

Editorial.

Bodies, gender, and marginalization in children's literature

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"Bodies, gender and marginalization in children's literature" is a special issue in *Analyze - Journal of Gender and Feminist Studies*, a collaboration between the *Romanian Society for Feminist Analysis* and the *Research Environment of Children's Literature and Young Adult Fiction* at Stockholm University, Sweden. Special thanks are due to Arina Stoenescu, Lund University, a close friend of children literature writers from Romania, for facilitating the contact between the Journal's editors and Elina Druker, the guest editor of this special issue.

For Romania the theme of this journal issue is a premiere. If feminist and gender sensitive research has lately covered a diversity of subjects, the topic of the gender dimension of children literature has not been attentively approached in Romanian research. The present issue of the journal is therefore of utmost interest in Romania – and certainly in many other parts of the world. The children literature landscape has been diversifying lately. Today, we see a growing interest for both contemporary and historical children's literature, and an openness to accepting non-stereotypical or even anti-stereotypical stories that address the complex issues confronting young people today.

Authors of children's literature, taking good examples from countries with rich traditions of this kind (e.g., Nordic countries), are now more often embarking in the creation of less conventional, traditionalist stories and more challenging ones, stories that deal with difficult issues confronting the younger generations (violence, bullying, migration, reproductive issues, body shaming, etc.). They look at stories as ways of describing challenging experiences, how to cope with change, accepting and promoting it, and in this, they invite young readers to lean back on the old and find themselves in what William Bridges calls an 'emotional wilderness' (*Managing Transitions*).

In our turbulent times, children need more than ever support to cope with the new environments around them—for example, to adjust to the new gendered realities, to understand the fluidity of gender, to critically reflect on the over-visibility of some genders and the invisibilities of others in public narratives.

In this context, the present issue presents articles by five scholars working within the field of children's literature research in different European countries. The theme issue is the result of a cross-interdisciplinary collaboration between our research environments and brings together scholars working within both children's literature and gender and feminist studies.

Childhood and its representations in children's literature are here understood as complex and ambiguous. Despite different theoretical and methodological approaches applied by the authors, these articles express a shared scholarly interest in the physicality of children's bodies and their environment, but also how these bodies are used to question norms and expectations, both in children's fiction and in society at large. A common denominator for the articles is an interest in the materiality of the body, and how the physical body and its immaterial, fictional forms in literature for children and young adults can be understood and investigated. When turning our attention to children's bodies in literature for young audiences, structures like gender, race, sexual orientation and power hierarchies become crucial for our understanding of what is described and what kind of messages these depictions convey. The articles within this issue investigate a heterogeneous material that includes various investigations and portraits of children and their bodies within picturebooks, prose, and illustrated novels.

In their article "Depicting Fatness in Picturebooks. Fat Temporality in Malin Kivelä's and Linda Bondestam's *Den ofantliga Rosabel* and Anete Melece's *Kiosks*," Mia Österlund and Åsa Warnqvist suggest new ways of approaching bodies, and more specifically fat bodies, in children's picturebooks. Applying the queer-theoretical concept of '*fat temporality*', the authors discuss how manifestations of fatness in picturebooks express temporality. They suggest that fat bodies – both human and anthropomorphic – can be used to question a normatively organized life span by, instead, applying the concept of queer temporality. The article shows that the studied contemporary picturebooks resist the predefined way of thinking about body norms, fat, and temporality.

As Österlund and Warnqvist demonstrate, the use of norm-breaking bodies is a complex issue, and is addressed in children's literature in various and sometimes contradicting ways. In Elina Druker's article "Vermin beings. Anthropomorphism and dehumanization in children's literature," blurred boundaries between human and animal are discussed, with a focus on animal and humanoid protagonists depicted as vermin. The use of vermin is often associated with dehumanizing imagery and rhetoric, and the metaphor has historically been used in different discriminatory contexts. The article investigates whether using small characters that can be seen as vermin in literature for children reflects or questions dehumanizing imagery. Furthermore, the characters both delineate and question the human body as opposed to the non-human body. Applying posthuman and critical animal theory, the article discusses how these miniscule bodies are used to express otherness, marginalization, and a lack of power, but, more importantly, how these characters draw attention to, and question, discriminative and dehumanizing images and rhetoric.

The concept of dehumanization is also central in Maria Andersson's article "The Making(s) of a Girl. Gender and Humanness in Frances Hardinge's *Cuckoo Song*," where the author discusses the changeling motif with a focus on gender and humanness in Frances Hardinge's contemporary young adult novel *Cuckoo Song*. The author shows that the motif where a human child has been substituted by another being, and where, consequently, the world is described from the monster's point of view, juxtaposes the non-human with humans that have been represented as the "other" in Western society—like women, children, and foreign people. The article discusses how the narrative thus sheds light on practices of othering and the gendered, racialized, and age-specific norms of human life. Andersson's analysis points at a tradition in children's and young adult literature where anthropomorphic toys and other fantastical creatures are employed in order to examine issues of subjectivity, gender, and humanity.

Realistic fiction, however, has its own ways of highlighting bodies. Societal views on sexuality and sexual pleasure in young adult fiction are discussed by B.J. Epstein in her article "The (Lack of) Pleasures of Girlhood: The Masturbating Queer Girl in Young Adult

Literature.” Epstein uses masturbation in queer young adult literature as her case study and argues that societal discomfort with masturbation, female sexuality in general, and lesbian sexuality in particular, combine to make queer female solitary sex an invisible and possibly taboo subject. While a wide range of sexual practices by young males (both heterosexual and queer) is common in English-language young adult novels, there are few explicit portrayals of young queer females exploring and appreciating their own bodies and sexual responses. The author argues that this lack does young queer women a disservice, teaching them shame and secrecy rather than healthy and confident sexuality.

As the articles in the theme issue demonstrate, literature for young audiences express ideas and norms about children’s bodies, ideas that are historically ever-changing. Through their attention to the myriad fictive bodies in stories for children, whether big or small, human or non-human, organic or mechanic, they point at a muddling of categories, systems, and hierarchies.

This entire issue of our journal makes, in fact, a clear statement: stories are dynamic, constructed interactively with an audience and within a context. They are useful to entertain, but, at the same time, to illustrate, instruct, envision, help, feel and, not ultimately, provoke. Beyond bedtime stories there are also *wake-up stories*, and children all over the world need both. Some gendered wake-up stories have been under scrutiny in this special issue of the journal. Many others, from different cultural backgrounds, still wait to be scrutinized.