

Bending the Rules: Social Radicalism, Wanderlust, and Utopianism in Children's and YA Literature

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 Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb

 radicalchildrensliterature@proton.me

Introduction

In 2024, the first socialist utopia in Serbian and broader Yugoslav literature, the short novel *Šetnja kroz budućnost / A Walk through the Future* (1924) by social democrat and union organizer Dragutin Vladislavljević, was reprinted and published as a monographic edition. On this occasion, the novel was also translated into English. Originally, the novel was published in installments in children's magazine *Budućnost / The Future*, whose editor-in-chief was Dragutin Vladislavljević. This first monographic, bilingual edition by [Edicija Jugoslavija](#) (2024), entitled *The Unpredictable Past of the Future: The Political Potential of Utopia*, includes two introductory texts: Ivana Momčilović's "Free Territories of Fiction: The Political Potential of Utopia" and Biljana Andonovska's "Introduction to *A Walk through the Future*." Together, these texts highlight utopian and radical traditions in world literature that have long been marginalized not only in mainstream discourse but also within socialist and left-wing movements.

By revisiting one of the earliest socialist utopias for young readers in South Slavic cultures, we aim to reconsider the crisis of emancipatory imagination that characterizes our present moment. We invite contributions that investigate socially subversive, radical, utopian, and revolutionary ideas, settings, and discursive or narrative strategies in children's literature across all genres, languages, formats, and historical periods.

We are especially interested in contributions that question how literary works challenge, complicate, or reconfigure the conceptual frameworks of historiography and cultural studies. Submissions may explore how particular works disrupt, destabilize or blur entrenched binaries such as:

- high-brow vs. low-brow culture
- adult vs. juvenile readership
- normative vs. outcast identities
- center vs. periphery
- canon vs. counter-canon

We welcome analyses that illuminate how children's literature can function as a site of social dissent, ideological experimentation, or disruptive world-making.

Potential Topics

We invite researchers to reflect on representations of wanderlust, social emancipation, the discovery of new worlds, and utopian or utopia-like communities in children's and young adult literature. Potential topics include, but are not limited to:

- Local and global networks of emancipatory movements in education and upbringing
- The semiotics of wandering, wanderlust, and exclusive dynamics or communities of children
- The circulation of utopian images, texts, and forms aimed at children and young adults
- Dystopian narratives and awareness-raising in children's and YA literature
- Liminal spaces in children's literature; the meaning of liminality in children's communities
- Ecological imagery and (proto)environmentalist thought in children's and YA culture
- Spaces of social and political subjectivation in children's literature
- Children, nature, and (post)industrial landscapes

Submission Guidelines

We welcome proposals from researchers at all career stages. Please send abstracts of up to 300 words for individual 15-minute presentations, along with a short biographical note, to  radicalchildrensliterature@proton.me.

The deadline for submissions is **20 February 2026**.

For any further information, please contact Dr. Jelena Lalatovic ( jlalatovi@m.ffzg.hr), postdoctoral researcher at the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Zagreb.

Keynotes

Julia Mickenberg, College of Liberal Arts, the University of Texas in Austin

Philip Nel, Kansas State University

Online Participation

Online participation can be facilitated, though we strongly encourage attending the event in person.
