



Call for Papers: The 21st Child and the Book Conference

THE POLITICS AND POETICS OF FRIENDSHIP: THE ETHICS OF STORYTELLING AND COMPANIONSHIP

**University of Szeged, Hungary
May 21-23, 2027**

The 2027 edition of *The Child and the Book* conference invites participants to return to enduring human values in times of crisis while critically reexamining concepts too often taken for granted. Friendship and storytelling are fundamental to human experience, yet both raise complex ethical, philosophical and political questions that deserve renewed scholarly attention.

The conference aims to approach friendship not only as a recurring theme in children's and young adult literature, media, and culture, but also as an ethical model through which storytelling practices may be reconsidered. Storytelling is fundamentally relational, emerging through acts of listening, trust, curiosity, reciprocity, and imaginative co-presence that connect tellers and listeners, adults and children, readers and characters, humans and non-humans. It may constitute a form of knowing *with* rather than knowing *about* another, challenging conventional hierarchies between knower and known and generating situated, embodied, relational forms of knowledge. Stories may create possibilities for companionship and recognition, allowing us to encounter forms of otherness that might otherwise remain inaccessible, and gain a better understanding of ourselves through the other. Yet neither friendship nor storytelling should be idealized as inherently benevolent or harmonious practices. Both may involve asymmetries of power, emotional dependency, exclusion, betrayal, miscomprehension, or the difficult negotiation of differences. Friendship can function simultaneously as intimacy and burden, care and control, solidarity and vulnerability: we can be making friends and breaking friends. Marked by ambiguities, friendship is a form of love (Kracauer), yet we may find it difficult to verbalise what exactly we find loveable in our friends; it is a learnt empathic engagement (García-González) grounded in mutual goodwill (*philia*), but its affective partiality conflicts the universalism of moral principles; it deepens self-knowledge, but by continually shaping one another, we also come to realize the fluidity, fragmentation, and plurality of the subject-in-process. Similarly, storytelling may create connection but may also expose, manipulate, alienate, discipline, or silence. The ethics of storytelling therefore concerns not only what stories communicate, but how narrative

practices establish, sustain, challenge, or fracture relations between subjects. Children's literature particularly foregrounds these tensions, as stories become sites where companionship, authority, agency, conflict, and responsibility are negotiated, where moral dilemmas are enacted, and where "the ethical encounter with the Other" may take place in Levinas's sense. Such encounters may give rise to a "transformative ethics of joy" (Deleuze, Braidotti), an "ethics of wonder" (LaCaze), an "unconditional hospitality" and a "politics of radical kindness" (Derrida) but they may also reveal a crisis of care, a "politics of uncertainty" (Scoones and Stirling), or what Nussbaum calls "the fragility of goodness."

We therefore invite contributions that explore friendship as a narrative motif, an epistemic medium, a structural principle, and a complex ethical lens through which storytelling practices can be critically examined. We look forward to conversations that rethink how children's literature and culture imagine friendship—what stories friendship generates, and how storytelling itself might be understood as an act of friendship, "a way of life, capable of yielding a culture and an ethics." (Foucault)

We invite submissions either in the form of **individual papers**, or **panels** that explore literary works across cultures, historical periods, and genres, examining the relationship between friendship and storytelling: **friendship as storytelling, and storytelling as friendship**. In line with the long-standing tradition of *The Child and the Book*, the conference aims to provide a forum for critical dialogue across disciplines, traditions, and methodologies. We particularly welcome theoretically grounded approaches that investigate the ethical, political, poetical, pedagogical, psychological, and affective dimensions of our interconnected key concepts. From multidisciplinary perspectives we seek to explore how friendship and storytelling can contribute to rethinking literary and cultural relations, as well as our understanding of childhood. The conference will be held **in person**, and can accommodate max. 100 papers.

Possible topics include, but are not limited to:

- **Theories and philosophies of friendship and storytelling:** ethical, political, and aesthetic approaches to representations of friendship and companionship in children's/YA literature and culture through affect theory, language philosophy, feminist and queer theory, decolonial and disability studies, critical posthumanism, new materialism, ecocriticism, cognitive narratology, and other emerging fields of interdisciplinary humanities research
- **Friendship across differences:** friendship as an ethical encounter with the other, negotiating differences of race, class, gender, sexuality, disability, age, species, culture
- **Friendship, belonging, community:** solidarity and exclusion, collectivity and solitude, being-with and becoming-with, children's friendship groups, outsiders, gangs, imagined communities, and forms of belonging
- **Power, care, vulnerability in intergenerational friendship and storytelling:** intergenerational and child–adult friendships; asymmetries of power and authority; collaboration, dependence, control, care, and agency in storytelling relationships
- **More-than-human companionship:** friendship with animals, plants, objects, and other-than-human beings; "making oddkin" (Haraway); companionship across species and more-than-human agencies, moving beyond anthropocentric storytelling
- **Imaginary and material companions:** imaginary friends, toys, dolls, monsters, machines, avatars; cognitive poetics, material culture, posthuman philosophies, and questions of agency and ontology

- **Ambivalent, impossible, broken friendships:** unequal, toxic, conflicted, transgressive, false and forced friendships; betrayal, rivalry, reconciliation, frenemy relationships, the limits of companionship
- **The affective transformative dimensions of friendship:** joy, intimacy, empathy, attachment, loneliness, grief, fear, anger, and other affects; friendship as a source of transformation, resilience and empowerment
- **Friendship, trauma, testimony:** companionship in crisis situations of war, migration, displacement, ecological crisis, illness, loss, and social upheaval; friendship as care, solidarity, resistance, and survival, as a mode of remembering, narrating trauma and affective witnessing
- **The spatial and temporal dimensions of friendship:** place, mobility, borders, journeys, thresholds, memory, nostalgia, narrative time, changing forms of companionship across life stages
- **Friendship as an ethical practice of reading and interpretation:** friendship with books and authors; the ethics of reading (Booth); affective attachment to fictional characters (Nikolajeva), reading communities and interpretive companionship
- **The ethics of voice, representation, and storytelling:** voice and silence, secrecy and disclosure, responsibilities of authors, illustrators, translators, editors, publishers, and adaptation practitioners telling stories about, for, and by children
- **Play, humour, nonsense, and transgression:** friendship as a playground, the ethics of laughter, touching strangeness, political correctness and freedom of expression
- **Digital friendship and participatory storytelling:** online friendship, social media, fan fiction, gaming, networked storytelling, participatory cultures, and new forms of mediated companionship
- **Historical, cross-cultural, and comparative perspectives:** changing conceptions of friendship and companionship; historical and cross-cultural approaches to the ethics, politics, and poetics of storytelling

LIST OF RECOMMENDED READINGS

- Ahmed, Sara. *The Affective Politics of Emotion*. Edinburgh UP, 2004.
- Alberoni, Francesco. *Friendship*, trans. Harry Blatterer and Sveva Magaraggia. Brill, 2016.
- AMITY. *The Journal of Friendship Studies*. <https://amityjournal.leeds.ac.uk/>
- Aristotle. *Nicomachean Ethics*. Books VIII-IX.
- Badhwar, Neera Kapur ed. *Friendship. The Philosophical Reader*. Cornell UP, 1993.
- Beauvais, Clementine. *The Mighty Child: Time and Power in Children's Literature*. John Benjamins, 2015.
- Booth, Wayne C. *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*. U of California Press, 1988.
- Braidotti, Rosi. "Ethics of Joy." *The Posthuman Glossary*, eds. Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova, Bloomsbury, 2018, 221-224.
- Caine, Barbara ed. *Friendship. A History*. Equinox, 2009.
- Derrida, Jacques. *Of Hospitality*. Stanford UP, 2000.
- Derrida, Jacques. *The Politics of Friendship*. Trans. George Collins. Verso, 2005.
- Deszcz-Tryhubczak, Justyna and Macarena García-González. "Ethics, Epistemologies, and Relational Ontologies in Researching Children's Cultures." *Children's Cultures after Childhood*, John Benjamins, 2023, 1-17.
- Foucault, Michel. "Friendship as a Way of Life." *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth* (The Essential Works of Foucault Vol 1), ed. Paul Rabinow, The New Press, 1997. 135-140.
- García-González, Macarena. *The Borders of Empathy in Children's Fiction*. Routledge, 2025.
- Haraway, Donna J. *Staying with the Trouble: Making Kin in the Chthulucene*. Duke UP, 2016.

- Joosen, Vanessa. *Adulthood in Children's Literature*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2018.
- Kracauer, Siegfried. *Über die Freundschaft. Essays*. Suhrkamp, 1971.
- Kowal, Ewa and Robert Kusek eds. *The Politics and Poetics of Friendship*. Jagiellonian UP, 2018.
- LaCaze, Marguerite. *Wonder and Generosity: Their Role in Ethics and Politics*. SUNY, 2013.
- Levinas, Emmanuel and Philippe Nemo. *Ethics and Infinity: Conversations with Philippe Nemo*. trans. R. A. Cohen. Duquesne UP, 1985.
- Michaelis-König, Andree and Philipp Lenhard eds. "Doing Friendship, Thinking Friendship." Special Issue of AMITY: The Journal of Friendship Studies 8.1 (2024)
- Mills, Claudia ed. *Ethics and Children's Literature*. Routledge, 2014.
- Moruzi, Kristine, Michelle Smith, Elizabeth Bullen eds. *Affect, Emotion, and Children's Literature: Representation and Socialisation in Texts for Children and Young Adults*. Routledge, 2019.
- Nehamas, Alexander. *On Friendship*. Basic Books, 2016.
- Nel, Philip. *Was the Cat in the Hat Black? The Hidden Racism of Children's Literature, and the Need for Diverse Books*. Oxford UP, 2017.
- Nussbaum, Martha. *Love's Knowledge: Essays on Philosophy and Literature*. Oxford UP, 1990.
- Phelan, James. *Living to Tell About It: A Rhetoric and Ethics of Character Narration*. Cornell UP, 2005.
- Reynold, Kimberley. "Ethical Debates in Children's Literature." *Children's Literature: A Very Short Introduction*, Oxford UP, 2011.
- Risseuw, Carla and Marlen van Raalte eds. *Conceptualising Friendship in Time and Place*. Brill, 2017.
- Sainsbury, Lisa. *Ethics in British Children's Literature: Unexamined Life*. Bloomsbury, 2013.
- Smith, Graham, Heather Devere, and John von Heyking eds. *Friendship Studies. Politics and Practices*. Columbia UP, 2023.

SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Please submit your abstract via the online application form at the following link:

<https://forms.gle/v48sCQ6ado812X7GA>

Individual paper proposals should include the following information:

- Presenter's name, affiliation, e-mail address
- Brief biography (max. 100 words)
- Paper title
- Abstract (max. 300 words)
- 5 relevant keywords
- 5 academic references

Panel proposals should comprise 3 papers that will address the main theme of the conference from a similar perspective. The panel organiser should invite participants, preferably from different countries, and evaluate each paper in the panel. However, the panel as a whole and its constituent papers will be blindly reviewed by external evaluators. Panel members should submit their paper proposals individually and include the name of their panel chair and the title of their panel in addition to the title of their paper in the online application form.

All proposals will be accepted for the conference based on their relevance for the general conference theme, originality, and the overall quality of the proposal.

KEY INFORMATION

Conference Chair and Local Host

Anna Kérchy (University of Szeged)

Organising Committee

Members of the Research Centre for Children's and Young Adult Literature and Culture at the University of Szeged: Anna Kérchy, Ágnes Hansági, Zsófia Szilágyi, Larisa Kocic-Zambo, Eszter Kovács, Nikoletta Szekeres, Emma Bálint, Elahe Mousavian, Tamara Frankó

Confirmed Keynote Speakers

Judit Berg, children's book writer, Deputy Secretary of State for Literature and Public Culture, former HUBBY president

Macarena García-González, Ramón y Cajal senior research fellow, Department of Communication at Pompeu Fabra University, Spain

Vanessa Joosen, full professor of children's literature, University of Antwerp, Belgium

Philip Nel, distinguished professor of children's literature, Kansas State University, USA

Scientific Committee

María Alcantud-Díaz (University of Valencia, Spain)

Francesca Arnavas (University of Tartu, Estonia)

Cristina Bacchilega (University of Hawaii at Manoa)

Anna Bugajska (Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, Poland)

Marnie Campagnaro (University of Padova, Italy)

Justyna Deszcz-Tryhubczak (University of Wrocław, Poland)

Jade Dillon (Norwegian University of Science and Technology, Norway)

Virginie Douglas (University of Le Havre, France)

Janet Evans (Independent Researcher, UK)

Giuliana Fenech (University of Malta, Malta)

Sidia Fiorato (University of Verona, Italy)

Ágnes Hansági (University of Szeged, Hungary)

Martine Hennard DuTheil de La Rochere (University of Lausanne, Switzerland)

Vanessa Joosen (University of Antwerp, Belgium)

Svetlana Kalezić-Radonjić (University of Montenegro)

Tzina Kalogirou (National and Kapodistrian University of Athens)

Anna Kérchy (University of Szeged, Hungary)

Lorraine Kerslake Young (University of Alicante, Spain)

Cécile Kovacs Nagy (University of Limoges, France)

Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer (University of Tübingen, Germany)

Ildikó Limpár (Pázmány Péter Catholic University, Hungary)

Chrysogonus Siddha Malilang (Malmö University, Sweden)

Jörg Meibauer (University of Mainz, Germany)

Dorota Michulka (University of Wrocław, Poland)

Xavier Minguez Lopez (University of Valencia, Spain)

Seyede Elahe Mousavian (University of Szeged, Hungary)

Smiljana Narančić Kovač (University of Zagreb, Croatia)

Åse Marie Ommundsen (OsloMet, Norway)

Ana Margarida Ramos (University of Aveiro, Portugal)

Michelle Ryan (University of Angers, France)

Krzysztof Rybak (University of Warsaw, Poland)

Farriba Schulz (Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany)

Elena Sottilotta (University of Cambridge, UK)
Hadassah Stichnothe (Freie Universität Berlin, Germany)
Björn Sundmark (Malmö University, Sweden)
Mateusz Świetlicki (University of Wrocław, Poland)
Sara Van den Bossche (Tilburg University, Netherlands)
Vassiliki Vasiloudi (University of Crete, Greece)
Krystyna Zabawa (Jesuit University Ignatianum in Krakow, Poland)

Poster design

Boglárka Paulovkin, children's book illustrator, presidential board member of HUBBY

Important Dates

Abstract submission deadline via online registration form: **15 December 2026**

Notifications of acceptance: **15 January 2027**

Early bird registration deadline: **1 March 2027**

Registration deadline: **1 April 2027**

Conference dates: **21-23 May 2027**

Registration fees

Early bird registration fee: 130 euros

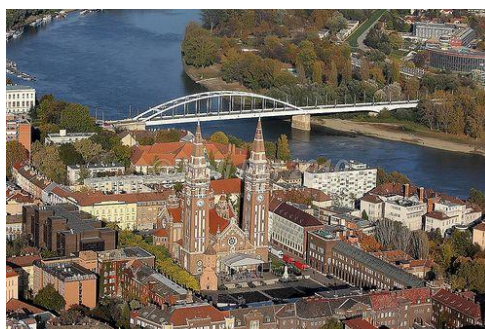
Late bird registration fee: 150 euros

PhD students: 100 euros

Registration fees will cover conference attendance, refreshments at tea and coffee breaks, light lunch, a tote bag with conference material, a welcome reception on Friday evening, a visit to a special library collection, and a puppet theatre performance of a contemporary opera adaptation of *Sleeping Beauty*.

Conference venue

University of Szeged, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Szeged 6722, Egyetem utca 2, Hungary



Conference proceedings

Following the conference, we plan to publish a selection of the papers in an edited volume.

For more information, please contact us at cbc2027@ieas-szeged.hu

The website is coming soon at <https://ieas-szeged.hu/childlit/cbc2027/>

We look forward to receiving your contributions and welcoming you in Szeged.

