

Les biennales de la littérature de jeunesse

Deuxième colloque international
Université de Cergy-Pontoise
Site universitaire de Gennevilliers

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**Avec le soutien des unités de recherche AGORA, EMA,
LLA CREATIS et Textes et Cultures**

Across Borders: What place/space for a European Children's literature in the 21st century?

It was back in Spring 2014, on an initiative of the teaching staff members of the Master Littérature de jeunesse de l'ESPE de l'académie de Versailles, that the first venue of the 'Biennales de la littérature de jeunesse' took place. The 'Biennales' have purported, since their inception, to be a platform for discussion open to all concerned actors in the field of children's literature – teaching and educational experts, librarians, publishers, creators, psychologists, and militant association members. Every venue is intended to allow the meeting and crossing of viewpoints on what stands out to be a quickly evolving object of study.

A key factor to the success of the first venue was the quality of the exchanges and confrontations of viewpoints between the participants, who represented the various areas of expertise concerned. The conference proceedings now relay part of these debates. They are available in printed form under the title: *(D)écrire, prescrire, interdire: les professionnels face à la littérature de jeunesse*. The publication closely reflects this plurality of viewpoints, while equally pointing to their congruence and contradictions.

The necessity of promoting dialogue between experts is seeming to us more relevant than ever in 2016, academic research and professional practices, within the creation and publication sector, undoubtedly sharing common vested interests in combining their approaches, especially when the overall challenge is no less than the stimulation of the younger public's sensibility and curiosity, the formation of their early representations, and their ability to develop their own reflections on their way to becoming tomorrow's citizens. Our intention with this second 'Biennale' is then to go on with the debate that was initiated in 2014 between the so many actors attending the conference. This is our chief concern in organizing our next 'Biennale' that is to take place on June 7th & 8th, 2017.

But what challenging question could provide matter for further discussion? The idea has soon grown on us that Europe, at a time when European values are being challenged in various ways, could be a relevant entry into issues relevant to contemporary children's literature and cultural productions, especially for the way these may forge and question, intentionally or not, various conceptions of Europe.

In the then context of our 2017 venue, titled 'Across Borders: What place/space for a European children's literature in the 21st century?', contributions in the following areas of research and interest are most welcome:

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Europe representing itself in 21st-century children's literature

The conception of literature as a mirror held up to societies and cultures is certainly not new. It has been applied to children's fiction for some time now. Our intention over our two days' conference is to go on discussing that conception, not least by questioning the so many perspectives whereby children's literature can provide some apt reflection, purportedly or not, of European societies and cultures. One underlying question is to know whether the younger readers are thereby made aware of what is different between European countries, or of what European societies and cultures may be having in common.

Studies in this specific area can bear on fiction, but also on non-fiction aimed at the younger public. They could examine one of the following aspects:

- **The relation established in children's books with national stereotypes:** Are there types of European characters? In what way do they comply with national stereotypes? How are national cultures represented? To what extent are they stereotypically depicted? What cultural practices are shown as typical of specific countries? Are these cultural practices challenged in any way?
- **Mobility between European countries:** What are the contexts to border crossings within Europe? Are issues like economic and political migration of specific concern? Are leisure and tourism, or any longing for far-off places, part of the background? Is educational mobility also a relevant aspect? Does the meeting of European peoples constitute a motif? What could that motif be promoting then?
- **Developments specific to 21st-century depictions of Europe, especially in non-fiction:** Whenever it comes to representing foreign European countries, where exactly does the point of view of a European author, illustrator, or publisher posit itself, regarding, for instance, the polar opposition between exoticism and some 'nation-centrism'?
- **Generic crossovers and crosscutting issues related to productions across European countries in the 21st century:** Do they share common interests in specific themes and questions? Do national specificities emerge? What place is left to the expression of cultural and linguistic minorities (French-speaking, German-speaking, etc.) by mainstream children's literature?
- **Is there an average young reader in 2016 Europe?** : What is the average child or teenage reader for professionals of the book chain? Studies in this area could profitably draw from a number of critical theories, perhaps with a central interest in reader-response criticism. But they could equally draw from sociological approaches aimed at singling out specific profiles of young readers.

Proposals drawing from a transnational corpus or crossing several corpora are most welcome.

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European children's literature under non-European influence; its critical appraisal outside European borders

Are critical concerns like cultural crossbreeding, the anxiety of influence, dissemination and hybridization, of any significance in the field of children's literature in the 21st century? Or are these

concerns biased angles of reading, which are mere remnants of the structuralist craze for classifying that marked the late 20th century? Is this critical framework indeed still valid to discuss children's literature today? And if so, what are the latter's defining features? As we now live in a globalized world, is it still worth crossing over national borders? Especially when this implies to be bound again within a larger European space, but whose own borders – whether geographic, cultural, or economic – keep changing and being challenged in various ways. Within the global sphere we live in, is the European 'level' relevant any more? How adequate is that question to children's literature today?

- Back in 2010, Boulaire and Letourneux declared that **'children's literature (...) now massively falls into a logic of internalisation and cultural integration'** (Our translation). If the resulting choice is between welcoming the influence of cultural models coming from far-off countries, which are sometimes culturally very different like Japan or the United States, or opting for some cultural withdrawal behind national borders, the question is also to examine the actual nature of the influences which European children's literature is today undergoing. Beyond the question of new genres imported from outside Europe, it should prove relevant to question the likely hybridization of pre-existing European genres and how porous fictional worlds may be within this set-up.
- **Embracing non-European points of view**, proposals could equally focus on the defining traits of European children's books in the eyes of non-Europeans, and on their critical appraisal outside European borders. In other words, is there any reason to ascertain European children's literature does come out as specific outside Europe? Could there be such a thing as cultural productions for children displaying their Europeanness like some ingrained defining trait? Proposals could focus on various types of discourses, whether held by writers, publishers, or issued in professional periodicals, specialists' journals, or mainstream publications outside Europe. Similarly decentred views could come out of discourses held by linguistic communities from overseas: while positing themselves within a linguistic continuum with former colonizing countries, how do such linguistic communities relate to children's literature produced in Europe? In what way is it close to them, or regarded as a specific entity, possibly even foreign to them?

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Putting children's literature to task for the better education of tomorrow's citizens: is this a national or European concern?

The official programmes of the French national education system promote the necessity of educating future citizens and of diffusing the proper values to reach that goal. As part of a whole range of teaching and educational approaches, they advance the benefits of reading fiction and especially children's fiction. Papers in that area of interest should address two main sets of questions:

- Official recommendations of this type have strong implications on the editorial offering targeting the younger public, developing as it does in close conjunction with the latest official directions and prescriptions within the school sector. Starting from that official framework, papers could examine the many ways whereby European countries have put children's literature to task for the better education of tomorrow's citizens: is the question specific to France? Could it be broadened to more European countries? What are the editorial strategies inherent in the process? What is the exact impact on the contents of such fiction? In what various ways are European writers now integrating those aspects to their fiction writing?
- Summoning children's literature to the task of building citizenship involves specific types of mediations: Which books are to be preferably selected? On which criteria should the selection proceed? What could be done to avoid instrumenting fiction altogether? Our recommendation is that participants should use contrastive approaches to identified practices of mediation, as

these are in effect conducted in possibly several countries throughout Europe. Papers could thereby focus on questions like how to develop the future citizen's sense of responsibility, whether on an individual basis or a collective level, or how to show respect for equality.

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What conditions border crossings inside Europe? And for what impact? Are we on a way to globalizing children's literature?

The circulation of children's books in Europe is made possible on certain conditions only: translation policies, new partnerships between European publishers, the availability of specific information through online professional networks, etc. In what various ways is this refashioning the canon of children's literature today? How can we assess the impact that the development of those new networks and partnerships is having on the circulation of children's books? Do they help to the preservation of some cultural heritage? How much of a challenge is this representing? Or are European professionals in the field resolutely turning their attention outside European borders? Which genres or specific lines of interest could they then be looking out for?

Papers in that area could examine the following questions:

- **In the field of translation:** Is it a majority of European children's books that are translated in Europe? How representative are translations of European children's books on non-European children's book markets? In what way do children's books available in translation promote some European cultural heritage, both inside and outside Europe? What may resist translation in a children's book? Can national idiosyncrasies be rendered in translation? What further challenge does humour represent in translation? What about illustrations? Is there such a thing as a European touch in this field? How integral are illustrations to the translator's job?
- **About publishers' editorial policies:** Studies could focus on the specific aspects of editorial lines: Which market sector is occupied by heritage literature (tales, fables, etc.)? How much do editorial lines contribute to the constitution, preservation, and promotion of a European canon of children's books? Are there major differences from one European country to the next in that field? Could also be profitably examined the various ways whereby publishers contribute to adapting some children's classics from heritage literature (for instance as it draws from a common background of myths) to today's issues and debates (over a likely cultural identity crisis in Europe, over citizenship, equality or social diversity).
- **About major European events in the field (book fairs, the Transbook project, etc.):** The chief actors in the field of children's literature are given many opportunities in Europe to meet and stay in touch through book fairs, shared sites, leading transnational projects like Transbook. Participants are invited to question the impact of such major events, gatherings of professionals, transnational contacts and exchanges. Do they help to the development of a European children's literature with its own specifics? Or do they work for its standardisation? Are they of great help to improve the circulation of European children's books besides other cultural goods? Which space do they leave to children's books compared to other media?
- **About European partnerships between national institutions and specialist libraries in the field of children's books.** What are today's priorities between conservation, information and education? How are those aspects thought of as a whole in European countries? Do lines of cooperation emerge between countries? In what way is dematerialisation helping in the youth sector? What are the European policies regarding the conservation of private collections of children's books (whether bequeathed by authors, or illustrators, collectors, etc.)?

Paper proposals have to include

- 1) your name, or names in case of co-authoring
- 2) your academic affiliation
- 3) your email address
- 4) a short bio (up to 4 lines) and up to 4 of your latest publications
- 5) the title of your paper
- 6) an abstract (in around 3000 signs, without the bibliography)
- 7) a bibliography or list of sources (up to 5 publications and/or sources)

Please take notice of the following deadlines

- Paper proposals have to be sent by 10 October 2016 to the following address:
biennale2-litterature-jeunesse@ml.u-cergy.fr
- Participants will be given notice of the acceptance of their paper proposals by 15 January 2017.

Paper proposals can be submitted either in French or English

Contact: christine.mongenot@u-cergy.fr

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Organising committee

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