

Call for papers

Third Biennial Conference on Children's Literature,
organized by the course team of the master's degree in children's literature of Cergy University
(EMA) and the CNLJ (Bibliothèque nationale de France)

The mediation of youth literature in 21st-century Europe

A two days' conference taking place on Wednesday, June 3, 2020 at the Bibliothèque nationale de France (the François-Mitterrand Library, Paris) and on Thursday, June 4, 2020 at Cergy University (INSPÉ de l'académie de Versailles, Gennevilliers)

Since their inception in 2014, the up to now two biennial conferences¹ organized by the course team of the master's degree in children's literature of the department of education of Cergy University have taken a resolutely interprofessional direction and questioned youth literature from a comparative and international angle. The scientific questioning thus engaged has focused on the contemporary period, while leaving ample room for professionals from various walks to discuss children's books as cultural productions aimed for young readers. The previous two biennials placed the focus of the reflection on objects ranging from original works to translated or adapted works.

This line of questioning intersects in many points with the reflection which the Centre National de la Littérature pour la Jeunesse (CNLJ, BnF) has long been engaged in, as made evident through a number of joint projects conducted by both our university department and the CNLJ². It is around these common interests that the project of a joint conference has matured over time, while the 2020 biennial now purports to shift the focus from objects proper (understood as books, writers, formats) to mediation practices making these objects (printed or digital) accessible to young readers across Europe.

But at the exact moment when European values are being challenged in various manners, the crisis which this set of values goes through doesn't fail to be regarded - legitimately or not - as manifesting de-culturation, notably among young readers. One of the alleged reasons is the assumedly growing distance to be observed between children and books, or the only sporadic access they may have to them. If such assumptions prove to be valid, the initial access of young readers to fiction and documentary productions remains to be facilitated. This constitutes a collective challenge to be taken up by adults and professionals in charge of children's education and training. What are the resources available to mediators in this regard? For what various purposes are they specifically designed? And for what foreseeable benefit to young readers?

In year 2020 researchers and professionals in the field share a common interest in jointly addressing this challenge. Their joint reflection should gain from opening itself beyond studies confined to mediation practices in France. It is from this challenging perspective that our June 2020 biennial conference is intended to focus on the mediation of youth literature in 21st-century Europe.

¹ The proceedings of the first conference were published in 2016 under the title *(D)écrire, prescrire, interdire: les professionnels face à la littérature de jeunesse aujourd'hui*. The proceedings of the 2017 second conference entitled *Frontières et circulations: une littérature de jeunesse européenne au XXI^e siècle?* will be published in a forthcoming issue of *Les Cahiers Robinson* (Université d'Artois, Arras).

² Members of the CNLJ participate in the training of our Master students, who have conducted a yearly session of the BnF cycle *Les Visiteurs du soir* for the past two years

Suggested questions :

– (1) Defining the mediation of youth literature

Finding apt definitions of the term 'mediation' is no easy task, for it relates to a polysemous and hazy concept. Jean Caune, as an expert in cultural mediation, wishes the term were used more discriminately³. The etymology of the term summons up such cognate terms as 'medium', 'a means to an end', while the suffix '-tion' adds a dynamic dimension to the term; hence the very broad definition of mediation as 'what creates links'. According to Mathilde Thieret, professionals working in cultural institutions use the term to reflect upon their relationship with service users, but the term also refers to 'experimental schemes'⁴. Mediation, in the most generic acceptance of the term, refers to links in a chain bringing the general public closer to art works. Jean-Marie Privat concluding the 2017 CRILJ conference singles out three models towards a better definition of mediation. Mediation may be 'transmissive', by relaying information or promoting communication. It may be 'incentive' through workshops and social events, as well as 'appropriative' through cooperation and acculturation⁵. The terminology used for these models borrows from the research field of cultural mediation. It was initially applied to the theatre, before its use extended to the plastic arts and to galleries or museums⁶. But what about mediation addressing young readers? To what extent is mediation in the field specific? Should translation be seen as mediation, when it is directed towards a young reading public? In what way should libraries, media libraries, book fairs be thought of as places of mediation, besides theatres and galleries or museums?

– (2) The question of the reading public

Cultural mediation developed against a political and philosophical background within an overall context of cultural democratisation: access to art works could not (always) be regarded as instant and intuitive. Reflecting upon cultural mediation has therefrom included the question of social bonding⁷. It has therefore appeared as necessary to consider the targeted public: what representation do professionals across Europe have of their targeted public? What about these sections of the public said to be 'disadvantaged', 'prevented' or 'excluded'? One may think in particular of cultural exclusion in the case of allophones, besides exclusion for economic, social, or physical impediments.

When considering books for 'young' readers, the very notion of 'youth' is another sociological category to be questioned. It covers areas whose exact perimeter may change according to political, legal or socio-cultural contexts. As evidenced by Isabelle Nières Chevrel, the question of age brackets and thresholds of intelligibility is a characteristic feature of children's literature. It is made all the more questionable as the range of books on offer has strongly broadened upstream and downstream: towards either very young readers or adolescent readers⁸. How do mediators segment specific sections of the reading public among allegedly 'young' readers? Do the categories evolve? And if so, which various factors make them change? Are they the same categories across Europe? What are the specific mediation practices related to them?

– (3) The current status of the mediation of youth literature across Europe

The very notion of mediation is variously defined. So are practices. We therefore intend to examine today's existing mediation practices from a comparative angle. A large number of initiatives actively promoting mediation have been taken since the 1980s. This notably calls into question the way such initiatives have been implemented in terms of public readings, meetings, events, workshops, etc. Have specific schemes been put into place for specific age brackets? Does the implementation meet socio-cultural representations of the targeted public? The place and status of youth literature in foreign languages or translation could also be examined in this regard. So should the question of emerging practices. What about online mediation? Have new technologies changed practices? What new perspectives do they offer?

³ Jean Caune (2006), *La démocratisation culturelle : une médiation à bout de souffle*, Presses universitaires de Grenoble, p. 132.

⁴ Mathilde Thieret (2004), *La formalisation de l'action culturelle*, ENSSIB, p. 13.

⁵ Concluding remarks made by Jean-Marie Privat during the 2017 CRILJ conference: *Élargir le cercle des lecteurs: la médiation en littérature pour la jeunesse*.

⁶ In their one volume, *La Médiation culturelle* (Armand Collin, 2013, 2017), Serge Chaumier and François Mairesse mentions the book industry and the specific role of media libraries, but their overall reflection concerns galleries or museums, while encompassing other fields by analogy with this primary model.

⁷ See Jean Caune (2000) : 'La médiation culturelle : une construction du lien social', http://w3.u-grenoble3.fr/les_enjeux/2000/Caune/index.php

⁸ Isabelle Nières Chevrel (2004), *Littérature de jeunesse, incertaines frontières*, Gallimard jeunesse, p. 13.

– (4) **The mediators of youth literature in today's Europe: is the sector wide and diverse, integrated, competitive?**

The mediation of youth literature has developed in France through the joint efforts of various categories of professionals: librarians, teachers, community workers, booksellers specializing in children's books, as well as volunteer workers from charities promoting books, reading, or specific actions towards 'prevented' sections of the public. It appears that school currently plays a crucial role. So do publishers. Has such a wide variety of professionals and non- or semi-professionals been similarly diverse down the history of mediation in the field? What consistency of action between them is to be observed, notably in terms of lasting cooperation schemes and the several forms these schemes may take? This should call into question the nature of the link between formal and informal education. The questioning should greatly benefit as well from comparing practices across Europe.

– (5) **Assessing mediation practices, training mediators**

The great diversity of today's offer finally implies that we should reflect upon what may thoroughly legitimate mediation practices in the field of youth literature.

How are the schemes on offer designed? Do project designers lean on past experiences and their assessment? Which tools do they use to reflect upon the impact of previous schemes? What benefit do they draw from research studies in various fields such as child psychology, cultural sociology, youth literature?

Mobilising scientific learning to the benefit of adapted schemes, suited to specific sections of the reading public, requires that mediators become familiar with that learning. What are the training possibilities for them? What are the training schemes on offer worldwide? What are their contents and objectives? Do they include training schemes for mediators with an interest in translated texts or the mediation of books in foreign languages?

Organising committee :

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Modalités

Deadline for submission: **29 November 2019**. Notification of acceptance: by the end of January 2020.

Proposals of around 2000 signs including a title, together with a short bio, should be sent to Marion Caliyannis (marion.caliyannis@bnf.fr), Lydie Laroque (lydie.laroque@u-cergy.fr) and <https://biennale-lj2020.sciencesconf.org/>

Papers can be delivered in French or English. Speaking time expected: 25 minutes.

Selected papers will be considered for publication