecting to see Aladdin, the great Maltese cat, enter with his stately port. There was a pause; then Adam came back with a white, scared face, and looked at his father without speaking', and alliteration where two or more words in a phrase or line of poetry share the same beginning consonant sound 'hate to trouble you, father, but I expect you'll have to speak to him'. Still, in my opinion, euphemism has a special charm here. It is as a word or descriptive expression that is neutral in meaning. I note that in my opinion this was used by the author intentionally to develop situations of the previously designated hurdle of accepting someone else into your heart and life path. I suggest paying attention in detail to 'to keep him through his teething and stomach troubles, and give him a good start in the way of proper food and nursing. At them homes and nurseries, they mean well, but the most of them's young, and they don't understand a child's stomach'. Certainly, a woman who has given birth and raised more than one child, and now sees a healthy baby in front of her, does not think about the problems of digestion and colic of the baby. She is only trying to postpone the moment of a shelter in which the child will probably be malnourished all his life or will die from lack of attention from professionals. In my humble opinion, these events are hidden under the pretext of the health of the baby. Notwithstanding, all these devices help make the text attractive for reading while the reader's imagination assimilates stylistic and lexical literary devices.

In conclusion, I would like to emphasise the main message of the work which is not to be afraid to open your heart to strangers, so they too can become kindred people despite blood differences. I believe that the topic of such life actions will always have a response from a reading and empathetic audience. 'Little Benjamin' is valuable because it gives a new spectrum of emotions and food for thought after reading. For my part, I am infinitely grateful to the organisers of the competition for the opportunity to get acquainted with this literary work and the opportunity to express my ideas, which provides the basis for moral guidance in my future life.

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How does a family react to an orphan being left on their doorstep? Do they send him to an orphanage or raise him as their own? What truly makes a family – mere blood relations or sheer love for one another? And can a little change of perspective shift the way we see our loved ones? All of these are the questions posed in the short story “Little Benjamin” written by the American writer Laura E. Richards.

The work explores the themes of family, love and what it means to truly belong somewhere. The idea of unconditional love and acceptance is central to the story, and we will attempt to dissect and study these ideas in our analysis.

The story is narrated in the third person singular by an omniscient narrator, who makes no direct appearance in the text. The narratee’s point of view is confined to a single room, and the only way for the reader to find out what goes on outside of it is through dialogue, which dominates the story, occasionally interweaving with the author’s narration.

The story is split into two parts, the first of which deals with the appearance of little Benjamin, and the second part follows up with the state of the matters ten years later.

At the beginning of the story, we are introduced to the Goldens – a big, tight-knit family, who discover a basket that has been left outside their door. Inside is a baby-child, crying plaintively for food and attention, and a note stating that the baby has no one to care for him, and the addresser hopes the “the woman with the kind eyes” will take him in. Thus, the story is set in motion: the family – Mother Golden, Father Golden (or Joel) and their children Adam, Lemuel, Mary, Ruth and Joseph – are astounded and quite unsure of what to do. However, Mother Golden’s confusion doesn’t last long and she is quick to feed and cradle the baby while the other children gather around to take a closer look at this unexpected delivery. The story develops as a discussion ensues about where to situate the boy and by the end of it the decision is made to keep the baby, at least until he is done teething. After a quick flip through the Bible the child is given the name of Benjamin.

Then the reader finds out how this arrangement has turned out ten years later, with the boy growing up to be quite mischievous and, as his adopted brother calls him, “a perfect nuisance”. We are presented with five of the children and the old head of the house, Father Golden, Mother Golden having passed away. First

Mary, then Ruth, then the sons, all come to their father to complain about little Benjamin's mischief. Their complaints are met, much to the siblings' surprise, with an offering. That is to say, the father provides his now grown-up kindred children with a choice: whether to get rid of the foundling, or to finally accept him as their own and make no distinction between him and themselves, both in attitude and inheritance. In this climactic scene Joseph, Ruth, Mary, Lemuel and Adam each passionately speak for letting Benjamin stay, because they have all grown to love him as their true brother, and do not imagine their lives without him. The story's denouement is linked with the appearance of now ten-year-old Benjamin himself, and we find out that all his mischief was in the event of April Fool's, and that he really is a kind-hearted, good boy adored by his family. The story ends with Adam, Lemuel, Mary, Ruth, and Joseph, in a gesture of their new-found appreciation, agreeing to come fly a kite with their little Benjamin.

It is crucial to establish the setting of the story, which is a house ("nothing remarkable") in an undisclosed town in England, in a period towards the end of the nineteenth century-the beginning of the twentieth century. Mother Golden states: "You work hard enough as it is, father (...) But—well, seeing whose name he come in, I do feel to see him through his teething"; "He has been well treated, well fed and clothed", is said of Benjamin; finally, Father Golden says: "I have no great amount to leave you, but 'twill be comfortable so far as it goes". This, the fact that, although the father has a business of his own, Joseph is the first in the lineage to receive a higher education, and the description of their home ("the room, with its stuffed chairs, its tidies, and cabinet organ, was only unlike other such rooms from the fact that Mother Golden habitually sat in it", – the room is framed as a "commonplace", typical, but homely environment) indicates the status of the family as middle-class, though most likely lower middle class. Their lower status, stemming from a lack of college education, or a particular regional affiliation, is evident through the written representation of their speech's phonetic peculiarities, most notably reduction and dialectal variation: "'twas" instead of "it was", "ain't" instead of "isn't", etc. There is also a number of colloquial vocabulary units, for example "to swaller" as a word for "swallow".

There are three main conflicts presented in the story. The first one is between Mother Golden and her husband. She wishes to keep the foundling, yet Father Golden is sure that there are better places for him, and he is worried that the care would be too much for his wife, that with five children already in the family. Notably, the conflict is resolved with the help of the children, whom the father asks directly, in an order from the youngest to the eldest. As a result, the baby stays in the family. The second part has its own conflict, and it seems at the start, that little Benjamin is in an antagonistic position to his siblings. This, in turn, births the tension of the five children with their father. And parallel to the part one, the children are asked, from youngest to eldest, whether to let Benjamin stay. And once again, the decision is unanimous, the boy is to stay a part of the family forever; moreover, it turns out he was not as naughty and bothersome as he

seemed. Thus, the two final conflicts are also resolved in a friendly, democratic manner, which only goes to show how close and protective of each other the family are.

The author's aims with this story are quite simple: to create a piece of writing which can both entertain and teach the reader the values and ideals of Christianity, which the writer herself is passionate about, in a manner, accessible to anyone. These are achieved, first of all, with the use of humour. The story, particularly the first part, is marked by a lighthearted, humorous, somewhat ironic tone, which in part two, especially towards the climax, where the emotional peak is achieved, shifts to a more serious, sentimental tone (confirmed by the use of such emotionally coloured vocabulary as "grave looks", "in earnest", "passionately", "a sob", "grave compassion", etc.), before ending again on a light, yet touching note.

Laura E. Richards makes great use of comedy to entice the reader and simultaneously show the Golden's amicable, slightly naïve disposition.

There are several instances of the comedic effect being achieved through lexical means. The characters commonly mistake names and words, adults and children alike, which demonstrates their kinship, but also forms the basis of the stylistic device of the pun. For example, Mother Golden confuses a common noun "waif" (a stray person or animal) for a proper one, remarking that it is not, however, a Christian name. In another example Adam uses the word "wonderful" in the meaning of "astonishing", referring to the tyrannical king Richard the Third, and little Ruth takes the phrase literally, assuming that "Richard the Twentieth" must be even more wonderful, that is, better, than the Third. The joke plays at the contrast between the perception of the more knowledgeable (or trying to appear so) older brother and the young, innocent sister, who is ignorant to the historical context of Adam's utterance. Hence why the children reading the story, and the adults reading it to them, might both enjoy the text in ways different from each other. As you may observe, this example also demonstrates the proficiency of Laura E. Richards as a children's author, who also doesn't shy away from irony. While the reader is clearly meant to sympathize with the Golden's, they are the ones he or she laughs at. They are represented as faithful, but not the most well-versed in their own sacred texts, they open the Bible to blindly search for a name for a boy they had just found on the doorstep. This is ultimately used to show that, while they may not be the "smartest" Christians out there, it is the spirit, their attitudes towards each other and the world, their kindness, that matters most.

"Little Benjamin" is an inherently Christian story. It is revealed not only on the factual level, the family being literal Christians ("Coming into a Christian family, let him have Christian baptism" – says Father Golden), but in terms of the conceptual level as well. Numerous allusions to the Bible are made both in text and subtext. The author showcases and effectively uses her knowledge of the Bible to create new layers and meanings to the text. The first part of the story is

headlined with the verse that is used to name the foundling: “Then is little Benjamin their ruler”, a fragment of Psalm 68, which speaks of divine glory over enemies and difficulties, in it, God is asked to make clear who are the ungodly and the righteous. Here a connection to the polarizing character of Benjamin, who is seen both as “a nuisance” and a gift, can be made.

Now, it would be a grave omission not to touch upon name symbolism in the story. We have a wide cast of characters, all of whom (except, perhaps, the cat Alladin) have Christian names.

The family name Golden bears a symbolic weight, as gold has a long history of being linked to purity, value, excellence. The spiritual meaning of gold closely ties to the sun, health and vitality. Gold is associated with the divine and is used to adorn sacred objects and places in many religions, including Christianity. Thus, from the moment the family are introduced, the kind-hearted, jolly nature of the lot, as well as their devotion to God, is hinted to the reader.

It is certainly no coincidence the first child’s name is Adam, who, according to the Bible, was the first man. It is also worth noting that not only is he the eldest child, but the first to discover little Benjamin and, according to their “mother’s way” voices his opinion the last; in addition to that, Mother Golden believed “the youngest was nearest heaven” this making Adam, as the first man or, in this case, first-born child, the farthest from heaven and his Father.

In his turn, Benjamin is quite a fitting name for the youngest child in the family. Laura E. Richards directly references “little Benjamin”, the of the twelve sons of Jacob and Rachel in the Book of Genesis, and also one of the founders of the smallest of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Joel is the name of Father Golden. In the Old Testament, Joel was one of King David's 'mighty men', which is a good choice of name for the patriarch of the house.

A bigger role and more nuanced characterization are given to Mary. Mary is a popular girls’ name thanks to the Virgin Mary, mother of Jesus. There are five other notable Marys in The Bible: Mary Magdalene, Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus, Mary the mother of James and Joseph, and Mary the mother of Mark. But Virgin Mary remains the supreme figure in the collective mind. From the little hints left by the author in the text (“...Mary—” His quiet voice faltered. Mary took his hand and kissed it passionately; a sob broke from her, and she turned her face away from the brothers and sister who loved but did not understand her.”, ““He is the only child I shall ever have!” said Mary, simply. There was silence for a moment, and all thought of the grave where her young heart had laid its treasure.”) we may deduce that Mary had to bury the one she loved. It is not clear whether it was a lover, or a child, or both, but the image of the grieving mother or wife is one of the most powerful, even if so briefly alluded to in the story.

The minor characters' names, such as Lemuel, meaning 'devoted to God' (Lemuel was a Biblical king mentioned in Proverbs 31:1 and 4), Ruth, meaning "compassionate friend" (Ruth is a Biblical name from the Book of Ruth in the Old Testament, one of the only two books named after women, the other being Esther), Joseph, meaning 'God will give' or 'God will increase', may also be mentioned. Whether the parents attributed these names to their children purposefully or not, remains up for debate, considering the ceremony of name-picking custom in this family ("Joseph opened the great brown leather Bible, and closing his eyes, laid his hand on the page"). However, we may assume that the author was not careless when choosing names for her characters.

The figure of the Father is easily an allusion to God-the-Father. In a similar vein Benjamin may be connected to the Holy Spirit "the life of the house", but more likely to Jesus Christ, the Son, who comes into the world, in this case the microcosm of the Golden household, in a way unprecedented, and is there to guide and absolve of sins. Benjamin can, however, most definitely be likened to a little angel, a Cherub, as they are commonly depicted in Western-European frescos: "something white and fluffy", "the rosy, dimpled creature, the yellow floss ruffled all over his head, his absurd little mouth open in a beaming smile". In part two, while he isn't in the picture, the words of his brothers and sisters paint him as something a bit devilish, but the true image of the boy, a still "curly, rosy", but now also "dirty, ragged, laughing, panting". This vividly shows the transition children often make as they grow, which may be hard for their caretakers: sweet little Cherubs may grow up a little differently from what they expect.

In this entertaining yet touching story the theme of family is explored in detail, seeing how it is one of the core values of the Christian religion. In alignment with that, the theme of deserted children, as, probably, the most unprotected group in the world, is centered. The author drives home the idea that a true believer will take care of the orphaned, despite all conflicts that may arise, and do their best to relieve those children's sorrow or even raise them as dignified members of society. It is considered an act of true charity to bring a child into one's (already full) home and take as good care of it as they are able, and along with these values Laura E. Richards stresses the importance of compassion, understanding, acceptance and, of course, faith in building bonds that will last and creating a better world.

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Introduction: The General Framework of the Story

The story “Little Benjamin” is a vivid example of a work that not only reflects an ideal Christian family, but also in many ways refers to the Bible, the holy scriptures of Judaism and Christianity. From the position of culture, the Bible is the foundation of the formation of the European worldview, from the position of mysticism — a potential source for solving the mysteries of the universe.

First and foremost, let us analyze the story, starting with the setting. The action takes place, as seems most likely, in America in the 19th century or the beginning of the 20th century. The words “machine-embroidered” indirectly indicates the historical period, which is marked by the advancements of the Industrial Age. There is no mention of the noise of carriages or people in the text, but there is a one of a garden, so we can assume that the story unfolds in a small town or a village. The chosen setting reflects the homely ambience in the “Family Golden” and reinforces the themes of Family, Home, Childhood and Christian virtues in the sense of the Victorian Epoch.

The plot is quite simple and consists of two events that do not depend on the characters — the appearance of a child left at the doorstep of the family home in the first part and the bad behavior of the same kid as an older boy in the second. Still, the choice to keep the foundling or give him away for adoption is a decision of the characters and it is depicted in the story twice. Here we see a thematic parallelism aimed at emphasizing the love of the characters for Benjamin, their attachment to him.

Further, we can distinguish some of the possible themes: family values, the joy and difficulties of parenthood, a reflection of male and female roles, childhood and adulthood, Christian family.

The tone of the story is neat and laconic, but not dry. Stylistic techniques, such as metaphors, epithets, similes and allusions are woven into the succinct speech of the author. Almost the whole story is written in a form of a dialogue. This form reflects the democratic spirit of the family and shows the angles of character conflict. The third person narration serves to convey all characters equally, to demonstrate what is happening as objectively as possible.

It is not possible to single out the main characters, as well as the antagonists. The characters are a bit flat, but each of them has a few distinctive traits, for a

short story this is normal. For instance, Adam is quite strict, Mary is soft and gentle, Lemuel is sensitive, Ruth is enthusiastic and active, and Joseph is curious and quick-witted. The names of the characters play a big role, and this is the subject we will dwell on next.

The Main Part: Christian Allusions Make Sense in “Little Benjamin”

Having introduced necessary information about setting, themes, plot, characters, narration, tone, and conflict in the story, we should proceed directly to the allusions. Allusion is an expression designed to call something to mind without mentioning it explicitly; an indirect or passing reference [Oxford Dictionary]. Direct allusions in the given story, primarily evangelical in origin, are featured in character’s names and their speech. Indirect allusions are provided in the descriptions of characters’ appearance, behavior and quirks.

I dare to assume that the work contains a reference to the Trinity in Christianity: God the Father, God the Son and the Holy-Spirit. Let us figure this out, starting with the married couple Golden.

The choice of such a family name is no coincidence, since the word “golden” refers to something of value, something rare. Gold doesn’t corrode, which means it stays pure and unchangeable, and so do the Mother and the Father. We see that the parents are generally not referred to by their first names in the story, and it makes them the great abstract figures of kindness and divinity.

We should not overlook, though, that Mother Golden once calls her husband “Joel”, and this name means “Yahweh (is) God” from Hebrew [Wiktionary]. Yahweh is one of the names of God, which a reader of the Bible first encounters in the Old Testament. That leads us to the thought: “What if Father Golden figuratively represents God the Father?”. There is much to prove the theory. For instance, in part I Father Golden’s attitude to the foundling is rather cold and reserved, compared with Mother Golden. He is rational, pragmatic, and sensible, he is the true patriarch of the family, wielding his power wisely.

However, in the part II, when Mother Golden has passed away, we see a subtle change in his strictness. He often looks at the portrait of his Late Wife, and we notice a remark repeated several times by the narrator: “He looked at a portrait that stood on his desk, a framed photograph of Mother Golden”. Then, when the children come to him, he speaks softly, and kindly, helping them to realize the meaning of Benjamin in their lives. It seems as if Mother Golden is speaking through him at this moment, instilling tender feelings, sympathy and sound judgement. In this sense, Late Mother Golden could symbolically represent the Holy Spirit, still aiding the family from heavens.

As for Benjamin, his connection with the idea of God the Son is also reflected in the origin of his name. The name “Benjamin” literally translates to

"son of right," generally taken to mean "son of the right hand" [Online Etymology Dictionary], the "right" direction having the connotation of strength or desirability. The story portrays Benjamin as a unique baby, who visibly "emits" an aura of light and joy: "...the light in the room seemed to centre on the yellow flossy curls against her breast." "...laughing like a sunflower!". We can see the reference to light and the sun, and, speaking of the sun in Christianity, one of the most important mentions is Jesus Christ himself as the "Sun of Righteousness". This term is taken from Malachi 4:2 [Astromeridian.ru]. Another argument in support of Benjamin representing the figure of Christ, can be noticed in Mary's words: "He is the only child I shall ever have!". As we know, Virgin Mary, after whom the oldest daughter of the Goldens is named, is the mother of Jesus, and it makes us think about the allusion to the Immaculate Conception. Thus, Benjamin could figuratively connect to the figure of God the Son, or Jesus Christ.

Christian allusions in names are not limited by the three titular character and the parents. As the Family are of Christian Faith, they all have Christian names, impacting the development of the story. Adam is the biblical name of the first man, progenitor of the human race. Adam in the story is the eldest, and he "was the first that heard that little voice, ten years ago, and the first, except mother, that saw the child". Ruth is named after the main female figure from "The Book of Ruth" in the bible, the name suggesting a "ruthful" disposition and mild temper. Exotic Old Testament name "Lemuel", belonging to the middle child, is played out as an instance of humor in the story. One of the youngsters "Joseph" has the name of the youngest and the most favored, as well as the luckiest sons of Jacob and Rachel in the Book of Genesis.

Christian lore is incorporated in the smallest incidents of the family life in the story. For instance, rough games of Benjamin are called "playing Samson": "He says he is playing Samson". Samson is the Biblical hero, famous for his exploits in the fight against the Philistines. One day he caught 300 foxes, tied burning torches to their tails and let the foxes into the Philistine fields during harvest. In the story Benjamin "has tied Rover and the cat together by their tails". The allusion adds a tint of humour and suggests that Benjamin has learned thoroughly his "Bible Lessons".

Conclusion

To conclude, this work shows how strongly religion is connected with our culture and art, as well as with the concept of the family. Little Benjamin is a miracle of God, a messenger who helped the rest of the characters to know the difficulty of choice and love for one's neighbor. The Bible is rightfully considered the heritage of mankind, in particular a great work of art, because it never ceases to inspire us to creativity and reflection with its plots and images.

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The text under interpretation is a short story “Little Benjamin”. The story belongs to the pen of the American writer Laura Elizabeth Howe Richards. The work is an example of children’s fiction: it has typical characteristics for this kind of literature in terms of language and at the same time it carries an educational message – in this piece, the author reveals *the topic of love of neighbor*.

Compositionally, the story is divided into two parts. The first one describes one day in the life of the Golden family, namely the moment when on the doorstep of their house the eldest son finds a basket with a baby boy in it. In spite of the fact that the family is already raising five children, the merciful parents decide to keep the foundling to “*give him a good start in life*”, and the children support them in this decision. Like the native children, the baby is given a Christian name, Benjamin, and, as the subtitle goes, “*then is little Benjamin their ruler.*”

The second part of the story tells about the events that take place 10 years after the adoption of Benjamin. By this time, Mother Golden has been dead for 2 years, and the little boy is being taken care of by the father and older siblings. Unlike his family members who are grave and calm, the child is always naughty and gives them a lot of trouble. After Ben has lived in their family for 10 years, Father Golden poses the question to his own children: what shall they do next, send the boy to an orphanage or let him stay? Despite the mischievous nature of the younger brother, the elders love him much and do not even allow the thought of him being sent away.

As is usually the case in short stories, the characters of Richards’ work are flat; the reader knows only few details of their appearance (Mother Golden’s “*strong arms*”, “*placid face*” and “*silver hair*”; the children’s “*honest, sober faces*”; the baby’s “*absurd little mouth*” and “*yellow flossy curls*”), and we can only speculate about their character traits. To delineate the main figures, the author uses the technique of indirect characterization – she does not state many facts directly, but through the speech and actions of the characters we understand their personalities. For instance, the children are sincerely glad when the mother decides to keep the baby, so it indicates their kindness, compassion, and willingness to take care of the younger. Mother Golden is immediately ready to “*take the responsibility of a baby*” – thus, the reader realizes how merciful and good-hearted she is. And the fact that the father always gives his children a choice

demonstrates that he respects them, trusts them and considers the opinion of each of them important.

In addition to this, the names play a major role in understanding the personality of the characters in this work. The family has a speaking surname – *Golden*, which, according to the Oxford Learner’s Dictionary, figuratively means “special, wonderful” – *golden-hearted*. All the children in this devout, righteous family are named after the biblical figures: the oldest, Adam, the first son – after the first human; serious, reserved Lemuel – after the wise ruler; Mary, the kindest-hearted and most compassionate family member – after the mother of Christ; Ruth – after His ancestress; Joseph – after the eleventh son of Jacob, the founder of the Israelite Tribe of Joseph. When the family adopts the baby boy, he is also given a biblical name – the youngest son is named after the twelfth and youngest son of Jacob, the progenitor of the Israelite Tribe of Benjamin.

It is also noteworthy that Ben’s own father, as the note enclosed in the basket with the foundling says, is a waif. When we first come across this word in the text, it is written with a small letter, and we perceive it as a common name, as just a characteristic of the person. However, the second time, in the mother’s remark, it is capitalized – is it then a speaking surname? Perhaps, it is up to the reader to decide.

The story has a dynamic exposition; the narration begins directly with the Mother Golden’s words, the author does not give the reader any background information and does not provide them with any details about where and when the action takes place, the setting is not known to us.

The narration is conducted from the viewpoint of the third person limited narrator, who does not appear in the plot as a character, but follows the perspective of the main figures. Accordingly, the narrator is reliable, not intrusive; this type of narration creates the effect of objectivity and credibility.

As noted above, “Little Benjamin” is a story for children, and as such, it possesses the prominent features of this type of literature. There is an opinion that due to the age-specific mental peculiarities, children tend to think linearly, so retrospective scenes or parallel plot lines are rarely found in literary works intended for children. In the story under analysis, the events are presented consecutively, in chronological order. To establish the clear sequence of events, the author uses the past grammatical tense. There are not many detailed descriptions in the text, and the plot develops mainly through the dialogues. Short sentences prevail, which speeds up the rhythm of the narration and creates the effect of oral speech. In addition, many lines are quite emotional, contain inversions (“*as pretty a child as ever I saw*”, “*Here he comes now*”), interrogative and exclamatory sentences (“*A basket? What does the boy mean?*”, “*A baby!*”, “*Great Jemima!*”), which also makes the speech of the characters sound lively and natural. One more typical feature of works for children, including “Little

Benjamin”, is plain language, colloquial vocabulary; the author uses words that are understandable to children, avoids complicated and bookish terms. In the text there are examples of repetitions (“*A baby!*”, “*My heart!*”) and anaphora (“*It’s a boy, then!*” – “*It’s a boy, and a beauty!*”). Other literary devices include epithets (“*long, low, plaintive cry*”, “*kind eyes*”, “*rosy creature*”) and similes (“*[hands] like pink shells*”, “*he talks like a buzz-saw*”, “*laughing like a sunflower*”).

The conflict on which the narrative focuses is internal. The family faces a moral choice: to send the boy to an orphanage and forget about the worries and problems he causes, or to some extent forgo their comfort but allow the child to live with those he loves, care for him and love him in return?

Of course, the Golden family does not abandon the boy. The end of the story is ironic in its own way: after all the bitter complaints about Benjamin and his bad behavior, the family members realize how much they love him, how his antics enliven their quiet house (“*Why, the child is the life of the house*”), and they can’t imagine their lives without him.

In the end, it turns out that Ben’s numerous tricks on this day are due to the date – April 1 (“*did you forget it was April Fool’s Day?*”). After grasping this, the elder siblings probably rethink their judgments about him – in an instant, all his mischief, so annoying the family members, turns out to be harmless children’s pranks. So does the family have a good reason to disown a loved one?

Benjamin is *little*. Children are always different from “*humdrum and mopy*” adults, they are often over-emotional, restless and naughty, but this is what makes them so beautiful – they are always sincere, their souls are pure, they are not tormented by doubts – they do not think about *who deserves love and who does not*.

The message of the work is that *everyone deserves love*, even those who differs from us – by blood, by behavior, by character. Often we evaluate people by our own standards and neglect those who do not meet our expectations. We should not forget that every person is unique and has their own destiny and experience. We should learn ourselves and teach our children to respect each other and, of course, to love our neighbor – from our hearts, not for something, but in spite of everything.

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Some stories are told to demonstrate people what kindness is. They represent a sinless hero acting without any hesitation when people are in danger. But some authors, as true explorers of real world and people's souls with all their uncountable edges, tend to make one think of their stories - conflict, characters, emotions – over and over again, they create a complicated reflection of life. Laura Elizabeth Richards, an American writer, is one of those authors who leaves the right of drawing conclusion to readers. She was born in the year 1850 and had a long productive live. She has written more than ninety different books, among which there are a great many stories for children. One of her short stories is titled *Little Benjamin*. We're going to observe it from different points of view and attempt to interpret it.

Theme and Plot

The theme of *Little Benjamin* is family relationships and kinship. Laura E. Richards tells us a story, divided into two parts. The first part is devoted to the episode, where the Goldens, namely the eldest son Adam, find a little child on their doorstep. They debate whether they should send him off to an orphanage or let him stay with them. The mother insists on keeping the child, and the others agree. They name him after a Bible Character – Benjamin.

The second part of the story takes place after their mother's passing. In it the children come one after another into their father's study and complain of the youngest child's mischievous behavior. The father points out two options to them: Benjamin either stays as part of their family or he will be sent away. The children must vote, and all of them decide without any hesitation that Benjamin should stay with them.

In these two parts we observe two episodes in the life of one family, and they are both about accepting and embracing a foundling; in both situations the family shows great kindness and loyalty to each other. The author focuses on the relationships within the family.

Setting

First off, it is difficult to be certain of the exact location where the events of the story take place, because no specific details are given in the text, but one could imagine the story happening in England or America. It may be the outskirts of a small town since the family has a garden, which is mentioned in Ruth's speech

(...and they are rushing all about the garden almost crazy). Later on Adam and Lemuel return from their office as soon as possible and mention that Benjamin was the one who brought them a message. So, the office is probably not so far from their home, and it does not take long to get there.

As for the time of the narrative, the plot clearly relates to the past, if we take into consideration that people were so religious before the twentieth century, as a rule (as people have become less and less religious because of the advance of science). Moreover, the Goldens had many children which was a common feature for families in the past. Now the tendency has changed, and people prefer to have fewer children. The male members are part of the events so we can draw a conclusion that the country is not at war, and the action probably takes place in the second part of the nineteenth century or at the beginning of the twentieth century.

It is obvious that characters of the story are not people of a lower income or that they lack education since they can afford to take care of a sixth child, they're able to support the children in comfort and they are not concerned by any financial problems (*He [Benjamin] has been well treated, well fed and clothed, maybe better than he would have been by his own parents...*). They can afford to read books in their spare time (*Adam laid down his book and went out...*) as well as send one of the children off to college (*Joseph is going to college, which is new in our family...*). This shows that they're literate enough, though they use such contractions as *'twas*, *'twould* and *ain't* which are more common for colloquial speech, and their mother doesn't understand the meaning of the word *waiif* and takes it for a name.

To summarize, *Little Benjamin* is about a family of medium income, leading a calm, peaceful and trouble-free life.

Conflict

Two types of conflict may be distinguished in the text. The first one is external and is connected with Benjamin who causes a lot of trouble playing tricks on the other children, so it is small wonder that the elder siblings are displeased and come to their father to complain.

The second conflict is internal and is concerned with the hesitation of the family members when they are asked to decide about Benjamin staying. Their anger with Benjamin is contrasted to their desire to take care of him as part of their family, though he failed to live up to their expectations.

On this basis, one could argue that Benjamin is the antagonist of the story: he stirs up trouble, ties animals' tails together, deceives his elder brothers. The other characters seem to be protagonists because they suffer at the hands of the youngest child and want him stop misbehaving, their desire is to bring up a civilized person, though some of them also argue among themselves and call each

other names (“*Joe, you chuckle-head!*” said Adam...). The author depicts them as people with good intentions, but still uses *irony* as well.

Point of View

In *Little Benjamin* we deal with the so-called omniscient narrator, who knows and sees everything without showing any subjective judgement: beginning with actions of the characters and their appearance, ending with their thoughts and feelings:

““*But Bible names are so ugly*”, objected Lemuel who was sensitive, and suffered under his own cognomen”.

“*Father Golden looked up from his book; he was an old man now, but his eyes were still young and kind*”.

“*Mother Golden lifted the child out and held it in a certain way...*”

Tone

Laura E. Richards tells us her story in an ironical tone, which can be seen through the characters’ behavior and speech. First of all, when Benjamin becomes a ten-year-old boy and starts misbehaving, the elder children, especially boys, come to their father with grave faces and claim that something should be done:

“*He is the torment of the whole family*”, ““*No one can live a day in peace!*” said Lemuel”, ““*No dumb creature’s life is safe!*” said Joe”.

On the other hand, they suddenly change their mind while making a decision about his destiny, and in the end, they become very caring, especially when Benjamin promises to make up for his tricks. This rapid change of heart produces a comical effect, and it reveals the children’s true affection. They are extremely annoyed and *do* want something to be done, but when it comes to acting, they are at a loss because of the love for a member of their family.

Characterization

There are eight characters in the story, though not all of them are round or dynamic.

To begin with, there is a group of characters who are minor and flat, we don’t know much information about them, and they even speak together in one moment. They are Ruth, Lemuel and Joseph. Mary is characterized in slightly greater detail than the others and we know that she is responsible for the home after their mother’s death, but she is too soft and not strict at all. She tries to step in for Benjamin as well: “*You were all little once, boys*”. She seems quite static and does not change during the story, while Lemuel, Ruth and Joseph are more dynamic, though it may be observed only in the end, when they stop complaining and show their desire to spend time with Benny, when he asks who would like to fly his kite with him. They are characterized mostly through their father’s speech:

“Adam and Lemuel, you are settled in the business... Joseph is going to college...Ruth will make a first-rate dressmaker...”. But Mary is also described indirectly, with the means of her actions: “*Mary took his hand and kissed passionately; a sob broke from her...*”, “*Mary looked up and smiled through her tears*”. She becomes more important and noticeable in the second part of the story.

Adam, the eldest child, is as round as Mary; he is still a minor character, though the author makes him more dynamic and gives him more lines. He is the one to find Benjamin and he is the strictest among the siblings. He is also the one to call Benjamin “the torment of the whole family” and has the last word in making the final decision due to his age. The author often describes him using the word *grave*, but in the end he talks *cheerfully*, and we notice that he has become milder.

The parents are paid more attention to in the first part of the story: the father gives his wife and their children the right to decide the child’s destiny, and he accepts it, though he is worried about his wife having too much care (“...*and you’ve got care enough, as it is, mother, without taking on any more*”, “*I was only thinking of the care ‘twould be to you, mother...*”). In the second part he is described as an old man with *young and kind* eyes. His character doesn’t change, he asks his children to decide again and agrees to whatever they say. He is a minor, static and flat character. So is his wife. She is characterized as a kind and affectionate woman (“...*and there’s places, no doubt, could do better for him, maybe than we could. But – well, seeing whose name he come in, I do feel to see him through his teething.*”), but she continues to be the same during the story and does not evolve.

The main character of the story is little Benjamin. He is round and dynamic; the story cannot be told without him. He is the main subject of discussion through the whole story, and he is the one with whose appearance the story begins and then ends. We may observe how he changes when growing up and how he misbehaves, but in the end, he comes forward and promises he will put everything right explaining it was all just a joke because of April Fool’s. He is multi-faceted: cute and fluffy as a child, a torment from the point of view of his brothers when he grows up; he seems cheerful and energetic and a bit wild, but he takes responsibility for his tricks. It is difficult to call him a classic villain, but in the eyes of his siblings (a possible exception of Mary) he definitely is one. Generally, the story has no heroes or villains, the characters may only think of themselves or each other that way. Most of them are described indirectly through their dialogue and actions, and the author uses different tropes to characterize them.

Image and Imagery

The author’s language is very rich in stylistic devices and expressive means. She writes as if she draws an oil painting, and the reader can imagine various colours and shades which reflect various feelings. She uses similes, metaphors,

epithets, etc. It appears to be a very picturesque story, and we're going to observe some of the tropes below.

Simile: "*They're (hands) like pink shells, only soft*", "*...he ate "like a Major!"*", "*...he talks like a buzz-saw*", "*...and laughing like a sunflower*".

Metaphor: "*...while he was meditating a reply*", the whole passage "*It was a pretty picture: the rosy, dimpled creature, the yellow floss ruffled all over his head, his absurd little mouth open in a beaming smile; beaming above him, Mother Golden's placid face in its frame of silver hair; fronting them, Father Golden in his big leather chair, solid, comfortable, benevolent; and the five children, their honest, sober faces lighted up with unusual excitement. A pleasant, homelike picture. Nothing remarkable in the way of setting; the room, with its stuffed chairs, its tidies, and cabinet organ, was only unlike other such rooms from the fact that Mother Golden habitually sat in it; she could keep even haircloth from being commonplace. But now, all the light in the room seemed to centre on the yellow flossy curls against her breast*" (extended metaphor), "*...the baby, who... sat throned*", "*Joe entered with a face of tragedy*", "*Adam's face darkened into sternness*", "*He is the torment of the whole family*", "*...intentness seemed deepening into trouble*", "*the child is the life of house*".

Hyperbole: "*a perfect nuisance*".

Juxtaposition: "*grave compassion*", "*...hurried clamor, strangely at variance with their usual staid demeanor*".

Epithet: *mild deprecation, intricate feminine manoeuvres, a sudden movement of delight; men with grave, "set" faces; the loveliest little soul, pleasant, homelike picture, the rosy, dimpled creature.*

Set expressions: *to play tricks, your heart is in the right place, no harm in him.*

Repetition: author repeats the word *grave* when describing the children, except for Benjamin, which may be used to underline the difference between them. He is still young and cheerful, and they have already grown up. She also repeats word *kind* describing the parents' eyes to show that they were as affectionate and calm as the Bible characters.

So, the author's language is full of tropes, which makes the story sound very poetic and full of imagery. In the first part she convinces the reader that little Benjamin is a pure angel with hands like shells, laughter reminding everyone of a sunflower, and beautiful curls. In the second part she underlines the gloomy feelings and coldness of the children, even their compassion is *grave*.

Symbolism

Laura E. Richards uses character names as symbols, which are primarily connected with the Bible.

To begin with, we should mention the family's surname, which doesn't relate to the Bible. It is derived from an adjective describing something made of gold. Gold is one of the most precious materials and stands for many abstract notions such as perfection, respect, divinity, and purity, which may be used to describe the family that are very religious and whose hearts are so pure and kind as it is shown in the story.

Then come the children's names. Adam in the Bible is the first man created by God. The number is emphasized here: he is the first son and the first to find Benjamin. Mary is probably named after Jesus Christ's mother, though there were several people of the same name in the Bible. The father says that she is the homemaker which underlines the idea that Mary has a mother personality: she is soft, affectionate and pure of heart. The other children are named after Bible characters as well but they do not play a significant role in the story so there is little to tell: Joseph is Benjamin's elder brother in the Good Book, Lemuel is named after a wise king who listens to the mother's pieces of advice, which is explained in the story. Ruth is a righteous woman in the Bible.

The most interesting one is Benjamin himself. In the Bible his mother dies and he is the youngest son, as well as in the story by Laura E. Richards. He brings a lot of happiness to his father and is the most loved child, which is contrasted to the story where Benny causes a lot of trouble, but everybody still loves him. It is interesting to note that he is playing Samson, as Ruth says, since Samson is also a Bible character, who is quite cruel and brutal, though when the Bible Benjamin grows up, he becomes braver and more soldier-like. There is a noticeable parallel between these two Benjamins. They are both loved, and both differ from the other members of their families.

So, symbolism is significant for this story, because to understand the story better, one should be acquainted with the Bible. It also reminds the reader of the Bible stories, both because of their symbolic names and the imagery which has been mentioned above.

Conclusion

Creating *Little Benjamin*, Laura E. Richards tells people a story with a Bible-like plot and ornate language (which is also reminiscent of the Bible) but transferring the events to her own time and location. The story makes people think of love for the people who surround them, especially for the family. It reminds the reader of the popular Bible quote "Love thy neighbor as thyself". The characters of the story, despite much complaining and misbehaving, have kind hearts and good souls. Their imperfection only makes them look more like real flesh-and-blood people who are never sinless and may change their decisions and opinions because of the feelings and attachments. This is a story of hesitation where family values tip the balance in favour of acceptance and forgiveness.