

Introduction

Children and childhood are strongly associated with the idea of home, as is children's literature through the depiction of safe and unsafe homes, fantasy dwellings as well as realistically portrayed homes. But due to the close connections between childhood and home, homelessness too becomes topical. There are numerous fictional characters who, either mentally or materially, are represented as homeless. How children in different time periods and societies deal with marginalization, exclusion and exile say a great deal about the nature of the social order of that time and place. The homeless child is rootless but not voiceless.

Homelessness is not necessarily associated with social stigma and vulnerability. It can also represent self-reliance, freedom and having an open mind. To be homeless can thus be indicative of a productive stance and a new orientation. Forced homelessness is both threatening and dangerous to children, but at the same time homelessness can lead to liberation from the constraints of repressive homes, institutions and societies. Homeless children, whether they are liberated and allowed to grow or whether they are victims, challenge the notion of the good society as well as the very nature of the child. That is why children's literature is filled with homeless children, from Charles Dickens' *Oliver Twist* (1836), Laura Fitinghoff's *Barnen ifrån Frostmofjället* [The Children of Frostmofjället] (1907) to Astrid Lindgren's *Rasmus the Tramp* (1956). The theme of homelessness liberates the child character from the strictures of the home, both in terms of mental and material landscape. The homeless protagonist also offers the reader suggestive settings and places, such as the dilapidated garage in David Almond's *Skellig* (1998), the country road in *Rasmus the Tramp* or the tunnels under the hovel in Sonya Hartnett's *Thursday's Child* (2000).

Homelessness shows that home can be "unfixed" and made mobile. For instance, the YA novel *Karikko* (2012) by Seita Vuorela, winner of the Nordic Council award, is set in a strange landscape of hybridity where the reader cannot be sure of who is dead and who is alive. The book is based on a real event in Åbo, Finland, where boys playing in an abandoned silo fell to their deaths. The story takes place in a sleazy caravan park where a mother and her two sons are

stranded after their car has broken down. Thus the mobile home is situated in a symbolically rich landscape which allows the author to weave a very elastic and subtly intertextual tapestry.

Maurice Sendak's *We're all in the dumps with Jack and Guy* (1993) is an example of the ways in which the picture book can deploy themes of homelessness and challenge traditional norms and values. Disposable trash, the byproducts of consumer society, plays a significant role in this book where seemingly insignificant objects are laden with new meaning. For homelessness is closely associated with the deconstruction of nationality in the wake of globalization. Girls' and boys' books of an earlier era labored hard to promote the dual concepts of home and nation. There is no corresponding agenda in contemporary children's books, where hybridity and the dissolution of family and nation are topical. The concepts of home and homelessness rather point to overlapping historical, psychological, economic and cultural discourses (of, for instance, gender, class and consumption patterns). Given these fundamental changes, children's literature appears to have an exciting future.

In this *Barnboken* theme the scope and depth of homelessness is gauged. Hanne Kiil and Elise Seip Tønnessen analyze a recent Norwegian version of Red Riding Hood, *Skylappejenta* (2009) by Iram Haq and Endre Skandfer. In this controversial picture book Pakistani and Norwegian identity constructions merge in the girl protagonist. The critical underpinning of this article can be found in postcolonial theory of cultural encounters, globalization and hybridity. Concepts like reflexive identity and cultural identity (Anthony Giddens and Stuart Hall respectively) are used, as Homi Bhabha's critical use of the term hybridity. With these conceptual tools the authors attempt to show how the picture book investigates the story and instates a new discursive terrain for multicultural girlhood. In this text the theme of homelessness appears as uncertain or hybrid when the girl protagonist navigates between different nationalist discourses that resist harmonization.

Mavis Reimer's article "Mobile characters, mobile texts: Homelessness and intertextuality in contemporary texts for young people" points to a recent tendency in today's YA fiction. She reads homelessness as a metaphor and highlights the intertextual aspects of books such as *Skellig* by David Almond, *Comédia Infantil* (1988) by Henning Mankell and *Stained Glass* (2002) by Michael Bedard. With the help of Julia Kristeva's concept of intertextuality she shows how the novels engage in an intricate play of texts where ideas of homelessness are brought to bear both to the uncanny and to the effects of globaliza-

tion. Reimer particularly points to mobility as being characteristic both of characters and the textual patterning, and she anchors her analysis both in socio-economic and cultural contexts.

These two articles are to be seen as a starting point. We welcome further articles on the theme of homelessness.

Mia Österlund
Scientific editor 2013
Translation: Björn Sundmark