

Introduction

Birgitta Lilliehöök's cartoon strip "Spara och Slösa" (Save and Squander, 1926–1963) was a popular feature in the Swedish bank Sparbanken's children's magazine *Lyckoslanten*. "Spara and Slösa" offers children very explicit instructions on how to handle money: the conscientious Spara saves hers for a rainy day, while Slösa spends hers on sweets, ruining both her skirt and teeth in the process. This cartoon is an illustrative example of the economic socialization that forms part of children's literature. Through pictures and rhyming verses, ideas of how money should be earned, handled, and spent are conveyed. Since economics dictates the conditions of all lives, regardless of world view or assets, the topic of money is frequently addressed in children's and young adult literature. The spending and handling of money are recurring motifs, from 18th-century children's magazines, via girls' fiction of the Swedish *folkhem* era, to contemporary picturebooks and TV shows for children.

For this theme, I have therefore invited scholars to engage with the topic in depth. The seven articles presented within the theme discuss how texts for children reflect, reproduce, and challenge economic and social structures. What role do financial issues play in children's and young adult literature? How is children's and adolescents' relationship to money portrayed? For instance, is earning money – and what to spend it on – a central question in these stories?

First, Janicke S. Kaasa examines the representation of children's use of pocket money in the Danish children's magazine *Ungdommens Ven* (The friend of youth, 1770). She argues that the magazine's portrayal of child consumers can be linked to children's increasingly important position in both text and consumer cultures during the second half of the 18th century. In particular, Kaasa focuses on texts where child readers use their money to buy the actual magazine. This is depicted as an exemplary act, and is often contrasted to the purchase of things such as sweets. To conclude, Kaasa's reading shows how 18th-century children, through magazines such as *Ungdommens Ven*, are socialized into the economic system of the time.

During the following century a modern consumer culture emerges, where everything from products and advertisements to shops are shaped with children as a specific target group in mind. In the sec-

ond article within the theme, Elina Druker analyzes how this change is reflected in portrayals of children's encounters with the world of commodities in literature for young readers. Her material consists of Swedish and Danish picturebooks published between 1933 and 1965, which include different forms of gluttony motifs in a department store setting. Druker concludes that new technology and media are affirmed with the help of absurdist and nonsense-like elements. In modernist works by writers such as Lennart Hellsing, the classic Schlaraffenland motif is filled with new content, which opens up for critical and rebellious ideas.

Consumption is also a central theme in the third article. Here, Anna Cavallin demonstrates the presence of discursive practices related to normative femininity in Ingegerd Granlund's handbook for teenage girls, *Tolv brev till Tonina* (Twelve letters to Tonina, 1956), and the pseudonym Claque's girls' fiction series about Pella (1958–1965). Cavallin focuses on teenage femininity and the portrayal of clothes, bodies, and household economics. It is clear that the feminine norm emerging in Granlund's handbook simultaneously is embodied and exceeded in Claque's characters. Like the department store motif of the picturebooks mentioned above, post-war girls' fiction includes both normative and subversive depictions of consumption.

In the following article, focus shifts from the private consumption of children and adolescents to their relationship to different types of economic systems. In her analysis of representations of monetary economies and gift economies, Sarah Hardstaff examines two American young adult novel series: Mildred Taylor's novels about the African American Logan family (1975–2020), and Cynthia Voigt's novels about the Tillerman siblings (1981–1989). Hardstaff calls attention to several similarities and differences between the two popular series. While Taylor depicts money as a social means that the protagonists use to collaborate or punish each other, Voigt instead presents money as a central part of the individual's quest for self-actualization. In both series, the border between monetary and gift economies is exceeded, in line with the conveying of hope for a more just world.

The fifth article returns to the context of the Swedish folkhem, from which Druker's and Cavallin's primary sources also stem. Andrea Berardini discusses Ulf Stark's *Min vän Percys magiska gymnastikskor* (*My Friend Percy's Magical Gym Shoes*, 1991) and *Min vän shejken i Stureby* (*My Friend Percy and the Sheik*, 1995) in relation to the image of the social and economic ideology of the folkhem (the people's home). Using the complex relationship between the protagonists Ulf and Percy as his starting point, Berardini reveals a tension between uto-

pian and disillusioned views of the folkhem enterprise, which envisioned “the nation as a good home for all Swedes, with the state cast in the role of the wise family head” (Berardini 3). Moreover, material objects play a fundamental role in Stark’s stories, and these are often used to visualize a class difference otherwise neglected by society. A noteworthy conclusion is that Ulf, thanks to Percy, learns how the economic system works, how value is created, and how it changes. In this respect, these stories have great similarities with the message revealed by Hardstaff in Taylor’s and Voigt’s young adult novels.

A similar form of economic socialization can be seen in Peter Kostenniemi’s examination of two of Swedish Television’s Christmas calendars, *Kaspar i Nudådalen* (Kaspar in Nudå Valley, 2001) and *Tjuvarnas jul* (The thieves’ Christmas, 2011). These, too, include depictions that move both within and outside of a monetary market. Using a critical view of children’s culture and capitalism as his starting point, Kostenniemi analyzes how the calendars relate to the neoliberalist *homo economicus* and thereby depict entrepreneurship beyond a commercial context. The calendars have previously been criticized for their negative portrayals of entrepreneurs, but Kostenniemi argues that they are more nuanced than that. Applying a wider definition of the term, he points to various positive depictions of entrepreneurship.

The last article of the theme lingers in the post-millennium era, but focuses on the lack of money instead. I examine the representations of poverty that have characterized children’s culture of the 2010s. The material consists of nine contemporary Swedish picturebooks, which in different ways address child poverty, homelessness, and begging. These works use the picturebook’s potential as a medium to encourage readers to reflect on issues of power, economy, and the rights of children and adults. The article ties in with several of the questions addressed in other articles within the theme, and describes, for instance, the picturebook’s portrayal of consumption, financial problems, and moral dilemmas.

The fact that the topic of money is closely linked to moral questions becomes apparent in many articles within this theme. The stereotypes Spara and Slösa appear in different forms in both older and more recent children’s and young adult literature. It is worth noting that those who squander their resources not only ruin their finances but also their bodies. Aside from poverty, the result of Slösa’s actions is also ruined teeth and clothes. The connection between money, consumption, and respectability is discussed by several of the authors. For example, both Cavallin and I use Beverley Skeggs’

concept of respectability to make visible what is at stake in the negotiations of norms and ideals at play in children's literature. From the representation of children's magazine readers of the 1700s to the begging EU immigrants of the 2010s, values linked to respectability are repeatedly confirmed but also frequently challenged.

Another recurring topic within the theme, which also can be seen as related to moral issues, is the notion of the competent child. It is clear that through money, issues of responsibility, power-powerlessness, and competency-incompetency are brought to the fore. Kostenniemi points out that a question debated within contemporary consumer research is whether children should be seen as vulnerable and therefore kept outside of consumer society, or if they, instead, should be considered capable of handling it. Since children's literature has a long history of competent children, participating in consumer culture is often portrayed as advantageous. For instance, Kaasa shows how early-modern child consumers are depicted as responsible for their own finances and how these texts convey that there is a price to pay for being irresponsible. Hardstaff, on the other hand, sheds light on the discrepancy between the preconditions of children and adults. For example, in Voigt's young adult novels, skills developed by the protagonists within the frames of the informal economic system of childhood have little value in the formal adult world of insurances, savings, and loans. Moreover, connections between the competent child and the Swedish folkhem also emerges in several articles. Both Druker and Berardini point out that the competent child was an ideological key ingredient of the folkhem project.

In many of the portrayals of child consumers examined by the authors, there is an interesting tension between being good and respectable on the one hand, and pleasure, gluttony, and play on the other. Kaasa's article, for example, demonstrates the importance of teaching children to spend their pocket money wisely, and how new products such as the children's magazine *Ungdommens Ven* became something that virtuous children were expected to spend their money on. In Druker's material, a contrary picture emerges in the depictions of consumption as pleasurable and life-affirming. In many cases, the contemporary picturebooks I analyze mix duty and pleasure: the last of the salary can be divided between sweets and charity. What is more, Cavallin brings up a significant aspect of child consumption: its identity-building elements.

Together, these articles reflect both continuity and change in terms of how economics and financial issues are described for children and youth. It is my hope that this theme will inspire more research on

the multitude of connections between money and children's literature. Many questions remain to be discussed. Money conditions life as well as literature, and it is a hotly debated component of both everyday life and art. Today, Spara and Slösa are drawn by Lena Forsman who has changed the colour of their hair. The aim is still to teach children about personal finances and savings, but in all other respects the two characters are virtually unrecognizable. The ability to economize is no longer linked to the body, and the piggy bank and the sweets have been replaced with recyclable cans and debit cards.

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