

JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory Special Issue: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature

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JNT: Journal of Narrative Theory

Special Issue: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature

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Ever since its emergence, narrative theory has been devoted to continuous and oftentimes polemic theoretical discussions and applications in various narrative forms, which explains why it has kept developing for almost half a century with a momentum that seems to last for another long time. One of its vitality lies in its constant mission to accommodate new forms that challenge its established system and therefore make new developments possible, both in theory and in practice. The application of narrative theory in children's literature has been pioneered on the side of narratologists such as Michael Cadden, who edited the volume *Telling Children's Stories: Narrative Theory and Children's Literature* (2010), as well as on the side of children's literature scholars, most notably represented by Maria Nikolajeva, former dean of Faculty of Education, Cambridge, who has called for, together with John Stephens, former president of the International Research Society of Children's Literature, the application of narrative theory in children's literature studies. In her early years, Nikolajeva for the first time and systematically adopted the framework of classical narratology and published *The Rhetoric of Character in Children's Literature* (2002). She has kept a keen eye on the development of post-classical narratologies and published *Reading for Learning: Cognitive Approaches to Children's Literature* (2014), in which she mainly adopts Lisa Zunshine's cognitive narratology based on Theory of Mind, as well as the notion of empathy, in the analysis of children's literature but from a more educational perspective.

The special interpretative power of narrative theory for children's literature lies in the genre's unique generic convention of the dichotomy of the adult author and the child reader. Though the dichotomy

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has been acknowledged a long time ago by many children's literature scholars, it is still a hot topic that has not been fully answered. In fact, most scholars' textual reading or philosophical approach to address the topic fails to explore the mechanism of the dichotomy, how the narrative strategy of adult authors and its underlying power assumptions and manipulations are translated into the discourse that will reach child readers. Narrative theory with its analytical tools such as the implied author, the narrator, the narratee, and the narrative mode, is especially illuminating when probing into the discussion of the dichotomy of the adult and the child as it provides bridges that help to illustrate this complex chain of communication.

Narrative theory is also helpful as it answers questions relating to other central questions in children's literature research such as the paratext, which is particularly rich and meaningful in works for children, and the question of metafiction and metadiscourse, which becomes more common and meaningful in children's literature as they again reveal the contrast of the adult author and child reader in terms of their knowledge, cognitive levels, values, ideologies, or, to use Nikolajeva's term, aetonormativity, which refers to "adult normativity that governs the way children's literature has been patterned from its emergence until the present day" (2009, p. 16).

This special issue of *Journal of Narrative Theory* invites scholars from around the world to contribute to new possibilities in narrative theory that is built on critical discussions of children's literature, and the application of narrative theory (especially post-classical narrative theory, such as unnatural, cognitive, feminist, and rhetorical narrative theory) in children's literature. Possible areas of investigation may include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. The adult author, the implied author, and narrative norms in children's literature

1. Narrators and narration in children's literature: who tells the story, and for whom?

1. Focalization and narrative voice in children's literature: who speaks? who sees what? And why/how? Adult authors and child focalizers; the voice of children characters and heteroglossia

1. Child readers as implied readers: Identification Fallacy: Perspective and Subjectivity in Children's Literature; the impossibility of children's literature

1. Unnatural narrative in children’s literature: anti-mimetic elements or narratives and their role in children’s literature, such as “it narratives”, anthropomorphism, metafiction, post-modern picturebooks, science fiction, hyperreality, etc.

1. Rhetorical narratology for children’s literature: narrative communications, narrative pressure, narrative distance, and narrative ethics in children’s literature---persuasive, educational and ideological function of children’s literature

1. Cognitive narratology for children’s literature: embedded mental states adjusted for child readers, socio-cognitive complexity, mind-reading and socializing function of children’s literature (“Reading for Learning”), cognitive mapping in children’s literature (fantasy), etc.

1. Feminist narratology: gendered discourse in children’s literature and narrative power; gender and identity construction/subversion; generic conventions in children’s literature and gender

1. Dual narrative progression and dual authorial communication: covert, subversive, and adult-targeted meaning in children’s literature and dual readership

1. Possible worlds for children: how fictional worlds are built, epistemologically, cognitively, and aesthetically in children’s literature, and how are child readers to understand them

1. Paratext in children’s literature: prefaces, covers, illustrations, blurbs, endpapers, gutters... for children

1. Reading Visual Narratives: image analysis of children's picturebooks

Please send your abstract to the guest editor Professor Haifeng Hui (huihf@hust.edu.cn) by September 10, 2022. Email subject: “JNT Special Issue: Narrative Theory and Children’s Literature.” The submission should include an abstract of no more than 300 words, a brief bio (c. 100 words) and 3-5 key words.

Abstracts due: September 10, 2022;

Completed papers: January 30, 2023;

Publication: Fall 2024.

Works Cited:

Nikolajeva, M. (2009). Theory, post-theory, and aetonormative theory, *Neohelicon*, 36(1), 13-24.

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