

Age / Narratives:

At the Intersection of Age Studies & Children's and YA Literature Research

October 11 and 12, 2019 in Frankfurt

Department for American Studies & Department for Children's and Young Adult Literature Research

Goethe-University Frankfurt

Organisation: Linda Hess and Anika Ullmann

The Workshop:

Children's literature and young adult literature are literary genres that emanate from age as a category of difference. Discourses of age are central with regard to the production and reception as well as the marketing and distribution of children's and young adult literary media. Furthermore, conflicts of age, attributions of age, and the focus on age-specific problems form typical motifs and themes of these genres. Consequently, children's and young adult literary media possess a strong discursive power. They not only mirror what it means to be a child or a young adult at a given moment in history in a given society, they also shape the kind of performances that render children and young adults intelligible *as* children and *as* young adults. As Vanessa Joosen states in *Adulthood in Children's Literature* (2018), "all these messages [about age] combined can become quite powerful to determine how (young) people act their own age, assess other people's performance of age, and think of their past, present and future selves" (12).

Despite the crucial role age plays for a complex understanding of children's and young adult media, scholars in the field of children's and young adult literature have been slow to integrate age studies into their research. Conversely, to date, age studies have hardly concerned themselves with children's and young adult literature and media. Even though researchers state time and again that "age identities" are learned and internalized at an early age (Gullette 2011, Lipscomb and Marshall 2010), moreover pointing out that the process of aging begins at birth, age studies as a field of research is strongly focused on "old" and "middle" age. Anita Wohlmann observes, "young people are typically of little concern to age scholars who start their investigations with later stages, such as middle age [. . .]. Upon a closer look, however, there are many examples that suggest a relation between young people and age awareness (2014, 13-14). Since age narratives do indeed surround us from childhood on and strongly influence our understanding of our own identity as well as our roles within communities, the ways in which we conceive and represent age are of vital social significance.

The two-day workshop on Age & Children's and YA Literature plans to tackle such heretofore neglected intersections of children's and YA literature research and age studies. Presentations will be 25-30 minutes followed by discussion.

Themes will include:

- Doing Age (in contrast to / in connection to Doing Gender)
- Age as a category of difference
- Narratology: narrating age
- The roles of childhood and youth in Age Studies
- Connections of power and narratives of age
- Representations of grandparents and grandchildren
- Representations and negotiations of adulthood
- The question of generations: conflicts and cooperation
- Concepts of time and future in relation to the category of age.

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