

Invisible Wounds: Reframing Adoption Narratives in Children's Literature

MLA 2027 Convention: January 7-10, 2027, in Los Angeles, California

From orphan narratives of the Victorian period to contemporary stories of those in the foster care system, the presence of adoption in children's and young adult literature has been a consistent theme throughout the genre. While the study of adoption has been largely covered through a sociological lens, less scholarly attention has been paid to this theme within children's literature studies. Scholars such as Sarah Park Dahlen have recently published on adoption narratives, but those voices are few within the field. While there can be negative ethical reasons attached to adoption, the pursuit of adoption studies allows scholars to examine stories from racial and gender minorities and diversify the experiences that exist within children's and young adult literature studies.

At the core of this panel is the idea that the act of being adopted, even into a loving family, is a form of trauma. Some adoption narratives tend to prioritize only the positive aspects of adoption, such as providing joy to the parents or taking children out of harmful situations. While both of these realities can be true, it is important to consider the lifelong impact that adoption has on a child. Adopted children often struggle with their sense of identity, feeling like they belong in their family, and guilt if they choose to seek out their birth parents. By taking a more realistic look at the implications of adoption, we can begin to view adoption narratives more sensitively and provide "mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors" for those to whom adoption and foster care trauma is a reality.

This panel seeks to interrogate the way that adoption has been represented throughout the history of children's and young adult literature from classic stories like *Anne of Green Gables* (1908), to more recent novels like Robin Benway's *Far From the Tree* (2017), to everything in between. This panel also seeks stories geared toward various ages, from picture books to young adult novels, to diversify the experiences represented. Panelists may approach their chosen texts through a variety of frameworks, including but not limited to, trauma theory, narrative theory, postcolonial studies, or historical approaches. Our goal through this discussion is to increase the conversation surrounding adoption narratives and to encourage other scholars to consider this theoretical approach as a vital part of the field.

Possible Topics:

Historical narratives of adoption

Shifting representations of adoption in the 21st century

Portrayal of minorities and POC in transnational and transracial narratives

Queer families and adoption

The ethics of adoption

Religious views on adoption

Foster care and kinship care narratives

Found family vs. adoption

Adoption in a post-Roe world

Please submit a 250-300 word abstract to Rebekah Lawler at rlawler@lipscomb.edu by **Sunday, March 1st**. Panelists will be notified of acceptance by March 15th and must be members of MLA in order to present.