Panel 6: Memories

Lena Ahlin, Elusive Girlhood in Adoption Memoirs

This paper begins by arguing that when the concept of girlhood is considered in relation to the presently growing body of memoirs by transnational adoptees, two central tensions emerge. On the one hand, the adoptee authors/protagonists are seen as perpetual children always being spoken for by adoptive parents, social workers, or other adults. On the other hand, the full story of their own girlhood is elusive; haunted by a past that was never to be.

The analysis focuses on adoption from South Korea using Lisa Wool-Rim Sjöblom’s graphic novel Palimpsest (2016) as a case in point; reading it in relation to other Swedish, and American memoirs of transnational adoption (Jane Jeong Trenka, Katy Robinson, Soojung Jo, Nicole Chung, Astrid Trotzig, and Sofia French). Hübinette (2005) notes that Swedish YAL about Korean adoption focuses on adoptive, rather than biological, relationships and promotes a liberal and progressive view of adoption as a form of family-making well suited to the idea of a multicultural society. The memoirs challenge this view, offering a more complex picture. All center on the theme of finding identity and a sense of belonging. By putting her life story into words, the adoptee memoirist writes herself into being, and the journey to South Korea constitutes a rite of passage in which the encounter with the mother (country) enables a reconciliation with past, and serves as a necessary step on the way to adulthood and motherhood. In addition to investigating the trope of adoption as enabling independence and hybridization (Novy 2001), the paper focuses on representations of an alternative past, and the persistent need to fill in the gaps about one’s childhood, which for many of the writers amounts to a yearning for memories that were never formed.

Lena Ahlin is Senior Lecturer in English/Head of English at Kristianstad University, Sweden, where she teaches literature and academic as well as creative writing. Research interests include African-American and Asian-American literature, and she is currently completing a project on memory, nostalgia and affect in transracial/transnational adoption literature. Her work on adoption has been published in Humanities (2019), and International Adoption in North American Culture, edited by Mark Shackleton (Palgrave Macmillan 2017).

Mateusz Świetlicki and Justyna Mętrak, “Girls should be plump and round. Men don’t care for bony women”: Girlhood, Femininity and Next-Generation Memory in North American Diasporic Children’s Literature

In the proposed presentation, we want to use the theoretical framework of memory studies (Ulanowicz, Hirsch, Oziewicz) and gender studies to analyze the various ways in which femininity is constructed in three Ukrainian-Canadian novels. Our aim is to show that the physical and emotional maturation of the protagonists symbolizes the Ukrainian diaspora’s capability to survive. It is no coincidence that the protagonists of most contemporary North American diasporic children’s novels are girls and young woman, as gender plays a vital role...
in the memory narratives of diasporic communities (Ulanowicz). While in Ukrainian-Canadian coming-of-age stories girls become the receivers of next-generation memory passed on to them by elderly women, usually their grandmothers, the eponymous protagonists of Gloria Kupchenko Frolick’s *Anna Veryha* (1992), Laura Langston’s *Lesia’s Dream* (2003), and Marsha Forchuk Skrypuch’s *Prisoners in the Promised Land: The Ukrainian Internment Diary of Anya Soloniuk* (2007) also represent the changes in the traditional understanding of Ukrainian gender roles (Świetlicki) caused by migration to Canada. Though girls in the novels are symbolically responsible for the persistence of their communities, in the process of becoming the givers of memory they have to struggle with misogyny, childhood (Joosen), and ethnic prejudices.

**Dr. Mateusz Świetlicki** is an Assistant Professor in the Department of American Literature and Culture (Institute of English Studies, University of Wrocław). He is a founding member of the Centre for Research on Children’s and Young Adult Literature (Faculty of Letters, University of Wrocław). He was a Fulbright scholar at the University of Illinois at Chicago (2018) and was awarded fellowships at Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv (2014) and Harvard University (2012). His expertise is contemporary children’s and YA literature and culture, as well as popular culture and film. He has taught American literature, film, and popular culture at the University of Wrocław and the University of Illinois at Chicago. His recent publications include: “Such Books Should be Burned! Same-Sex Parenting and the Stretchable Definition of the Family in Larysa Denysenko’s and Mariia Foya’s *Maya and Her Mums*”, *Children’s Literature in Education* 2019; “‘Oh, What a Waste of Army Dreamers…’: The Revolution of Dignity and War in Contemporary Ukrainian Picturebooks”, *Filoteknos* 8, 2018, 119–130; “Coming Out of the Ghostly Gay Children in Truman Capote’s ‘Other Voices, Other Rooms’” and Harper Lee’s ‘To Kill a Mockingbird’”, *Prikarpats’kiy visnyk NTSH Slovo* 3 (39), 2017, 201–210. He is currently working on a book project on memory in Canadian children’s literature. He is a representative for the Childhood & Youth Network of the Social Science History Association and a member of IRSCL and MSA.

**Justyna Mętrak** is an MA student at the Faculty of Letters, University of Wrocław, Poland. Scientific interests: YA literature, memory of the margins, queer theory, popular culture. She is currently working on a thesis about queerness and boyhood in Patricia Nell Warren’s fiction.

**Maria Freij, Anastasia and I: A Fictocritical Essay about Reading and Writing Girlhood**

This paper explores, in a fictocritical manner, the potential impact on childhood reading on identity-formation. The intermingling of memory and imagination can inextricably link a reader and a literary character, blurring the line between their experiences, feelings, and actions.

Lois Lowry’s Anastasia Krupnik series captures many of the key features of (pre-)adolescence: the unease of interaction, of the body, of being. The books are about a sense-making, but they are also books about writing, about voice. Anastasia expresses her loves and hates through lists, those first steps of beginning to order the universe through words. Like her parents are strong role models and representatives of humanist values, so Anastasia herself becomes a role model for the girl reader, and for the girl writer.

If “autobiographical memory becomes a site for the individual and social construction of truth” (Fivush 2013), it may be that “genuine” childhood memories intermingle with the memories of
fictional narratives: if “[t]o remember is to re-present” (Braunstein 2010, p. 12), then to remember is also to re-create. In the case of Anastasia and I, we became each others’ mirrors. I was convinced that signing the walls of beloved houses was inspired by her actions, but some thirty years later, I realised that my first such signing predated reading the book by three years. If Néstor Braunstein is correct in the assertion that “we are what we remember” (p. 22) then we are also what we remember we read, and who we were when we read. The girls Anastasia and I were shared many traits and experiences, as we were written into being. This paper explores this experience against Pierre Bayard’s four hypotheses of strange coincidences (2005), and how reading may intermingle with writing to form the site for the formation of “decisive events” (Braunstein, p. 144).

Maria Freij is Senior Lecturer in English, Kristianstad University, Sweden. Teaching interests include Creative Writing, poetry, literature, grammar, and translation. Research interests include representations of selves and identities through the imagery of childhood landscapes, primarily in the poetry of Lars Gustafsson. Her critical work appears in Humanities, AJFS, and TEXT; translations in the Redroom Company/Lyrikline Project and Mascara Literary Review; and creative work in journals including Meanjin, Blue Dog, Southerly, Softblow, and Overland. Her translation of Boris Vian’s Je Voudrais pas Crever was published in If I say If—The Poems and Short Stories of Boris Vian (Adelaide University Press 2014, ed. Rolls et al.).