

House and Home

Giuseppe Zago, Carla Callegari, Marnie Campagnaro, eds. 2019. *La casa nella Letteratura per l'infanzia contemporanea: Figure, modelli e visioni nella Letteratura per l'infanzia dal Novecento ad oggi*. Lecce: Pensa MultiMedia Editore. 231 pp. ISBN 978-88-6760-683-2.

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In recent times, the concept of home as a research object has been studied in anthropology, psychology, pedagogy as well as philosophy, thus providing an interdisciplinary view of the topic. Although the process of transformation of residential architecture can be dated to as far back as the 15th century, it was only in the 19th and 20th centuries that the domestic place underwent deliberate, conscious privatisation, and the home became an element of familiar, social and cultural stability. Besides, the 19th century was a highly relevant period for the construction of the concept of “home”, seen as a projection of the unity of the family and of the sense of identity and belonging, leading to the “century of the home”, as the 20th century is frequently referred to. This is why the home as an important point of reference for children is an essential space in children’s literature, both as a physical space and a metaphorical one.

The volume entitled *Home in Contemporary Children’s Literature: Figures, Models and Visions in Children’s Literature since the 19th Century until the Present Day*, edited by Giuseppe Zago, Carla Callegari, and Marnie Campagnaro, all from the University of Padua, contains a selection of papers presented by Italian researchers at the 6th International Conference of the European Network of Picturebook Research on Home and Lived-In Spaces in Picturebooks from the 1950s to the Present (Padua, 2017). The book, written exclusively in Italian, aims, in the words of its editors, at collecting and relaunching reflections coming from Italian authors, concerning the home and lived-in spaces in picturebooks in the second half of the 20th century and in the 21st century.

It is a collection containing eight chapters, organised in two thematic sections, offering thus a twofold interpretation in reading the theme of home. In the first section (containing two articles), the home is investigated as a primarily educational object (in a historical perspective), whereas the second section (comprising six articles), explores the models, forms, visions and transformations of the home which have defined the narratives of the analysed picturebooks.

The opening text, “La casa come ‘oggetto pedagogico’: Uno sguardo storico [The Home as ‘an Educational Object’: A Historical Overview]” by Giuseppe Zago, represents an extensive elaboration of the importance of home and family in the processes of growing up and education, emphasising the changes which have occurred in the image and concept of the home through the centuries. The chapter covers the role of home for the family, its role as an educational object starting from the Renaissance, proceeding with Comenius’ maternal home and Locke’s concept of paternal power in the 16th century, and Rousseau’s education in a home without a family in the 17th century. Pestalozzi and Fröbel’s pedagogy

emphasised the significance of domestic life in the 19th century, whereas Montessori and Dewey established a new domestic paradigm in the 20th century.

Carla Callegari's text, "Le trasformazioni storiche della famiglia e della casa attraverso un albo illustrato [Historical Transformations of Family and Home through a Picturebook]", provides an account of the changes in culture and the roles and dynamics of the family in Italian society in the picturebook *Casa del tempo* [The House] written by Roberto Piumini and illustrated by Roberto Innocenti, award-winning author and illustrator. The main character of the story is a house which was built in 1623, telling the story of time through a period of a hundred years. Covering the 20th century, the house lives and changes with the people that inhabit it.

The second part of the volume opens with Marnie Campagnaro's chapter "Sull'abitare: Geografie domestiche e visioni di 'genere' negli albi illustrati [On Living: Domestic Geographies and Visions of "Gender" in Picturebooks]". In the author's words, "exploring these geographies of home interiors also shows that they can be a precious resource worth sounding from the standpoints of the history of education and critical hermeneutics to shed light on how the perception and representation of childhood has changed since WWII" (Campagnaro, 2019: 42). Campagnaro looks into the reasons why the home has become the object of study in such a broad interdisciplinary area (history, literature, pedagogy, philosophy, anthropology, and other fields). The author brings into focus the different representations of home and family (the home providing shelter from the elements, such as a small fort or a home-raft, or the home as an expression of identity, such as the home as a clothing item, referring to the small homes emerging during the 20th century, growing and embracing their inhabitants, just like garments, etc.). She goes on to analyse their modifications, through a particularly significant selection of picturebooks such as *Il meraviglioso Ciccipelluccia* [*The Wonderful Fluffy Little Squishy*] (by B. Alemagna, Topipittori, Milan: 2015), *Il disastrosissimo disastro di Harold Snipperpott* [*Harold Snipperpot's Best Disaster Ever*] (by B. Alemagna, Topipittori, Milan: 2018), and *Via buio togliti* [I Want to Take the Night Away] (originally in French: *Je veux enlever la nuit*, by H. Gaudy and S. Rea, published in Italian by Topipittori, Milan: 2016). The author ponders whether the dominant family setting of 60 years ago has changed in contemporary picturebooks, and to what extent cultural changes have modified the domestic visions reproposing them in a more balanced and collaborative relational frame.

Lorenzo Cantatore looks into the theme of home in Italian children's literature during the 1940s and 1950s in "Case e bambini fra realtà e sogno negli anni del Neorealismo [Homes and Children Between Reality and Dream in the Years of Neorealism]" – a turbulent period for Italy, characterised by the fall of Fascism, the end of World War II, the fall of the monarchy and the reaffirmation of the Republic. The home often serves as the background for those traumatic events. Cantatore performs an analysis of two works: Elsa Morante's *Le straordinarie avventure di Caterina* [Caterina's Extraordinary Adventures] and Bruno Munari's *Le macchine inutili* [Useless Machines].

"La 'casa mobile' nelle fiabe russe e negli albi illustrati contemporanei [The 'Mobile Home' in Russian Tales and in Contemporary Picturebooks]" by Dorena Caroli closely considers the topic of various forms of mobile home in children's books, describing on one

hand their fairy-tale-like architecture, from homes moving like robots or being towed by means of transport, to becoming humanised themselves thanks to their inhabitants. On the other hand, Caroli analyses those stories with respect to their educational purposes, covering narratives containing both realistic and fantastic protagonists. The study starts from the Russian folklore tradition, including Baba Yaga's hut, usually described as standing on chicken legs, through the re-interpretation of the Russian fairy-tale canon, to the Soviet picturebooks of the 1930s. Finally, the representation of the moving home in contemporary picturebooks is discussed.

In the chapter “La casa da fiaba [The Fairy-tale Home]”, Susanna Barsotti discusses the home in widely popular tales as a place of initiation, analysing, among others, the famous story of Little Red Riding Hood, revisited in the contemporary picturebook *C'era una volta una bambina* [Once Upon a Time there Was a Little Girl] by Giovanna Zoboli and illustrated by Joanna Concejo (published by Topipittori, Milan, 2015).

Maria Teresa Trisciuzzi, in her chapter “La casa sull'albero. Infanzie sospese e libere nella letteratura per l'infanzia [The Tree House. Elevated and Free Childhood in Children's Literature]”, investigates the narratives of tree houses and stories telling of protagonists who are light and elevated between the earth and the sky, distant and free from the earthly world of adults.

Finally, in “Oltre la casa: la luna come simbolo di ricerca identitaria [Beyond Home: The Moon as a Symbol of the Search for Identity]”, Sabrina Fava interprets the image of the moon in *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* by Brian Selznick as a metaphorical home, a symbol of affective and internal belonging, a search undertaken by the protagonist, an orphan like many other famous characters in children's literature, for a symbolic place to live.

The authors in this volume provide valuable historical and comparative research, showing how an interdisciplinary approach to studying domestic spaces represented in picturebooks is a particularly promising investigative field. Children build their own identity in the context of their families, developing relationships not only with people, but also with places and things. The editors have succeeded in drawing together an informative series of new insights into a topic not sufficiently explored yet: the evolution of the representation of home and lived-in spaces in European picturebooks published from 1945 to 2010. The volume opens up numerous themes, signalling there is ample space for further research in this area. For this reason, it appeals to early childhood educators and teachers, but also to theorists of children's literature, visual arts experts and many other theorists and practitioners involved in literary theory and/or educational studies. Unfortunately, this highly valuable selection of contributions does not offer summaries in another language, so it only addresses a limited audience of Italian-speaking readers. That is a pity because its content would certainly be of interest to a much wider readership had it included summaries at least in English.

References:

- Campagnaro, Marnie. 2019. “Narrating” homes and objects: images of domestic life in Italian picturebooks since the mid-20th century. *Ricerche di Pedagogia e Didattica – Journal of Theories and Research in Education* 14 (2): 9–48.