

Call for Papers

Conference organized by

Valeska Bopp-Filimonov (Jena, Germany) and Marina Ortrud M. Hertrampf (Passau, Germany)

Friedrich Schiller University Jena

28-30 September 2023

Violent Child-Animal Encounters in Literature

Interdisciplinary Perspectives

In the last decades, we have witnessed a variety of theories and approaches - from multispecies ethnography to trans- and posthumanist philosophy - that aim to decentralize the category of the human. Introducing a posthuman perspective into the study of childhood and human-animal relations will allow us to forge a new path to habitats and spaces at the margins of the dominant adult human world. These habitats usually mirror human society at large, at the same time offering a place for the unobserved stubbornness and resistance. For this conference, we would like to encourage contributions that look at the more-than-human world in literature and study the relations between human children and non-human animals.

After all, they share some characteristics. Discourses on so-called civilisation and/vs. wildness can be easily traced to the “wild” or “uneducated”, be it a human child or a non-human animal. Essential dimensions of power – by the adult world, the human intellectual world, and the assumed higher position of the adult human – influence the relative invisibility of children as actors in society and children as protagonists of novels alike. Animals, on the other hand, overpopulate children's books. Children's rooms are stuffed with cuddly toys, and it often is for the children that pets are part of family households. These manifold aspects of contact and relation are rarely the topic of any research.

We are particularly interested in violent interaction. Initially observed in a somewhat random and exemplary manner, we came across more and more literary works with memorable scenes of children torturing animals. The narrative point of view varies from child-centred perspectives to speaking animal protagonists complaining about their human-child counterparts. What makes children and animals - two “disempowered and oppressed positions” as Flegel puts it (2017, xiv) - live together in unease? What philosophical, ethical, social and/or psychological questions are being staged and negotiated here? Even if being part of a country's canonical literature, these passages are rarely given much attention.

We would like to encourage interdisciplinary exchange, taking into consideration but not limited to, the following questions:

- Pet and child subjectivity: How are they narratively shaped? From which narrative perspective is child violence against animals told, and how?

- To what extent do literary portrayals of child violence against animals differ in stories addressed to children as opposed to stories for an adult readership? Are there any differences in the way the readers are addressed?
- How is child violence against non-human animals evaluated in narratives? What didactic/moral/ethical standards are applied? With regard to interspecies relations: Is there any inherent critique of how we treat non-human animals?
- Trauma vs. subversion: To what extent are literary children and literary animals exposed to the world of adults and “larger power structures” (Feuerstein, Nolte-Odhiambo 2017, 2)? How do they resist or fight back? How much subversive power and agency is inherent in them?
- The political, ideological, social and/or historical context: In which way is the (literary) child-animal encounter meaningful regarding the outer world? How are “deeply aesthetic literary questions [...] interwoven with both political and material spheres” (Borgards 2015, 156)?
- Are there any differences in national versus regional literary works and with regards to historical moments? If so, (how) can this be justified culturally and historically?
- What effect does the narrative of cruelty between the human child and the non-human animal have on the reader? Is there complimentary research following in the footsteps of Małecky and his colleagues (2018, 2019)?
- Ethical dimensions: Is there a difference between violence against inanimate (cuddly or toy animals) and living animals? Are symbolic-metaphorical representations of child violence against animals different from non-symbolic-metaphorical ones?

The list of possible approaches does not end here. Psychological findings for child violence towards animals, but also insights from play theorists (see for instance the findings on children’s “dark play” by Sutton-Smith) might provide useful for the topic. We are happy to interact with the most diverse disciplines to stimulate processes of hermeneutic understanding.

The conference languages are German, English and French.

We are looking forward to your proposals and would like to receive your title and abstract (max. 300 words) with academic references and a short biography by 15th January 2023. Please send your documents to child-animal-encounters@uni-jena.de. We will share information on the acceptance or rejection of contributions by early February 2023. A publication of selected contributions is planned.

For any specific questions, please contact

Valeska Bopp-Filimonov, Jun.-Prof. für Romanistik mit Schwerpunkt Rumänistik, Friedrich-Schiller-Universität Jena, valeska.bopp-filimonov@uni-jena.de

Marina Ortrud M. Hertrampf, Professur für Romanische Literatur- und Kulturwissenschaft (Schwerpunkt Frankreich), Universität Passau, marina.hertrampf@uni-passau.de

Selective Bibliography

Borgards, Roland: Introduction: Cultural and Literary Animal Studies, in: *Journal of Literary Theory* 9 (2015), pp. 155–160.

Chimaira – Arbeitskreis für Human-Animal Studies (Hg.): *Human-Animal Studies. Über die gesellschaftliche Natur von Mensch-Tier-Verhältnissen*. Bielefeld: transcript Verlag, 2011.

Feuerstein, Anna, Nolte-Odhiambo, Carmen (eds.): *Childhood and Pethood in Literature and Culture. New Perspectives in Childhood Studies and Animal Studies*. New York (Routledge: Children's Literature and Culture Series) 2017.

Ferrando, Francesca: Posthumanism, Transhumanism, Antihumanism, Metahumanism, and New Materialisms. Differences and Relations, in: *Existenz* 8/2 (2013), pp. 26-32.

Flegel, Monica: Children and Animal "Pets" (Preface 1) in: Feuerstein 2017, xiii-xvii.

Haraway, Donna: *When Species Meet*, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2007.

Loring, Marti T, Robert Geffner, Janessa Marsh (eds.): *Animal Abuse and Family Violence. Linkages, Research, and Implications for Professional Practice*. Philadelphia: Haworth Press 2007.

Małecki, Wojciech, Bogusław Pawłowski, Marcin Cieński, Piotr Sorokowski: Can fiction make us kinder to other species? The impact of fiction on pro-animal attitudes and behavior. In: *Poetics* Vol. 66, February 2018, pp. 54-63 (<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2018.02.004>).

Małecki, Wojciech, Piotr Sorokowski, Bogusław Pawłowski, Marcin Cieński: *Human Minds and Animal Stories. How Narratives Make Us Care About Other Species*. New York: Routledge 2019 <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780429061424>

Małecki, Wojciech, Bogusław Pawłowski, Piotr Sorokowski, Anna Oleszkiewicz: Feeling for textual animals: Narrative empathy across species lines. In: *Poetics*, Volume 74 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.poetic.2018.11.003>.

Sutton-Smith, Brian: *The Ambiguity of Play*. 2001.

Ritvo, Harriet: On the Animal Turn, in: *Daedalos*, Fall 2007, pp.118-122.

Cary Wolfe. *What is Posthumanism?* Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010.