

Call for Papers

International Conference
13 and 14 November 2025

Max, Martine, Maya and C° Children's classics, masterpieces, and best- sellers: which heritage(s) to share?

International Conference organised by the French National Library (BnF) / National Centre for Children's Literature (CNLJ), with the support of L'Afreloce (French Research Society on Children's Books and Cultural Objects) and the project Sciences de l'Enfance et de la Jeunesse (EnJe), Sorbonne Nouvelle University, Paris.

In 2008-2009, the exhibition "Babar, Harry Potter and C°" celebrated the inauguration of the National Centre for Children's Literature at the French National Library, marking in spectacular fashion the legitimization of children's books as cultural heritage. In a nod to this earlier event, new characters have been chosen (this time with a boy, a girl, and a bee.... it's 2025 after all!) to symbolise the continuation of these reflections.

Canonical texts, masterpieces, classics... whatever label they are given, there are some perennial texts that it is essential to know and must be preserved, for what they can still bring to today's children, teenagers and adults. This process of legitimization and integration into cultural heritage takes many forms. This conference will bring together researchers, creators and book and mediation professionals to interrogate this notion of the 'classic', which Italo Calvino famously defined as "a book that never finishes saying what it has to say".

The aim is not only to continue the reflections that began with the conference "Penser/Classer l'album classique" held at the University of Artois in 2021, and the publication by Sophie Van der Linden and Raphaële Botte for the National Centre for the Book [CNL], *100 classiques et merveilles pour la jeunesse* [100 classics and wonders for the young] in 2023, but also to find answers to the many questions raised by librarians responsible for updating their collections, many of whom signed up for the CNLJ course entitled "Classic picturebooks : books that shouldn't be thrown away". The specificities of children's literary classics will be explored: does children's literature, with the particular nature of its readership and modes of legitimization, operate differently from general literature (initial references to Baudelaire, Rimbaud and Flaubert were rejected), and does the passage of time constantly re-evaluate the appreciation of a work?

The very title of the conference suggests that our use of terminology needs to be questioned. Are we discussing the same thing when we use the words classic, heritage text, masterpiece, or canonical text? Does designating some works as classics or masterpieces necessarily preclude others from being considered worthy of interest? Can popular or mass market books produce classics, or does they have to come from a field recognized as literary? Should a bestseller de facto be considered a classic, given the breadth of its readership... or, to put it another way, does the *Martine* series, which has sold millions of copies, deserve to take its place alongside Maurice Sendak's Max, who has been the subject of multiple monographs and conferences? Moreover, the name Max could just as easily refer to the hero of the *Max and Lili* series, undisputed leader of public library loan rankings, as it could to Sendak's famous instigator of the "wild rumpus".

Paper proposals may focus on the following themes:

Legitimizing institutions

As Alain Viala points out, "to call something a 'classic', is to categorise it, and situate it within a hierarchy of values". The processes of legitimization of children's literature, "classicization", canonization and designation as cultural heritage need to be interrogated, as does the role of the various institutions involved – such as schools, libraries, publishers (through classic collections, re-editions and re-illustrations, translations and re-translations), booksellers, critics, researchers, book festivals and fairs, literary prizes, exhibitions, and social media, etc.

- What are the criteria used by institutions that award certain titles at the expense of others? What is the specificity of children's publishing in these processes of legitimization?
- How homogeneous are the corpora identified by different actors?
- What are the differences between countries, depending on whether the legitimizing bodies belong to the educational or cultural spheres, and whether they promote "national" works or, alternatively, those open to works from abroad?
- Do works from non-"legitimate" genres (such as thrillers or romances) stand a chance of achieving classic status?
- Does the proliferation of literary salons and prizes blur or reinforce the specificity of certain titles? Do prizes reward one-off works, or rather an author for their entire career?
- What role do young readers play in these processes? Can literary recognition only be bestowed by adults? Do recent forms of peer recommendation (such as teenage booktubers and booktokers) constitute new forms of legitimization?
- What are the key issues from a conservation perspective between cultural legitimacy and libraries' need to carry out "weeding" of their collections? What is the role played by policies on digitisation and publishing corpora online, at a time when the carbon footprint from the energy required to preserve virtual data is further exacerbating the issue of storage space?

Temporality

"It is better to let the success of a book become more clearly defined, profound and consolidated over time", replied Marc Soriano cautiously when asked in 1973 for a list of classics for young people. The question of the relationship with time is indeed central to the notion of a classic, which suggests a timeless quality while simultaneously reflecting the spirit of its time. As Antoine Compagnon said of Proust at the Collège de France: "each generation renews the meaning and scope of this work, enriches it, takes possession of it. [...] The classic text is one that never ceases to disturb." This resistance to the passage of time ensures these texts and characters figure in the collective unconscious and form a source of inspiration - whether they are conscious of it or not - for contemporary creators.

- can the list of canonical texts be extended indefinitely?

- do images and texts age differently?
- does canonization work only on a text in its entirety, or rather does it operate using episodes, or “selected extracts” of the work?
- accessibility of works and the perpetuation (or not) of their ‘classic’ status: how and why do publishers choose to keep (or not) titles available in their collections, and what criteria do they use to decide which titles to reissue, and with what aims? How do libraries/bookshops decide which titles to keep on the shelves?
- how does peer legitimization work? What are the strategies (imitation, citation, rewriting and reinterpretation) used by contemporary authors and illustrators to pay homage to previous generations?

Literature and society

Children's literature always reflects the values that a society, at any given time and in any given place, wishes to pass on to its younger generations. These values evolve over time and space. In the case of the international circulation of works, translation can lead to transformations of the original work, as was the case in Pierre-Jules Hetzel's translations of *Little Women* [rendered as *The Four Daughters of Dr Marsh*] in the 19th century, or the transformation of Pippi Longstocking into Fifi Brindacier [Fifi Little-bit-of-steel] in France in the 1950s-1960s, in which the subversive nature of the character was toned down.

- In the case of international heritage and a sort of globalized corpus of classics, how do these works circulate, and what is at stake in their translations and adaptations?
- What is the relationship between classics/bestsellers/long-sellers and social issues (such as discussions around feminism or racism), and how are such books being read today in a radically different context?
- How is the revival of certain texts being played out, particularly the trend for recovering older books on social media?
- how can female authors or and authors from minoritised backgrounds who have been forgotten or erased from the canon be restored and valorised?
- How have the major debates that have taken place in the United States called into question the very notion of the “canon” since the advent of the Black Lives Matter and #MeToo movements? Has the move in English-speaking scholarship and activist circles to consider the canon as a vector for excluding authors who are racialised or from economically disadvantaged backgrounds provoked comparable discussions in France?

Literature and reception

Children's literature can have multiple audiences, thanks to its polysemy, variety and richness of interpretation. “In this [conventional] space, we create a universe in which adults and children can dialogue and communicate” (Joëlle Turin). As readers grow older, they may re-read the same book and find different things in it. For each age group they pass through, they are also confronted with new classics. Reception also depends on the degree of mediation through which the child accesses the book: they may have been imposed by educational or family settings (“classics are books that adults want us to read at all costs”) or, on the contrary, the completely freely by the reader (Marc Soriano: “a book which the child always picks up of their own accord and for pleasure”). In most cases, the answer is probably somewhere in between, and with the support of numerous mediators... and provided that the books are easily accessible, without discrimination in terms of classification, storage, etc.

- What role do creators play in the preservation of a work (reading versus “writing” in the broadest sense)?

- what role does the singularity of reception play in the process of creating a classic: is this a classic in just one person's opinion/ or is it a classic for all?

Literature and transmedia

Of the three names featured in the title of our conference, Maya refers to the title of a novel by Waldemar Bonsels published in 1912 (*Die Biene Maja und ihre Abenteuer*), a character popularized in the 1970s by the German-Japanese cartoon *Maya the Bee*. What happens when classics move from one medium to another?

- Does the integration of books into a multimedia universe (films, plays, shows, games and merchandising) ensure their continued presence?
- while adaptations help to ensure the survival of classic texts, do they not also risk leading to the "forgetting" of the original works?
- in today's highly visual society, is the remediation in images (illustrated editions, graphic novel adaptations) a necessary condition for success?

Conference organisers

Agnès Bergonzi, BnF/CNLJ
Célia Charpentier, BnF/CNLJ
Romain Gaillard, BnF/CNLJ
Éléonore Hamaide-Jager, Université de Lille
Mathilde Lévêque, Université Sorbonne Paris Nord
Christophe Meunier, Université d'Orléans
Virginie Meyer, BnF/CNLJ
Anne-Claire Raimond, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle
Marie Sorel, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle

Advisory board

Agnès Bergonzi, BnF/CNLJ
Célia Charpentier, BnF/CNLJ
Romain Gaillard, BnF/CNLJ
Florence Gaiotti, Université de Lille
Éléonore Hamaide-Jager, Université de Lille
Sophie Heywood, University of Reading
Mathilde Lévêque, Université Sorbonne Paris Nord
Christophe Meunier, Université d'Orléans
Virginie Meyer, BnF/CNLJ
Isabelle de Peretti, Université d'Artois
Anne-Claire Raimond, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle
Marie Sorel, Université Sorbonne Nouvelle
Milena Šubrtová, Masaryk University
Hélène Valotteau, Fonds patrimonial Heure joyeuse, médiathèque Françoise-Sagan (Paris)
Sophie Van der Linden, literary critic and expert on children's picturebooks

How to send paper proposals and timeline

The conference will be held on Thursday 13th November 2025, in the Petit auditorium of the Bibliothèque nationale de France (**Paris 13^e**), and Friday 14th November 2025, at the Centre de colloques [Conference Centre] of the Campus Condorcet (**Aubervilliers**).

This is an international conference. The languages of the conference are French and English.

Deadline for sending proposals: **21th May 2025**

Please send proposals to: virginie.meyer@bnf.fr

Paper proposals will contain the following:

- paper title
- abstract (approx. 500 words)
- 5 key words
- a short bibliography
- a short biography of the author, including university affiliation, email address and contact number
- the document will be sent in PDF format under the file name of the person submitting the proposal: Surname_firstname.pdf

Proposal decisions will be communicated: **June 2025**

Speaker travel and accommodation expenses will not be covered by the event organisers.

Papers will be recorded for posting online on the BnF and partner websites.

A publication is envisaged to extend the reflections and exchanges arising from this conference.

Bibliography

« Les classiques font-ils kiffer ? » : dossier, *Lecture jeunesse*, septembre 2022, n°183.

Balley, Noëlle, « Le livre pour la jeunesse, un patrimoine comme les autres ? », in *Livres de jeunesse d'hier, publics d'aujourd'hui : quelles rencontres ?*, journée d'étude du 4 octobre 2016 organisée par la BnF/CNLJ, l'ENSSIB et la FILL [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <http://www.enssib.fr/bibliotheque-numerique/documents/66994-qu-est-ce-que-le-patrimoine-pour-la-jeunesse.mp4>

Balley, Noëlle, « Le puzzle, la coquille et le lego : constructions patrimoniales », *Bulletin des bibliothèques de France*, 2008, t. 53, n° 6, p. 6-13 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <http://bbf.enssib.fr/consulter/bbf-2008-06-0006-001>

Balley, Noëlle, « Les livres pour la jeunesse comme objet patrimonial », in *Le livre pour la jeunesse : répartir la conservation des fonds jeunesse : enjeux et perspectives* : actes du colloque national du 7 octobre 2004. Bibliothèque nationale de France, la Joie par les livres, Paris bibliothèques, 2005, p. 26-37.

Bishop Marie-France, Belhadjin Anissa, *Les patrimoines littéraires à l'école : tensions et débats actuels*. Champion, 2015.

Botte Raphaële, Van der Linden, Sophie, *100 grand livres pour les petits : des Trois brigands à Hugo Cabret*. Gründ, 2021.

Bouju, Emmanuel, Gefen, Alexandre, Hautcoeur, Guiomar, Macé, Marielle, *Littérature et exemplarité*. Presses universitaires de Rennes, 2007 (Cahiers du Groupe phi).

Boulaire, Cécile, *Les petits livres d'or : des albums pour enfants dans la France de la Guerre froide*, Presses universitaires François-Rabelais, 2016 (Iconotextes).

Calvino, Italo, *Pourquoi lire les classiques ?* Seuil, 1993 (1981) (La librairie du XXe siècle).

Chapuis, Lise, « Questions de valeur(s) dans la littérature de jeunesse », in Dominique Rabaté (dir.), *L'art et question de la valeur*. Pessac, Presses Universitaires de Bordeaux, 2007 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.pub.2618>

Connan-Pintado, Christiane. « Chapitre 14. Littérature pour la jeunesse et patrimoine de l'éducation », in Jean-François Condette et Marguerite Figeac-Monthus (dir.), *Sur les traces du passé de l'éducation...* Maison des Sciences de l'Homme d'Aquitaine, 2014 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <https://doi.org/10.4000/books.msha.729>.

La conservation partagée des fonds pour la jeunesse à l'heure de la valorisation des collections : actes de la journée d'études nationale, Marseille octobre 2009. BnF/CNLJ-La Joie par les livres, Paris-bibliothèques, 2010.

Diamant, Nic, « De la littérature de jeunesse considérée comme objet patrimonial », *Bulletin des bibliothèques de France*, 2004, t. 49, n° 5, p. 65-73 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <http://bbf.enssib.fr/consulter/bbf-2004-05-0065-011>

Ducas, Sylvie, « Ce que font les prix à la littérature », *Communication & langages*, 2014, n° 179 (1), 61-73 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <https://doi.org/10.3917/comla.179.0061>

Douglas, Virginie, Cabaret, Florence (dir.), *La retraduction en littérature de jeunesse*. Peter Lang, 2014 (Recherches comparatives sur les livres et le multimédia d'enfance).

« Élargir le cercle des lecteurs : la médiation en littérature pour la jeunesse », *Cahiers du CRILJ*, novembre 2017.

Ezratty, Viviane, Lévêque, Françoise (dir.), *Le livre pour la jeunesse : un patrimoine pour l'avenir. Synthèse des journées d'études organisées par la Bibliothèque L'Heure joyeuse les 14 et 15 novembre 1994, suivi de : Répertoires de fonds de conservation de livres pour la jeunesse*. Paris : Agence culturelle de Paris, 1997.

Fette, Julie, *Gender by the Book: 21st-Century French Children's Literature*. Routledge, 2025.
Gaiotti, Florence, Hamaide, Eléonore (dir.), « Penser/Classer l'album classique », *Ondine/Ondina*, 2023, n° 9 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <https://papiro.unizar.es/ojs/index.php/ond/issue/view/572>

Gaiotti, Florence, Hamaide-Jager, Eléonore, Hervouët, Claudine, Vidal-Naquet, Jacques (dir.), *Max et les maximonstres à 50 ans : réception et influence des œuvres de Maurice Sendak en France et en Europe* : actes du colloque des 12-13 décembre 2013 organisé par la Bibliothèque nationale de France-CNLJ et l'Université d'Artois. BnF-Centre national de la littérature pour la jeunesse, 2015.

Krywicky, Victor, « Best-sellers pour adolescents et culture médiatique. Une approche transversale du succès littéraire », *Belphégor*, 2023, 21-2 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <http://journals.openedition.org/belphegor/5676>

Laroque, Lydie, Raulet-Marcel, Caroline (dir.), « Littérature et valeurs » : dossier, *Le Français aujourd'hui*, 2017, n° 297.

Lévêque, Mathilde, « Le cas du chanoine Schmid, un déluge de traductions avant la mort et l'oubli », *Cahiers d'Études Germaniques*, 2010/2, numéro 59, p. 67-78.

Le livre pour la jeunesse : répartir la conservation des fonds jeunesse : enjeux et perspectives : actes du colloque national du 7 octobre 2004 à la Bibliothèque nationale de France, organisé par la Bibliothèque nationale de France, la Bibliothèque l'Heure Joyeuse, la FFCB, la Joie par les livres. BnF, La Joie par les livres, Paris bibliothèques, 2005.

Meunier, Christophe, *Caroline : héroïne des trente glorieuses*. Presses Universitaires François Rabelais, 2024 (Iconotextes).

Meyer, Virginie, « Contexte et enjeux de la conservation des collections jeunesse », *Patrimoine, y es-tu ? Entends-tu ? Que fais-tu ? : la patrimonialisation du livre jeunesse*, journée d'étude du 6 octobre 2022 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rrxv5PPrpsw>

Nel, Philip, *Was the Cat in the Hat Black? The Hidden Racism of Children's Literature, and the Need for Diverse Books*. Oxford University Press, 2017.

Nières-Chevrel, Isabelle, *Introduction à la littérature de jeunesse*. Didier Jeunesse, 2009 (Passeurs d'histoires).

Nières-Chevrel, Isabelle, Perrot, Jean (dir.), *Dictionnaire du livre de jeunesse : la littérature d'enfance et de jeunesse en France*. Éditions du Cercle de la librairie, 2013.

Nodelman, Perry, « Deciding which Children's Books Are the Most », *IBBYLink Autumn 2018* [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <https://www.ibby.org.uk/decidingwhichchildrensbooksarethemost/>

Nodelman, Perry, *Touchstones : Reflections on the Best in Children's Literature*, Volume 1. Scarecrow Press, 1995.

Peretti, Isabelle de, Ferrier, Béatrice (dir.), *Enseigner les classiques aujourd'hui : approches critiques et didactiques*. Peter Lang, 2012 (ThéoCrit').

Perrin, Dominique (dir.), « Critiquer l'album sériel. Vers un décroisement des corpus légitimes et populaires dans les études sur l'album », *Strenae*, 2023, n° 22 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <https://doi.org/10.4000/strenae.9614>

Planche, Marine, « Le patrimoine : une nouvelle jeunesse ? », in Françoise Legendre (dir.), *Bibliothèques, enfance et jeunesse*. Éditions du Cercle de la librairie, 2015, p. 184-190 (Bibliothèques).

Prévost, Christine, « Le patrimoine en séries d'animation », in Anne Besson (dir.), « Série et cultures de jeunesse », *Cahiers Robinson*, 2016, n°39, p. 132.

Quet, François, « L'album pour enfants entre culture contemporaine et légitimation savante : une mémoire scolaire et didactique », in Dominique Perrin, Cécile Boulaire (dir.), *Fabula-LhT*, 2024, n° 32, « La littérature avant la lettre : l'album pour enfants devant la théorie littéraire » [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <https://doi.org/10.58282/lht.4381>

Soriano, Marc, « Qu'est-ce qu'un classique pour la jeunesse ? », *Bulletin des bibliothèques de France*, n° 2, p. 57-70 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <https://bbf.enssib.fr/consulter/bbf-1973-02-0057-002>

Turin, Joëlle, « Quand vivent longtemps les êtres de papier », *La Revue des livres pour enfants*, 2000, n°193-194 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : https://cnlj.bnf.fr/sites/default/files/revues_document_joint/PUBLICATION_4340.pdf

Van der Linden, Sophie, *Album(s)*. Éd. de Facto, Actes Sud, 2013.

Viala, Alain, « Qu'est-ce qu'un classique ? », *Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France*, 1992, n° 1, <http://bbf.enssib.fr/consulter/bbf-1992-01-0006-001>

Viole, Benoît, « De la pérennité des héros pour la jeunesse », 2008, n°241 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : https://cnlj.bnf.fr/sites/default/files/revues_document_joint/PUBLICATION_7459.pdf

Von Stockar, Denise, « Les secrets du héros bien-aimé », *La Revue des livres pour enfants*, 2008, n°241 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : https://cnlj.bnf.fr/sites/default/files/revues_document_joint/PUBLICATION_7457.pdf

Weis, Hélène (dir.), « Objets culturels de l'enfance à l'école primaire. Quels liens possibles entre la recherche en littérature de jeunesse, la définition des corpus et les pratiques enseignantes ? », *Strenae*, 2021, n° 19 [en ligne]. Disponible sur : <https://doi.org/10.4000/strenae.8697>