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6<sup>th</sup> International Seminar  
New Directions in Children's Literature Research

# The Symbiotic Child

## Rethinking the **Vegetal** through Children's Literature



ONLINE CONFERENCE  
8-9 April, 2021

1222-2022  
80 ANNI



UNIVERSITÀ  
DEGLI STUDI  
DI PADOVA

FISPPA

DIPARTIMENTO DI FILOSOFIA, SOCIOLOGIA,  
PEDAGOGIA E PSICOLOGIA APPLICATA

# THE SYMBIOTIC CHILD

## Rethinking the *Vegetal* through Children's Literature

Much has been said about the importance for children to be aware of, respect, appreciate and comprehend the subjectivity of another. From this perspective, animals and nature play an important role because children seem to be able to quickly develop a deep and long-term intimate association with other species.

Although the exposure of children to nature through books has been declining in many ways, representations of symbiotic interactions between children and other species are quite common in children's literature. However, contemporary research emphasises that there has been a shift in children's books towards a more innovative eco-evolutionary approach.

The aim of this conference is to investigate the shift that has occurred in both children's fiction and nonfiction and to explore some research paths with scholars and authors that can help to expand children's literature horizons and environmental awareness.





8 APRIL, 2021

9.30

Welcome address

**Rosario Rizzuto**, Rector Magnificus of University of Padova

**Egidio Robusto**, Dean of Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology (FISPPA), University of Padova

**Chair: Marnie Campagnaro**, University of Padova

10.00

**'I felt like a tree lost in a storm.' The process of entangled knowing, becoming and doing in Beatrice Alemagna's picture book *Un grande giorno di niente***

**Nina Goga**, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway

Goga examines how the child character in Beatrice Alemagna's picture book *Un grande giorno di niente* (2016) intertwines with trees and other elements of nature when he, after playing his game for a long time, is urged by his mother to go outdoors in the rain. Drawing on theoretical perspectives on the tree-human relationship in children's literature, post-human child-oriented theory and eco-critical studies of children's literature, the talk aims to conduct a diffractive reading of how various forms of nature/culture binaries are depicted and blurred in the book and how the boy intra-acts together with trees and other life forms in both the verbal and visual text.

10.30

### Of children and trees: a bond from old

**Beatrice Masini**, writer, journalist and translator, Italy

Children and gardens, children and trees, children and woods: childhood and flora are naturally linked, as shown in classics such as *The Secret Garden*, *Winnie Puh* and *Peter Pan in Kensington Gardens* as well as in true stories such as that of Louisa May Alcott's childhood, which is at the core of a recent novel by Beatrice Masini, *Storia di May Piccola Donna*. A green thread is recurring in some of Masini's other works, as she herself will show in this talk.

11.00

### 'He has needs only trees understand' Thinking about/with plants in children's culture

**Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak**, University of Wrocław, Poland

**Macarena García González**, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

*Greenling* by Levi Pinfold is a rare example of a children's book depicting the interdependencies between plants and humans from both anthropocentric and ecocentric perspectives without positioning child readers as the (future) agents of change and saviours of the Earth (read: the Earth's resources). In our presentation, we discuss *Greenling* as a counterpoint to books that are often recommended but that we see as engaging in slow violence (Nixon 2011) not just because they are made from trees but because they present naive solutions to environmental problems, thereby potentially making readers self-complacent about their own role in solving them. This discussion then leads us to sketching out what we term 'movements' to think about/with plants in children's culture: (1) a movement away from sustainability and stewardship models towards a representation of slow violence, (2) a movement away from the exclusionary forces of book culture, towards an ecology of children's culture and (3) a movement to recognise and learn from indigenous knowledge systems and their epistemological attention to the more-than-human.

11.30

*Break*



## A SPECIAL INTRODUCTION/WELCOMING

11.50–12.10

### M9 Forest. A public action to give hope to local communities

**Luca Molinari**, University of Campania 'Luigi Vanvitelli' and scientific director of M9 Museum of the 20th Century, Italy

After 11 months of silence, we decided to re-open the M9 Museum in Mestre-Venezia with a striking provocation: a forest of more than 550 young trees on the third floor of the museum. This was a public action under lockdown during the pandemic and, at the same time, a public workshop for local communities. In two months, the trees will be gifted to seven different municipalities in the Veneto region to start new, local forests. The third floor will be transformed into a healing playground, and we feel it is the main task of cultural institutions today.



## MASTER CLASS

12.10–13.00

### The sacred pencil/La matita sacra

**Gusti**, author and illustrator, Argentina

In one of his original books, Gusti told the story of a young boy recording his dad's stories of the Amazonian jungle in his journal. As the protagonist does this, he cannot help but compare his own life: when you visit the rainforest, you should ask the Zápara peoples for permission and be respectful, just like when you visit your neighbour in the city. The rainforest is like a great big house for plants, animals and spirits, but it is disappearing little by little. Gusti, inspired by his volunteer efforts to assist the Zápara peoples in protecting an endangered bird, will tell us about his experience in the rainforest and in creating his picture book *When My Dad Went to the Jungle*. Thanks to this experience and his pencil, Gusti portrays a young boy exploring big ideas about the natural world.



9 APRIL, 2021

**Chair: Nina Goga**, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences

9.30

**Translating nature. How different illustrators represent the landscape in Maria Parr's novel for young adults**

**Maria Pujol-Valls**, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Spain

The novel for young adults, *Tonje Glimmerdal* (2009), by the Norwegian author Maria Parr was originally illustrated by Åshild Irgens. However, its translation into Spanish, *Tania Valdelumbre* (2016), was illustrated by Zuzanna Celej. The main aim of this talk is to determine whether the concepts of nature, landscape, trees and plants shown by the book in Norwegian are modified by the illustrations from the translated version. This is to understand the influence of paratexts on the message that the text conveys. The way in which these two versions of the book represent symbiotic interactions between species is analysed using an ecocritical theoretical framework.

10.00

**Houses in the tree. Trees in the house**  
**Children's literature, architecture and green imagination**

**Marnie Campagnaro**, University of Padova, Italy

The quality of life of human beings not only depends on the relationship with other life forms but also is tightly entangled with specific settings or localities. In the early twenty-first century, the majority of the global human population lives in cities, and future population growth will mostly occur in cities. This shift challenges children's conventional forms of environmental imagination with their focus on wild and rural habitats. Linking children's literature to urban landscapes and environmental awareness can turn out to be a strategic ally to foster a more profound comprehension of sustainability and to expand green imagination in children.

10.30

Discussion

10.40

Break

11.00

### Do not call them weeds/Non chiamiamole erbacce

**Marianna Merisi**, author and illustrator, Italy

Marianna Merisi's nonfiction picturebook *Vagabonde!* (Topipittori, 2017) is a passionate journey into the world of the most common, but most interesting, plants: those that bravely grow and flourish even in the most unexpected places. Marianna Merisi will share her love for these plants. We will learn their extraordinary behaviour and how to look for, discover and understand these living organisms that remind us about the intelligence and beauty of nature.

11.20

### Reading trees, listening to plants. Childhood and nature in non-fiction illustrations/

**Leggere gli alberi, ascoltare le piante. Infanzia e natura nelle illustrazioni nonfiction**

**Irene Penazzi**, author and illustrator, Italy

Nature as the protagonist of the story: if plants could talk, they would have wonderful stories to tell! Starting from the picturebook *Voci dal mondo verde* (Voices from the Green World), we can think about some processes and choices that take place in translating the viewpoints of trees and plants into words and images and can explore what happens in the relationship between childhood and nature in children's nonfiction.

## SPECIAL SESSION WORKSHOP 1

11.50 & 12.30

(max. 30 people in each group)

### Travelling postcards/Cartoline vagabonde, by **Marianna Merisi**

Mail art began in the 1960s when artists sent postcards inscribed with poems or drawings through the post rather than exhibiting or selling them through conventional commercial channels. In this session, we will test a botanical mail art experience with weeds. After reading the literary adventures, we will develop a new visual perspective on weeds, creating small-scale works and setting them free to travel around the world.

These special sessions are primarily reserved for students attending the children's literature course (EAS - Rovigo) in education sciences and the postgraduate course in 'children's literature (0-18 year)' at the University of Padova.

## SPECIAL SESSION WORKSHOP 2

11.50 & 12.30

(max. 30 people in each group)

### A guide to the trees of my garden/Guida agli alberi del mio giardino, by **Irene Penazzi**

The relationship between humans and nature, in its different shades and variations, has always been one of the most discussed topics in children's literature. Above all, it is one of children's favourite topics. Among the most interesting picture books that deal with this theme, there are many that tend to return children to nature and immerse them in its changing forms. The natural environment is often presented in picture books as a simple background for memorable adventures. However, in some cases, it becomes the undisputed protagonist of the story as well as the engine of the characters' actions – a source of inspiration and reflection on themselves and the surrounding reality.

External invitees can be eventually added to the online workshops as attendees until exhaustion. For more information, see INFO.



13.00

Conference Summary and Closing





## SPEAKERS

**Marnie Campagnaro** is an assistant professor at the Department FISPPA, University of Padova, and a didactic coordinator of a postgraduate course in children's literature. Her main research fields include picturebooks, fairy tales, domestic geography, architecture, fashion and Italian children's writers. In 2017, she hosted the 6th International European Network of Picturebook Research Conference. Her most recent publications include *Stepping into the World of Houses. Children's Picturebooks on Architecture* (2021), *Materiality in Bruno Munari's Book Objects: The Case of Nella notte buia and I Prelibri* (Libri & Liberi, 2019) and *Narrating Homes and Objects: Images of Domestic Life in Italian Picturebooks Since the Mid-20th Century* (RPD Journal of Theories and Research in Education, 2019).

**Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak** is an associate professor of literature and director of the Center for Young People's Literature and Culture at the Institute of English Studies, University of Wrocław, Poland. She is the author of *Yes to Solidarity, No to Oppression: Radical Fantasy Fiction and Its Young Readers* (2016) and co-editor of *Rulers of Literary Playgrounds: Politics of Intergenerational Play in Children's Literature* (2021), *Intergenerational Solidarity in Children's Literature and Film* (2021) and *Children's Literature and Intergenerational Relationships: Encounters of the Playful Kind* (forthcoming in 2021). Her research focuses on speculative fiction, utopianism and participatory and child-led approaches.

**Macarena García-González** is an associate researcher at the Center for Advanced Studies in Educational Justice and a lecturer at the Faculty of Communications of the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile. She holds a PhD in social anthropology and cultural studies from the University of Zurich and an MA in cultural studies from the University of Maastricht. She has authored *Origin Narratives. The Stories We Tell Children about Immigration and International Adoption* (Routledge, 2017), *Enseñando a sentir. Repertorios éticos en la ficción infantil* (Metales Pesados, 2021) and several articles on children's literature and culture. She is the leading researcher of the research project 'Emotional and Literary Repertoires for Childhood' (2018–2022), a new materialist exploration of the affective in encounters between texts and children. She is the convener of the 25th IRSCS Congress 'Aesthetic and Pedagogical Entanglements.'

**Nina Goga** is a professor of children's literature at Western Norway University of Applied Sciences and co-ordinator of the only Norwegian MA program in children's and young adult literature. Her most recent works are *Verbal and Visual Strategies in Nonfiction Picturebooks: Theoretical and Analytical Approaches* (2021, co-edited with Sarah Hoem Iversen & Ann-Stefi Teigland), 'Verbal and Visual Informational Strategies in Non-Fiction Books Awarded and Mentioned by the Bologna Ragazzi Award 2009-2019' (2020), *Ecocritical Perspectives on Children's Texts and Cultures* (2018, co-edited with Lykke Guanio-Uluru, Bjørg Oddrun Hallås, & Aslaug Nyrnes) and *Maps and Mapping in Children's Literature. Landscapes, Seascapes and Cityscapes* (2017, co-edited with Bettina Kümmerling Meibauer).

**Gusti** was born in Argentina. He studied advertising design at the Escola d'Art Fernando Fàbregas and has lived in Europe since 1985. He first worked in Paris and currently lives with his family in Barcelona, where, while working as an illustrator, he also gives classes on illustration at schools, libraries and cultural centres. He has co-founded the non-profit association Window-La Ventana, which works towards building a more inclusive society.

**Beatrice Masini**, born in Milano, has a degree in classics and is a journalist, a translator and an editor. She is a well-known and successful writer of books for children and teens, translated into over 20 languages, from Finnish to Thai. She has also written novels and stories for adults. She works as an editor in an Italian publishing group and has translated books such as the Harry Potter saga by J. K. Rowling. In 2004, she received the prestigious Andersen Prize as the best children's author of the year.

**Marianna Merisi** is a landscape architect who has extensive botanical knowledge as well as uncommon talent in drawing. In 2015, she was awarded the Premio Lavinia Taverna, a prominent prize dedicated to women working in the fields of gardening and landscape. She graduated from Milan Politecnico. From 2010 to 2016, she collaborated with Cooperativa Sociale Cascina Bollate, a nursery-garden inside the jail premises in the outskirts of Milan, where unusual plant species are grown. She contributes to specialised magazines by writing texts between narratives and scientific essays with her own illustrations. Currently, she is a freelance landscape designer.

**Luca Molinari** is a full professor of theory and architectural design at the University of Campania 'Luigi Vanvitelli' and scientific director of M9 Museum of the 20th Century.

**Irene Penazzi** is a children's book author and illustrator based in Lugo, near Ravenna, Italy. She has a degree in illustration from the Academy of Fine Arts in Bologna and completed an internship at the Hamburg University of Applied Science (HAW Hamburg, Germany). She received a special mention from the jury at the Premio Rodari 2019 with *Nel mio giardino il mondo* (Terre di mezzo Editore, 2019) and was included in the Ibby Honour List 2020 with the same picture book. She works with Italian publishers Terre di mezzo Editore (Milan), Editoriale Scienza (Trieste) and Il Pozzo di Giacobbe (Trapani) and with French publishers Maison Eliza (Paris) and Bayard Jeunesse (Montrouge). Her picture book *Voci dal mondo verde* (by Bordiglioni, Editoriale Scienza, 2020) was shortlisted for the Orbil Award 2020 – non-fiction section.

**Maria Pujol-Valls** is a lecturer in children's literature at the Faculty of Education Sciences, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Barcelona (Catalonia, Spain). She teaches children's literature and language and literature didactics in the degrees in pre-primary and primary education as well as in the master's degree in language acquisition and teaching English as a foreign language. Her latest publications are 'Ecocritical Engagement with Picturebook Through Literature Conversations about Beatrice Alemagne's *On a Magical Do-Nothing Day*' (with Nina Goga, *Sustainability*, 2020) and 'Holistic Approaches to Develop Sustainability and Research Competencies in Pre-Service Teacher Training' (with Sílvia Albareda, Salvador Vidal, & Mónica Fernández, *Sustainability*, 2018).

## Scientific Committee

**Marnie Campagnaro**, FISPPA, University of Padova, Italy

**Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak**, University of Wrocław, Poland

**Macarena García González**, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Chile

**Nina Goga**, Western Norway University of Applied Sciences, Norway

**Maria Pujol-Valls**, Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Spain

**Giuseppe Zago**, FISPPA, University of Padova, Italy

## Local Organising Committee

**Giuseppe Zago**, University of Padova

**Marnie Campagnaro**, University of Padova

**Corina Laasch**, University of Padova

**Chiara Malpezzi**, University of Padova

**Raffaele Lusiani**, Rovigo University Consortium

**Mirko Masin**, Rovigo University Consortium



An illustration of a tree with green leaves and yellow, spiky fruits. A boy with dark hair, wearing a green shirt and blue pants, is sitting on a branch of the tree, using a laptop. The background is white.

## INFO

## VIRTUAL VENUE: ZOOM

University of Padova  
Department of Philosophy, Sociology,  
Education and Applied Psychology (FISPPA)  
Via Beato Pellegrino, 28  
35137 PADUA – Italy

If you are interested in participating  
in the seminar, please contact us  
by 6 April via email at:  
[marnie.campagnaro@unipd.it](mailto:marnie.campagnaro@unipd.it)

The international seminar will be virtually hosted by the University of Padova in  
Rovigo and is powered by the ZOOM video conferencing service. The seminar will  
follow the Central European Summer Time (Rome time).  
A main virtual room will be made available for live talks and two virtual rooms will  
be made available for special sessions.



1222•2022  
**800**  
ANNI



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