



L-Università ta' Malta  
Faculty of Arts

Department  
of English

ABSTRACTS

# The Child and the Book Conference

26-28 May 2022  
Valletta Campus



# Abstracts

## Core Conference Programme

**Thursday, 26th May**

### **Panel 1 - Reading as a Tool for Empowerment**

Chaired by *Svetlana Kalezić-Radonjić*

1. **Maisha Auma** (University for Applied Sciences, Magdeburg-Stendal), **Melanie Ramdarshan Bold** (University of Glasgow) and **Farriba Schulz** (Potsdam University)

#### **Inclusive Children's Literature as a Reading for Pleasure Tool in the Primary School Classroom: A Scottish and German Comparative Case Study**

Inclusive children's literature is vital. Books can shape how young readers from socially-marginalised backgrounds see themselves as well as how readers from dominant groups see and understand diversity (Bishop 1990, Ramdarshan Bold and Phillips 2019, Auma 2021). These depictions are often shaped through "cultural (master) narratives" (Lindemann Nelson 2001), that, even with inclusion and multiculturalism, tend to lead to stereotypical characterisations and reduction to the (exotic) Other and therefore culturalisation of marginalised groups that are damaging to their identities (González 2019; Schulz 2020). Counter narratives are urgently required to influence self-conceptions (Lindemann Nelson 2001; Auma 2021), give marginalised groups a voice and, based on the intersectionality approach, enhance their representation in multifaceted dimensions. The classroom is an important place to shape EDI conversations since teachers have a captive audience of pupils who can then take these insights to be explored at home. This paper will present the results of our cross-cultural, interdisciplinary research project, which explored the role of inclusive children's literature in encouraging reading for pleasure; pupils', particularly those from socially marginalised groups, reader-responses to inclusive books; and how primary school teachers curate and engage with inclusive books. Our project focused on books for 8-11 year-olds, which is a critical period in academic development, and one where there is often a decline in children reading for pleasure. Through our project, we engaged with core stakeholders – teachers, student teachers, and pupils (in Scotland and Germany) – in an interactive inquiry process, which helped us develop a larger project based on the needs of these communities. In supporting change within schools to encourage the consumption of better-quality books, we will address some of the obstacles which will be investigated within the framework of a participatory action research approach to reading for pleasure.

2. **Ana Margarida Ramos** (University of Aveiro)

#### **The Power to Change the World: A Call for a Children's Crusade**

The purpose of this text is to analyse a children's book published in Portugal in 2015, entitled *A Cruzada das Crianças (Vamos Mudar o Mundo)* [*The Children's Crusade (Let's Change the World)*], by Afonso

Cruz. Our twofold objective is: i) to reflect upon the hybrid and multimodal genre of this book, since it includes characteristics of theatrical/performative, lyric and narrative genres, combining them with references or excerpts from other discourses and arts; and ii) to analyse how it promotes and encourages children's activism, in order to change the world as we know it, in terms of the core values of the society. Inspired by the middle age children's crusade topic, the author updates children's claims to a better and more harmonious world, by creating a sequence of dialogues between children and adults, taking place in different contexts, in which children present their claims in an original and sometimes unusual way. Besides the illustrations, also by Afonso Cruz, the book includes real news regarding children's rights, underlining the need for an authentic change in the organisation of society. Themes such as poverty, inequality, hunger, child labour and climate change are just a few of the topics addressed in the book, which implicitly stresses the negative social consequences and implications of the capitalist economy model. As an example of a children's book that addresses issues related to child activism and depicts children as self-aware, proactive and demanding citizens, capable of questioning adults' choices, *The Children's Crusade (Let's Change the World)* not only gives a voice to children to express their claims and points of view, but it also illustrates a growing trend in contemporary children's literature, in relation both to the content of the book and to its form and genre, by combining literary elements with non-fictional ones.

### 3. Leanne Ellul (University of Malta)

#### **The Fun(damentals) of Reading Characters in Maltese Children's Literature**

Reading is a complex process, albeit a fun one. Readers use their prior understanding of the world to delve further into the imaginary realm of stories. Thus, readers create a special bond between themselves and the characters in a story based on similarities with people they know, or characters they've met in other books. Some readers are inclined to look for traits typical of certain characters, or furthermore, assume that the main characters are a reflection of the writers themselves. Being a writer myself, I look at books from two angles. On one hand, I get to have all the fun in creating characters who can take on some of my characteristics like Seb in *L-Istorja ta' Seb it-Tieni (u tal-Ewwel ukoll)* [*The Story of Seb the Second (And of the Seb the First as well)*] (Ellul 2017) or the characteristics of the people I know and meet like Noè in *Noè u l-Iskojjatlu bla Kwiet* [*Noè and the Restless Squirrel*] and the (Ellul 2019), whilst on the other hand, I am also a reader who loves to discover the characters in the stories of others like *F.A.R.T.S.*, known as *The De Molizz trilogy* (2009-2017), by Clare Azzopardi. By looking at the characters I created, amongst other examples, I aim to reflect further on how I mould characters with a young audience in mind. How do these characters, in turn, empower young readers? Are there particular characters that serve a better purpose of empowering readers namely superheroes like the characters in *Il-Mostru tal-Bajja tal-Ġnejna* [*The Monster of Ġnejna Bay*] (Ellul 2020)? This paper aims to show how writers write fun stories whilst bearing in mind the other roles that reading plays.

### 4. Rosalyn Borst (Tilburg University)

#### **The Role of Emotions in Power Struggles between Young Children and Adults: A Functional Absence of Anger in the Dutch Picturebook *Handje*?**

In social justice discussions, anger is often viewed as a tool to battle personal and political oppression (Lorde 1981; Chemaly 2018). In media for young children, the view of anger as a transformative source

of power is less pervasive. Classic picturebooks such as *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) and *Angry Arthur* (1982), which revolve around child characters who fly into a rage after a parent has exercised authority, focus on the child's management of anger. Displays of children's anger as tantrums that need to be managed, Murriss points out, risk confirming 'the belief that children's anger is without reason, self-indulgent, and anti-social' (2012), which robs children of agency. In this presentation, I examine the awarded Dutch picturebook *Handje? [Take my Hand?]* (2017) by Veldkamp and Tulp in which a child's display of anger remains conspicuously absent, and I explore to which extent it empowers the fictional child character and implied child reader. In *Handje?*, a young girl, Anna, wants to visit the apes at the zoo while her father wants to go home, exercising his parental authority by taking her by the hand. Instead of getting angry, Anna takes advantage of the fact that her father and other fathers are not paying attention to their children, and she swaps fathers with other children until she is with the apes. Through a multimodal analysis, I demonstrate how the absence of anger in the Dutch picturebook empowers children at two levels. First, I show how it invites the implied child reader to identify with the fictional child's empowerment which contests the aetionormativity (Nikolajeva 2010) that is characteristic of many children's books. Second, I demonstrate how the book acts as an ally to children by confronting adult mediators with the harmful consequences of parental emotional neglect, thus fostering intergenerational solidarity between child and adult (co-)readers.

## Panel 2 - Links between Materiality and Agency

Chaired by *Virginie Douglas*

### 1. Marnie Campagnaro (University of Padova)

#### **Children's Agency and Materiality: The Transformative Power of Picture Books**

Children regularly explore and manipulate objects and materials in their environment and this is one of the most important activities children engage in during childhood (Wynberg et al. 2021). It has been persistent throughout human evolution and is observed across different cultures. These activities of exploring and/or manipulating objects and materials are also well-represented in picture books. Characters are often doing something with their hands. Furthermore, objects provide concreteness to stories and bring importance to dialogues, encounters and transformations. Analysing these interactions in picture books can represent a port of entry into the important, but sometimes elusive, concept of children's agency. Even though children's agency is widely discussed in children's literature research (Lesnik-Oberstein 1994, 2011; Douglas 2007), recent conceptualisations (Flynn 2016; Gubar 2016) provide little information about the dynamics through which children's agency emerges at a material level in children's books and how the interactions with objects and materiality influence and transform characters. Drawing on Gallagher's theorisations (2019) of children's agency for childhood studies, four different objects (a box, a chair, a suitcase and a tissue) will be investigated, focusing attention not on the representations of adult oppression or on how children demonstrate their power and rights, but on how children can exercise forms of freedom through these four objects. Depending on the context within which the object is experienced, agency will be exercised in radically different ways. This paper aims to offer a framework to explore the concept of children's agency through the transformative power of objects, throwing some additional ideas into the mix of debates about children's agency in children's literature.

## 2. Mar Sanchez (Surrey University)

### **Cartonera Publishing with Children: Intergenerational Solidity and Cultural Activism**

Due to substantial media coverage many academics interested in childhood may be familiar with young activists such as Greta Thunberg, who are leading activist movements in the Western world. Simultaneously, there are children taking part in lesser-known forms of collective, local activism in the Global South, which have not received such public interest. A fascinating example is the active role that children play in socially-engaged cartonera publishers across Latin America, which sheds light on the way in which children are taking part in wider struggles through artistic and cultural production. Cartoneras are “community publishers who make low-cost books out of materials recovered from the street in the attempt to democratise and decolonise literary/artistic production” (Bell et al. 2020). They emerged as an alternative to a commercial publishing industry concerned primarily with competition and profit-making. Cartoneras are diverse, and their objectives differ, but some of the most socially-engaged collectives aim to give a voice to underrepresented groups, engaging in cultural activism (Bell et al. 2022). These cartonera publishers create opportunities for children to write, illustrate and publish their work, challenging the deeply entrenched epistemic injustice (Murriss 2013; Murriss 2016) that children experience. On occasion, children themselves have taken the lead in running their own small cartonera publishers, dedicated solely to the work of young people. Many of these publishers follow principles of horizontality and collaboration that foster intergenerational solidarity. In line with the kinship model that Gubar advocates (2013), these collaborations facilitate and enable children’s agency. This paper analyses selected publications from Mexico and Argentina in which adults and children join voices to address social issues, such as gendered violence and incarceration, and their effect on families and communities. Using these examples, it is argued that intergenerational solidarity and collaboration in which children are key actors is a valuable tool in the fight for social justice.

## 3. Katharina Egerer (Technische Universität Dresden)

### **Typewriters as an Instrument of Empowerment for Children: Representation in Contemporary Picture Books**

Although the analog technology of typewriters is outdated and no longer part of children’s everyday life, a lot of contemporary picture books integrate typewriters in different contexts. This could be misconceived easily as a simple retro trend or as motivated by a kind of nostalgia (Salisbury 2017). But through their visibility, typewriters can not only refer to special activities, certain periods of time or cultural-historical developments - they can also be evidently as well as veiledly linked to the topic of children’s empowerment. The linkage can be found in two fundamental aspects of traditional typewriter representations. Firstly, the device contributed to different forms of emancipation through its development in the history of technology - like the emancipation of typing and publishing women. Secondly, “[c]hildren have always been part of the visual story of the typewriter” (Vangool 2015) by using them. Against this background, it is conclusive that the typewriter in the contemporary picture book can also support the empowerment of child protagonists and encourage a positive formation of their identity. By using a typewriter, they become active in a childhood which is marked by challenges, and therefore become able to change their life circumstances, gain self-confidence, receive recognition or feel liberated. In this light, the paper explores how the typewriter in contemporary picture books contributes to the empowerment of children and describes the relation between the



device and the child protagonist. Therefore, picture book analyses (Staiger 2019) of selected typewriter picture books in different languages is conducted. The analyses focus on the inspirational narration as an educational element for a child to develop into a responsible adult shaping society and on the literary-aesthetic character of the picture books themselves (Ewers 2018).

#### 4. Maria Frendo (University of Malta)

### **'I was transported in thought to the scenes of childhood': Reading Children/Children Reading**

This paper looks at childhood examples in fiction which focus on children engaging with books and music scores. English literature dips into this subject with regular emphasis so that one can almost trace a genealogy going back to Chaucer. The image of the child and the book comes to more prominence, however, with the late eighteenth century and becomes a sort of leitmotif through Victorianism into the twentieth century. From Blake to Wordsworth, Keats to Austen, Dickens to the Brontë Sisters, at some point we find a child reading a book, reconstructing it in the imagination, engaging with it in retrospect as an adult, and so many more reconfigurations of the icon. The book in the child's hands is that which at once provides a shield of protection against an intruding or invasive adult (for instance, we think of *Jane Eyre*), a source of comfort and an escape into dreamland (Jo Marsh), the precociousness of Matilda in the eponymous novel by Roald Dahl, and so many more examples. Books, however, do not only come in pages printed with words; sometimes they contain printed tunes, a different albeit no less valid language. Examples abound especially in Dickens's *David Copperfield* (1850), *Dombey and Son* (1848), *Martin Chuzzlewit* (1844) and more. A close reading of a few of the texts referred to here attempts to relate the importance of books in a child's life, and how this then becomes a silent protagonist in the child's development as a responsible citizen. To this end, the reading of these works is related to Rousseau's *Emile*, tracing the fundamental trajectories between the child as individual and the society which s/he then forms part. The title 'Reading Children' refers to both children reading books as well as adults understanding children who read books.

## **Panel 3 - Children and the Political Avantgarde**

Chaired by *Kenneth Kidd*

#### 1. Michael Heyman (Berklee College of Music)

### **The Child and No Book: Political Activism in Breakbeat, Slam Poetry and the New Auditory Avantgarde**

This paper takes a tour through the largely unexplored poetry landscape, rarely available in bookstores, sometimes called 'BreakBeat'. This wide-ranging genre, found mostly in the UK and the USA, is a mixture of hip-hop and the slam/performance poetry scenes that creates what Dana Gioia calls a kind of popular "auditory avant-garde" grounded in political activism and the dynamics of identity empowerment. Although hip-hop for children may sound like an odd pairing, hip-hop has, since its start in the 70s, been deeply woven into the lives of American youths, bringing with it Black urban culture and engagement with social change, in addition to rigorous technical and aesthetic elements via rap, deejaying, dance, and graffiti. The more recent trend of slam poetry, which had its ragged beginnings in the late 80s, has since filtered down to teenagers and even elementary schools,

creating a thriving arena of competition, cultural criticism, and self-discovery. BreakBeat is the convergence of these aesthetics and cultures: a performative, radical, experimental hybrid genre to which children are finding their way primarily via the Internet, since publishers seem reticent to publish it. This talk surveys some of the rare print sources of BreakBeat, online sources popular with children, and school and community programs, both in America and the UK, that promote the appreciation, creation, and performance of BreakBeat poetry. The focus here is on three practitioners: Benjamin Zephaniah, Adisa the Verbalizer, and of more recent fame, Amanda Gorman. This talk also looks at the anthology *Hip Hop Speaks to Children* (2008), edited by Nikki Giovanni, one of the few examples of commercial print culture embracing this living, thriving new form.

*Note: This is a collaboration with Dr. Joseph T. Thomas, Jr., Professor of English and Director of the National Center for the Study of Children's Literature at San Diego State University, San Diego, USA.*

## 2. Jill Coste (TeachingBooks) - virtual

### **Ageism and Activism: Generation Z Authors as Truth-Tellers**

In a podcast discussing publishing and age bias, bestselling authors Chloe Gong and Faridah Àbíké-Íyímídé address the condescension they have faced as young writers. Both women wrote their books at age 19 while attending college and they published in their early 20s. “Everyone knows it’s rude to say ‘older people can’t get published.’ But the same courtesy doesn’t extend to younger writers,” says Gong. While Àbíké-Íyímídé and Gong voice their frustration at not being taken seriously, their work also illustrates a deft understanding of oppression and hegemony. Gong undertook extensive research for her Romeo & Juliet retelling, *These Violent Delights* (2020), diving into the history of Shanghai in the early 20th century. She immersed herself in imperialism and colonialism and felt a personal connection to, and frustration about, the story of her heritage. “It’s strange to research your own ancestral history,” Gong says, “and then feel a century-old anger come to life.” Gong channelled that anger into her novel, which envisions rival gangs in 1926 Shanghai, where the characters Juliette and Roma struggle with hybrid identities that make them question the world around them. By integrating the systemic injustices of colonialism with the retelling of a classic, Gong demonstrates the power and potential of young adult literature to speak to cultural issues. Similarly, Àbíké-Íyímídé’s novel, *Ace of Spades* (2021), evinces a savvy grasp of contemporary race relations. *Ace of Spades* critiques the privilege of whiteness and wealth at private schools in America, presenting a thriller that offers chilling commentary on racial power dynamics. Through crafting provocative YA texts that offer fictional entrées into social (in)justice, both Gong and Àbíké-Íyímídé engage in their own sort of activism. As teenage writers who are not far removed from their target audience, Gong and Àbíké-Íyímídé can speak directly to the needs and interests of modern teenagers. This paper argues, then, that Generation Z writers are possibly *best* poised to address contemporary cultural issues. Their very success both repudiates those who would say teenage writers shouldn’t get published and shows how much conversations about social justice resonate with young readers.

### 3. Hadassah Strichnothe (Bremen University) – virtual

#### **The Transhuman and the Sea: Political Activism in Contemporary Fantasy Novels for Young Adults**

This presentation explores the political agenda of contemporary YA fantasy novels that centre around water creatures and the pollution of the environment. It will argue that in novels and series like Tanya Stewner's *Alea Aquarius* (2015), Katja Brandis' *Seawalkers* (2019) or Dan Jolley's *Waterland* (2021) the figure of the water creature is fused with the redeeming child (or young adult) who transcends the boundaries of human nature. Traditional figures from mythology such as selkies or mermaids/mermen are thus reinterpreted as transhuman activists who seek to save their home environment from the destruction caused by human technologies. These usually adolescent protagonists function as role models for the reader who is called to act on the injustices addressed in the texts. Implicitly, these novels develop a transhuman activist ethics based on Romantic ideas of the child as a harbinger of a golden age that seeks to heal the damages caused by humankind. The paper will argue that fantastic literature which has often been accused of escapism, on the contrary, works as a conscious incentive to political activism.

### 4. Nikola Novaković (University of Applied Health Sciences Zagreb) – virtual

#### **Comic Stoicism as Reclaimed Agency: Children's Resistance to the World of Adults in the Works of Edward Gorey**

According to the description of the exhibit entitled 'Hapless Children', organised in Edward Gorey's house in Massachusetts in 2021, the author's works are "populated with a menagerie of youngsters who come to bad ends" but without an attendant invitation to the reader to establish an emotional attachment. In fact, quite the opposite: "empathy is not to be served at this meal." Inverting the mechanics of the Dickensian story and the cautionary tale, Gorey plays on the reader's expectations by parodically excising the former genre's happy endings and transformative ascendancies (The Edward Gorey House 2021: n.p.) while removing the latter's moral or didactic purpose (Lackner 2015; Petermann 2018). In such works, child characters are often framed as victims: they come to harm because of adults who are shown to be incompetent or distracted (*The Retrieved Locket* [1994]), or who harbour criminal tendencies (*The Loathsome Couple* [1977]); they suffer at the hands of other, malicious children (*A Limerick* [1973]); or they perish for no reason at all, devoured by a careless or mysterious universe unconcerned with the sensibilities of children (*The Gashlycrumb Tinies* [1963]). Such a conception of a world would perhaps be overly bleak were it not for Gorey's characteristic humour, and in works outlined above much of it is created by the visual depiction of the "hapless children". For, despite the grave circumstances in which they find themselves and the lack of agency which they experience, such children often remain impassive, bemused, or even bored. Their absence of a strong emotional reaction, when contrasted against situations which the reader might expect to be framed as frightening or tragic, leads to humorous incongruity. In my presentation, I plan to show how this comic stoicism of Gorey's doomed children functions as a way for them to reclaim their agency by retaining control over their own reactions when faced with the brutality of the adult world.



## Panel 4 - Children's Rights and Books

Chaired by *Evelyn Arizpe*

### 1. Tracy Fletcher (Uppsala University)

#### Role Models Inspiring Social Change

This paper discusses the potential of literary non-fiction to mediate mental health awareness in young adult readers. There is scope and reason to explore the potential for this type of literature to be used in education as firstly mental health in the age group 14-18 is of huge concern, and secondly due to how teaching strategies and literature can improve the dialogue between young men and women surrounding mental health. Specifically, this research centres around three examples of literary memoirs: *Women Don't Owe You Pretty* (2020) by British writer/artist/activist Florence Given, *My Name is Why* (2019) by the British/Ethiopian poet Lemn Sissay, and *Reasons to Stay Alive* (2016) by British writer Matt Haig. Although very different in backgrounds they share similar themes relating to mental health along with a cult status and fan following via social media. Given's debut novel *Women Don't Owe You Pretty* is part memoir, inspired by her own experience of a toxic relationship, and part wake up call, applicable not only to women or even her own generation. Given confronts the issues of contemporary feminism through her direct and engaging stream of conscious style writing, by alerting readers to question societal norms and ideals. Lemn Sissay recounts his childhood in Northern England, after being adopted and then fostered, through an intensely stark and emotional account of growing up in the British care system. Finally, Matt Haig describes living with depression as a young man. The research includes teaching observations and the reading, analysis and discussion of texts with a class of 25-30 students, interviews and surveys to determine the conclusion and further research.

### 2-4. Julie McAdam, Rabaha Arshad and Rowena Seabrook (University of Glasgow)

#### [PANEL ABSTRACT]

#### Envisioning Steps Towards Advancing Children's Rights Through Books

This panel looks at different research approaches with the overall aim of raising awareness and advancing children's rights based on children's books. Each of the presenters worked with different children's texts but all can be seen to highlight the issue of social justice and children's rights, with the second two papers reporting on empirical data collected in England, Scotland and Pakistan. The panel moves from a focus on the book, to a focus on the mediators and, finally, a focus on children and young people. The first paper provides a theoretical framework that draws on the concept of 'resources of hope' in children's texts that help encourage 'utopian thinking' and imagine alternatives to current situations of injustice, such as forced displacement and poverty, that have a disproportionate impact on children. The second paper presents initial findings from research located in schools in Pakistan, where collaboration between teachers and the researchers through children's texts helped raise awareness of violence, a widespread but often ignored issue in educational contexts that also mainly affects children. It shows how creating a space for dialogue can begin significant discussions on the need for changing not only teaching practices and the curriculum but also, in some cases, children's texts themselves. The final paper brings young readers' voices into the picture through a research

project that allowed participants – both children and adults – to select a human rights theme and work creatively to discuss and respond to it even in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic which prevented in-person interaction. The creative responses from different generations of participants working together and initial steps towards action bring us back to the notions of hope, ‘utopian thinking’ and envisioning positive alternatives which can be applied to different contexts and amplified through a careful selection of children’s books. They are also a reminder of the power of collaboration and caring relationships which are at the core of any steps taken towards advancing children’s rights.

- **Julie McAdam**

### **Using Children’s Literature to Engage in Utopian Thinking**

Previous work by McAdam et al. (2020) suggested that children’s literature is imbued with “resources of hope” emphasising ways of being in the world that can provide children with space to imagine alternatives, providing them with “thought experiments that they can draw upon to situate themselves and their communities”. This paper draws on work from Ruth Levitas (2013) on “utopian method”, expressed through archaeological, ontological and architectural modes, as means of critically directing the analysis of two texts, *The Invisible* by Tom Percival (2021) and *Wisp: A Story of Hope* by Zana Fraillon (2018) as possible “resources of hope” (Levitas 2013). This paper looks to provide insights into how such texts might potentially be used (by mediators and children) to sustain or direct hope with reference to human rights and social justice. McAdam archaeologically digs into the work of social justice educators and critical pedagogues who ontologically embrace human flourishing to architecturally create a set of critical lenses. These allow the authenticity and intentions of the authors to be examined, the spaces and places within the texts that challenge or reimagine oppression to emerge, and the power of collaboration and friendships to be foregrounded. By juxtaposing the analysis of the two texts, it can be argued that children need to be introduced to literature that ignites sparks of utopian thinking, pointing towards directions of travel where the sparks may travel, and to literature that pre-figures potential transformations of how to create socially just spaces. Attending to this balance between the aesthetic and didactic potential of the literature returns us to More’s (1516) original pun of utopia as the good place that is no place and the need to revisit the potential of utopia not as places or space but as means of guiding our thinking.

- **Rabaha Arshad**

### **Addressing School Violence through Children’s Literature: Initial Findings from a Teacher-researcher Collaboration in Pakistan**

Discourses on children’s rights, regardless of context, tend to imply a consensus on their right to education (Article 28), however, children’s rights with regards the content, means and outcomes of education (Article 29-31) and the consequences for their development and wellbeing are seldom realised in practice (Todres & Higinbotham 2016). Hence, the sites of education are often a site of oppression in children’s lives. The violence children experience in schools can be widespread and takes many forms. In the South Asian context, some of the recognised forms include corporal punishment, physical violence (in or on the way to school, including terrorist attacks), sexual abuse and psychological and emotional violence (by teachers and/or peers) (SAIEVAC 2016). Despite this, few studies have examined schooling practices that contribute to this violence by not respecting children as individuals. This paper draws upon initial data from a research project with school teachers in

Pakistan which aims to develop interventions based on children's texts that address different forms of school violence. It focuses on the role of teachers in reimagining a school climate and pedagogy that uses children's texts and text-based activities to help incorporate children's voices. Previous research has shown that introducing children's literature to facilitate this process and address issues of critical importance to communities has the potential to open a dialogic space where children feel safe and are supported in reclaiming their agency (McAdam 2020). In addition, a critical, hopeful and action-oriented approach (Short 2017) through children's texts which pays attention to inequities within the schooling system and pedagogical practices that contribute to violence children experience, can provide visions of an alternative schooling experience that respects the rights of the child. The initial data from the teacher-researcher collaboration for this project will provide insights into the following themes: teachers' understandings of the role pedagogy plays in perpetuating school violence; personal and organisational challenges in designing and implementing children's texts driven interventions addressing school violence; and the extent to which children's literature from Pakistan promotes and supports children's agency in addressing school violence. The conclusion relates to the role of adults as protectors of children's rights and also enablers in the children's struggles to achieve them.

- **Rowena Seabrook**

### **Stews and Skeys: Intergenerational Human Rights Education with The Discovery Book Club**

Education is central to the achievement and defence of universal human rights (UNGA 2011). This paper explores lessons learned from research into using children's literature for human rights education. Particular attention is paid to centring children's agency and embracing intergenerational dialogue in the research methodology. The Discovery Book Club was a research project that took place during 2021 in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Children and adults selected a human rights theme through a series of online activities and then received specially curated book boxes in the post. Participants were encouraged to make choices as to whether and how to engage with the books. This paper discusses the use of participatory methods to invite knowledge and agency into the research space as well as the facilitation of the "between-ness" of intergenerational dialogue (Hanmore-Cawley and Scharf 2018.) Questions of "ethical behaviour" (Manzo and Brightbill 2017) are considered in relation to the selection of texts, the role of technology, and power dynamics between child participants, adult participants, and the adult researcher. Examples of creativity on the part of both the researcher and the participants are shared. These are connected to the significance of care in this project, not only because of the focus on human rights and the relationships between participants, but also the experience of participating in research in the context of a pandemic. Finally, the paper reflects on the question of whether The Discovery Book Club increased knowledge and understanding of human rights, and if participants were more motivated to take action to defend their own and others' rights.

## Panel 5 - Race, Heritage and Civic Pride

Chaired by *Roxanne Harde*

### 1. Nicholas Kleese (University of Minnesota)

#### **The Whiteness of America Green: Space, Race and Ecology in *Caddie Woodlawn* and *M.C. Higgins, The Great***

In recent years, climate activists and authors have called to conceptualise “citizenry” as an intergenerational, global, ecocentric sociocultural formation more capable of combating the global climate crisis (Oziewicz 2022). The need for this conceptualisation is paramount; so too are the sociopolitical barriers for ensuring that this citizenry is equitable and just. Historically, in the United States – a nation that has had an outsized, destructive impact on the ecosphere – political disenfranchisement played out in tandem with violent geospatial reconfiguration and racial regimentation (Gilmore 2007). White male individuals were granted greater access to nature via colonial expansion, while indigenous Americans and enslaved Black Americans were forced into particular ecological relationships spatially arranged as the reservation and plantation. Thus, the right to nature was limited to those with full rights of citizenship – and, following Robin Berenstein (2011), the right to childhood as a form of nascent citizenship. In my presentation, I discuss the spatial and ecological implications of the American pastoral child subject. I argue that the pastoral, in its American iteration, must be understood as both an aesthetic and an ideology (Marx 1964) that relied on the figured innocence and futurity of the abstracted white child (Rosaldo 1989). I ground my claims in readings of two Newbery Award-winning middle-grade novels, *Caddie Woodlawn* (Brink 1935) and *M.C. Higgins, the Great* (Hamilton 1974), to offer distinct examples of how the literary pastoral can be used to uphold or subvert the pastoral ideology and, in doing so, figure particular socio-ecological futurities for their focal characters. I conclude by considering the pastoral’s pedagogical and political impacts on potential American engagement with a global ecocentric citizenry – one that will be necessary in the struggle to secure a sustainable climate future.

### 2. Karen Sands O’Connor (Newcastle University)

#### **Through the Streets of Babylon, Led by a Child: Race and Child Activism in Heritage Spaces**

In 1820, William Blake completed his illuminated work, *Jerusalem*, which criticised (in part) Britain’s rape of the countryside through industrialisation. In his self-illustrated poem, part of which has become an unofficial British national anthem, Blake argues that a metaphoric representation of Britain would travel “through the streets of Babylon, led by a child” (1820). The aged man being led is blind, but the child brings him to the new Jerusalem in England’s green and pleasant land. Blake’s rural England is associated with innocence and renewal, especially for generations of Britons who knew Blake’s poem through Hubert Parry’s hymn version. The linking of innocence with English rurality ignores the many British country houses built on wealth from colonial plantations worked by enslaved people from Africa. British country estates housed people of colour from the Caribbean, Africa and Asia. The historic presence of people of colour in the British countryside is often resisted by white Britons; Corinne Fowler points out that country houses “have been instrumental to depicting rural England as a white preserve which valiantly resists foreign influence” (2016). This paper investigates Fowler’s Colonial Countryside project, begun in 2016, which used child historians to investigate links

between country houses and empire. Mitchell and Sobers argue that “audiences often look for themselves in the work with which they are engaged” (“Re:Interpretation”). Many of the child historians came from Black or Asian backgrounds, and their responses often criticised Britain’s involvement in imperialism and enslavement. The paper investigates the children’s role as activists and writers, as well as public response to the project, including negative responses from white British people in media and government who condemned the project for “rewriting” history and harming Britain’s national image.

3. **Naomi Hamer** (Ryerson University) and **Ann Marie Murnaghan** (York University, Canada)

**Child Curators Inside and Outside of the Text: Young People’s Agency and Activism in Museum Kid Lit and Exhibits**

In children’s literature and media, museums act as important sites for stories of children’s adventure, agency and independence. The popularity of these fictional narratives reveal fantasies of children as active curators within museum spaces (Zimmerman 2015). These representations stand in stark contrast to children’s experiences in contemporary museums, where their presence is monitored, their actions curtailed, and their participation limited by rigid pedagogic and nationalistic agenda geared towards young visitors. Activist movements of decolonising and queering the museum (Coombes and Phillips 2020; Sullivan and Middleton 2019) often omit or downplay the potential role of young people as curators and active citizens in these spaces. Critical children’s museology (Patterson 2021) has emerged to address these gaps, and we situate our work within this framework. This paper will explore the space between the fantastical representations of museums in children’s literature, museum programming inspired by these literary representations, and critical interventions in museum spaces that support movements towards children’s agency and engagement in museum spaces. Through an analysis of Konigsberg’s *From the Mixed-Up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (1967), and Trenc’s *Night at the Museum* novel (1993) and film franchise (2006; 2009; 2014; 2022), associated programming at the Metropolitan Museum of New York and American Museum of Natural History, and contemporary projects that incorporate children as curators, we highlight how children’s citizenship is both imagined and enacted. We argue that museums are significant sites for analyses of children’s citizenship (Mai and Gibson 2011) as they represent both the past of national heritages and their potential as liberatory venues for imagined futures.

4. **Regan Postma-Montaño** (Hope College, Michigan) – *virtual*

**Propelling Mass Movements Forward: Black Lives in Anti-Racist Literature for Young People of Our Americas**

In *Medicine Stories*, Aurora Levins Morales instructs us to centre young people in our discussions of activism: “we need to listen to children more than we talk to them. We must back the initiative of children themselves, secure resources and share skills, respect their right and ability to lead themselves, and learn to let them lead us” (1998). Listening to children and letting them lead us, for my purposes, means examining the way they are impacted by oppressions and how they find avenues to resist and challenge these oppressions. This paper examines literature for young readers by Margarita Engle (US/Cuba) and Quince Duncan (Costa Rica) who redress the erasure of African heritage in Latinx/Latin American cultures thereby inviting young readers to see Black heritage as an integral part of past and present identity in the hemispheric Americas. Through these storytelling efforts in works

such as Engle's *The Surrender Tree: Poems of Cuba's Struggle for Freedom* (2008) and *Silver People: Voices from the Panama Canal* (2016) and Duncan's *Los cuentos de Anansi* (reissued 2019), as well as his participation in curricular project *Del olvido a la memoria: Nuestra historia afro-caribeña* (2011), young readers are provided ways to see Afro-Latinx/Latin American peoples as part of the hemispheric imaginary and destabilise racism. Historical in nature, these texts foreground cross-historical analysis by young readers, enabling them to see those who came before them, and who fought for racial equality, as predecessors for their racial equity activism. An overarching theme of this paper, therefore, is the ways in which our current Black Lives Matter movement is strengthened by understanding these transnational and hemispheric forms of resistance around race. My guiding light is that children, as Levins Morales tells us, propel "mass movements forward into open rebellion almost faster than adults could build organisations behind them" (1998).

## Panel 6 - The Role of Education in Children's Civic Agency

Chaired by *Maria Alcantud Diaz*

### 1. Michael Marokakis (Newington College, Sydney)

#### **Meeting Shakespeare at School: Adolescent Agency in School Story Adaptations of Shakespeare**

The school story became home for many Shakespearean literary adaptations by Australian authors in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. In these novels, the Shakespearean worlds are cast onto the lives of adolescents who encounter Shakespeare in school spaces. The characters hold Shakespearean books in their hands, meeting his words and characters in ways that ultimately connect the past literature to contemporary experiences and pursuits for agency. These encounters reify childhood through the cultural capital of Shakespearean words and worlds, folding the ideologically edifying qualities of Young Adult literature into the didacticism of the school classroom or stage. Readers clearly recognise these spaces as schools where students are learning about Shakespeare or rehearsing his plays, but simultaneously authors take liberty in releasing these spaces from the strictures of education that might have otherwise impeded the appropriation of Shakespearean stories onto adolescents' lives. These representations have emerged as a corpus of Australian literary adaptations of Shakespeare for Young Adults in the last two decades and form the basis of this paper. By examining these spaces through the educational theory of 'weakness' posited by Gert Biesta and advanced by Liam Semler, alongside notions of Shakespearean cultural capital, questions about how authors realise the connections between Shakespeare and contemporary adolescent identity and agency emerge. Does the liberation of these spaces inevitably allow adolescents to find voice and identity through Shakespearean encounters? Is that the intention of representing school spaces in such ways and is there a difference between the way that certain school spaces activate the agency of the adolescent? This paper will explore these questions through a selection of Australian Young Adult novel adaptations of Shakespearean plays.



## 2. Anna Kérchy (University of Szeged)

### **Wonderland Belongs to Everyone: Fusing Politics with Pedagogy to Promote Ethics of Enchantment**

*Wonderland Belongs to Everyone (Meseország Mindenkié)* is the most controversial volume in the contemporary Hungarian children's book market today. Published by Labrisz, an association of lesbian, bisexual and trans women, this anthology of fairy-tale retellings features characters from minority groups – including queer, Roma and disabled protagonists – who are portrayed in an empowering, positive light. The volume uses the postmodern narratological strategy of 'writing beyond the ending' to challenge debilitating norms which perpetuate social injustice, and to spread a lesson of inclusivity, diversity, and empathy. The book has elicited heated debates about the roles and responsibilities of children's literature, the compatibility of pedagogical and activist agendas. Although the first print run sold out within a week, and the book boasts a growing fandom - with its editor nominated by Time magazine as one of the 100 most influential people in 2021 - the Hungarian government, in the name of consumer protection, ordered the publisher to place disclaimers on the book cover warning readers of "behaviours inconsistent with traditional gender roles", and a right-wing female politician even shredded the book to protest against its immoral, transgressive content. The aim of this presentation is three-fold: (1) to contextualise the banning of the collection within the cultural history of children's books' censorship, that has a haunting prehistory within post-socialist Central Eastern European countries, (2) to study how the volume revives what fairy-tale scholar Jack Zipes considers the inherent political intent and egalitarian message of the folk and fairy tale genre, and (3) to explore the different modes of resistance through which adult and child readers may interpret these stories. asking how audience reactions resonate with the ethics of dis/enchantment.

## 3. Elżbieta Jamróz-Stolarska and Bożena Hojka (University of Wrocław)

### **Polish Children's Literature in the Battle for Children's Rights**

In 1989, the United Nations approved the Convention on the Rights of the Child. Poland ratified this document two years later, although the beginnings of children's rights activities in our country date back to the interwar period and are connected with the pedagogical thought of Janusz Korczak (1878-1942). This outstanding writer and pedagogue emphasised that "There are no children - there are people," and his postulates for respecting the child as an equal to the adult were far ahead of the era in which he lived. Although children's rights have been written down and are legally protected nowadays, it, unfortunately, does not mean that they are universally respected in everyday life. Children are often seen as too inexperienced and immature to be rights-bearing citizens (Saguisag and Prickett 2016). There are cases of violations of their rights, which are often the result of their ignorance, both by children and adults. That is why it is so important to educate about them. Teaching children about their rights not only prepares them to exercise them as adults, but also makes children more respectful of the rights of others (Todres and Higinbotham 2013). One way to make children aware of their rights may be through books, more and more of which can be found in the Polish publishing market in recent years (Zabawa 2015; Kucharska 2018). In our paper, we will focus on books devoted to children's rights by Polish authors published after 1989. We will try to answer the following questions: How many works on this topic were published in the discussed period? What genres do they represent? What age groups are they addressed to and how are they adapted to them? What verbal and visual strategies do their creators employ? What methods of popularising knowledge do they use? Finally, how are children's rights understood and interpreted in them? Additionally, we

will analyse the communication strategies used by the authors of the discussed publications in order to reveal what kind of relations the adult senders enter into with the child reader - do they perceive him or her as a full-fledged citizen and partner in social coexistence, or rather as an object of socialising educational and upbringing activities?

4. **Miranda A. Green-Barteet** (University of Western Ontario) – *virtual*

### **Transgressing Normative Girlhood: Conduct Manuals for Black Girls**

Nineteenth and early-twentieth-century conduct manuals were written for U.S. girls primarily intended to teach girls how to become good wives and mothers. These manuals, including those written in 1845 and 1869 by Catharine Beecher and Harriet Beecher Stowe, constructed girlhood so as to privilege and normalise the experiences of middle- and upper-class white girls. Put another way, these manuals suggested that girlhood was universal and that all girls experience girlhood similarly. On the surface, nineteenth- and early twentieth-century conduct manuals written for Black girls seem to emphasise the mode of girlhood proffered by Beecher and Stowe, among others. While authors such as Silas X. Floyd, Maria W. Stewart and Anna Julia Cooper do offer Black girls advice on how to be good wives and mothers, they also advise girls on how to educate themselves, how to carry themselves in public spaces and how to establish careers. Further, many such manuals include information on how to organise meetings, how to serve their communities and how to express themselves in public. Thus, these manuals subvert the traditional purpose of conduct manuals and offer Black girl readers an alternative to the normative construction of girlhood. Such manuals also tacitly teach Black girls how to conduct themselves in a white supremacist world. This paper analyses conduct manuals for Black girls, focusing on Floyd's 1905 *Floyd's Flowers; or, Duty and Beauty of Colored Children*, arguing that many such manuals challenged the normative construction of girlhood. In so doing, these manuals implicitly challenged the idea that there is a singular way to be a girl and argued that notions of U.S. girlhood must also account for Black girls if they are to accurately represent U.S. girls. Further, these manuals often taught Black girls how to negotiate white supremacy.

## **Panel 7 - From Trauma to Empowerment**

Chaired by *Elizabeth Leung*

1. **Katrin Dautel and Daniela Brockdorff** (University of Malta)

### **Temporal and Spatial Shifts as a Means of Empowerment in Narratives on Child Abuse and Neglect**

“You just have to remember the future, it’s as simple as that” (Vanderbeke 2017). In narratives of child abuse and neglect, both for children as well as narratives about children, a way of coping and empowerment to escape the confines of harsh reality is often achieved through the various realms made available by the protagonists’ imagination. As Dyregrov states, the victims’ “imagination [is] a partner to help cope with the situation” (2011). Upon reading narratives of this kind, one often encounters children who undertake spatial and temporal shifts, both in their imagination as well as in real life. This can be a simple shift away from home or even in the form of time travel, physical travelling or gaining superpowers like telekinesis to construct an alternative reality. In fact, Shadia Abdel-Rahman Tellez explains that “[i]mmediate dissociation is a common defence mechanism in

certain cases of trauma, as victims tend to evade the traumatic scene” (2018). This leads to the necessary distancing from their suffering, compartmentalising their experiences for the sake of survival. However, even though this may often seem like a way of merely fleeing their traumatic environment, one may also consider this as an opportunity, allowing the protagonists agency within their own narratives to counter the lack of it in their present circumstances. In our proposed paper, this will be analysed and discussed through various contemporary literary examples from narratives written both in German and English, focusing primarily on the depiction of children and their construction of agency to mitigate their disturbing situations.

## 2. Janice Bland (Nord University) - *virtual*

### **Picturebooks Inspiring In-Depth Learning: Stories of Determination and Wisdom**

According to Serafini (2008), “picturebooks present possibilities and challenges for novice and experienced readers alike”. While challenging picturebooks are increasingly admired by readers of different age groups (Ommundsen, Haaland and Kümmerling-Meibauer 2022), the picturebook might still be considered the quintessential literary format for pre-adolescent children. Therefore, it makes absolute sense that recent picturebooks on social justice issues spotlight children who are exceptionally brave and resilient under very difficult circumstances, including Malala Yousafzai, Greta Thunberg, Autumn Peltier and Louis Braille. This paper focuses on picturebooks on themes of social and environmental justice that can motivate children (and their teachers) towards *in-depth learning*, an approach that “involves the students as agentive and motivated participants, working collaboratively and with empathy while preparing for and confronting the challenges of today and of times ahead” (Bland 2022). Global movements are being led by young people, the fight for climate justice and literacy for all girls, the fight against ableism and other critical issues. The picturebooks I will introduce in this session, Malala Yousafzai and Kerascoët’s *Malala’s Magic Pencil* (2017), Bryant and Kulikov’s *Six Dots: A Story of Young Louis Braille* (2016), Tucker and Pesico’s *Greta and the Giants* (2019) and Lindstrom and Goade’s *We are Water Protectors* (2020), demonstrate that young people have voices that must be heard, seeking to bring about change, by breaking rules when necessary. As educators, “we have a responsibility to bring their ideas into the classroom so our students are able to read climate change critically and engage with the crisis that affects their futures” (Janks 2020). It is now recognised that supporting an eco-conscious attitude from the youngest age should be an educational priority, while clearly literacy for girls and other minoritised groups (Malala’s autobiographical picture book and the biographical story of Louis Braille) are also essential steps in this process, which recognises child agency and activism as an empowering source of strength.

## 3. Andrea Davidson (University of Antwerp) – *virtual*

### **Adult Author, Adolescent Consciousness: Aidan Chambers' Infusion Technique in Theory and Practice**

The British author Aidan Chambers has written about a technique that adult authors can use to write fiction representing the consciousness of adolescent characters: infusion (2020). My paper contextualises and critiques Chambers’ infusion technique to examine the dynamic between adult and (fictional) adolescent voices in practice in his creative writing. Like Gubar’s proposal that a kinship model of childhood can conceptualise young people’s agency as related to adults’ (2016), infusion requires an author to consider that people whose age identities differ experience interior lives akin to

the author's own. Having this outlook lets the author of YA fiction write from within an adolescent character's consciousness. Nevertheless, it entails dismissing the notion that consciousness has an age and can change over the life course, despite the fact that Joosen has found adult authors to be self-conscious about their age when writing books for children (2018). Chambers' process of writing YA fiction with an adolescent narrator reveals that, in practice, infusion worked differently than how Chambers described it working in theory. In practice, for Chambers, infusion worked similarly to a response to reading, comparable to what Soeting observes in Anne Frank's emulative writing style (2018) – a suitable comparison because Chambers considers Frank's diary a "benchmark" for adolescent consciousness and narrative voice (1996/2001). My paper analyses a passage from Chambers' YA novel *Dance on My Grave* (1982/2000) genetically to show how the sixteen-year-old protagonist's voice evolved from Chambers' own voice. As Chambers' archive shows, this passage originated as a private, self-reflexive piece of writing before the then-middle-aged Chambers infused it with an adolescent consciousness. The textual changes that this infusion involved reveal that Chambers perceived voice itself to be something separate from internal life. The differences between adult and adolescent voices in this passage's different versions also reveal some assumptions behind Chambers' construction of adolescence – an important coda to how he theorises infusion.

#### 4. Emanuel Madalena (University of Aveiro) – *virtual*

### **Own Your Own Story: How Transgender Children are Speaking through Picturebooks**

Most of the transgender characters depicted in picturebooks are children, while their authors are mostly adults. However, there are some explicitly autobiographical books, (co)written by the transgender protagonists themselves. To what extent do these books deviate from the more common narrative model of transgender-themed picturebooks? Do they really offer the perspective of these children, or do they point to a contamination of adults' discourse about gender diversity? What seems to be the motivation for telling the story publicly? Furthering the investigation of our PhD (concluded earlier this year) about transgender representation in children's literature, this communication aims to answer these questions while contextualising the place of autobiographical narratives among transgender-themed picturebooks in general, discussing the agency of transgender children in their own stories and inquiring the activist impetus (sometimes not from the children themselves, but from their parents and community) behind these books. By describing and analysing four autobiographical picturebooks, we will then compare their most relevant transgender representations, narrative features and character descriptions to the most common (and usually somewhat poor and even problematic) representations in transgender-themed picturebooks in general (as found in our PhD research). These four books are *I Am Jazz* (2014), written by the protagonist, Jazz Jennings, and Jessica Herthel; the Maltese picturebook *Truly Willa* (2016), written by Willa herself; *It's Okay to Sparkle!* (2017), written by the protagonist, Avery Jackson, who in the text is called "Avery Sparkles"; and *Phoenix Goes to School* (2018), written by the protagonist along with her mother, Michelle Finch. From this analysis and comparison, we proceed to discuss the issues mentioned above, confronting the content of the books with the socio-cultural discourse on transgender children.

## Panel 8 - Collaborations with Children

Chaired by *Nicholas Kleese*

### 1. Devon Arthur (University of Glasgow)

#### **X is for X Ray Days, Y is for Lesser Yellow Legs, Z is for Zorro: The Making of *Alphabet Book***

First published in 1968, *Alphabet Book* is an illustrated abecedary featuring black and white hand-drawn children's artwork. This book is the result of a school project by youth ages five to eight from Kettle Point Reserve (Wiiwkwedong, Anishinabek Nation) in Ontario, Canada. The creation of *Alphabet Book* took place under the direction of teacher Anne Wyse and artist Alexander Wyse. Originally conceived as a centennial initiative, *Alphabet Book* was designed by renowned Canadian graphic designer Allan Fleming and published as a limited edition by the University of Toronto Press. This research considers *Alphabet Book* as a work of children's (co)production, tracing its publication history as well as its relevance to concepts of agency, Indigeneity, and settler colonialism in twentieth-century Canada. Using *Alphabet Book* as a case study, this research asks: how does children's co-authorship uphold or subvert dominant ideas about children's literature? How does *Alphabet Book* challenge or reinforce notions of Indigenous childhood at the time of publication? This research draws on the Alex and Anne Wyse fonds held at the Library and Archives Canada to analyse the book's production process and public reception. Marah Gubar argues that scholars have chosen to ignore young people's contributions as (co)authors of children's literature because "the critical story we have been telling about children's literature rules out the possibility that young people can function as artistic agents, participants in the production of culture." (2013). Reframing this "critical story" rejects Jacqueline Rose's notion of the 'impossibility' of children's literature. While other scholars have begun to draw attention to the role of children as authors (Rachel Conrad; Victoria Ford Smith), less notice has been paid to the role of children as artists and illustrators.

### 2. George Cremona (University of Malta)

#### **Giving Children and Adolescents' Voice and Space through Live Radio Productions: Reflections, Insights and Lessons Learnt**

While more frequently we are seeing children and young adults being encouraged to be active citizens, on the other hand in the Maltese media, the 'it-tfal jikxfu l-għawar' (i.e. children may reveal vices) mentality still prevails. Media producers and presenters tend to admire foreign media productions where children are given space to talk, but at the same time fear taking the risk of including children and adolescents in TV or radio (especially live) programmes. Frequently, this is done because they perceive children's presence and what they say as unpredictable. Back in 2018, as a proactive reaction against this seemingly predominant mentality, the author of this paper embarked on the research venture of producing a 13-week radio series called Generation Gap. This programme tackled topics which are daily bread and butter for children and adolescents. Through a live unplanned and unscripted transmission which also included phone-ins, it gave Maltese children and adolescents between the age of 8 and 13 the opportunity to share their views, react to what listeners said and also debate with adults invited as guests in the studio. Based on this, the purpose of this paper focuses on one research question: What can we learn when we give children the opportunity to voice out their views and insights in live radio productions? To answer this question, the paper adopts a

social-semiotic theoretical framework (Cremona 2017). Adopting stratified sampling (Creswell 2013) the data analysed includes three of the programmes which focused on education and school life, homework, school uniform and immigrants in Malta. The paper presents two main conclusions. The first conclusion suggests that children and adolescents have deep insights and, when given voice and space, rather than simply presenting status-quo related ideas, they help adults to think outside the box. A second conclusion indicates that to feel at ease to voice out their views, children and adolescents require a safe space that includes non-judgmental questions and reactions from adults receiving the shared insights.

### 3. **Jodie Coates** (University of Cambridge)

#### **Children in the Driver's Seat: Novelty Books as Vehicles for Power**

Seeking to expose the “apparent changes in youth, their behaviours, and their books” (Dresang 2008) in the twenty-first century, Eliza Dresang formulated a theory of Radical Change. Dresang argues that the global rise of digital media and internet culture has encouraged young people to adopt principles of “connectivity, interactivity and access” (1999) from a very young age and, as a result, today’s children are “much more than any previous generation, in the driver’s seat”, (2008) regarding their reading experiences. This paper demonstrates how a shift in literature and play can be observed in contemporary novelty children’s books which explicitly cater to this craving for interactive, narrative control – literally placing a child in the “driver’s seat” (Dresang 2008) with the addition of a plastic fire-truck wheel in *Fireman Sam: Rescue Day* (Publications International 2012), a codex which converts into a play-mat or sit-in *Princess Carriage* (Parkin & Abbott 2015), or *Disney Pixar’s Cars 2: Augmented Reality Book* (O’Ryan 2011) which allows the reader to become a sentient car character via a webcam. Manual animation of the hybrid book object, and immersive imaginative play, are two key characteristics of the modern-day novelty genre. Children can use these books as metaphorical, and mimetic, vehicles to indulge in fantastical positions of power from firefighter to royalty to race-car. The hybridisation of forms and the combination of new material and digital technologies invites a posthuman perspective where the book, the vehicle and the child can be reframed as interlocked cogs in a complex, playful assemblage (Deleuze & Guattari 1980). This paper demonstrates how these texts involve a variety of performative, scriptive actions (Bernstein 2009) which can radically alter a child’s relationship with the book and increase their agency as a young reader-players.

### 4. **Denise Hành Huành, Nicholas Kleese, Sean Cameron Golden and Sarah Kopp-Reddy** (University of Minnesota)

#### **Here on Earth: Citizenship, Anti-Oppressive Pedagogy and KidLitLab!**

“Citizen” is a fraught concept. From a young age, many of us are taught implicitly or explicitly that full citizenship is defined as white men who own land (Fassbinder 2020). Those who do not fit into this definition must aspire to imitate white male colonial behaviours to be considered successful citizens. Anti-oppressive teacher education – a project which opens “citizen” to all – challenges future teachers to adopt critical stances toward their pedagogy (Kumashiro 2002). However, this criticality can cause discomfort, hindering authentic engagement. Scholars theorise discomfort rises from several sources: as white supremacist anxiety about articulating racism/racist practices (DiAngelo 2018), as refusal to acknowledge colonial violence (Reese 2018), as embodied practice invalidating lived experiences of oppression (Grinage 2017). Pre-service educators need sites to engage



discomfort authentically. As artists, researchers and educators, we argue creative practices are powerful means for such engagement. In our paper, we share background, theory and implications from the first three years of KidLitLab!: a participant-led workshop series for pre-service educators to craft stories that better serve their unique students (Sims-Bishop 1990). Developed in conversation with curriculum from a required children's literature course at the University of Minnesota's undergraduate program for pre-service elementary education teachers, KidLitLab! draws from fields of arts education (Eisner 2004; Dewey 1934) and critical community education (Freire 1970/2000), offering space to critique and challenge normative/neoliberal expectations for teachers (Biesta 2016). Our work seeks to open channels for embodied ways of knowing by encouraging students to do, make, create (Wilcox 2009). We intentionally bring students together with queer, PoC, local artists, and writers to engage in dialogical exchange. KidLitLab! provides a nimble student-centered alternative to creating transformative children's literature. Ultimately, we posit creative engagements with the community generates more opportunities for students to develop both an anti-oppressive pedagogy and a deeper notion of citizenship.

## Panel 9 - Facilitating Agency through Picture Books

Chaired by *Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer*

### 1. Nicola Daly (University of Waikato) – *virtual*

#### **The Small Girl Who Lives Next Door: Child Language Activism**

Milani (2017) explains that language and citizenship are deeply interwoven. Since Te Reo Māori, the indigenous language of Aotearoa New Zealand, was made an official language in 1987, there has been a steadily increasing number of picturebooks featuring Te Reo Māori alone (for Māori medium settings), and in combination with Te Reo Pākehā or English for those English-dominant speakers wishing to learn Māori or teach it to children. Indeed, recent statistics show that while the majority of New Zealanders speak English, Te Reo Māori, the indigenous language of Aotearoa is considered by eight out of ten New Zealanders to be part of their national identity. The way in which the two languages are positioned on the linguistic landscape of picturebook pages has been analysed previously to explore whether the layout supports or challenges existing language hierarchies (Daly 2016). Recent work shows how language use in picturebooks reflects changing attitudes to language in Aotearoa since the 1970s (Daly 2021). This presentation examines the visual and textual representations of child language activism in *The Small Girl who Lives Next Door. Te Kōtiro Nohonohi e Noho Pātata Ana* (Colquhoun & O'Brien 2021). In this bilingual picturebook, the eponymous 'small girl' sends her friend on a journey which not only changes his language use, but also his worldview, and, the paper argues, his identity as a New Zealand citizen.

## 2. Kerenza Ghosh (University of Roehampton) – virtual

### **Life Below Water in Children’s Non-Fiction Picturebooks**

This paper takes as its inspiration the United Nations sustainable development goal, Life Below Water. The goal sets out to conserve and sustainably use oceans, seas and marine resources. Its aim is to highlight the many ways in which the ocean is central to those global systems that make the Earth habitable for humankind. Rainwater, drinking water, weather, climate, coastlines, food and oxygen are all ultimately provided and regulated by the sea. Consequently, the preservation of the ocean is essential to a sustainable future. Presently, however, coastal waters are steadily deteriorating due to man-made pollution, with ocean acidification having adverse effects on ecosystems and biodiversity. This in turn impacts human coastal lifestyles, such as small fisheries. Since marine biodiversity is critical to the health of our planet, saving our ocean remains a priority. Yet despite its significance to all life on Earth, the ocean is an abstract and somewhat mysterious place for humans: many of us, children included, will have had limited, if indeed any, direct experience of the sea and what lies beneath. Children’s literature, therefore, becomes a major source through which children can discover life in the ocean. Nonfiction picturebooks specifically set out to provide readers with insight and information about underwater locations and elusive creatures. What kinds of information about the sea do nonfiction picturebooks provide to children? How is this information presented? What capacity do these books have in relation to children’s agency in protecting the ocean? In response to these questions, this paper presents an analysis of selected nonfiction picturebooks about the sea and marine life, to consider the aesthetic and pedagogical potential of those texts aimed at young readers. Books for consideration include *Under the Ocean* (Boisrobert and Rigaud 2013), *Big Blue Whale* (Davies 2008) and *The Big Book of the Blue* (Zommer 2018).

## 3. Marisa da Silva Martins (NOVA School of Social Sciences and Humanities) – virtual

### **Children Living Inside a Whale: Ocean Awareness and Exploitation in *Orphans of the Tide***

Approximately 70 per cent of our planet’s surface is covered by oceans. Perhaps more crucially than ever, there is a deeper understanding on the oceans’ impact on our daily life, as well as the evidence that this watery world is threatened (Irwin 2019). According to Mike Brown and Kimberley Peters, “this acknowledgement has led to an ‘oceanic turn’ slowly emerging across the humanities and social sciences, with a burgeoning of academic work which takes seriously the place of seas and oceans in understanding socio-cultural and political life, past and present” (2019). However, apart from Bernhard Klein’s collection of essays on the cultural meaning of the sea in British literature from Renaissance to twentieth-century novels (2002), not much attention has been paid to the representation of oceans in British literature. Nevertheless, oceans have had an integral place in literature, noticeably in contemporary middle-grade fiction and picturebooks. This presentation considers how children engage with the sea in *Orphans of the Tide* (2020), written by the Scottish author Struan Murray and illustrated by Manuel Sumberac. The first line of research will address the representation of the sea in the novel, but also examine how The City profit from sea animals’ exploitation, particularly marine mammals (e.g. whaling). The second line of research will debate whether children’s characters conform or protest against sea animals’ unsustainable exploitation, evoking change in The City’s society and its involvement with the ocean. Ultimately, it will be argued that children take part in the environmental issues informed in the text. As a theoretical framework,

the ideas developed on the grounds of ecocriticism will be applied to the novel (Garrard 2011, 2014; Dobri 2021).

#### 4. Soledad Véliz (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile) – *virtual*

##### **Dead Children: Inhuman Agencies Involved in Contemporary Picturebooks about Death**

Victoria de Rijke (2004) considers the death of children as one of several categories under which the horror in children's literature can be organised. Classified as fears of adults, the death of children and infants is considered part of the Lacanian Real; neither symbolic nor imaginary, but a trauma beyond language (Lacan 1994). An unrepresentable, unspeakable horror, the death of children in contemporary picturebooks is as scarce as it is devastating. Narratives about death usually revolve around the death of grandparents or pets (Arnal-Gil, Erlé and López-Gaseni, 2017) and establish themselves as a pedagogical opportunity to teach readers about the importance of relationships and the value of accepting death. Emotionally, these narratives usually centre around grief and the process of mourning. This paper analyses a corpus of contemporary (2000-2022) picturebooks translated or published in Spanish that depict the death of children as central to its narrative (*The Mother and the Death/The Departure; When the Fish Went Flying; The Sad book; The Children's Funerary; The Children's Crusade*). Drawing from children's literature studies and using Sara Ahmed's materialist account of emotions as productive modes of attention, the paper proposes this specific literature as a space to reaffirm and challenge the reproductive futurism (Edelman 2004) that lies at the centre of children's literature studies. The paper argues that this corpus offers a productive space to explore the anxieties and fears of the death of the future and a figuration of childhood beyond potential. In a more precarious and frail future, this corpus of death narratives proposes an emotional and affective repertoire for intergenerational relationships that do not rely on the dichotomy of actual versus potential, of adult and child. Agency, in these narratives, becomes something inhuman and eerie, challenging human precepts about what life and knowledge are.

**Friday, 27th May**

## **Panel 10 - Activist Picturebooks**

Chaired by *Marnie Campagnaro*

### **1. Krzysztof Rybak (University of Warsaw)**

#### **Can We Not Save our Planet, or do 'Green' Informational Picturebooks Invite Critical Engagement?**

'Green' picturebooks on environmental topics became a significant trend, especially in recent years, due to the popularity of the Fridays for Future movement and Greta Thunberg, also in works for children. Often in both main text and paratext (afterword), readers find brief descriptions (even to-do lists) of actions they may take to change their habits, and eventually, save the planet. On the one hand, they give readers agency necessary for engaged activism; on the other – as pointed out by Clémentine Beauvais – they “transfer guilt and shame from adult to child” (2015), which may be disempowering. Among 'green' titles one also finds informational picturebooks, which engage readers “intellectually and emotionally” (von Merveldt, 2018). In Joe Sutliff Sanders' words, contemporary children's nonfiction is rather “literature of questions”, as it often invites critical engagement (2018), provoking questions and reflections on particular topics. In my paper, I will analyse selected books published in recent years in different languages, including, *Śmieciogród* (Woldańska-Płocińska 2019), *Be a Tree!* (Gianferrari 2021), *Müll* (Raidt 2019), and *La Storia di Greta* (Camerini 2019), referring to two different approaches towards informational picturebooks: following the instructions to engage in activism and – seemingly opposed – critical approach towards content presented. Are some topics (i.e. climate change) “immune” to critical engagement, and presented not only as “good” but also necessary and essential; hence, becoming an area of adult oppression, transferring to children responsibility for making the world a better place (Beauvais 2015)? In my paper, I will consider how shaping the moral attitudes of readers in 'green' informational picturebooks relates to inviting critical engagement towards surrounding reality.

### **2. Sara Vanden Bossche (Tilburg University)**

#### **A Small Step for a Small Person? Scripts of Migration and “Rehoming” in Contemporary Dutch Language Picturebooks**

Xenophobia and negative imagery of migration abound in contemporary European societies (Callens 2017), entailing othering of migrants and refugees. Children's books provide a rich source of images of migrating subjects, the representation of which it is meaningful to study. For this purpose, I employ an interdisciplinary method, framed within cognitive criticism. I draw on schema and script theory (Stockwell 2002; Stephens 2011) to scrutinise the conceptualisation of homes – both lost and newly acquired. In children's literature, migration, or, the home-away-home is a central plot pattern (Reimer 2013). Cognitively speaking, it equals a script, viz. a “socioculturally defined mental protocol for negotiating a situation” (Stockwell 2002; cf. Stephens 2011). Prototypically, it “takes its main character from home to homelessness to (new) home” (Reimer 2013). Since the 1990s, however, ever more texts contest the traditional script and focus instead on “child subjects on the move” (Ibid.). This evolution is also evident in contemporary Dutch-language children's literature (Van den Bossche & Klomberg

2020). Taking its cue from this trend, this paper explores how three Dutch-language picturebooks centring on forced migration conceptualise home and migration. Drawing upon cognitive criticism, I investigate their use of conceptual, embodied metaphors (Stockwell 2002). Furthermore, I examine the texts' relation to the home-away-home script. I argue that each picturebook places a different emphasis within the script, on departure, journey, or arrival. Furthermore, I scrutinise the way the narratives typify refugee and migrant characters. Do the texts employ the hostile stranger-schema (Stephens 2011)? Do the unhomed subjects (Bhabha 1994) get to rehome themselves (Reimer 2013), and if so, how? I will share this exploration's results during the presentation.

### 3. Marianna Koljonen (University of Helsinki) - virtual

#### **Activism, Veganism, and Notions of EcoDemocracy in Finnish Picture Books**

The current climate crisis calls for a renewed relationship between humans, non-human nature, and animals. Professor for Education Veli-Matti Värri has proposed in his book *Education in the Era of Ecocatastrophy* (2018) that the project of renewal should start with children. According to Värri, a critical set of values, moderateness, kindness, and a responsible attitude towards non-human nature should be the main goals for current and future education. On that note, dozens of children's picturebooks about climate change, nature conservation, species extinction, biocentric worldview and respect for the non-human animal point of experience have been published in Finland during the last five years. In this paper, I examine the ways in which books of 1) relate with the non-human nature, 2) offer solutions to the problems at hand, 3) display children's agency in the solutions, and especially, 4) discuss plant-based diet or reducing/giving up meat in pursuit of a more ecological and ethical lifestyle. The ethics of meat is the topic of my larger research. Meat and dairy production are major drivers of climate change, and one of the most efficient methods of curbing it is to adopt a plant-based diet. However, in Finnish children's books, the consumption of animal products is a very delicate, cautiously approachable issue. In the analysis, I will apply methods derived from ecocriticism and critical animal studies in trying to sketch a notion of ecodemocracy in the books. My sample of titles include e.g., Laura Ertimo & Mari Ahokoivu's non-fiction book, *Ihme ilmat! Miksi Ilmasto Muuttuu?* (*Strange Weather! Why is the Climate Changing?*) with translation rights sold to over 30 languages, Vuokko Hurme & Anni Nykänen's *Eläinkirja* (*Book about Animals*), Lina Laurent & Maija Hurme's *Plats på Jorden* (*Secret Gardeners*), Reetta Niemelä & Sanna Pelliccioni's book *Älä Vihaa Minua - Kirjeitä Ihmisille* (*Please Don't Hate Me - Letters for Humans*).

### 4. Herdiana Hakim (University of Glasgow) - virtual

#### ***M is for Movement: Children's Text as Space for Conscientisation and Political Participation***

Most well-known for the picturebook *A is for Activist* (2012), Indonesian-born author and illustrator Innosanto Nagara has published an array of children's books that promote social justice issues. This paper is a critical content analysis of one of Nagara's works, *M is for Movement* (2019), a fictionalised memoir for children in which the protagonist recounts his journey of growing up during the social and political turmoil in Indonesia. My reading of Nagara's book is informed by the theoretical frameworks of childism and critical pedagogy. Short (2017) maintains that these two are essential in examining children's books "where children resist injustice and engage in social action". While childism offers a tool to unpack underlying assumptions about children and their agency (Young-Bruehl 2012), critical pedagogy provides a lens to examine how children's text can be a potential space for conscientisation,

i.e. the critical consciousness to recognise and challenge oppression (Freire 1970/2014). In Nagara's book, conscientisation is manifested in political terms and issues, both in Indonesia and in the global world, aimed to raise young people's awareness of the social and political contexts that affect their life. I also apply Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation (1997) to assess the degree of children's participation in disrupting oppression and bringing about change as modelled by the child characters in the text. Through *M is for Movement* (2019), I argue that Nagara advocates for children and young people to gain political awareness and recognise their critical roles as agents of change.

## Panel 11 - The Fight for Justice

Chaired by *Anna Czernow*

### 1. Roxanne Harde (University of Alberta)

#### 'What about justice?' Girls and Agency in YA Rape Fiction

In Nina Foxx's *And You Better Not Tell*, which was nominated for an NAACP Image Award, a rapist's young victims punish him by participating in a fairly underhanded scheme. Their route to justice, however, ensures that he won't victimise other girls. In Hannah Capin's *Foul Is Fair* (2020), Jade enlists the help of her three best friends to destroy the boys who gang-raped her. In Kiersi Burkhardt's *Honor Code* (2018), Sam, a near-victim of her boarding school's most popular boy, appropriates the story of a girl he raped. In her single-minded quest for justice, Sam both silences her friend and negatively affects that girl's healing. Many of the novels in the large catalogue of recently published YA fiction about acquaintance rape follow standard "rape scripts" and sometimes reify rape culture even as they criticise it. In line with current statistics, their victims are reluctant to report the crime and their perpetrators are rarely punished by judicial or educational institutions. The survivors in the above novels actually succeed in punishing the rapists. However, are their challenges to rape culture effective, given that they find justice through deception and subterfuge? How do we understand their persistence? Are these quests to claim agency and punish a rapist by any means possible praiseworthy? In *The Subject and Power* (1982), Michel Foucault focuses on sites of resistance as the way to bring to light power relations, their positions, their points of application, and the methods used. He begins with "immediate struggles," (Foucault 1982) such as opposition to the power of men over women, in which "people criticise instances of power which are the closest to them, those which exercise their action on individuals. They do not look for the 'chief enemy' but for the immediate enemy. Nor do they expect to find a solution to their problem at a future date" (Foucault 1982). Foxx, Capin, and Burkhardt have positioned their girl victims in immediate struggles as they use craft to subvert rape culture. This presentation draws on Foucault's discussion of power and the subject to examine these justice-seeking girls. They epitomise what he describes as "insubordination and a certain essential obstinacy" that insists on justice and freedom, that challenges power relationships in a strategic struggle and claims the rights of citizenship (Foucault 1982). I argue that by acting as agents in their immediate quests for justice by means fair or foul, these characters bring to light the workings of rape culture and challenge the institutions in which it thrives.



## 2. Jennifer Duggan (University of South-Eastern Norway)

### **Thumbing Trans Noses: Exploring Trans-Positive Harry Potter Fanfiction Framed as a Deliberate Response to J. K. Rowling's Anti-Trans Twitter Statements**

As the call for papers emphasises, children are increasingly active in the public sphere, and digital arenas have impacted on the ways in which readers interpret and interact with children's texts. Responses to reading now often take place in networked digital communities (Jenkins 2006). Of children's literary fandoms, the Harry Potter fandom has long been considered particularly queer-positive (Duggan 2017a, 2017b, 2019, 2021a, 2021b; Fowler 2019; Tosenberger 2008a, 2008b, 2014; Willis 2006). Moreover, an increasing number of scholars have been exploring the importance of fanfiction to trans identity development and self-acceptance (Duggan 2021a, 2021b; Ledbetter 2020; McInroy 2020; McInroy & Craig 2018, 2020; McInroy, Zapcic, & Beer 2021; Rose 2018, 2020). Although J. K. Rowling continues to make headlines around the world by supporting so-called TERFs (trans-exclusionary radical feminists) and making comments on her Twitter that have widely been interpreted as anti-trans (Duggan 2021b), her fans and the actors associated with the series have reacted with shock, dismay, and rebellion (Bird 2019; Lang 2020; Smith 2019; Watson 2020). In the online fandom, fans' rebellion has included not only open statements of revulsion and dismissal of Rowling's perceived anti-trans stance but also an increase in the number of fan fiction texts that include explicitly transexual characters. This paper will explore some of the trans Harry Potter fan fiction that is explicitly framed as a response to Rowling's perceived anti-trans stance. It aims not only to explore the framing of this fanfiction as a response to Rowling but also the ways in which trans characters are depicted within these fan-authored, trans-positive stories. In doing so, it hopes to elucidate one of the many ways in which fans of books respond to and take ownership of beloved stories, and to further consider the roles of authors and readers in responses to texts.

## 3. Caroline Starzecki (University of Rouen)

### **"I will love you as [...] justice loves to sit and watch while everything goes wrong": Challenging the Unjust System in Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events***

Following on from a tradition of rebellious children's books from Lewis Carroll to Roald Dahl, Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* (1999-2006) participates in the subversion of the long-established dominance of adults over children in children's literature. In his thirteen-book series, Lemony Snicket (Daniel Handler) examines how the three young Baudelaire children respond to deep injustice, emanating from those meant to protect them, namely the adults. Highly caricatured, the latter constantly reject the Baudelaires and even threaten their lives. In the book series as in a fair share of children's books today, children are invited to fight against the pervasive exertion of power, which highlights a dialectics of subordination and domination. In Snicket's books, there is a clear gap between the Baudelaires' expectations of the world, stemming from their education and moral values, and reality as presented by Snicket, with the presence of irresponsible and dangerous adults.

The books feature three displaced children who are constantly reminded of their condition as orphans. The protagonists' status as children is persistently compromised as the story progresses, and, unable to escape orphanhood, they remain the "eternal Other" (Kimball), forever outside of the traditional nuclear family unit. The Baudelaires are denied any sense of hope for a better future. Nonetheless, although it is first a means of subjugation for the adults, orphanhood ultimately becomes the protagonists' driving force: with no strings attached, the children's perception of the world changes,

and with growth comes power. However, are the books about giving power to the powerless? Snicket rather advocates for the appropriation of agency, and he urges his readers to accompany the Baudelaires on their journey towards emancipation and empowerment, enabling them to turn their feeling of displacement into strength to overturn their condition. The three protagonists hence become the spokespeople of the voiceless in the face of injustice, both diegetically and extra-diegetically.

4. **Sarah Laura Nesti Willard** (UAE University) and **Fawzia Gillani Williams** (University of Worcester) - *virtual*

### **Children's Rights and Justice in the United Arab Emirates: The Case Study of Maitha Al Khayat's *Wadeema's Law* Book**

In the United Arab Emirates, children's rights became a recent issue. In 2016, when a brutal case of child abuse shocked the country, immediate action was taken: a new Child Protection Law was introduced to safeguard and empower children across the nation against abuse. Consequently, literature was produced to educate children on sensitive issues and to enlighten them about their social rights as minors. This qualitative case study covers the ethical-juridical role that one specific book plays in advocating for children's rights in the UAE: Maitha Al Khayat's book, *Wadeema's Law*. This study analyses images and text of *Wadeema's Law*, which is currently shared in Emirati elementary, middle and high schools, and Maitha Al Khayat's comments, obtained from a personal interview with the distinguished author and illustrator. The book is particularly interesting because it focuses on explaining juridical rights to two siblings, who learn about their children's rights through playful activities and adventures at the Dubai Court. The first part of this study centres upon explaining the book's content. Visual and literacy methodologies are implemented to explain ideological, cultural, social, or behavioural patterns that these two young Emirati characters experience. The analysis of the text and illustrations aims to bring to light the main cultural aspects paramount to Emirati children and their upbringing. The second part of this study discusses Maitha Al Khayat's perceptions of her commissioned book, the role it plays within the Emirati society and how it has impacted its readers. The study hopes to inspire authors from all over the world to create literature that educates children about their social and human rights and gives some feedback on how certain issues are approached in a country such as the United Arab Emirates.

## **Panel 12 - Children's Right to Participate**

Chaired by *Karen Sands O'Connor*

1. **Nicky Parker** (Amnesty International)

### **Upholding Children's Right to Participate in the Publishing Process**

This paper will explore Amnesty International's approach to upholding children's rights to knowledge, education and participation through a non-adult-centric creation of a child rights handbook for young people. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) obliges governments to educate children and adults about child rights, but there is little evidence that this happens. Children also have the right to be heard and to participate in all decisions that affect them. Amnesty's objectives

in creating the book were to empower children and young people to know, understand and claim their rights; and for adults to support them. The paper will look at our process to achieve this, including a collaboration with the Open University's Children's Research Centre to gather c.200 UK-based children's views. The subsequent book outline was shared with child and youth activists internationally and revised according to their feedback. Manuscripts were sent for comment to children, youth activists and adult rights experts, blending adults' protection and provision responsibilities with children's participation rights. The book includes case studies of child activists with whom relationships were built that respected their voice and dignity as equal rights-holders. All potential international publishing partners were screened for human and child rights track records. The book was first published in the UK in September 2021, alongside YouGov poll findings that 83 per cent of UK children know little or nothing of their child rights. Amnesty further created a free online course 'Introduction to Child Rights' for educators, to support classroom exploration of the issues. The presentation will also explore the wider social benefits of empowering children to know and claim their rights.

## 2. **Maria Alcantud Diaz** (University of València) - *virtual*

### **Teaching Citizenship and the U.N. Sustainable Development Goals through Children's Literature**

The world community is engaged in accomplishing the UN 2030 Agenda, a working tool aimed at ensuring a better world for future generations. This Agenda includes 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that mean an outstanding opportunity for educational centres, both in respect of teaching and in pursuing the linking up with society. In turn, fictional narratives can bridge that gap between schools and society since some children's literature could be used to address social issues. This is so because they might strengthen cultural norms and challenge cultural practices by showing characters in a wide range of roles and actions (Rothery & Stenglin 1997). Thus, this article explores the introduction of the SDGs through children's literature by showing examples of books for different ages and focused on different subject matters matching each of the 17 UN SDGs topics ranging from environmental problems to peace, equality or quality education and health issues. The objective is to show how schools could adopt readings for disseminating awareness about SDGs and to provide tools to accomplish Sustainable Development and Global Citizenship Education through literature. It is expected that this kind of literature, which is both educational and entertaining, will provide children with the opportunity to develop critical literacy. In addition, these books could allow children to think through local issues to be able to understand the global ones and propose solutions to problems so as to improve the world for every one of us. Finally, as Holshouser and Medina (2021) mention, the study of the SDGs through literature supports, on the one hand, teaching reading comprehension strategies by making connections between the text and the world and, on the other hand, writing production by, for instance, creating a persuasive piece of writing for a potential real audience.

## 3. **Angela Balca** (University of Évora) - *virtual*

### **Migration, Migrants and Human Rights in Children's Literature**

This paper connects with the thematic line *Children and young adult literature and the United Nations SDGs*. Taking into account SDG 16, Peace, Justice and Effective Institutions, we will focus on the role played by children's literature in promoting the goals set for this SDG: promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development; provide access to justice for all; build effective, accountable and

inclusive institutions for all. In this paper, we start from a methodology of hermeneutic analysis of visual narratives, and our goal is to critically and reflectively analyse different picturebooks. These picturebooks take children to the reality of migration and the terrible conditions these people face in their search for a life of peace and justice. In a turbulent world, where Human Rights are threatened in various countries around the world, children's books can become subversive objects associated with resistance. Through them we share what is happening in the world without filters; through them, we foster a citizenship education. The works covered in this work are by the Peruvian artist Issa Watanabe, *Migrantes (Migrants)* (2019); and by Argentine artist Mariana Chiesa Mateos, *Migrando (Migrating)* (2013). These picturebooks are powerful metaphors for the migrations taking place almost all over the world. Its characters symbolise, and personify men, women and children, from a large part of our world, who now migrate, reach another part of the world, where they hope to re-exist. These works contain the story of the path that migrants follow, the pain and sacrifice that this entails, but also the underlying hope. These picturebooks also remind readers of the responsibility of those who welcome migrants, of the institutions that should contribute to their integration. The analysis of these works allows us to reflect on the importance of children's literature in educating the youngest, in promoting their activism and citizenship.

#### 4. **Amanda Allen** (Eastern Michigan University) - *virtual*

### **The Children's Literature Network (CLN) and the Hidden Social Activism behind Mid-Century Children's Literature**

In 1932, editor May Masee was fired from her job as director of Doubleday Junior Books, a department she had founded in 1922. In response, Anne Carroll Moore, head of children's services for the New York Public Library, chose Masee as the main speaker for the influential Children's Book Week celebration. Moore's signal was clear: the firing of Masee was not to be tolerated. Indeed, Masee was soon hired as the founding director of Viking Junior Books. While this short "blip" within Masee's career may seem unimportant, I suggest that Masee's firing, coupled with Moore's influential indignation, signal the beginning of a history of women's activism hidden within the history of American children's literature. This paper uses a feminist materialist methodology, incorporating archival evidence, to suggest that midcentury children's literature (and construction of childhood within that literature) was the product of a silent, hidden, but powerfully organised women's employment movement. I call this movement the Children's Literature Network (CLN). The CLN was a multi-generational network of women who produced, distributed, and critiqued children's literature from 1919 to 1976. Composed of editors, reviewers, and librarians, the CLN focused on cross-disciplinary communication and networking that sought to establish professional autonomy within larger patriarchal publishing and librarianship institutions. Network members' battles for "good" children's books—and struggles regarding who made that determination—were paralleled by their activism for women's employment autonomy. This paper thus complicates traditions of public activism and social movements by presenting a hidden movement behind mid-century children's literature and constructions of childhood: one whose goal was ostensibly to produce and distribute good texts for children (however defined), but whose activism focused primarily on sustaining women's employment autonomy, and whose functioning relied on remaining invisible to the patriarchal institutions against which it fought.

## Panel 13 - Children's Role in the Climate Crisis

Chaired by *Barbara Kalla*

### 1. Letterio Todaro (University of Catania) and Tiziana Mascia (University of Urbino)

#### **Education for Environmental Citizenship: The Contribution of Non-Fiction Children's Literature Supporting the Development of Ecological Critical Thinking**

Glaciers are melting, forests are burning, and floods are inundating vast areas of the earth, endangering various species of animals and plants. What stories do we need to become aware of current climate emergencies? Traditional environmental education focuses on the concrete issues of climate change, which is addressed in schools as part of science or geography lessons, disciplines that inform but may not stimulate children and young people to a greater personal relationship with climate issues and agency around it. Non-fiction literature can address this gap, offering a focused attention on the young reader, with relevant and well-researched content, generating an incredible variety of topics on 'how to think' and not only 'what to think'. Non-fiction literature is of course about facts, but if well-written, it also can achieve the goal of actively engaging the reader. Today, children's non-fiction literature seems to be at the centre of a broad process of evolution of literary storytelling, which blends science and art, knowledge, emotion and reasoning. Emphasis on both an engaging narrative style and illustrations with artistic touch have been positive factors in the development of non-fiction literature for children. More and more writers are today contributing to the growth of the thematic strand oriented towards nature, recycling and respect for the environment. This new approach is no longer based exclusively on the transmission of knowledge, rather it is focused on a narrative style, which allows readers to reconnect with their own environment, think critically about future sustainability and become protagonists of a possible positive change. By examining the most recent production of Italian youth literature, the presentation aims to analyse the contribution of non-fiction children's literature in supporting the development of ecological thinking and awareness along three lines of analysis: engaging, narrative and interactive writing styles; emphasis on images and illustrations; and the educational potential of non-fiction.

### 2. Anto Thomas Chakramakkil (St. Thomas' College, Kerala, India)

#### **Ecofeminist Picturebook Biographies on Forestation**

Picturebook Biography is a vibrant subgenre of children's literature to represent responsive young citizens and construct childhood through agency and activism. Contemporary examples of two people from India are Jadav Payeng and Shyam Sunder Pariwali, who make a difference by planting trees have inspired authors of picture books. Their work inspires child readers to realise how one person's contribution can make a difference in helping to save the environment and in celebrating girlhood. In this paper, I examine three picture book biographies: (1) *The Boy Who Grew a Forest: The True Story of Jadav Payeng* (2019) by Sophia Gholz and Kayla Harren, (2) *The Forest Man: The True Story of Jadav Payeng* (2020) by Anne Matheson and Kay Widdowson and (3) *111 Girls: How One Village Celebrates the Birth of Every Girl* (2020) by Rina Singh and Marianne Ferrer in the theoretical contexts of ecofeminism and reader response theory.

### 3. Ben Screech (University of Gloucestershire)

#### **How can Climate Change Themed Children's Literature Prompt Greater Environmental Awareness Among Young Readers?**

"The young", Carolyn Stevenson and Lynn Wilson argue in *Promoting Climate Change Awareness Through Environmental Education* (2015), "have a significant role to play in creating a sustainable and resilient future". With this in mind, my talk will consider how non-fiction texts for young readers may have the effect of generating greater environmental awareness. Considering texts as diverse as, for example, Rita Gray's *When the World is Dreaming* (2016), Harriett Rohmer's *Heroes of the Environment* (2009), Lily Dyu's *Earth Heroes* (2019) and Juliana Westcott's *Our Fight: Extinction Rebellion* (2019), I will consider how environmental issues such as climate change are represented in these books both visually and textually. I will consider how authors draw on real-life stories of environmental crises from around the world. In so doing, my research will ask three key questions, i.e. How do text and illustrations work in tandem to depict the gravity of the environmental crisis affecting the earth? How do books such as these 'reach out' to young readers to empower them and secure their involvement in taking on a more significant sense of environmental responsibility? How do key primary texts privilege children's voices and agency more generally in exploring how climate change resonates particularly strongly with younger generations? I will argue that what David Waugh et al term the "affective aspects" (2016) of other texts such as Jeanette Winder's *The Watcher* (2011) and Luisa Neubauer's *Vom Ende der Klimakrise* (2019) also have wider implications in terms of young readers' social and emotional learning and readerly development more generally. These are abilities which can be drawn upon beneficially in supporting young people to ultimately effect greater change in terms of environmental action. Climate change and environmental awareness are key issues that face every person in the world right now. Young people will inherit the earth and therefore giving agency to their concerns and allowing their voices to speak freely on the issue, whilst also educating them so that they have the intellectual resources to make a difference in this regard, is I believe, a key responsibility facing children's authors in the present day.

### 4. Anne Klomberg (Tilburg University)

#### **Roots of Rebellion: An Ecofeminist Approach to Power and Teenage Activism in Adolescent Fiction**

Since 2018, Greta Thunberg has regularly demonstrated the power of adolescent activism in public and political spaces. However, adult critics devalue her performances based on normative assumptions about age, gender and neurodiversity. One implication is that Thunberg ought to grow up before she scrutinises politicians' efforts to address the climate crisis. Urging young people to grow (up) is common in contemporary adolescent fiction (Trites 2014). This emphasis on growth presents adulthood as a norm and grants more power to adults than to youth, a phenomenon Nikolajeva (2010) describes as *aetonormativity*. Until adolescents meet society's adult norms, they can be considered outsiders. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily render them powerless. Beauvais (2015) argues that children's and adults' *temporal otherness* accords each party unique powers. As adolescence traditionally occupies a space in-between, I investigate what particular powers might then be available to adolescents. Specifically, I explore whether adolescents' *embodied outsiderhood* can be empowering, rather than a drawback, through fictional representations of teenage activism. My case study is *Green Rising* (2021), a young-adult novel about a group of teenagers who discover they can grow plants from their skin and subsequently attempt to save Earth from climate disaster. By analysing how these young

people stand up against governments and corporations (mostly adult-led organisations), I show how their activism challenges established, aetonormative power dynamics. As developing subjectivity and agency is fundamental to adolescence, I also demonstrate how activism affects young people's *becoming* (Trites 2018). In the novel, teenagers' power is embodied, highlighting a close connection to nature. I rely on ecofeminism – which foregrounds the intricate relationships between human bodies, environment and culture – to study how adolescents' sense of self is formed through interactions between their embodiment, nature and social discourses. This may help in understanding adolescents' (growing) potential influence within society's (aetonormative) structures.

## Panel 14 - Gender Equality and Its Impact on Children's Lives

Chaired by *Inès Naji*

### 1. Iana Nikitenko (University of Glasgow)

#### Young Adult's Voice Against Homophobia: Same-Sex Parenting in a Russian Coming of Age Novel

The fight against homophobia and the representation of the LGBT+ community are widely sanctified topics in Anglophone culture (Świetlicki 2020). In Russia, the situation is different, as homophobia is enshrined at the legislative level through the amendments to the constitution, laws against “propaganda regarding non-traditional sexual relations” and adoption by same-sex couples (Suchland 2018; Buyantueva 2018). Nevertheless, the presence of both representatives of the LGBT+ community and same-sex families must be reflected in literary works, as such books encourage wider acceptance (Sunderland & McGlashan 2010; Świetlicki 2020), serving as windows to and mirrors of the underrepresented people's stories (Bishop 1990). Despite the state regulation of the representation of same-sex families in culture, books about this topic exist in the Russian literary market. This paper focuses on one of them, a novel *The Days of Our Lives* (2020), written by a young adult transgender Mikita Franko about a Russian homosexual family. This piece contains autobiographical elements and addresses many of the problems faced by representatives of the LGBT+ community and same-sex families in modern Russia. Through a close reading of *The Days of Our Lives* and an analysis of the novel from the perspective of queer children's literature, this study considers works written by young adults as a way to influence global issues on the example of drawing attention to the lack of equal rights to the LGBT+ community representatives. The analysis compares the experience described by the author with information from interviews with children from Russian same-sex families (Safonova 2017). The study shows how children and young adults as members of underrepresented parts of the society can “come to voice” (Hooks 1988) through the debunking of stereotypes by creating a literary representation of their own life experiences.



- 2-4. **Angel Daniel Matos** (Bowdoin College), **Derritt Mason** (University of Calgary), and **Gabriel Duckels** (University of Cambridge)

[PANEL ABSTRACT]

**Queer AIDS Activism in Young People's Literature**

To think about the HIV/AIDS pandemic in the Global North is to call upon powerful and ongoing histories of political activism. The queer, counter-hegemonic dimensions of this activism mean it often has an uncomfortable relationship to young people's literature. As Gross, Goldsmith, and Carruth (2010) point out in a detailed study on the topic, HIV/AIDS is frequently mis- and underrepresented in young adult literature (YA): primarily, its modes of transmission are inaccurately depicted in order to preserve the sexual innocence of its young protagonists, and the AIDS crisis is often painted as a historical event with no bearing on present-day youth. Although eleven years have elapsed since this study, its conclusions remain apt. Young people's literature remains nervous about the relationship between youth, activism and HIV/AIDS, despite, as Sarah Schulman (2021) writes, the "radical and ragtag process of gay kids demanding their rights," ongoing for decades. Through three papers that examine representations of queer AIDS activism in texts for and about young people, this panel will consider the dilemma of representing HIV/AIDS in such texts, insofar as YA literature demonstrates the porous parameters of the status quo. If representing AIDS-related death in young people's texts merely fed into larger equivalences between sexuality and death, then constructing alternative representations of HIV/AIDS activism can resolve old injuries while raising new questions. This is especially true when we reflect on whose histories are recovered and whose remain unseen. In our papers, which draw on queer theory, Latinx studies, the conventions of the Bildungsroman and both historical and contemporary literature, we ask: how has young people's literature represented AIDS activism, or even performed its own activism of sorts? How does genre influence the way we read and write about HIV/AIDS? How might children's literature and children's literature studies engage with HIV/AIDS as an ongoing crisis, and not merely a historical one?

- **Angel Daniel Matos**

**Back to the Past: Aristotle and Dante Dive into the Waters of the World, the AIDS Crisis, and the Limits of Reparative Reading**

Although Benjamin Alire Sáenz's *Aristotle and Dante Discover the Secrets of the Universe* (2012) is one of the most critically acclaimed texts that focuses on the experiences of queer teens, critics like Michelle Ann Abate have drawn attention to its omission of HIV/AIDS representation. Abate approaches Sáenz's novel as a type of queer speculative fiction that imagines a fictive universe not dominated by homophobia, thus framing the absence of AIDS as a positive feature of the text. While such a reparative approach is useful in examining the first novel, these stakes were challenged significantly through the recent publication of *Aristotle and Dante Dive into the Waters of the World* (2021), in which the AIDS pandemic is a central topic. If the omission of AIDS in the first novel becomes an opportunity to revisit, redeem and reimagine history, what can we say about the second novel of this series, which becomes an opportunity to reflect, reemphasise, and remind readers about the gravity and weight of the AIDS crisis? What does this tension demonstrate in terms of the limitations of reparative approaches in examinations of HIV and AIDS in YA literature? Drawing from queer studies, Latinx studies, and affect theory, my paper examines how AIDS discourse shapes the emotional and narrative dimensions of the Aristotle and Dante sequel. I argue that approaching Sáenz's series as queer

speculative literature does a disservice to the series, for such an approach sidelines the codes of silence and omission present in queer Latinx discourse and contexts — silences that are central to understanding the tense relationship between queer practices and the norms of latinidad. My paper offers a nuanced way of thinking about AIDS discourse in these novels that opens avenues toward redeeming and reimagining not by omitting history, but by using history as a platform for queerer thinking.

- **Derritt Mason**

### **Games as Activism: The Gaiety of GayBlade**

Curiously, although much has been written about HIV/AIDS and young adult literature, Bildungsroman studies — including recent examinations of “Lesbian, Gay, and Trans Bildungsromane” (Miller 2019) — tend to overlook how the HIV/AIDS crisis has influenced a genre very much concerned with growth and maturity. In other words, how has a virus that prevented so many young people from growing into adulthood shaped a genre that typically narrates a young protagonist’s growth into adulthood? This paper argues that, in the context of the Bildungsroman, HIV/AIDS activism is often called upon to perform a specific narrative function: in the absence of the possibility of physical growth, these novels signal the moral growth of the protagonist through their shift in orientation from self to community. Also unique to the HIV/AIDS Bildungsroman is how protagonists often undergo two distinct crises of “self-fashioning,” to borrow the language of Aleksandr Stevic’s recent study (2020). The first involves reconciliation with the protagonist’s queer identity; the second, which typically involves a turn to activism, is about navigating what Roberta Seelinger Trites (2000) calls the “ultimate authority” in Bildungsromane: death. As Yale, the protagonist of Rebecca Makkai’s *The Great Believers* (2018) narrates, coming into activism is experienced like a second “coming out” (369). Thus, as I will illustrate, activist moments in HIV/AIDS Bildungsromane like Makkai’s—my primary case study in this paper—are at once conventional and exceptional in the context of the genre more broadly. Activism signals moral growth and a kind of reconciliation with or resistance to death: two crises that manifest themselves in response to the AIDS crisis.

- **Gabriel Duckels**

### **AIDS Activism and the Late-Twentieth-Century YA Novel**

The AIDS pandemic was most visible in American culture during the 1980s and 1990s, but AIDS was seldom depicted in young adult novels published in this period. The reasons for this tension around its representation include the heteronormative, white-coded, middle-class values of mainstream YA literature as a field of cultural production. With this in mind, it can be easy to focus on the effects of the marginalisation of HIV/AIDS discourse in queer texts for young people, as well as the role played by some early YA novels in sustaining rather than challenging the othering of HIV+ people in general. In this paper, I take a different approach. It is certainly true that the relation between AIDS and queerness in YA literature was often shaped by homophobic erasure. But it is also the case that several early YA novels about AIDS contain glimpses of AIDS activism and community organising, and hence gesture towards a radical politics—a queer politics which lies beyond the usual understanding of the ‘problem novel’. This gesture is hard to appreciate within an “anxious” (Mason 2021) critical mindset which expects to see early novels as producing homophobia and contemporary novels as providing its remedy. This paper will explore such glimpses of AIDS activism in several problem novels about AIDS

published between the late 1980s and the early 1990s. Broadly, I am interested in how early YA literature about AIDS worked to construct compassion for HIV+ people and the LGBTQ+ community, and with what effects. To do this, I take a stance of “critical optimism” (Miller 2022), which enables me to think generously and generatively about these representations while paying attention to the social and historical limitations of their production.

## Panel 15 - The Child's Perspective on Nationalism, Violence and Recovery

Chaired by *Nina Goga*

1. **Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer** (Universität Tübingen) and **Jörg Meibauer** (Universität Mainz)

### Fighting for a Better Future: Children's Gangs in Post-War Germany

Shortly after the end of WWII, many children were in severe danger: They had no home and no family, they suffered from hunger and diseases, they were victims of adult violence and traumatised by the experiences of heavy bombings. As a result, many homeless children joined together to live in ruins and fend for themselves. This situation is mirrored in three German novels that appeared in the post-war years and tell stories about children's gangs struggling not only for survival but also for a better society. *Die Aufbaubande* [*The Reconstruction Gang*] (1948) by Walter Pollatschek focuses on a group of children searching in the ruins for items that can be used or sold on the black market. This group consists of members with remarkably different social backgrounds and fates. They act autonomously and show tolerance and mutual respect. While Pollatschek's novel has a socialist background, *Die Trümmerkolonne* [*The Rubble Column*] (1949) by Willi Reschke propagates Christian ideas. The eponymous group refrains, under the influence of a war returnee, from their criminal activities on the black market and turns to the reconstruction of a destroyed house. In comparison to these novels that implicitly convey an ideological agenda, *Flunki und der Au-Ha-Klub. Eine tolle Großstadtgeschichte* [*Flunki and the Au-Ha-Club. An Awesome Big-city Tale*] (1948) by Hansgünther Thebis offers a simple detective story. In this book, the “Aufbau- und Handelsklub” (i.e., the reconstruction and trade club) catches dangerous black-market gangsters. For Thebis, humour and suspense are the remedies for the misery of many children in the post-war years. Throughout this paper, the role of book covers and illustrations will be closely considered because they directly resonate with the historical background. While the three novels stress the agency of the children's gangs and highlight their important work for a better society, we will also point out why this topic was not taken up anymore in 1950. An important reason for this change is the re-establishment of pedagogical institutions that curtailed children's desire for freedom and ushered in a restoration phase.

2. **Sandra Leticia Oropeza Palafox** (University of Tilburg)

### Chilean Empowered Children in Al Sure de la Alamed

In 1989, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child assured children's right to participation (Todres 2020, 25). As a consequence, the work of children activists has been recognised. Thus, Malala Yousafzai, for example, is identified by Todres (2020) as the embodiment of the “empowered child”. In this idea of childhood, children not only participate in promoting their own

interests and making their voices heard, but they come to the forefront to become leaders of social movements (Todres 2020). Nevertheless, in Chile, children's political participation has existed for several decades. There are some antecedents of middle schoolers protesting Pinochet's dictatorship since the 1980s (González-López 2008). After that, "the citizenry has sought restitution for their oppression, using [...] what Elizabeth Jelin describes as the 'vehicles of memory'" (García-González 2018), which included books for children, but also with organisations for popular self-education, where children teach and learn about politics (vtr. González-López 2008). In *Al Sur de la Alameda. Diario de una Toma* (2014), by Lola Larra and Vicente Reinamontes, these "vehicles of memory" allow children to acknowledge their agency and civic responsibility. This graphic novel tells the story of a strike organised by a group of teenagers to protest the unjust law of education in Chile. It was inspired by "la Revolución de los Pingüinos" [Penguins Revolution] that occurred in 2006. Hence, based on the concepts of "empowered child" (Todres 2020) "agency" (James & James 2008), "vehicles of memory" (García-González 2018, 164), this paper aims to answer two questions: a) To what extent do the characters of *Al Sur de la Alameda* acknowledge and exercise their political agency? and b) Do they embody the idea of the "empowered child"? The relevance of this research is to compare the concept of the empowered child with the representation of childhood in Chile, and how the differences between both are a consequence of the long history of youth's political agency in the Latin American context.

3. **Macarena García González** (University of Chile) and **Evelyn Arizpe** (University of Glasgow)

### **Negotiating Hope in Recent Latinx Books about Border Crossing**

In the wake of an intensifying hostile environment towards migrants and refugees in the U.S. after Donald Trump's triumph in 2016, children's and young adult literature authors responded with diverse forms of politically-engaged texts to celebrate diversity (Orgad et al 2021). For this presentation, we focus on books published between 2018 and 2021 by Latinamerican or Latinx authors in which border crossing is thematised, enquiring into how these books negotiate forces of exclusion or what Sara Ahmed calls "the phenomenology of being stopped" (2007) in relation to migration. We will briefly examine three books that were published in both English and Spanish in the USA: *Caravan to the North* (2019) by Jorge Argueta, *Dreamers* (2019) by Yuyi Morales, and *My Two Border Towns* (2021) by David Bowles. In these three books, immigration is connected to family separation and to the production of hope for younger generations. We examine these books with attention to how family and nation tropes (Lakoff 2002) are produced in them; how the displaced child begins to be constructed as a citizen and what repertoires for the hope they put forward.

4. **Tone Louise Stranden** (Oslo Metropolitan University)

### **Creating Space for Agency and Activism through Shared Reading of a Challenging Picturebook**

In this paper, I aim to show how shared reading inspires young readers to participate in conversations about the world when reading a challenging picturebook (Ommundsen, Haaland & Kümmerling-Meibauer 2021). During shared reading, students construct meaning together, raise questions, engage in critical reading of the world, and get inspired to find solutions to injustice and act upon it. *3,2,1* (2019) is written and illustrated by Mari Kanstad Johnson. The book is about Anna, the only child in kindergarten without travel plans during summers. She agrees to take over Grandmother's job to look after five neighbouring houses in order to earn enough to buy a toy rabbit

to show off. The job is more complicated than Anna predicted, and Grandmother is unwilling to help her in the process, with the result being Anna owing Grandmother money by the end of the week. The illustrations are detailed, inspired by the puzzle book, allowing a manifold of reading options and encouraging highly active responses of the reader. The word-image interplay is interdependent and both sign systems contribute equally to the meaning-making process (Nikolajeva & Scott 2006). Data for this paper is video observation from two reading events in two different groups in second grade in Norway. Freire (1972) and Greene (2009) are used as a theoretical framework to analyse the data.

## Panel 16 - Anthropocentric Child Empowerment

Chaired by *Farriba Schulz*

- 1-4. **Janet Evans** (Independent Scholar), **Georgia Kalogirou** (University of Athens), **Dorota Michulka** (University of Wrocław), **Xavier Minguez Lopez** (University of València) and **Farriba Schulz** (Potsdam University)

### [PANEL ABSTRACT]

#### **'It's Only Human!' Anthropocentric Views in Children's and Young Adult Literature: From Ecocriticism to Ecopedagogy**

Environmental consciousness and ethical awareness that comes with the Anthropocene discourse emphasise the mutual entanglements of humanity, technology, and nature through the lens of (postcolonial) ecocriticism (Maxwell 2009). Children's literature underpinned by a number of key anthropocentric views is linked to questions of political and ideological issues, which also raises questions of the child's agency. How is the Anthropocene discourse in children's and young adult literature shaped by representations of nature and environmental values? Which interconnections between the binarities of nature and culture are inherent? How are childhood and its actors constructed? In a collaboration of four European perspectives, the panel examines how children's and young adult literature written in the context of the Anthropocene recognises and responds to actual discourses and discusses its role in literary classrooms. By evaluating the representation of developments in children's literature and reader responses to those texts, corner points from ecocriticism to ecopedagogy (Gaard 2009) are reviewed. As Clare Bradford and Geraldine Massey state, (2011): children's environmental texts "socialise young people into becoming the empathetic adults of tomorrow by positioning readers as ecocitizens, dedicated both sustainable development in the local sphere and also to global responsibility", children's literature once again takes on the responsibility of introducing to essential values of society – in this case, environmental agency. The kind of ecocitizenship that these texts promote and the ways these texts are implemented in literary classrooms are crucial to ecocriticism and education for sustainability. Examining children's environmental literature the panel discusses: a) literary constructions of human's relation with/to nature, environmental problems, their social contexts and environmental values in children's literature, b) reader responses in literary classrooms by raising questions that are particularly resonant in light of questions about the role of storytelling and environmental rhetoric in children's literature.

- **Georgia Kalogirou and Dorota Michułka**

### **Nature, Mindfulness and Ecological Compassion in Children's Literature: Seeking Our Lost Soul through Reading and Writing**

It is undoubtedly true that students and teachers from diverse educational environments all over the global world are constantly trying to find new ways to respond to the complex, interconnected ecologies that pre-date many of the core themes and concerns of the multi-faceted environmental humanities. The presentation draws on several self-reflexive, environmentally conscious children's books that draw attention to the world around us. Inspired by the 'new nature writing' which is an increasingly popular literary genre, they help us reimagine humanity's place on earth amid our ecological crises. Some of these texts show an influence by philosophies of mindfulness and compassion toward nature, thus inviting people to slow down and take their time to experience the wonders of nature. Working with students/training teachers at the university, we offer insights into how literature might enhance pupils' environmental sensibility through a set of pedagogical activities/creative writing exercises that cultivate mindfulness, emotional intelligence while building connections among natural and anthropogenic populations.

- **Xavier Mínguez López**

### **From an Animal World to a Reconstructed Reality: Ecocriticism in European Picturebooks**

Ecocriticism is, undoubtedly, a topical subject at the moment. Discourses about the environment, global warming, global pollution, etc. are multiplying every day since we are in what is commonly called, a climate emergency. Literature, generally speaking, is a sensitive field and children's literature is not unconnected to this world reality and faces it in different ways. Although it is difficult to delimit the boundaries of what we can call ecocriticism - as Timothy Clark (2011) points out, "The 'environment', after all, is, ultimately, 'everything'" - this paper intends to examine a sort of issues related with this field in a European corpus of picturebooks. The corpus of 100 picturebooks has been created following the prestigious White Raven award (International Library of Munich) from 2008 to 2016. I selected narrative fiction books in five major European languages (Spanish, English, French, Italian and German) so I can have a wide panorama of European picturebooks with the obvious limits of the selection of countries and languages. In order to check the ecocriticism issues in this corpus, I followed the "Cheryll Glotfelty's questions for the ecocritic" (1996) to establish a set of items that could be analysed. Even though the overwhelming presence of nature and animals does not mean that books can be considered 'eco', this is the first result I would like to highlight. There is also an important amount of books that could be related to what is call 'language and or cultural ecology': the preservation of traditional literature (fairy tales), traditions (games, custom, etc.), or the care for language (old vocabulary, special words, etc.). However, I consider that metafictional picturebooks offer new insights to deal with ecocriticism from a non-conventional perspective.

- **Farriba Schulz**

### **Reading of What Is Yet to Come: University Students Reviewing Children’s Literature in the Context of the Anthropocene for the Literary Classroom in Primary Schools**

Addressing the concept of the Anthropocene in children’s literature mirrors transformations and continuities related to pedagogy and aesthetics, blurring the line between moral/instruction and entertainment. Within a pedagogical framing, it also includes a romantic ideal of childhood, placing hopes for restoring society on children. Since university students who are training to become teachers will be future multipliers, gatekeepers and therefore acting as change agents (Wanning 2020), the literary classroom is an important place to shape cognitive criticism (Nikolajeva 2014). The use of a large range of diverse texts in genre, illustration and anthropocentric approaches, the presentation of various strategies and the opportunity for critical conversations intended to give student teachers insights into the aesthetic of genre, character, medium and other literary aspects in the literary classroom at university. While students were encouraged to respond to these texts, they had to express their individual perceptions in a book review and became active authors while referring to its literary and pedagogical value (Brendel-Perpina 2019). In this way, they were provided with a tool to explore their own beliefs alongside the literary examples upon which they can build. Based on the student teachers’ book reviews this paper reflects on strategies that allow students to respond to texts in a critical way. Therefore, this paper explores university students’ understanding of the “child in/with/as nature” (Malone/Tesar/Arndt 2020) and the consequences of the pedagogical framing in the literary classroom reviewed through the lens of childhood agency. What and in which way do university students recognise agency and childhood, pedagogical framing of child/nature and the bounds of nature/culture in selected children’s literature?

- **Janet Evans**

### **Environmental Disaster and Human Greed: Children’s Critical Responses to Eco Picturebooks**

Literacy is never neutral. All texts contain particular views of the world along with associated attitudes and values. Children should be encouraged to critically question the beliefs and ideologies embedded in texts, whilst at the same time questioning their own beliefs and viewpoints. This presentation will focus on socially critical response work done with primary school children linked to *War and Peas*, an eco-picturebook by Michael Foreman first published in 1974. Almost forty years after its original appearance, Foreman’s innovative classic about lack of cooperation between nations, catastrophic environmental disasters caused by man-made climate change, and subsequent large-scale famine and international food shortages, still remains as pertinent as ever. Worryingly, it still poses more questions than answers to world issues, including environmental problems; social and political issues; and the battle for human rights. In drawing on transcriptions of the children’s oral responses before and after reading *War and Peas*, sharing their views and opinions about the deeper issues raised by the text, and considering their creative ideas linked to a series of collaborative and essential, “taking action” sessions (Vasquez 2004) which emanated from the discussions related to the text, this presentation will consider how a closer consideration of the children’s reflections of themselves as critical learners can improve their perceptions of self in any given learning process. The presentation will conclude with a consideration of the children’s reflections of themselves as critical learners and will reflect on how enabling critical reader response can improve children’s perceptions of themselves

as learners. McLaughlin & DeVoogd (2004) noted that critical literacy is not a teaching method but a way of thinking and a way of being that challenges texts and life as we know it.

- Georgia Kalogirou

### **Taking Time to Consider a Better (Fairer and Greener) World: Working with Picturebooks and Creative Writing Practices in the Classroom**

Working with pupils in the Primary/Middle level, we demonstrate creative writing activities and practices that aim to enhance the pupil's environmental sensibility and emotional intelligence while building connections among natural and anthropogenic populations. The children read, discuss and use the acclaimed picturebook by Jo Loring Fisher, *Taking Time* (2020) as an initiative for creative work in the classroom. The pedagogical background of this approach is drawn upon the inclusive creative writing pedagogy (Adsit 2017) which opens the discipline of creative writing to consider the wide range of ways that diverse people engage with the literary phenomenon. The new environmental writing paradigm (Galleymore 2020) is equally important for our approach because it addresses important ways of how people of all ages can establish a more intimate and responsive relationship with nature and how humans can acquire a more ecocritical imagination. A basic tenet of both theoretical paradigms is the urgent need to rethink under a new perspective the Romantic philosophical idea of *Natura Naturans/Natura Naturata* and also to reappropriate accordingly the boundaries between human, animal and technological bodies.

## **Panel 17 - Navigating War Horrors through Story**

*Chaired by Smiljana Narančić Kovač*

1. Åse Marie Ommundsen (Nord University) and Gro Marie Stavem (Oslo Metropolitan University)

### **The Role of the Child in a War Zone: Using a Cognitively Challenging Picturebook to Support Children**

Contemporary global challenges due to war and terror lead to cultural changes influencing the lives of children worldwide. An estimated one billion children are facing a brutal existence due to conflict, war and the related effects of poverty. These global challenges create an educational need for discussing war with children in all age groups. We argue in favour of the use of high-quality picturebooks to help readers understand and navigate these human crises and to develop emotional and critical literacy. Both the European Commission and the Norwegian curriculum advocate a broad definition of literacy including concepts, feelings, facts and opinions as objects for expression and interpretation. Teaching critical and emotional literacy is a way to grow agency, making students interact and get involved with texts that matter. We report from a recent classroom study investigating the following research question: How can shared picturebook reading from a challenging picturebook on war meet an educational need for discussing war with children and foster emotional and critical literacy among ten to thirteen-year-old students? As a starting point for the shared picturebook reading, we chose the Norwegian/Danish picturebook, *Når Kaniner Blir Redde [When Rabbits Get Scared]* (2019) by Arne Svingen and Kamila Slocinska. This book visualises dramatic war experiences from the perspective of a



young boy. The teacher read the picturebook aloud while the students have access to the pictures on a big screen. The reading session is followed by a literary conversation where the students collaborate in groups and contribute with oral and written responses. In the light of perspectives on emotional and critical literacy from Nussbaum, Nikolajeva, Luke and Vasquez et al., we discuss how *Når Kaniner Blir Redde* invites the child reader to build empathy through narrative imagination and to use the text as a social tool in ways that create space for agency.

## 2. Barbara Kalla (University of Wrocław)

### **21st-Century Children's Literature about the Holocaust and Citizenship Education: Ecocritical Reading in a Comparative Approach**

Post-catastrophic literature and eco-criticism are intimately interconnected and mutually complementary. As Ubertowska observes, “the search for affinities between [...] the history of extermination of human communities and the devastation of nature is probably fuelled by the belief that traditionally compartmentalised fields in fact make up one ecosystem which eludes depictions underpinned by anthropocentric research concepts” (2013). I argue that, in contemporary children’s and young adults’ literature about the Holocaust, the educational function of teaching about the Shoah and urgently keeping the memory of it alive as time passes is intertwined with the function of ecological education, which is itself part of global citizenship education (Yarova 2021). In this context, I will explore a few Dutch and Polish children’s books on the Holocaust, written in the 21st century. The analysis will show that the similarities between the books are rooted in a concern for a future in which people’s continued carelessness about the environment and about each other could become the beginning of the end of humanity. It is no coincidence that these concerns are articulated in books about the Holocaust. An analysis of the differences, on the other hand, will show the strategies with which the authors try to convey an ecological message.

## 3. Emily Murphy (University of Newcastle)

### **The Anarchy of Children’s Archives: Trauma and the Transnational Child**

In a letter to her editor, author and illustrator Esphyr Slobodkina, most famous for her picturebook, *Caps for Sale* (1940), writes about fleeing Russia with her family to Northern China, before eventually immigrating to the United States in her early twenties. She explains in this same letter how her forced migration shaped her girlhood and her notion of citizenship and belonging. Similarly, in a letter from a small school in Indiana in the 1970s, a group of children talk about a Vietnamese classmate – a child named Puch who formed part of the first major wave of Vietnamese refugees following the fall of Saigon in 1975 – urging author Ezra Jack Keats (best known for *The Snowy Day* (1962)) to write a book featuring this boy. Unlike Slobodkina, we know little about Puch and what his experience of immigration was like, much less how much he felt he fit in with his predominately white classmates. Yet what the comparison of these traces of childhood indicate is the value of developing methods for reading and recovering the archived voices of children as a way of mapping transnational experiences of childhood. Framing these experiences within the context of war, and the forced migration that often results from it, I will discuss what I call the ‘anarchy of children’s archives’, or the potential for the archive to disrupt the binaries that empire often seeks to enforce, including the domestic and the foreign. By considering the ways in which children dismantle these binaries through the archived materials left behind by them – letters, exercise books, artwork, and other scraps of memorabilia – I

argue for the importance of bridging archival theory in the humanities with participatory research in the social sciences as a way of ethically engaging with these voices.

#### 4. Hanan Mousa (Sakhnin College) - *virtual*

### **Palestinian Children's Literature's Role in the Battle for Human Rights**

Researcher Asma Bayumi mentioned the legitimacy of writing for children about subjects that have features of violence from the Palestinian reality saying: "If the story is about Palestine, there is no objection to their inclusion of mean actions, brutality in using power against a defenceless people, and non-human crimes that the Zionist committed in the West Bank and Gaza Strip during the Intifada of Stones. If the story tells about colour prejudice in South Africa, there is no objection to mentioning low vulgar repulsive words by white Europeans in order to show their prejudice against the Blacks and their hatred to the African, who is the owner of the land of the country." If we adopt the attitude of the researcher and apply it to the Palestinian Children's Literature, we will face subjects that completely differ from any literature that is intended to children. After 1949, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was defined as a conflict of survival for the Palestinians. In view of that, it is no wonder that this literature should be reflected in the children's stories that deal with the subject of the 'conflict with the Israeli', which is clearly reflected in all the stories and in a context that is characterised by violence. These children's stories introduced a direct message to the children, which is 'resistance to the occupation'. They also focused on the Israeli occupier who is represented in scenes of violence that the child sees when the soldiers attack the houses and destroy them, shoot people or arrest them. They also represent the state of loss and uncertainty that the Palestinians lived in that period. The study will also give answers to questions like: Are there taboos in the Palestinian children's literature? what are the subjects that are considered taboos in Palestinian children's literature?

## **Panel 18 - BEYOND DISABLING STEREOTYPES**

*Chaired by Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak*

#### 1. Anna Travagliati (University of Bologna)

### **Girls Defeat Patriarchy: Children Protagonists in Dalla Parte delle Bambine**

Children's literature has always had an important role in educating children to socially correct behaviour and in transmitting cultural values. Among these, gender norms are particularly important: various studies have found that children as young as kindergartners recognise desirable behaviours for girls and boys and know that infractions are disapproved. Concerning this, since the seventies scholars from various disciplines (as well as feminist activists) have denounced picture books' deeply sexist content. In order to offer alternative models and narratives, in 1975 Adela Turin founded Dalla parte delle Bambine [On the Side of Little Girls], Italy's first feminist publishing house for children's literature. Her picture books, critically and commercially successful, presented their young readers with feminist messages, from divorce to criticism of the repressive patriarchal family. In order to investigate how these books addressed post-'68 children, this paper will focus on some of the young protagonists of Dalla Parte delle Bambine's stories, able to claim agency and inspire society's improvement. So, in *Rosaconfetto* [Candy Pink] (1975), young elephant Pasqualina rejects sexist

education and leads her peers to rebellion; in *Storia di Panini* [*Story of Sandwiches*] (1976), Ita discovers that men exploit female unpaid domestic labour and inspires women to organise a strike; in *Maiepoimai* [*Never Ever*] (1977), princess Lucinda defies her royal parents (a parody of conformist middle-class families) and refuses to marry the handsome but foolish prince, preferring to move in with her dear friend, the clever witch Cappuccina. As the famous feminist slogan reads out, "the personal is political", and the spontaneous rebellions of these young protagonists bring profound changes to their societies. This paper will investigate how these books, presenting independent heroines and unconventional endings, fulfilled Dalla Parte delle Bambine's overtly feminist, and therefore social and political, commitment.

## 2. Elizabeth Leung (University of Cambridge)

### **"There is only one baby": Activism, Ableism, and the Changeling Myth in Kenneth Oppel's *The Nest***

Five years after Kenneth Oppel's consideration of the animal in *Half Brother* (2010), he continues to explore themes of duty and care through the folkloric creature of the changeling in *The Nest* (2015). Common throughout Western mythology, the child substitution story provided a pre-medical explanation for congenital disabilities: a healthy human child was replaced with a fairy (Eberly; Goodey and Stainton). This myth provided an excuse to neglect, and even kill, disabled children without confronting one's moral compass; a prime example of ableism: the oppression, dehumanisation, and othering of people with disabilities (Bogart and Dunn). Oppel's middle-grade novel *The Nest* explores how these concepts of ableism and normalcy continue to penetrate our culture and how a child can reject these ideologies. The perpetually anxious Steve, worried about his sick newborn baby brother, is visited by an angelic wasp queen in his dreams. She comes with the promise to help 'fix' his baby brother by replacing him with her 'perfect' child being grown in the nest outside his window—Steve just has to say yes. Saddled with the choice to 'fix' his baby brother or possibly watch him die, Steve grapples against the concepts of ableism and normalcy — both in terms of accepting his baby brother's congenital disability and his own anxiety. Drawing on Lennard Davis' *Enforcing Normalcy* (1995) and Mitchell and Snyder's *Narrative Prosthesis* (2014), this paper will explore how Steve's rejection of ableist ideologies presented by the wasp queen is portrayed as activism against eugenic ableism.

## 3. Hai Nin Yeoh and Huey Fen Cheong (Universiti Malaya) - virtual

### **Can Children Think Critically? Voices on Gender Stereotyping in Literature for Malaysian Classrooms**

This paper investigates whether children have the agency to respond critically to gender stereotyping in children's literature. Focus is given to the perceptions and voices of young children in Malaysian primary ESL (English as a Second Language) classrooms, where reading resources are mainly Western-authored. This paper hopes to provide fresh insights as to how ten- to twelve-year-olds perceive children's stories that are heavily gender-stereotyped. Despite the typical belief that young children blindly learn and accept anything presented to them (Filipović 2018; McCabe et al. 2011), this paper intends to find out if they have the agency to think critically for themselves. Through a focus group discussion, the children reflect on selected stories based on Gibbs' (1988) 6-step Reflective Cycle: description, feeling, evaluation, analysis, conclusion, and action plan. Butler's (1990) gender performativity theory serves as the underlying theory of this research. The findings revealed that these children do not hold gender stereotypes for traditionally masculine or feminine occupational

roles. They insist on adding a father character mainly to support his wife's career. However, they still subscribe to a traditional nuclear family structure that consists of a father, a mother and their offspring (Murdock 1949). Compared to the girls, the boys have firmer opinions on gender equality. They demand the father's presence at home to lessen his wife's workload. Contrary to the common scenario where women fight for equal rights, the boys calling out for more male participation in the domestic setting brings hope to the future of gender equality. Gender equality is evident among these children who insist that both male and female characters are equals who should help one another. In conclusion, this paper hopes to contribute to the limited research that taps into the gendered understandings and practices of young children and the Global South, particularly in Southeast Asia.

#### 4. Laurence Talairach (University of Toulouse) - *virtual*

##### **Child Agency in Mid-Victorian Children's Periodicals: The Case of *Aunt Judy's Magazine***

*Aunt Judy's Magazine* was a mid-Victorian children's periodical founded and edited from 1866 to 1873 by the naturalist Margaret Scott Gatty (1809–73), and edited by her daughters, Juliana Horatia Ewing (from 1873 to 1875) and Horatia Katherine Frances Gatty (from 1875 until 1885). Margaret Gatty and her daughters were all naturalists and children's writers who not only presented the natural world as an ecosystem in which organisms were interrelated and interdependent, but encouraged above all young audiences to take an active part in the protection of their environment (Talairach 2021). As this paper will highlight, *Aunt Judy's Magazine* offers a good illustration of the way in which British women naturalists trained children both to collect and care for the natural world, developing, in so doing, child agency. By encouraging juvenile audiences to practise natural history more than simply learn botany as one of women's accomplishments, these Victorian pedagogues helped juvenile audiences develop an ecological consciousness which taught children to "Think for others, and care for others" (Ewing qtd. in Eden 1895). Moreover, their stories and articles show how "[c]are is not the means by which agency occurs; it is itself agential", to borrow Johns-Putra's terms (2013). Indeed, Ewing's last story, "Mary's Meadow," serialised in *Aunt Judy's Magazine* from November 1883 to March 1884, prompted many readers' letters inquiring "about the various plants mentioned in her tale" (Horatia K. F. Gatty, "Preface," Ewing 1886, n. p.). In addition, whilst "Mary's meadowing" became a term used to describe the planting of flowers "beautifying hedges and bare places," a "Parkinson Society" was formed in the months that followed the publication of the story, aiming to "search out and cultivate old garden flowers which have become scarce" and "try to prevent the extermination of rare wild flowers, as well as of garden treasures" (Horatia K. F. Gatty, "Preface," Ewing 1886, n. p.) – hence sowing the seeds of activism amongst their young readership, as this paper will show.

**Saturday, 28th May**

## **Panel 19 - ACTIVISM, AIRWAVES, AND ARCHIVES**

*Chaired by Carly Wanner-Hyde*

**1-3. Anna Mae Duane, Victoria Ford Smith and Katharine Capshaw (University of Connecticut)**

### **[PANEL ABSTRACT]**

#### **Agency, Activism, Archive and Airwaves: Challenges and Possibilities of a Childhood Studio Podcast**

The past decade has seen an increasingly polarised political sphere in which children are placed at the centre of pitched battles over everything from vaccines to history lessons to environmental policy. Even as young activists like Greta Thunberg, Malala Yousafzai, Mari Copney, and others have positioned themselves as political leaders, many politicians, journalists and even educators still operate under the assumption that young people are passive recipients of adult power. Our panel will discuss *The Children's Table Podcast*, a collaborative public-facing digital project that seeks to bring the insights of childhood studies to a larger audience as we draw from case studies that demonstrate children's historical capacity to wield influence as political and cultural actors. These case studies interrogate adult assumptions about who children are and what they need, and in the process invite the public to explore the current narratives adults tell each other about children. We see this panel as a collaborative exercise that invites the audience to a vibrant discussion about the work of untangling the stubborn assumptions around childhood innocence in ways that are both intellectually and politically efficacious. Katharine Capshaw, a specialist in Black American literature and culture, will talk about Black schooling and the creation of photographic books in community spaces. Anna Mae Duane, who specialises in race and childhood in the nineteenth century, will discuss the speculative reading required in the archives of childhood, and Victoria Ford Smith, an expert on child-produced culture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, will consider how our ideas about agency might obscure the often complex and unexpected ways that children participate in the world around them. In the spirit of a conference asking us to rethink the power differentials attached to ideas of citizenship, our panel will emphasise how creating this public conversation has productively disrupted the usual forms of authority invested in academic teaching and scholarship.

- **Anna Mae Duane**

#### **The Archives on the Air**

In *Archive Fever*, Jacques Derrida reminds us that the idea of the archive derives from the ancient Greek *arkheion*, a term that denotes the archival as residing “within a house, a domicile, an address, the superior magistrates, the archons, those who commanded.” For those working in childhood studies, as well as those working in other fields focused on minoritarian subjects know all too well how archival structures often obscure the presence of those who did not “command.” My paper will suggest that the form of public speech, enabled by podcasting, offers both new possibilities and new challenges for thinking about archival thinking, or more specifically for confronting what Derrida deemed *mal d'archive*: the desire to locate and possess origins, a desire made more intense by the ephemerality of childhood itself, and the generic pressures of the podcast to provide “historical detective work.” More

specifically, I'll ask how we can imagine a form of child citizenship within a digital format in which the certainties of political punditry and "true crime" narratives predominate. How do we introduce the listeners to the idea that children have long influenced the historical events we've come to see as formative, and at the same time adhere to the reality that we can only catch glimpses of their influence in the historical archives which invariably privilege a form of citizenship embodied by adults? To think through these questions, I'll focus on two examples—one featuring an African American child in the nineteenth century and another featuring medieval child mystics—in which the archives require speculative reading practices that lean into the epistemic and ethical ambivalence of excavating childhood history.

- **Victoria Ford Smith**

### **How a Podcast Can Make Child Agency Appear**

When Anna Mae Duane, Katharine Capshaw, and I first conceived of The Children's Table Podcast, we were eager to introduce listeners to the remarkable young people we encounter in our research. Pamela Bianco, a child artist of the early 1900s, exhibited her paintings in important modernist galleries. Claudette Colvin, as a teenager and months before the landmark resistance of Rosa Parks, refused to surrender her seat on a segregated bus. As we worked, Autumn Peltier, a young Anishinaabe activist, addressed the UN about water protection. Such children certainly make cameos in our podcast, but we soon discovered we were eager to think through how common constructions of childhood make some young movers and shakers visible while obscuring others. This paper argues that limited understandings of agency, in the academy and in the popular imagination, make it difficult for us to see the multifaceted ways young people participate in cultural history. If we assume agency requires autonomy, examples of game-changing children are extraordinary but rare. Such limited definitions often result in an overestimation of adult authority and underestimation or even dismissal of children's modes of engaging with politics, culture, and community. If, however, we conceive of agency in broader terms — for example, as an individual's ability to navigate social discourses or forge partnerships with those with more social capital — a much larger community of noteworthy children appears. Taking as case studies some of the children and childhoods we have featured on the podcast — the children who collaborated with photographer Arthur Tress, the girls implicated in the Salem Witch Trials, students engaging in clandestine schoolroom economies — I explore the advantages of using public-facing scholarship to make agentic childhoods appear.

- **Katharine Capshaw**

### **Public Accounts of Activism: Using a Podcast to Promote Knowledge of Resistant Literacies in Black American Communities**

Scholarship within the field of children's literature has overlooked the powerful effects of activist education within Black American communities. By focusing on sites of community intervention around Black children's textual representation, my paper will grapple with the challenges of reshaping public knowledge about the range and accomplishment of resistant schooling and bookmaking. As Russell Rickford explains in *We Are an African People: Independent Education, Black Power, and the Radical Imagination*, Black nationalist schools took hold in the late 1960s and early 1970s, across the United States: "As grassroots 'counterinstitutions' built on a thoroughgoing critique of white cultural hegemony, Pan African nationalist schools, or 'independent black institutions' as they were known by

the 1970s, served as successors to the civil rights movement's 'freedom schools'... and as forerunners to modern Afrocentric academies" (2). These schools also responded to the struggles in urban sites in the late 1960s for community control over schooling and to the material neglect of Black children in city schools; they aimed to take the reins of academic education and also of a decolonisation of the minds of children that the activists believed was fundamental to cultural transformation by publishing books that resisted racist defamations and claimed African cultural identity and practices. Part of the effort to reshape public awareness of this activist history has come through discussing the work of particular Black schools on The Children's Table podcast. My paper will explore the challenges of encapsulating a complex history of Black activist schooling for a general audience and will consider the rewards of public awareness of this rich and important history.

## Panel 20 - Exploring Children's Agency in the Classics

Chaired by *Xavier Mínguez-López*

### 1. Dorota Pielorz (Jagiellonian University)

#### **'She Is Shedding the Light All Over' – Lucy Maud Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* and Women's Emancipation**

Children's literature can play a significant role in the battle for human rights. It often supports those who are marginalised, silenced or deprived of access to education, development, and other fundamental rights. Over the years, one of those discriminated groups was (and unfortunately still are) women. Hence, in my paper, I would like to focus on the internationally renowned example of college girl literature – *Anne of Green Gables* by Lucy Maud Montgomery – and try to briefly sketch the role it plays in the battle for women's rights. Anne Shirley, the main protagonist of the novel in question, can be perceived as a literary figure based on the author herself, who was in favour of women's emancipation and is often claimed to have been a feminist. Starting from the seemingly lose-lose position of a poor orphan girl, Anne manages to gain an education and makes a spectacular social advancement. Thus, Montgomery's work emphasises the role of women's education and development – this kind of message was still controversial at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, when the novel was published (1908). Moreover, she introduces to adolescent girls and young women the protagonist who is sensitive, feminine, but at the same time strong and determined to fight for her independence. This powerful figure effectively influences thousands of readers' lives. Since the publication of the first Polish translation which was issued in 1912 (only four years after the original), there have appeared not only many updated and new renderings but also studies concerning different aspects of Montgomery's work. Since then *Anne of Green Gables* has enjoyed unprecedented popularity in Poland and has played a considerable role in the shaping of modern Polish culture. To prove its impact and significance I want to present how Anne became a role model for girls in Poland. Based on selected examples (excerpts from diaries, memories, reviews, and letters), I will show how Montgomery's novel helps Polish girls (but not only them) shape their personalities and gives them strength and courage to fight for their rights and for their dreams.

## 2. Virginie Douglas (University of Rouen)

### Talking to the Child or Talking with the Child? Adult Child Conversations as a Space for Child Agency in E. Nesbit's *The Story of the Treasure Seekers*

Although children's literature has always been about finding a flimsy equilibrium between adult authority and a certain amount of child empowerment, Edith Nesbit is certainly one of the children's authors whose books most clearly convey a shift in the adult-child balance of agency, both through the depiction of her child characters and through the author-reader relationship her stories put forward. For Croxson (1974), who claims the novelist did not get involved in the suffragette movement only because she was too busy with the emancipation of another minority – children, Nesbit's typical young hero is indisputably an "emancipated child". In the essay *Wings and the Child*, Nesbit vindicates children's rights to freedom, condemning adults' smothering authority: "Liberty is one of the rights that a child above all needs—every possible liberty, of thought, of word, of deed." (1913). Focusing on the first Bastable novel, *The Story of the Treasure-Seekers* (1899), I will argue that Nesbit uses the diegesis as a space for child freedom and agency. Not only does the children's widowed father work long hours away from home, giving them some leeway in living various adventures in order "to restore the fallen fortunes of the House of Bastable"; but the children also emancipate themselves from adult authority by symbolically writing their own story, inspired by the books they have read, giving intertextuality a new, liberating dimension. It comes as no surprise, then, that Nesbit should make one of the siblings, Oswald, the narrator of the story, having a child engage with the adult author in the same way as his brothers and sisters engage with the adult figures in the diegesis. However, the adult-child relationship is more complex than a simple reversal of power, with the children assuming the parental role. Although he seems mature and self-confident, Oswald has his weaknesses and is not a reliable narrator, and the six Bastable children find kindly, helpful parental figures in adults outside the family circle, like Albert-next-door's uncle, who has a dialogic way of addressing them. I will contend that these complex relationships and the depiction of adults' and children's conflicting interpretations of reality (Guillaume 2008) allow for a metatextual reflection on the intricacies and paradox of writing for children when you are an adult.

## 3. Ines Naji (University of Rouen)

### You Could Give it Up: The Agency of the Female Child in Noel Streatfield's *Ballet Shoes*

Published during the interwar years when the conception of female agency was shifting, notably thanks to women's contribution to the war effort, *Ballet Shoes* (Streatfield, 1936) stands as a feminist account of women and girls' ability to take action. After the male head of the household vanishes from sight, the three Fossil sisters and their female carers are left almost penniless. While the latter start to make their own money by renting rooms in the house, the girls soon follow in their footsteps and decide to work as child actresses and dancers to help support their family. While "girly" Pauline and Posy are born performers and shine in their respective disciplines, Petrova stands as the tomboy, the outcast. With her short hair and boyish figure, she would rather spend her time reading books about aeroplanes rather than reciting Shakespeare verse. Petrova's personality makes her stand out right from the start and influences her experience of agency: while her sisters' agency is not questioned, for performing is what they really want to do, Petrova does not fit in and is repeatedly given the freedom to stand down. Yet, she refuses and persists in order to provide for her family. This paper will analyse the different stages of Petrova's emerging agency, and the way they come into play with the



conception of girlhood. At first introduced and potentially impaired by the way her characterisation contrasts with her sisters', Petrova's agency gradually goes from being applied to a selfless enterprise to fostering one of self-determination. Indeed, at the end of the story, Petrova is rewarded and finally able to focus on her real interests, thus conveying a sacrificial conception of female agency, but also giving girls' voices and aspirations greater significance.

## Panel 21 - Subversion, Literature and Civic Participation

Chaired by *Gabriel Duckels*

### 1. Smiljana Narančić Kovač (University of Zagreb)

#### Subversive Messages Between the Lines

This study explores the idea of subversiveness, focusing on two representative examples of children's texts from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century: *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* by Beatrix Potter (1902) and *The Strange Adventures of Hlapić the Apprentice* by Ivana Brlić-Mažuranić (1912). Subversiveness in children's literature specifies a quality which promotes values different from those of the conventional adult world; such literature appeals to the rebellious child and acts as a force for change (Lurie 1990). It requires an active child character and an inquisitive child reader, and approaches children as "not just objects but also subjectivities that creatively challenge engrained normative assumptions" (Wall 2019). The dichotomy of the socialising and subversive functions of children's literature (Flynn 2006) emphasises the difference between passivity and agency. Active children are seen as "involved in the construction of their own social lives, the lives of those around them and of the societies in which they live" (James and Prout 1997). The emphasis on child agency also contradicts the idea of passive children in need of adult protection and offers "possible forms of freedom or even empowerment facilitated by a not-so-protected childhood" (Winkler 2019). At first glance, *Peter Rabbit* represents a naughty child who is punished for his mischief, and the novel about Hlapić and Gita promotes dominant social values of the time. However, the deeper meanings, intended for a thoughtful reader, reveal rewards obtained through agency. In the novel, the main characters are orphans, and their unprotected status creates space for empowerment. The analysis of the agency of these characters exposes the subversive messages offered to the child reader. These works (and their authors) treat the young readers with respect and invite them to look for substantial meanings between the lines.

### 2. Maciej Skowera (Faculty of Polish Studies)

#### Change the City, Change the World: Urban Fantasy in Novels by China Mieville and Marcin Szezygielski

The proposed paper discusses literary images of young citizens as individuals who, despite (or perhaps thanks to?) their supposedly subordinate position in the power structure, can enter close relations with other marginalised beings and, in an intergenerational, intersectional, or even interspecies manner, fight against the oppression to bring about the collapse of the ossified social order. The research material includes British and Polish novels which can be classified as leftist or left-leaning urban fantasy: *King Rat* (1998) and *Un Lun Dun* (2007), both by China Miéville, as well as *Leo i czerwony automat* [*Leo and the Red Machine*] (2018) and *Oczy Michaliny* [*Michalina's Eyes*] (2020), written by

Marcin Szczygielski. The aim of the paper is to compare the two writers' strategies of constructing 'mighty children' (a reference to a term coined in another context by Clémentine Beauvais, 2015), to consider whether such works enable the empowerment of their hypothetical young readers; and especially to show how urban fantasy, by drawing attention to social inequality, climate issues, or the collective well-being of urban populations, reformulates the convention of traditional heroic fiction using the characters of child saviours. The concepts of aetnormativity by Maria Nikolajeva (2010) and of radical fantasy fiction by Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak (2016) will be used as a conceptual framework.

### 3. **Glenda Oris** (Ateneo de Manila University) - *virtual*

#### **Growing Up in the Time of Martial Law and People Power Revolution**

The declaration and promulgation of Martial Law and the staging of the People Power Revolution (EDSA I) in the Philippines happened over three decades ago. Even though there is a dearth of information to be found in textbooks and in classroom discussions regarding this period, historical fiction for children published in the Philippines has provided representations of the events leading up to Martial Law, the experience of Martial Law and the People Power Revolution, and the events soon after the People Power Revolution. Aside from the narration of events, these books for children represent the development of activism and agency of children during the said period. This presentation shall analyse the representations of growth and development of agency and activism among children during a segment of Philippine history rife with conflict, violence, and struggle, through the following books; *Isang Harding Papel [A Paper Garden]* (2014) by Augie Rivera, illustrated by Rommel Joson; *Si Jhun-jhun, Noong Bago Ideklara ang Martial Law [Jhun-jhun, Before Martial Law]* (2001) by Augie Rivera, illustrated by Brian Vallesteros; *Bertdey ni Guido [Guido's Birthday]* (2001) by Rene Villanueva, illustrated by John Crisostomo; *Salingkit: A 1986 Diary* (2012) by Cyan Abad-Jugo. The analysis of the books shall focus on three things: (1) portrayal of images and experiences of children from Martial Law to People Power revolution, (2) agency and activism exercised by children in the narratives, and (3) results of agency and activism of the child characters in the stories. The presentation shall underscore the critical contribution of child characters in fiction for children to the development of socio-civic engagement among children, and the importance of historical fiction as a way of strengthening social and political awareness and historical rootedness.

## **Panel 22 - Children in the Social and Cultural Environment**

*Chaired by Victoria Ford Smith*

### 1. **Helen King** (Newcastle University)

#### **Adults Should Start to Listen to Us: Naidoo's Creative Collaborations with Young People**

In this paper, I explore the collaborations with young people that shaped Beverley Naidoo's *Web of Lies* (2004). Naidoo's work often explores the agency of marginalised children; *Web of Lies* depicts teenage Nigerian refugees Sade and Femi in London, UK as they wait for their asylum claim to be processed, and Femi looks for belonging to a local gang. Naidoo's archive at Seven Stories, the National Centre for Children's Books, UK contains transcripts of sessions in which Naidoo workshopped ideas and drafts of *Web of Lies* with young people. Whilst participatory research with children proliferates in childhood

studies (Deszcz-Tryhubczak; Joosen), there has been little research into the use of such approaches by children's authors. In a 'recuperation of the tradition of adult-child collaborations' (Smith), I explore Naidoo's use of 'Drama-in-Education' as a methodology for creative collaboration with young people (Heathcote). Revealing how these collaborations shaped *Web of Lies*, I argue that in viewing children as experts, Naidoo's collaborative methodology creates space for children to be viewed as both the consumers and the creators of children's culture.

## 2. **Sonali Kulkarni** (Tilburg University) and **Emilie Owens** (The Queer Games Library)

### **Book Talk on BookTok**

First launched less than three years ago, TikTok has quickly become a mainstay in the lives of social media users. This is particularly true for children and young adults between ages 10 and 19 who account for over 30% of TikTok's one billion active users, making them the most populous age group on the platform (Doyle 2021). This popularity also percolates into TikTok subcultures where users engage with niche interests. One such subculture is #BookTok – a TikTok-based digital community on which (young) readers actively engage with the literary texts that they consume. Owing to the significant impact of the #BookTok trend on the YA publishing industry (Harris 2021), it has been the subject of several recent studies that understand BookTok as a form of literacy engagement (Jerasa & Boffone 2021) and examine its scholastic utility for teachers and librarians (Merga 2021). The present study shifts attention from *literacy* to the *literary* to understand the ways in which young readers harness the BookTok subculture to position themselves as active agents within the literary sphere. Upon framing BookTok within the democratisation of literary criticism and the shift from a top-down system of literary criticism to a "horizontal network of lay readers" (Neima 2017), we argue that young BookTokers' agency as digital literary critics may be understood by employing insights from practice theory. Drawing from the work of Couldry (2004) and Johansen (2018) on understanding media as practices - that is, attempting to understand what young people are actually *doing* in relation to media - we propose a re-conceptualisation of BookTok as a space for the negotiation of young adults' readerly and critical agency through which literary discourses have shifted and developed as practice. Through this research, we espouse a move away from discourses of technological determinism to foreground the young adult users and their agentic reshaping of digital literary criticism.

## 3. **Anna Czernow** (University of Poznań)

### **Citizenship through Agency – Agency through Court. Janusz Korczak, the Orphans' Home and the Collegial Court**

My presentation aims to analyse the Collegial Court, a pedagogical institution in the orphanage led by Janusz Korczak for thirty years between 1912 and 1942. Korczak himself was a Jewish-Polish writer, pedagogue, paediatrician and philosopher of childhood, who was introduced to the idea of a children's court from 1904 to 1908, while working as a caretaker in the summer camps as described in his reportages for children. The Collegial Court evolved into one of the pillars of his Orphans' Home, the famous Warsaw orphanage for Jewish children. It was established before Poland gained independence operating during both World Wars and liquidated by the extermination of all staff and pupils in Treblinka Extermination Camp. The idea behind the Orphans' Home can be summarised as 'citizenship through agency'. The child as a citizen constantly occupied Korczak's thoughts which one can trace in his writings. "Children make up a large percentage of the human race, the population, the nation, its

inhabitants, our fellow-citizens – they are permanent comrades," he wrote in his manifesto, *A Child's Right to Respect* (1928). The Orphans' Home was thus a place that gave its children's citizens the agency understood as rights, voice and responsibility. One of the tools for experiencing it was the Collegial Court. The judges were exclusively children, but the plaintiffs and defendants could be children and grown-up caregivers. In other words, a child could sue a grown-up which was perceived as a controversial, even dangerous idea. By analysing Korczak's writings about the Collegial Court (mainly the excerpts of *The Court Gazette* and the Collegial Court Codex) as well as the archival material such as memories and essays by the former pupils of the Orphans' Home, I am going to interpret the Collegial Court as a practice of children's citizenship.

## Panel 23 - The Agentic Power of Auto/Biography

Chaired by *Melanie Ramdarshan Bold*

### 1. Louise Couceiro (University of Glasgow)

#### Contemporary Children's Biography

The publication of children's biographies has grown exponentially in recent years, with collective biographies about women paving the way. Books such as *Fantastically Great Women Who Changed the World* (Pankhurst, 2016) present stories of women's achievements throughout history, making their primary aim – to inspire readers into action – very clear. For example, the blurb of *Fantastically Great Women* reads: this book is "the perfect introduction to just a few of the incredible women who helped shape the world we live in". Follow them and prepare for an adventure of your own. Generally, 'following' these women means doing something; one thing, extraordinarily well, and doing it by oneself. For the most part, their lives are reduced to a single area of focus/achievement, and these achievements are presented as entirely independent enterprises. In other words, specialisation and individualisation are central to these 'success stories', whilst examples of generalisation (looking beyond a single area of focus) and collaboration, are largely absent. This representation merits reflection given that, arguably, the world increasingly requires individuals to work together and consider phenomena from a range of perspectives if global issues are to be addressed effectively (Epstein 2019). What are the implications of inviting children to 'change the world', in a way that foregrounds specialisation and individualisation? In this paper, I interweave my critical content analysis of four collective biographies of women, which is grounded in post-structuralist and neoliberal feminist theories (Rottenberg 2014; Banet-Weiser et al. 2020) with empirical data from my PhD study. The study used creative methods to explore how a group of children responded to and engaged with the texts analysed. My analysis incites valuable questions regarding the purpose of contemporary children's biography, the opportunities and pitfalls of presenting inspiring 'world changers' as specialist and individualistic, and the texts' potential for mobilising readers to act.

## 2. Gabriela Niemczynowicz-Szkopek (University of Warsaw)

### **“We support girls today so they change the world tomorrow”. Shaping Girls' Agency in the Contemporary Polish Magazine *Kosmos dla Dziewczynek* (*Cosmos for Girls*)**

The magazine of Kosmos dla Dziewczynek Foundation has been published under the patronage of the IBBY's Polish section. The aim of the magazine, each issue being devoted to a different topic – such as girl power, is to shape a sense of agency in young girls and making girls' voices heard. Underaged female readers can express their opinions and put forward agency stimulating ideas of activities in current topics such as climate change. As Kathy Short writes in a rather old but still relevant article analysing, among other things, the influence of literature on children's sense of agency: “Agency reflects children's belief in their capacity to take action” (2012). In this context, I am mainly interested in how the idea of girl's agency is depicted in the magazine, how female role models are presented in the short stories published in episodes in the magazine, and how the discussion on gender and job stereotypes is addressed. All in line with the Foundation's motto: We support girls today so they change the world tomorrow.

## 3. Chiara Malpezzi (University of Padua)

### **Portraits of the Artist as a Young Girl: The Representation of Agency in Biographies about Female Artists**

Recent studies have defined children's agency as the right of self-expression and active influence in drawing a life path, considering children not as passive recipients of culture, but as active creators (Flynn 2016). In this perspective, foregrounding historical figures, juvenile biographies show readers possible paths for their identity formation and action (Eaton 2006). My research aims to explore young people's agency in the biographical genre, which is still underinvestigated in children's literature but increasing in numbers and quality. Referring to juvenile biography studies (Beauvais 2020), I investigate how the childhood of female artists is narrated in picturebooks and graphic novels about four outstanding women who have deeply influenced the culture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century through different artistic forms, such as Virginia Woolf (Gazier & Ciccolini 2011; Gabriele 2011), Frida Kahlo (Novesky & Diaz 2010; Sánchez Vegara & Fan Eng 2015), Joséphine Baker (Powell & Robinson 2014; Winter & Priceman 2012) and Coco Chanel (Byrne 2019; Perrin 2020). The methodology is based on critical content analysis (Johnson *et al.* 2017), and I will focus on three agential tropes: consciousness, self-determination and resistance (VanderHaagen 2012). My hypothesis seeks to investigate if and how, in their childhood, the heroines portrayed in the biographies have developed the power to affirm themselves, along with their art, making choices for their growth as artists.

## Panel 24 - Agentic Children's Literature

Chaired by Georgia Kalogirou

1-3. Björn Sundmark, Aliona Yarova and Chrysogonus Siddha Malilang (Malmö University)

### [PANEL ABSTRACT]

#### Active Reader - Activist Child: 100 Years and 1000km of Agentic Children's Literature

The common denominator of the three paper panel presentations is that they recognise the potential of some children's books to promote activity (readerly and otherwise), and ultimately to alter the readers' ways of seeing and acting in (and upon) the world, making readers into "activists". This is true of the two children's classics analysed in the first presentation: Selma Lagerlöf's *The Wonderful Adventures of Nils* (1907) and Robert Baden-Powell's *Scouting for Boys* (1907). Both books have a pedagogical intention. Lagerlöf's schoolbook was designed to teach geography, literature and reading, but also aimed at providing citizenship education; Baden-Powell's handbook has a similar aim, but the education provided is not bookish but practical and outdoor activities oriented. By contrast, the second paper presentation focuses on non-didactic, contemporary YA fiction. It shows the pedagogical capacity of magic realist narratives like *A Monster Calls* (2011) by Patrick Ness, and *The Midnight Zoo* (2010) by Sonya Hartnett, and argues that these novels have the capacity to activate child readers and to, figuratively speaking, recruit them as meaning-makers and "co-authors" of the text. In the third presentation, the potential of Gengoroh Tagame's manga series *My Brother's Husband* (2014-2017) to raise awareness of interculturality, identity and sexuality is explored. While the three fields of children's literature (in a broad sense) analysed in the presentations presuppose active readers and aim to produce aware and ultimately "activist" children, whether it is in relation to family, society and nation, or to nature and animals, they also display great variation in terms of themes, genres and forms. They also show how our understanding of what it means to be an "active" reader and an "activist" has evolved over one hundred years. Finally, several of the chosen texts explore activity/activism in terms of travel and/or displacement, as in Nils' travels across the country, scout hikes, the flight of the Roma children (in *The Midnight Zoo*), and Mike's journey from Canada to Japan (in *My Brother's Husband*). Hence, the "1000 kilometres" of the subheading.

- Björn Sundmark

#### Citizenship and Children's Identity in *The Adventures of Nils* and *Scouting for Boys*

In my paper, I will focus on two seminal works of citizenship and children's identity: *The Adventures of Nils* (1906-7) by Selma Lagerlöf and *Scouting for Boys* (1908) by Robert Baden Powell. I analyse the books in the light of recent theories on citizenship and multiculturalism (Kemp 2005, Kymlicka 2003), and show in what ways these children's and YA texts have shaped notions of citizenship and coming of age that, for better and worse, are still very much with us today after one hundred years. Indeed, some of Lagerlöf's and Baden Powell's ideas are peculiarly modern, such as the notion that good citizenship is bred in contact and interaction with the natural environment. The idea of 'the competent child' is another tenet of faith in both Lagerlöf and Baden-Powell which a modern reader can relate to. Other aspects of the two books are more dubious. The two texts are certainly characteristic of their time and their respective national and cultural contexts (British Empire and Swedish nation), and there is a lot of ideological and pedagogical lumber between the pages. Much has dated. *The Wonderful Adventures of*

*Nils* is a work of instruction, calculated to build character and nation and language. As such it represents the vested interests of the state school system, and the national ideology of modern Sweden. Conversely, *Scouting for Boys* is a manual on citizenship in the British Empire. Significantly, the subtitle is *A Handbook for Instruction in Good Citizenship Through Woodcraft*. Both texts can be seen as powerful tools of ideology. However, even apparently chauvinistic ideas about nation and race are constructively addressed in a close reading of the texts. The fears and hopes are largely the same now as they were one hundred years ago. Thus, the two books have something important to say in our globalised 21st century.

- Aliona Yarova

### **Child-readers as Co-Authors: Magic Realist Children's Literature and Non-Didactic Education**

Roland Barthes claimed "the death of the author" (1967), suggesting that readers are free to interpret literary texts regardless of the author's intention. Children's freedom of interpretation of literary texts has been considered problematic as children's literature is viewed as always having either a direct or an implied didactic message (Sipe 1999). The debate around didactic children's literature is based on the two main arguments against didacticism: moralising fiction for children will not attract readers; the messages in didactic texts "are likely to misfire" (Mills 2014). This paper explores how a magic realist narrative mode provides alternative learning opportunities by being educational, but not moralising and overtly instructional. In particular, this paper focuses on the pedagogical capacity of two magic realist children's novels; *The Midnight Zoo* (Hartnett 2010) and *A Monster Calls* (Ness 2011) to non-didactically teach about environmental issues. Drawing on the constructionist approach which advocates that learning is an active rather than passive process of knowledge construction, this paper suggests that magic realist narrative mode encourages readers to negotiate with the texts and construct their knowledge through their individual understanding of the meaning. Readers' active participation in the text's meaning-making is encouraged by the magic realist narrative techniques, such as inversion and defamiliarisation. Inverted and defamiliarised reality is not represented directly but reconstructed by the reader's individual process of making the meaning of the story. Inversion creates a cognitive conflict for the reader who has to navigate the reversed notions of the magical and the real, assembling mental jigsaw puzzles into a picture that the reader 'draws' from the material given by the author. This paper explores how magic realist narratives encourage the reader to become a co-author of the narrative, where the author is no longer the only 'authority' but a 'stimulator' of the reader's imaginative action.

- Chrysogonus Siddha Malilang

### **"My Brother's Husband": Child Agency through Seriality, Interculturality, Sexuality and Identity**

The common depiction of LGBTIQ+ identity in manga generally revolves around gendered fantasy, either from female gaze on forbidden love in yaoi genre or the gay gaze on masculinity in bara genre. The publication of Gengoroh Tagame's graphic novel, *My Brother's Husband* (2014-2017), is considered a breath of fresh air in terms of authentic representation within the manga sphere. The book itself revolves around the journey of Yaichi, Mike, and Kana in exploring and accepting/tolerating new, sometimes alien concepts of sexuality and identity within the setting of intercultural encounters. Despite the dynamic interactions between these three characters, the child (Kana) plays an important role in sparking, facilitating and sometimes leading the dialogues that further explore the complexity



of sexuality and identity from both Canadian and Japanese perspectives. This paper aims to study how child agency and activism are portrayed and used in this book to help both the child and adult readers to navigate the complex issues, such as interculturality, identity, and sexuality. The rise of Kana into an active citizen and how she claims her own space in the public sphere, and debates of sexuality and identity become the focus of this study. The child mediation, agency and activism in the book are analysed using the framework of intergenerational solidarity and the idea of “child-as-kin”. Focus on the visuality and image seriality is also employed in the study, considering the importance of visual layers in the graphic novels in telling a story, the potential to further engage the readers and build the affective foundation to finally embrace diversity.

## Panel 25 - Aetonormativity in Child Empowerment Processes

Chaired by Ana Margarida Ramos

### 1. Vanessa Joosen (University of Antwerp)

#### United in Childism and Activism: Adolescence and Old Age in Anne Fine's *The Granny Book*

This paper will use childhood scholar John Wall's concept of “childism” as a starting point to reflect on the construction of age in Anne Fine's *The Granny Book* (1983), and match it with reflections on intergenerational solidarity by Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak and Zoe Jaques and on a post-age society by Johanna Haynes and Karin Murriss. Wall pleads for using childhoods as “prisms or microscopes through which to deconstruct historical expressions of adultism and reconstruct more age-inclusive social imaginations” (5). He wants to use “childism” for a broader social critique, one which is informed by a keen awareness of the interdependence and interconnectedness of people. Here lies the potential to use the concept as a lens for exploring intergenerational relationships and activism, especially since Wall himself has used the term for reflections on children's rights. Children's literature itself can have an important role to play in this debate. I will use Anne Fine's *The Granny Project*, first published in 1983, as a case study to make this point. The grandmother in this novel is repeatedly “othered” and the reader is compelled to take a position vis-à-vis the hostile stance on old age that various adult and adolescent characters take. The strategy of “reading against the text” is offered by the novel itself, as it draws attention to how texts are constructed and how language and perspectives can be used to manipulate the reader's point of view. Moreover, the novel shows how the young and the old can also become allies when it comes to defending human rights, such as the right to vote, and offers multi-layered reflections on the reciprocity of care.

### 2. Nina Goga (Western Norway University of Applied Sciences)

#### The Adult's Role in Supporting or Facilitating Child Character's Opportunities to Exercise their Rights

This paper is motivated by Michelle Superle's (2016) call for a child-centred critical approach to children's literature (CCA), and the key principle of this approach: the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) as the core theoretical document anchoring the CCA. Framed by the CCA and the UNCRC, the aim of this paper is to examine a selected corpus of children's books to find out whether and how adult characters support or facilitate the child characters'



opportunities to exercise their rights as advocated in the UNCRC. The corpus consists of ten children's books (including two graphic novels and one illustrated autobiography) nominated for the Norwegian book award Bokslukerprisen 2021/22. The idea of this award is to give young readers aged 10 to 12 the opportunity to suggest, review, nominate and choose the winner from among the new Norwegian children's literature. Hence, the idea of the award itself takes the articles of the UNCRC seriously, for instance, numbers 12 (children's right to express their view in all matters affecting them), 13 (children's right to express their thoughts and opinions), and 31 (children's right to take part in cultural activities). The paper will present the study in three steps: the first step is to map out the examples of the UNCRC rights found in the corpus; the second is to examine the overall role of the adults; and the third is to examine the most conspicuous examples of the UNCRC rights and the child characters' latitude in practising the right(s) in focus. A preliminary observation is that the most prominent rights that are dealt with are those from articles 2 (non-discrimination), 12 (respect for the views of the child), and 16 (right to privacy), often related to minority cultures and gender identity. The role of the adult seems to be supportive, although the adults do not always facilitate opportunities from the beginning.

### 3. Kenneth Kidd (University of Florida)

#### **Zora Neal Hurston for Kids**

African American storyteller, novelist, filmmaker and anthropologist Zora Neal Hurston is not generally considered a writer for children. Hurston did, however, assemble groundbreaking works of African American folklore based on her own research in Florida and the American South, among them *Mules and Men* (1935), *Tell My Horse* (1938) and *Every Tongue Got to Confess: Negro Folk-Tales from the Gulf States* (posthumously published in 2001). That material has been re-presented in a series of picturebooks for kids, among them *The Skull Talks Back* (2004), *The Three Witches* (2006), *The Six Fools* (2006) and *What's the Hurry Fox?* (2004). Scholar Cara Byrne has written brilliantly on the pros and cons of transforming Hurston's anthropological and scholarly work into children's picturebooks. Meanwhile, and with approval from the Zora Neal Hurston Trust, T. R. Simon and Victoria Bond have collaborated to write two very successful middle-grade novels that imagine Zora's childhood, *Zora and Me* (2010) and *Zora and Me: The Cursed Ground* (2020). There's also a picturebook biography of Hurston, *Zora Hurston and the Chinaberry Tree* (2020), as well as a graphic/illustrated biography titled *Fire!* (2017). Building on Byrne's insights, this presentation examines the contemporary retrofitting of Hurston by adults as a subject for and even an author of children's literature. Contemporary claims upon Hurston are admirable in that they help construct an African American literary tradition for children and young adults, but that "for" is tricky. All the more so since Hurston did not participate in Harlem Renaissance writing for children or show any particular interest in youth literature. What, then, are the ethical and ideological dimensions of this retrofitting on the part of adult stakeholders? And if Zora Neal Hurston is for kids, are kids in turn for Hurston? Meaning, what impact has this work had on child readers?

## Panel 26 - Political Subjectivities in Children's Literature

Chaired by Anna Duane

### 1. Svetlana Kalezić Radonjić (University of Montenegro)

#### **The Figure of the Heroic Child and Formation of Political Subjectivities**

This paper will attempt to illuminate the literary forms of ideologisation and politicisation of Yugoslav childhood; how the massive production of novels about World War II with characters of children as pioneers influenced the development of the political subjectivities of Yugoslav children and their role in the political processes of that time. A special role was given to the figure of the heroic child which in the younger generations was to produce a model to be emulated, a model in which the collective goals were placed above the individual. Such a child, regardless of sex, from early childhood had to show certain socially useful characteristics, and so *activism* was one of the most highly valued of these given that it contributed equally to the transformation of society and the celebration of that transformation. Activism needed to indirectly influence the development of a whole series of other 'personality traits' – the sense of collective life and socialist upbringing, unquestionable patriotism, nurturing the legacy of the revolution within the youngest and their preparation for later participation in the CPY...Also, some universal, timeless characteristics were also expected of pioneers – honesty, decency, diligence, boldness, progress, perseverance, openness, pride, independent initiative, and creativity, Given that children and their childhoods in Yugoslavia were under the guidance of a strong ideology, the shaping of their political subjectivities mainly had the goal of directing their behaviour, whereby the end goal was to make children into examples not only of civic obedience, but also of patriotism and sacrifice for the greater good (martyr ideology). In such a "project" the Union of Pioneers, the school system and school reading material played a key role. The basic goal of this paper, therefore, is to examine the role, or to put it better, the power that literary texts and figures of the heroic child have over the politicisation of childhood, as well as over the political subjectivity of young readers.

### 2. Shuya Su (University of Glasgow)

#### **Love Me, Please Understand Me: Reading Subjectivity from Diaries and Letters of Left-behind Children in China**

With China's rapid social and economic development, rural populations are leaving for other cities to improve economic situations. They leave their school-aged children alone with other caretakers. These children are termed "left-behind children." Research has shown that being left behind can have a huge impact on children's educational achievements, character development and psychological well-being. The alarming number of left-behind children and their sufferings have also been noticed by children's authors, and a body of books about left-behind children have been created. Most of the books are fiction, but there exists some life writing by left-behind children. In life writing, China's researchers focus more on well-established authors, and overlook life writing written by ordinary people, let alone marginalised groups (i.e. females, children). The present research attempts to examine how left-behind children, through life writing where they are allowed full control of the interpretation of their lives, show that they are not just vulnerable beings but resilient agents. Resilience is an individual's capability to draw on resources in the environment to maintain his wellbeing and produce good outcomes despite his adversity (Bonanno & Diminich 2013). Guanglun Michael Mu and Yang Hu

(2016) have provided an ecological approach to resilience building for floating and left-behind children. They propose that, first social support and school support can facilitate resilience building against the backdrop of adverse life events. Second, children's resilience can buffer the negative effect of adversity and contribute to children's wellbeing and wellbecoming. Using the life writing project conducted by Yang Yuansong (2012) and Blue Letter Project (2015), the paper aims to examine left-behind children's resilience against their separation from parents and lack of resources (i.e. money, water) through their thoughts, emotions and actions towards their surroundings. Then, the paper argues for a strength-based approach to understand left-behind children in real life and to depict them in literature.

### 3. Tehmina Pirzada (Texas A&M University at Qatar)

#### **Snapshot of Muslim Girlhood: Negotiating Hudood through the Vignette in *Lahore with Love* and *The Day I Became a Woman***

My presentation focuses on the representations of Muslim girlhood in textual and cinematic vignettes such as Marzieh Meshkini's film, *The Day I Became a Woman* (2000) and Fawzia Afzal-Khan's autobiographical novella *Lahore with Love: Growing up with Girlfriends Pakistani Style* (2010). Narrated by Muslim girls while simultaneously depicting their adolescence within the confines of a religio-patriarchal society, I argue that the referred texts deploy the girls' playfulness to explore as well as counteract *hudood* laws—the moral, juridical, and penal codes—that control social behaviour in Iran and Pakistan. These understandings of *hudood* are further complicated when the age of consent is discussed according to the *hudood*, a significant component of *Sharia*. Some proponents of *hudood* consider the age of menstruation as a termination of girlhood, considering girls as young as between the age of nine and thirteen eligible for marriage (Baderin 543). Others prefer to interpret and define *hudood* according to the needs of the time. Emphasising the underlying conflicts that surround *hudood*, Hina Azam argues the interpretation of *hudood* is dependent on the historical, social, cultural, and legal dichotomies within which it exists, making it tough to come up with a conclusive definition. The term *hudood*, according to Azam, only means a moral and ethical concept that has evolved over time into a set of laws/disciplinary punishments that impact the corporeality of girls and women the most (6). However, in the referred texts, *hudood* laws do not simply exist as a legal abstraction, in fact, their presence is both literal (in the form of walls, roofs, boundaries, and legal documents) as well as a metaphorical (unspoken codes of honour, discipline, and good behaviour) with which the girls interact with, and negotiate, through their playful performances. Building upon Ruby Lal's idea of how playfulness as resistance, and the necessity of examining "school" and "household" as institutions that both confine, and at times liberate girls, this presentation explores the girls' playfulness, their subversion of religio-patriarchal restrictions for the performances of "piety" and respectability (Khoja 6), their creative engagement with a difference (both linguistic and spatial), to establish that Khan's autobiographical narrative and Meshkini's cinematic rendition are a complex exploration of the agential and political potential of Muslim girlhood.

## Panel 27 - Diversity and Children's Civic Rights

Chaired by Macarena García González

### 1. Yasemin Yilmaz Yuksek (Boğaziçi University) - virtual

#### Representation of Agency and Children's Rights in Contemporary Children's Literature in Turkey

Considering that children's literature has more than a 300-hundred-year past and the history of children's literature cannot be discussed aside from the history of childhood, defining the place/role of children in literature necessitates an understanding of the concept of agency. This paper begins with an exploration of agency as a problematic concept in children's literature. It then focuses on representations of agency in children's books published in Turkey. Used as a tool of education with its highly pedagogic function, children's literature in Turkey has only very recently started to be written in line with the reality of children. The pedagogic view, which dominated studies in children's literature until the 1980s, led to the publication of manipulative books considered 'suitable' for children. Thanks to the studies of many scholars who try to analyse children's literature from the perspective of sociology, philosophy, and aesthetics rather than from a merely pedagogic viewpoint, important concepts such as children's agency, children's rights and selfhood have become subjects of study. Various literary genres such as poems, letters, stories, theatre plays and novels were analysed in terms of their literary and aesthetic properties rather than educational functions. In these works, agency is represented with the purpose of raising discussions about self-expression, children's rights, and the construction of identity. This article provides a number of examples from children's literature in Turkey to explore conceptions of agency and children's rights. Building on the arguments that children's literature must take children's reality into account, the books analysed in this paper portray the child as an individual with his/her own preferences, decisions and ideas. They also exemplify how children's literature in Turkey has historically evolved from a highly dogmatic and pedagogic viewpoint to a more contemporary one with an artistic and aesthetic nature. One of the books discussed in the paper is a five-book-collection called *Çocukların Hakları Var* [Children Have Rights] by Süleyman Bulut. Using United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child as its framework, the collection raises awareness about the basic rights of children for education, health, accommodation, and self-expression as well as issues about discrimination and children's participation. The second book, a fairy tale collection called *Masallarla Çocuk Hakları* [Children's Rights in Fairy Tales] by Yücel Feyzioğlu, is the first example that discusses the rights of children through child characters in Turkey. Critically examining notions of childhood and agency in children's literature, this paper will represent historical ideologies of children's literature in Turkey and contribute to discussions about the stages children's literature has gone through in different countries and the emergence of agency as a crucial subject of study.

### 2. Ritwika Roy (Jadavpur University) - virtual

#### Reclaiming Children's Narratives: Children Writing for Children in Contemporary India

An article in The Telegraph India in March 2021 was ostensibly supposed to be about children being published, but close reading betrayed the fact that for the adult publishers and authors quoted, the creative output by children was trivial and non-serious (Ghose, The Telegraph). Children's literature itself is infamously created, maintained and controlled by adults, and the expected receiver of this category is neither the creator, nor the first recipient of the finished product. Yet, children are

historically prolific producers of creative fiction and non-fiction, be it in public spaces such as schools, or in private, which in posterity have been relegated to juvenilia. The last decade, however, particularly with the advent of social media and teenage activism, has seen children be acknowledged as creators of children's literature, which has traditionally been for them but is not by them. In the Adult/Child binary, this marks a shift in power dynamics when the passive recipients demand active contribution. This paper proposes to do a close reading of *A Bend in Time: Writings by Children on the COVID-19 Pandemic* (2020) to examine this reclamation of this space as a political act, in this case by urban, English educated children who use their privilege and voice to comment on social issues of climate change, class hierarchies, poverty, healthcare, and education. The text will be looked at in terms of its publishing history and the dynamics of allyship shared between the adult publishers at Talking Cub and the child authors by speaking to the editors and publishers of the book. The young authors of the reflective essays and fictional imaginings in this book range from age 10 to 17, from a few select Mumbai schools, and their vision is diverse and wide-ranging, displaying a developing sense of activism, particularly at a historic time such as this pandemic.

### 3. Sara Reis de Silva (University of Minho)

#### **The Portrayal of Child as an Engaging Citizen in Portuguese Children's Literature**

In Portuguese children's literature, the literary figurations or the portrayal of children, assuming traits and gestures that reflect the context in which the texts were edited, appear assiduous. Ilse Losa (1913-2006), and her children's characters revealing pioneering civic and environmental concerns, or Matilde Rosa Araújo (1921-2010) and her literary representation of a golden childhood, an unprotected childhood or a childhood as a project, just to mentioned two canonical Portuguese authors for children, are writers who were wide awake of children of their time. On this specific subject, the case of Sidónio Muralha (1920-1982), who wrote 15 books for children, is paradigmatic. Besides the publication of the poetry book *Bichos, Bichinhos e Bicharocos* (1949), which was edited when the author was exiled due to the dictatorial government of Salazar and the political persecution, after the democratic revolution (April 25<sup>th</sup> 1974), Muralha published a set of original texts with child protagonists. These books testify that writing for children becomes an ethical imperative and, in these, the attribution of socio-political responsibilities and an active role to children, understood as emerging citizens, stands out. They materialise the belief in children's role in the construction of a better world, dominated by solidarity (as in *A Amizade Bate à Porta* (1975)), by respect for mother nature (as in *Valéria e a Vida* (1976)), by peace (as in *Todas as Crianças da Terra* (1978)) or by justice and brotherhood (as in *Terra e Mar, Vistos do Ar* (1981)). This paper will reflect upon the mentioned theme(s) by cross-reading the referred texts by Sidónio Muralha, emphasising the novelty in child (re)presentation, as well as his/her place and dignity as a social individual susceptible to political intervention, as an agent of change whose action is fundamental for a socially, politically and environmentally different world.

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