

International Symposium 22- 23 April 2021

## **Sugar and Spice and the Not So Nice: Comics Picturing Girlhood**

Comics have long relied on reinforcing reader identity formation whether through interest, age group or hobbies. Constructed and largely mythical notions of gendered readership consequently became key aspects of many of these comics. As gendered products, comics have constructed feminine role models and identities to which girls have replied with both rebellion and conformity. The aim of this symposium is to inspire and promote discourse around comparative constructions of girlhood. This exploration will consider relationships between and influences on European girls' comics in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. We invite paper proposals under four key areas which can include, but are by no means limited to, the following:

- **Genre and Categorisation.** What (un)acceptable genres for what girls? We seek further understanding of the historical, social and economic preferences for and divisions between gendering of different genres through discussion of more familiar genres such as romance, as well as girls' relationships with less frequently studied genres such as gothic or fantasy/adventure.
- **Representations of Girlhood.** What does the representation and embodiment of girlhood look like in comics? How do comics depict girls' physicality? We seek to examine different kinds of protagonists, alternative identities of girlhood and the impact of female role models and feminine role play. We are especially interested in papers that deal with marginalised identity categories, making explicit room for work on disabled, black, and trans girls, both diegetic (the characters in the texts) and real (the writers, illustrators, editors, researchers).
- **Emotional Impact and Response.** How do emotionally loaded representations of girls such as the coquettish, nymphetic, cute or grotesque impact readers? We invite a reconsideration of both conventional and radical aesthetic notions associated with girlishness which are perpetuated by comics. We additionally strive to illuminate models of good practice in girlhood comics studies by engaging with the problematic ethical and emotional questions of how personal identity, readership and scholarship impact upon one another, and what implications this has.
- **Practices and Interactivity.** How do girls use their comics? Papers could contemplate the differing ways in which children are encouraged to act as more than just readers. Does gender play a role in interactions, whether through scrapbooks or paper doll construction, comics collecting, fandom or letters to the editor?

Please submit a proposal of approximately 400 words for a 20-minute paper, together with a biographical note (100-200 words), to [comics@ugent.be](mailto:comics@ugent.be) by **15 September 2020**. You will be notified of acceptance by or before **15 October 2020**. The conference language is English. For any questions, please contact us on the above email address.

The **keynote lectures** will be delivered by Dr. Mel Gibson (Department of Social Work, Education and Community Wellbeing, Northumbria University Newcastle) and Dr. Julia Round (Faculty of Media and Communication, Bournemouth University). Drs. Monalesia Earle and Joe Sutliff Sanders will lead a

**reflective analysis** of three 'girl comics.' The conference will furthermore involve a **book presentation** by comic artists Valentine Gallardo and Mathilde Van Gheluwe.

This symposium is organised by Eva Van de Wiele and Dona Pursall, doctoral researchers of *COMICS: An Intercultural History of Children in Comics from 1865 to Today*. The conference will be based at Ghent University, Belgium, if health conditions allow. Arrangements for an online conference will be made. We therefore request participants to also commit to a digital presentation.

### Funding

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