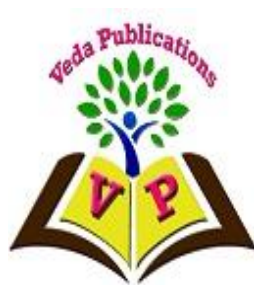


**USE OF LANGUAGE IN ARTEMIS FOWL BY EOIN COLFER**

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*M Phil Scholar, Madras Christian College, Chennai*DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54513/JOELL.2022.v9spli1.18>**ABSTRACT**

Language reflects the mood, mind, and make-up of the author at a given point of time in history and his own story. More so in the making of fictional settings and characters in whatever genre the author chooses to work in. When it comes to specific fields like science fiction, the demands on the author are more pronounced. And, the pressure is unimaginable when the field becomes a blend of fiction, science, technology, and fairy world with an amount of local myth thrown in.

Eoin Colfer is a prime example. An ordinary school-teacher with teaching experience in different national and ethnic backgrounds, Colfer turned to writing short stories and then on to novels. Even in long fiction, Colfer attempted a variety of settings and characters.

**Keywords:** *Language, Fiction, Myth, Artemis Fowl, Gnommish.*



Eoin Colfer (born 14 May 1965) is an Irish author of children's books. He worked as a primary school teacher before he became a full-time writer. He was Ireland's Children's Laureate and still wears the medal at all times. He is one of the world's favourite children's authors and has written the international bestselling Artemis Fowl books. Eoin lives in Wexford with his wife Jackie and sons Finn and Seán. He worked in Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Italy, as well as in Ireland. Eoin is very involved in theatre and has written several plays, which have been staged in various parts of Ireland.

Working as a primary teacher for 14 years after leaving Dublin University saw Colfer teach in Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Italy. His first children's book *Benny and Omar* (1998), a novel, was based on experiences he had living in the Middle East. It was published by The O'Brien Press in October 1998 and was an immediate bestseller. It was applauded by critics because of its comic genius. International recognition soon followed with several translations published. swiftly followed by a sequel *Benny and Babe* (1999) and *Going Potty* (1999). *Benny and Babe* became a No 1 bestseller in Ireland, knocking the famous Harry Potter out of the top spot in the Bestseller List. *The Wish List* is the story of Meg Finn, a young teenager who dies, but is too good for Hell and too bad for Heaven. His first few youth-market books had sold only moderately in his native Ireland – it was with

*Artemis Fowl* that he broke out of his home market and into an international arena. The first Artemis Fowl book was so successful that in 2001 he took up writing full-time. But he sees teaching as a valuable steppingstone.

Colfer has gone on to write 26 books, published in languages and countries from all over the world. He has won numerous awards, including the WH Smith People's Choice Award, the Irish World Literature Award, and the British Book Awards Children's Book of the Year, among others. In 2009 he was honoured to be commissioned to write the sixth instalment of Douglas Adam's world famous *The Hitchhiker's Guide to the Galaxy Saga, And Another Thing*. Best known for his immensely popular Artemis Fowl series, Eoin Colfer departed from his usual territory and delved into the world of crime-solving with *Half Moon Investigations*.

His most famous work is the science fantasy series Artemis Fowl. Also referred sometimes as the new Harry Potter, *Artemis Fowl* was published in 2001 and instantly gave a well lift and recognition to Eoin as a writer. Colfer has been widely criticized for being too modern and for being too violent for young audience. This criticism has been the source of many heated debates among his supporters and those who oppose his series. Colfer says he is not restrained to writing utterly for his best-selling character.



*Artemis Fowl* is the first book of the first cycle of *Artemis Fowl* in Colfer's series *The Fowl Adventures* on the fictional character Artemis Fowl (Colfer). The series is about the twelve-year old criminal mastermind Artemis Fowl. With a legacy and background of criminals from generations, it is his desire and plan to build his family fortune through crime, through getting gold from the fairy world. This is in response to the mysterious death of his father Artemis Fowl I at the hands of the Russian mafia and his mother's descent into madness. Fowl Junior takes control of his criminal empire, criminal family and starts his operations.

Because Colfer's publications prior to *Artemis Fowl* received wide acclaim, he was offered an advance of £500,000—unheard of in the children's book industry. Before Colfer finished the novel, its rights were sold in twelve different countries, including Sweden, Brazil, Spain, Israel, Denmark, Italy, and Germany. Colfer has stated that he "deliberately set out to write a book for an international audience, particularly in the fantasy market" when writing *Artemis Fowl*. In doing so, he hoped to "write the fairy world from a new angle, creating fairies who were not just good or bad, but had a lot of human qualities, family problems, neuroses, the works." In this way, the novels are a combination of real-life and "updated" Irish mythology. The fairies are slightly based on the television drama *Hill Street Blues*, one of the

only shows Colfer was allowed to stay up and watch as a kid.

When *Artemis Fowl* was published, it received much positive critical attention. In 2004, it won the Young Reader's Choice Award and the Garden State Teen Book Award. The New York Post said that *Artemis Fowl* "will grab your interest, no matter what your age." Time.com said "Artemis Fowl is pacy, playful, and very funny, an inventive mix of myth and modernity, magic and crime." The New York Times Book Review said that "Colfer has done enormously, explosively well." It has since been adapted into a graphic novel and a Disney film, which premiered on Disney+ in June 2020.

*Artemis Fowl* is probably the most famous of Eoin Colfer's books and characters and has played a huge part of his launch to literary superstardom. Moreover, these fast and funny plots are matched by Colfer's humorous and witty style of writing. He deals with difficult topics such as death, morality, poverty, and cultural differences in a way that is not overbearing, but accessible and palatable. It is this appeal that makes Eoin Colfer one of the forefront writers in his field, and one of Ireland's bestselling children's authors.

*Artemis Fowl* is a young-adult fantasy novel about a twelve-year-old criminal mastermind from Dublin. Unlike most main characters in young-adult novels, Artemis is an



antihero instead of the hero of the series. He is a deviant mastermind whose ultimate goal is to steal gold from the fairy world, by whatever means. His plot begins in Vietnam, where he blackmails an alcoholic sprite for her book of secrets. After he translates the book into modern English for the first time in history, he plots to kidnap a fairy in order to blackmail the fairy underworld to give him gold. Meanwhile, Captain Holly Short of the LEPrecon unit (the fairy special forces) is placed on a mission to recover a wayward troll who is causing mayhem in the human world. The fairies live underground, completely cut off from the human world. The human world does not know about their existence, and they want to keep it that way—they believe that if humans were to discover the existence of fairies, there would be a disastrous war that could wipe out the fairy race. Holly is able to subdue the troll, but it takes the rest of her magical powers. She travels to Italy in order to complete a ritual which will return her powers to her.

Artemis kidnaps Holly in Italy before she can complete the ritual. Artemis and Butler, his servant, take Holly back to the Fowl estate in Dublin. His plan hits a roadblock when the fairy special forces, the LEPrecons, stage a counter-attack. A LEP retrieval team is first sent to the manor, and they use their fairy “shielding” ability in order to disguise themselves—using their magic, they can make themselves vibrate

at an incredibly high frequency, which makes them invisible to the human eye. Luckily, Artemis has anticipated their shields and programmed the security system of his house at a faster frame-per-second rate so that he can see the fairies. Butler takes down the intruders, while LEPrecon unit commander Root decides to place a time-stop over Fowl manor and enters the manor to negotiate with Artemis. Artemis tells Commander Root that he wants one ton of 24-carat gold, and that he knows about the time-stop and knows how to defeat it. Meanwhile, the LEPrecons, led by Commander Root, attempt to gain entrance into Fowl Manor to save Holly. They call upon a notorious criminal, the kleptomaniac dwarf Mulch Diggums, who is often on the wrong side of the law. They ask him to dig a tunnel underground in order to break into Fowl Manor. Normally, fairies are prohibited from entering households where they are not invited, but Mulch gave up his magical powers after a lifetime of crime. What they don't know, however, is that Mulch is secretly intending to keep the gold for himself.

Mulch is able to break into the Manor while Foaly (a centaur who works at the LEPrecon and is excellent at developing new technology) feeds Artemis's security cameras a loop. Mulch explores the Fowl manor, and he finds a safe where Artemis is hiding the Book, revealing to the LEPrecons where his knowledge is coming from. The Fairy Counsel, fed up that



they have made no progress, promotes a fairy named Lieutenant Briar Cudgeon to Acting Commander, replacing Commander Root. Meanwhile, Holly breaks through the concrete floor of her holding cell and is able to complete the rituals which give her back her magical power. Cudgeon decides to release the troll that Holly released earlier into the Fowl manor, but Butler is able to subdue the troll after Holly heals him. Cudgeon is subsequently fired. The LEPrecon unit finally gives Artemis the gold ransom, but they are planning to perform a "blue rinse" (a bomb that kills all life) which will give them back their gold once they defeat Artemis. Artemis administers a sleeping potion to himself, Butler, and Butler's little sister, Juliet. Bound by magical law, the fairies are forced to leave half of their gold with Artemis. After the fairies leave, Artemis discovers that his mother has been cured by Holly's healing powers.

There are many settings in the series, including Siberia, Chicago, Vietnam, Morocco, France and various places in Ireland. Artemis himself lives in Fowl Manor, a huge mansion close to Dublin, Ireland. Most of his delightful fairy friends live in the Lower Elements, Haven and Atlantis for example.

The setting is almost all over the map, and under it. Haven exists underneath all the surface continents. The story starts unravelling in Ho Chi Minh City, and Ireland is the main place. Artemis

lives there, and Holly shows up in Ireland too because Ireland is the "old country," the most magical spot in the world. Most of the later action happens in and around Fowl Manor and the grounds.

Haven and Fowl Manor are old. Haven was built out of necessity when the fairies were driven underground. Fowl Manor was built with money and for family legacy. Fairies have to be invited into Artemis's setting. Artemis walks in Haven's front door. Haven is less like an actual haven. Fowl Manor is a symbol of Artemis's expansive power.

But then again, time-stop gives the fairies a way to turn any place into their home turf and control the setting in both space *and* time. Artemis robs them of this ability at his house. He single-handedly turns the most magical country in the world into the number one danger zone for fairies, casting doubt on the future of fairy life.

Colfer wrote *Artemis Fowl* at the dawn of the twenty-first century. It pays homage to a new era of cyberculture. It is such a blend of fields and so immersed in technology that this book for young adults is hardly understandable without the knowledge of a specialized jargon. Human, non-human, machine and myth: Colfer deliberately makes a mix of them in this book. The success of this series partially lies in his striking combination of supernatural and



technical elements. He forces us to take a new vantage point, which no longer allows for the ordinary division of the 'technical' from the 'magical.'

In the age of cyberculture, yesterday's magic is today's technology. The twentieth century was a time of rapid technological advancement. Even at its start, one could read in Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough* how technology had replaced the magical, the supernatural, and the fantastic. More than a century later, however, we cannot confirm his description. The two spheres co-exist and merge, being indispensable for humans. The 'Supernatural', the 'magical', and the 'fantastic' become separated, which is clearly visible in *Artemis Fowl*. (Bugajska)

All of these traditional set interact with a highly technical world: fairies deprived of natural wings use their artificial counterparts; dwarves are practically walking machines; invisibility is achieved by 'shielding'; and Artemis uses 'human magic' to heal a fairy, but must rack his brain to escape 'fairy technology'. The convergence point comes at the search for a Booke of Magick and at a failed ritual performance. Apparently, the supernatural has not been swallowed up by technology, and is

vital to human life. It is, rather, the world's approach to it that has changed; and this needs to be discussed. In the face of scientific progress, man has to redefine his stance and combine 'fairy' with 'technology'.

Gnommish is the language of the fairies. It is originally compared by Artemis to the Egyptian hieroglyphs. When Artemis Fowl and other characters speak Gnommish in the books, they are clearly speaking another language, but the reader-translatable Gnommish written on the bottom of each page of the books directly corresponds to English letters.

Due to Gnommish's similarity to hieroglyphics, it was assumed by Artemis that the early Egyptians might have adopted an already existing writing style instead of coming up with a new one. It is also mentioned that Gnommish is a mix of symbolic and alphabetic letters. It was originally written in spirals, starting from the middle of the page and ending at the edge, but since reading in spirals gives most fairies migraines, most modern fairy script is arranged in horizontal lines.

Artemis Fowl is the only human who is fluent in Gnommish. This comes in handy for him when speaking to one of the People who doesn't possess the gift of tongues. Also, when Artemis is in Opal Koboï's weapons laboratory, he uses his fluency in Gnommish to use a computer to open all the cages, creating a



distraction for him to get away during The Time Paradox.

Lines of translatable Gnommish run along the bottoms of *Artemis Fowl*, *The Eternity Code*, *The Opal Deception*, *The Lost Colony*, *The Time Paradox* and *The Last Guardian*. In *The Arctic Incident*, Gnommish script is typed at the end. There is also a book called *The Artemis Fowl Files* where there is a translation exercise.

The Gnommish alphabet appears in the *Artemis Fowl* books by Eoin Colfer. It is supposedly the ancestor of Egyptian Hieroglyphs and is used to write Gnommish, the language of the fairies. In the books it is used to write English and appears on the front covers, at the beginning of each chapter and runs along the bottom of each page.

Talking about Colfer's book, Blasingame commented:

Peopled with spies, goblins, dwarves, trolls, elves, pixies, centaurs, Russian mafia, and an English boys' school psychologist, this story has the charm of a fairy tale, the wonder of a sword-and-sorcery fantasy, and the futuristic gadgets of a good science fiction novel. Fairies and humans alike depend on their laptops, networks, and satellite signals to provide measures, countermeasures, and counter-

countermeasures in their battle for dominance of the earth, both above and below ground. Strategy, bravery, technology, and magic vie back and forth, as the novel accelerates toward an ending that leaves plenty of room for the next novel in this highly successful series. (Blasingame)

Colfer's current creative challenge is writing the final book in the *Artemis* series, a task that involves mixed feelings. "Artistically, though, the time is right, and it's a good time to end it, do a great last book."

Colfer got used to being compared to JK Rowling by critics and readers alike. "I have never minded," he says. "In fact, I am flattered as she is a really great writer. But I do feel that it is a superficial comparison based on genre only as our characters are very different." (Raveendranathan)

In her article on 'The Writers who invented languages', Hephzibah Anderson commented: "Languages are communities; they embody the soul of the culture that spawned them, capturing a people's history and dreams...." She also remarked,

"Authors regularly create worlds that are so fully realised they come with their own topography, history and mythology. Yet nothing is as piquant as language,





which is why some writers go that step further and create their own." (Anderson)

Eoin Colfer may not have invented a language of his own for his own literary worlds, but proves himself a success in dealing with a blend of multiple worlds in terms of language. And, it is no doubt to assume that a detailed in-depth study of his language in the worlds of *Artemis Fowl* would put him on par with writers who invented languages for their own worlds.

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