

■ In turning our attention to the performance of the child in children's literature and culture we want to consider the narratives told to children not only as meaning but also as action. Following this, the predominant theoretical starting point in this issue of *LIR.journal* stems from the interdisciplinary field of performance studies as well as from the fact that performativity has turned into a commonly discussed topic in the humanities.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the different representations and executions of children and childhood found in children's literature and culture is here regarded as performative utterances that not merely reflect or describe the world, they also intervenes and participates in the shaping and making of it.<sup>2</sup>

The articles in this special issue analyse the ideas of children and childhood inscribed and enacted in children's literature and culture. The question of how the child is performed is addressed not only in relation to the narrative text but also in the combination of different semiotic systems: the visual, the textual, and the presentational acting. By doing so the articles explore the implications and limits of different and alternative visions of what it means to be a child and what childhood is supposed to be.

Children's literature can be understood as a site of performative action, as it constructs and reconstructs often seemingly neutral and natural representations that are in fact representations of different power relations.<sup>3</sup> Instead of viewing children's literature and culture mainly as conservative, colonial or regressive, as a tool for providing children with values and images with which adults in general approve of or feel comfortable with,<sup>4</sup> we ask in what degree it can be seen as a creative or disruptive force.<sup>5</sup> As Kimberly Reynolds argues, children's culture contributes to the social and aesthetic alteration of culture by empowering its readers to approach beliefs, issues, and objects from new perspectives and thus it makes way for change.<sup>6</sup> In light of this, the articles in this issue investigates how children's literature and culture seeks to provoke new perspectives on children and childhood, in relation to a number of important and closely interconnected topics, such as children and nature (Camilla Brudin Borg and Margaretha Ullström), children and rights (Olle Widhe), children and agency (Peter Kostenniemi), children and democracy (Sandra Grehn), and children and norms (Kristina Hermansson and Anna Nordenstam). Taken together the examples put forward cover over a century of Children's literature and culture, beginning with the early 20th century, then turning to the new directions for children's literature in the late 1960s, and finally ending with the questioning of childhood norms

in contemporary culture. During this period the conceptions of childhood and the meaning of being or becoming a child changed in many significant ways, with profound importance for the use of children's literature and the performance of the child in different ideological contexts.

With this issue we once again want to ask in what way children's literature and culture can be said to perform the child as a site for change or if it only exposes its readers to a regulating and cultivating voice that depends on conventional adult constructions of children and childhood.<sup>7</sup> In doing so we want to draw attention to the child as a political subject, and we hope that the five articles in this special issue taken together is able to give a brief overview as well as point out an entrance to the burgeon field we would like to call power politics in children's literature.

— Anna Nordenstam and Olle Widhe

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#### ■ — ENDNOTES —

1 Judith Butler: *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*, (Routledge 1990); Mieke Bal: *Travelling Concepts in the Humanities: A Rough Guide*, (Toronto 2002); *Performativity in Literature: the Lund-Nanjing Seminars*, eds. Eva Hættner Aurelius, He Chengzhou & Jon Helgason (Stockholm 2016.)

2 James Loxley: *Performativity* (London 2006); Kimberley Reynolds: *Radical Children's Literature: Future Visions and Aesthetic Transformations in Juvenile Fiction* (Basingstoke 2007).

3 Erica Hateley: "Gender", in *Keywords for Children's Literature*, eds. Philip Nel and Lissa Paul (New York 2011), 90.

4 Jacqueline Rose: *The Case of Peter Pan, or, The Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (Philadelphia 1993); Perry Nodelman: *The Hidden Adult: Defining Children's Literature* (Baltimore 2008)

5 Juliet Dusinberre: *Alice to the Lighthouse: Children's Books and Radical Experiments in Art* (Basingstoke 1987) and Anne Higonnet, *Pictures of Innocence: the History and Crisis of Ideal Childhood* (London 1998).

6 Reynolds *Radical Children's Literature*, 1–18.

7 Maria Nikolajeva: *Power, Voice and Subjectivity in Literature for Young Readers* (New York 2010).

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—— Camilla Brudin Borg & Margaretha Ullström, »The Child in the Forest: Performing the Child in 20th Century Swedish Picture Books«

—— A B S T R A C T ———

This article investigates how the child is performed in the forest, or in relation to the forest, in Swedish picture books of the 20th century. Using an ecocritical approach, we lay bare themes, motifs and tendencies that indicate a changing relationship with the forest during the course of the century. While the child is dependent on the forest – but also very knowledgeable about it – at the beginning of the twentieth century, she is increasingly depicted as being cut off from her former natural environment as the century proceeds. Gradually, the idea of the child as a guest in the forest replaces the idea of man and nature being part of a whole, a theme that clearly reflects growing levels of alienation during the twentieth century. Of particular interest is that this alienation and »guest theme« first arises in environmentalist and didactic picture books from the 1950s onward, and especially during the 1970s. During this period, the child was supposed to be educated to take care of the forest and is thus required to conceive of herself as a guest paying the natural environment a brief visit. The feeling of being part of a whole, that is, of nature, starts to disappear. Some picture books from the late twentieth century try to question man's alienation from the forest and offer an alternative to man's domination of nature.

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—— Keywords: children's picture books, getting lost, nature, views of nature, 20th century

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