



The Swedish Institute for Children's Books

The Book Tasting

25 Years of the Book Tasting 1993–2017

Summary 2017–2018

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What is the Book Tasting?

The Book Tasting is an annual event arranged by the Swedish Institute for Children's Books. The aim is to give an overview of the children's and young adult books published in Sweden (Swedish original works and translated works) the previous year by examining prominent themes and presenting statistics. The Book Tasting consists of lectures and a written report, and it also includes an exhibition displaying the children's and young adult books published in Sweden the previous year. The lectures are recorded in Swedish and are, along with the report, available for downloading on the institute's website.

This report contains two parts. The first part is an overview of 25 years of the Book Tasting, 1993–2017. The second part consists of selections from the reports 2017–2018.

25 Years of the Book Tasting

The Development of the Book Tasting

The Book Tasting provides a unique and comprehensive view of the publication of books for children and young adults in Sweden. The idea for the Book Tasting arose in the beginning of the 1990s and the first report was published in 1994, which covered the year 1993. Initially, the Book Tasting was considered to be further education for children's librarians, but by the second year, university and college teachers were also invited. By the middle of the first years of the new century, the lectures were opened to everyone.

Then, as now, the Book Tasting consisted of lectures, an exhibition and a report with analyses of and statistics about the previous year's publications. Now, there is also a tour and, by this stage, twenty-something cities in the country have been visited. The Book Tasting is used in different ways: for educational purposes and as a basis for research and further training.

Much has changed over the course of the years in terms of how work is carried out on the Book Tasting. Up until 1998, the statistics were based on numbers from Kungliga biblioteket (the National Library), but since 1999, Svenska barnboksinstitutet (Sbi, or the Swedish Institute for Children's Books) has calculated our own statistics. The numbers are based on the books that have been received by the institute by the last day of February each year. That means that the statistics are not absolute, since some books are received after the statistics have been calculated, but there are few such books. As publication numbers have increased, our statistics have likewise been developed further, with more variables.

Looking Back on the Book Tasting: Statistics and Analyses 1993–2017

So what have we seen through the years? The most noticeable thing is the increased number of publications, which went up by 136% since the beginning of 1993. The primary reason for this has been technological development, which led to new publishing companies and also more self-publishing (see Åsa Warnqvist, “En marknad i förändring”, “A Changing Market”, 2016), (see diagram 1).

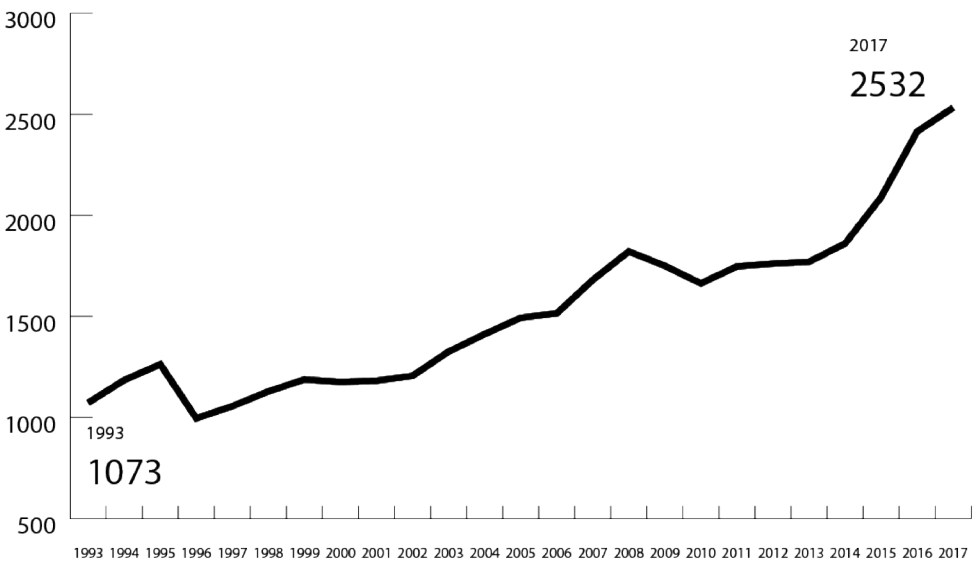


Diagram 1. Children’s and Young Adult Books published in Sweden 1993–2017. Source: *Bokprovning på Svenska barnboksinstitutet: En dokumentation. Årgång 2017, 2018, p. 32.*

The category that has increased the most since 2002 (when our current category divisions were put in place) is picturebooks. In general, picture-based and richly illustrated categories have increased the most.

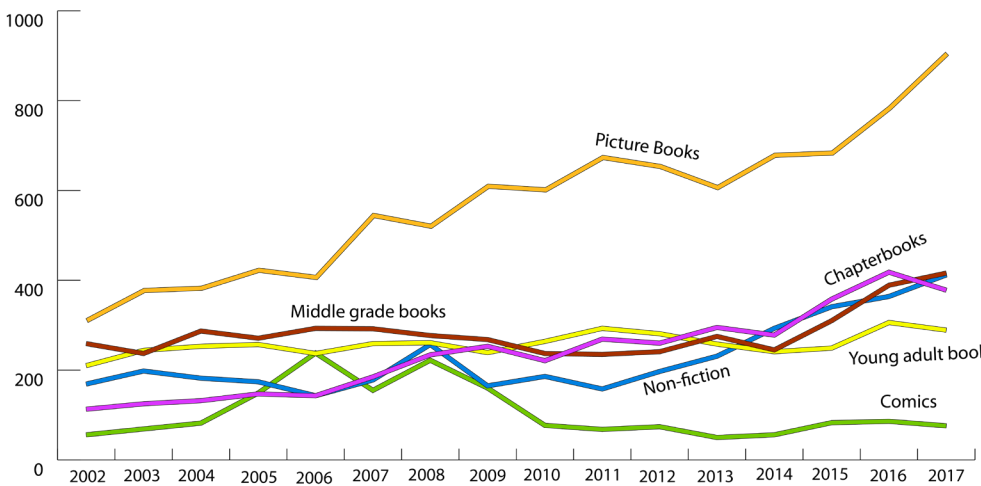


Diagram 2. Children’s and Young Adult Books in Categories, 2002–2017. Source: *Bokprovning på Svenska barnboksinstitutet: En dokumentation. Årgång 2017, 2018, p. 32.*

This probably is primarily due to the fact that colour printing has become cheaper during the 21st century and that technical innovations have allowed for more products that are something between book and toy. That pictures have generally become more important in this period of digitalisation can also have been a factor (see diagram 2).

In earlier years, translations dominated, whereas in the last seven years, there have been more Swedish original works. This can in part be explained by

releases in the categories of self-publication and easy-to-read works, which are primarily Swedish and which have increased significantly during the 2000s. In a market with evermore competition, it can also play a role that Swedish works sell well and that there seems to be more demand for them than for translations. A large majority of the 20 best-selling books for children and young adults in 2017 had Swedish authors and/or illustrators (see *Boken* 2018, pp. 13, 39) (see diagram 3).

Every year, the Book Tasting has shown a distinct English dominance as the primary source language for translations, while translations from other languages are few. With the exception of a period during the middle of the 2000s, when a number of Japanese comics were translated, English has been king.

1999 was the first time that the Book Tasting presented information about the authors’/illustrators’ gender and it was hardly surprising that women dominated. Since 2002, we have kept statistics about the protagonists’ gender and initially the gender divisions varied depending on the category. However, during the

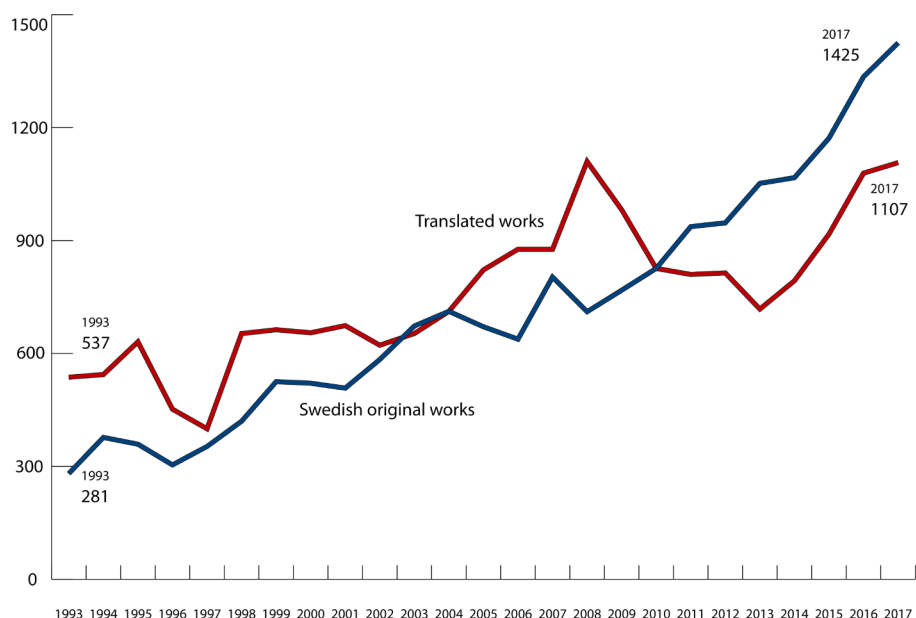


Diagram 3. Swedish original works in comparison with translated works. Children’s and Young Adult Books published in Sweden 1993–2017. Source: The Swedish Institute for Children’s Books.

2000s, the numbers of female authors/illustrators and of female protagonists have increased, above all in Swedish first editions. This increase is apparent in the categories of, among others, picturebooks, illustrated series and young adult books. In 2011, our report got the epithet “the year of girls and women” and we talked about a generational shift since females in that year were so clearly in the majority. This shift has later been confirmed by research (see Åsa Warnqvist, “Flickans århundrade?”, “The Girl’s Century?”, 2017).

Something we also track for our statistics but do not usually include in the appendix of statistics is

how the work is narrated. We have kept numbers about this since 2012 and that means that we track whether the story is told in third-person, first-person, or in another way. Across these years, the most common form has been third-person, especially in the picturebook category (83 percent in 2017). Young adult books are the only category where first-person and third-person are almost equal (see diagram 4).

In terms of content, it is of course difficult to summarise 25 years. In the middle of the 1990s, young adult books were so dark and violent that the Book Tasting report discussed “idyll-phobia”. The explosion of Swedish thrillers was not just for adult readers. In the middle of the 2000s, there was an increase in thrillers for children and young adults. It was also at this time that Japanese series took Sweden by storm and the manga boom lasted for a number of years, only to have in principle completely disappeared by 2011. There were, however, still influences from manga found in work by Swedish comics artists and illustrators. On the heels of J.K. Rowling’s *Harry Potter* books, there were also more and more fantasy books, and fantasy reached down through all the age categories. Suzanne Collins’ *Hunger Games* from 2008 also led to a dystopia boom, which reached its peak in 2015.

A major change during the 2000s was the large increase of easy-to-read books. The Book Tasting commented on these works from the start, but they had a real increase in 2012, when the number of such releases doubled. In the beginning, easy-to-read works were only published by publishing companies with a focus specifically on this, but for a number of years now, more

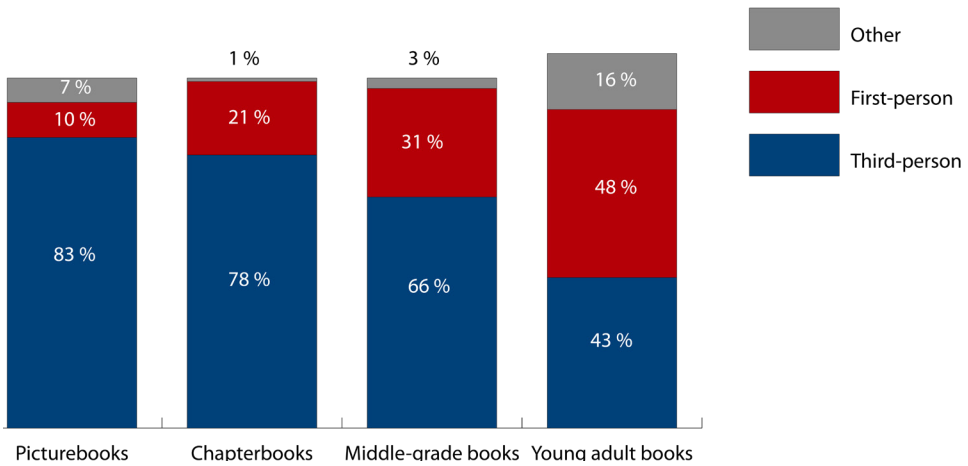


Diagram 4. Children’s and Young Adult Books published in Sweden 2017. Source: *Bokprovning på Svenska barnboksinstitutet: En dokumentation. Årgång 2017, 2018, p. 35.*

and more regular publishing companies have been putting out these sorts of books, which are now available in all age categories, from beginning readers to young adults.

Another reflection we have made over the twenty-five years that have passed is that we have seen many lone but competent children who help and support tired and stressed adults. Authors and illustrators have also testified to a certain adult anxiety about featuring challenging topics in children's books, and there have been attempts to rectify this in different ways. At times, the lack of diversity has been discussed, something that meant that more publishing companies with an aim of focusing on diversity and/or equality were started at the end of the 2000s. Over the last few years, more authors have explored different sorts of norms. Authors and illustrators constantly are searching for new ways to explore and challenge limits for literature. 2016 was the year of inclusion and in 2017, we saw that contemporary life was reflected in literature more than ever before.

The Swedish Children's Books Market

The Swedish children's books market is always changing, but for a long time has had three publishers as its source for the majority of the publications: Bonnier Carlsen, Rabén & Sjögren and B. Wahlströms. The largest, in terms of titles published, is Bonnier Carlsen. Among the others are many well-established smaller and medium publishers that have had many years of steady publication numbers, but the great changes that have occurred over the last decades have also meant that a number of new publishing companies have started. This has to do with the technological developments that have made it possible for more people to start publishing companies and release books. In 2017 there were 20 publishing companies that published more than 30 titles each in 2017. The first year that Sbi presented the list of publications divided up according to publishing companies was 2006, when 14 publishers released more than 30 titles each. Even publishers with a smaller number of releases have increased their numbers over time. In 2017, 61 publishing companies released more than 6 books each.

The Swedish children's books market on the whole is larger than what most readers and book consumers come in contact with. It consists not only of physical and digital publications from the usual children's book publishers but also publications from, for instance, associations, businesses and schools, which are distributed in ways other than through regular book shops, internet book shops or digital platforms.

Läsrörelsen (The Reading Movement) is a charity that distributes its books via McDonald's Book Happy Meals. IKEA also publishes children's books in a number of languages and sells them at its warehouses around the world. Some publishers, such as Stabenfeldt and Goboken, sell their books solely through their own book clubs. Some types of book products, such as mechanical books and puzzle books, are also sold in toy shops, in Pressbyråer (newspaper kiosks), and in department stores. Schools and school classes also sometimes publish anthologies of poems and short stories and distribute them themselves. Additionally, there are self-publishers with their own distribution and self-publication on the internet, along with companies that offer publishing services for self-publishers who prefer that. Some publishing companies, such as Idus and Lumenos, are hybrid publishers that both publish their own work and offer publishing services.

Book Tasting 2017

Summary

In 2017, 2,532 books for children and young adults were published in Sweden, an increase of 118 works (5 percent) compared to 2016. The number of books published has increased steadily over the last years, making 2017 a record year for the eighth year in a row. This year's increase mainly consists of picturebooks and other picture-based works, with picturebooks increasing by 15 percent. While we see an increase to both Swedish and translated works, the former continues to dominate. Among the books published in 2017, 56 percent were Swedish works.

While it is difficult to give an overview of over 2,000 works, it is striking how many of the books published in 2017 engage with contemporary issues and ideas. Although this is typical of children's and YA literature in general, the books of 2017 reflect this to a greater extent than usual. They depict and comment on issues such as sexuality and gender, cyberbullying and sexual assault, xenophobia and integration, activism and veganism. The explicit aim is often to challenge majority norms and promote new perspectives.

In this year's Book Tasting we also examine the forest in children's and YA books 2017. How is the forest depicted and what are the characters' attitudes towards it?

The Modern World

Many of the themes and motifs that Sbi has noticed in the publications from 2017 have a clear connection to current societal ideas and issues. This is so common here that an overarching theme for this year's releases for children and young adults can be said to be that they relate to and comment on the contemporary world in different ways. This is of course something that all literature does, and perhaps especially literature for younger readers, which is often quick to bring up current affairs. Despite this, 2017 is a year when the modern world is reflected to a particularly large extent.

So, in that case, what is distinctive about how children's and young adult books depict current times? Where are we now, according to literature for younger readers? Or perhaps the question ought to be phrased as: Where does literature for younger readers *want* us to be?

The modern world that is depicted in books for children and young adults is generally one affected by different types of tensions. Much of this has been previously noted in past Book Tastings. The tensions can arise from social divides or conflicting ideas about how we relate to one another in a time when people are fleeing from wars and are forced to settle in other countries. Or they can be about how we see one another, in terms of norms regarding appearance, gender, sexuality and different physical and psychological variations. In last year's Book Tasting, we noted that the overarching attitude that authors, illustrators and picturebook artists have when it comes to all this can be summed up with the word inclusion, and this is still the case. Authors and illustrators of literature for children and young people clearly encourage an inclusive perspective. This can be connected to the widely accepted view that one of the goals of literature for younger readers is to shape the next generation. What is happening here and now is relevant to discuss in literature, since it is the modern world that we want to socialise the next generation into.

These days, there are also more reflections on the contemporary world. In the recent published essay collection *Samtider: perspektiv på 2000-talets idéhistoria* (Contemporary Times: Perspectives on 21st Century History of Ideas, 2017, ed. by Anders Burman and Lena Lennerhed), 14 writers try to illuminate, understand, and reflect on current times and what makes them different. Interestingly, many of the contributions focus on the same questions that books for children and young adults do. They discuss, for example, sexuality, gender and norms; the refugee crisis and the state; our digital society; and overarching political and environmental questions.

Sexuality and Gender Expression

When it comes to norms regarding sexuality and gender expression, this is a subject that authors and

illustrators are still focused on to a significant extent. In previous Book Tastings, Sbi has noted that books for children and young adults depict sexualities (in the plural). Bisexual and homosexual children and young people and parents of the same gender are still common and are rarely commented upon, but instead are viewed as part of the norm.

In the latest Book Tastings, Sbi has also noted that it has become more common to depict transpeople and non-binary characters. In general, the focus of the works has been on the difficult path to acceptance for these characters, in order to reveal how vulnerable transpeople can be. In 2017, there were an additional ten titles where non-binary and trans people are the protagonists or secondary characters, but the approach has been primarily different.

Sara Bergmark Elfgren's young adult novel *Norra Latin* [North Latin] is an example. Tamar, one of the protagonists, has a friend called Sam who is non-binary. The narrator and people in Sam's circle use the pronouns "hen" and "henom" (Swedish gender-neutral pronouns -- the use of these pronouns is quite new in Swedish) to refer to Sam, and their gender identity is not problematised, which means that the novel is norm-inclusive. Another example of this is the young adult novel *Saker ingen ser* [Things No One Sees] by Anna Ahlund, where one of the protagonists is non-binary and is also referred to by the pronoun "hen". There are also examples of books about transpeople where the apparent aim is to discuss the children's gender expression. Eva Salqvist's middle-grade book *Julia finns inte* [Julia Doesn't Exist] explores gender dysphoria, where one's body does not match one's gender identity. Julia feels like a boy and is bullied because she looks like a boy. During the story, Julia becomes Julian.

Escape from War

In last year's Book Tasting, we discussed how the large wave of refugees gave rise to a variety of stories for all ages that depicted the experiences of fleeing from war. Publications about this had grown steadily for three years and in 2016 the increase was pronounced. The majority of the works were about fleeing from war and arrival in the new countries, and were often told from the refugee child's perspec-

tive. In 2017, we have seen a slight decrease to the number of books that thematise escape from war in some way, but a lot of titles are still being published. The focus is not as much on making the experiences of fleeing from the war zone understandable for Swedish children but rather we are now seeing new, deeper perspectives about life in the new country as well as works that increase readers' historical knowledge while connecting today's refugee crisis to similar events in history.

An example of the former is the middle-grade book *Om jag får stanna* [If I Can Stay] by Kajsa Gordan, about Ilona and her family, who have lived illegally in Sweden for 7 years. The story is about what it is like to live a life in secret and to not be seen, but also about what it is like to be born in Sweden and to take safety for granted. Among the books that increase historical knowledge is Christina Wahlén's *Tulpanpojken* [The Tulip Boy]. Wahlén makes a connection between the second World War and the unaccompanied minors of our own time, and she writes, inspired by her own family story, about eleven-year-old Wim, who comes from Holland to Sweden as a refugee child. Wim has been sent to Sweden from Holland because there is no food in his country during the last winter of the war – the so-called hunger winter – when 2000 children came from Holland to Sweden. In *Nosebleed Studio reser i den svenska historien* [Nosebleed Studio Journeys into Swedish History] by Joakim Waller, Natalia Batista and Magnolia Winroth, one part of the story is about immigrating to the US in the 19th century and another is about Finnish war children on their way to Sweden during the second World War.

Integration and Xenophobia

Also connected to the wave of refugees is integration and xenophobia. Many books in 2017 are about integration and integration problems, even if they are not always the main issues in the works. Related to racism is right-wing populism and scenarios in the future influenced by political right-wing rhetoric. Non-fiction works generally are lacking in terms of political perspective, but literary works show a desire to discuss political issues related to the refugee issue. In Per Nilsson's young adult work *Damaskus Sölvesborg*

[Damascus Sölvesborg], Nour, who has fled from the war in Syria, confides in Leo about her experiences and about the period before she had to escape. Between the chapters are quotes from the classroom, lunch room and staff room, along with interviews, all of which touch on xenophobia. In Cannie Möller's *Väntarna* [The Waiting], the reader experiences a small town's different perspectives about refugees when someone sets fire to a camp.

One of the conclusions in the anthology *Samtider* [Contemporary Times] is that today we tend to characterise ourselves in relation to the future and not to the past, and that we relate to the future as though there is a coming apocalypse. Maybe that is why we have seen such a flood of dystopias the last years. A dystopia that is clearly connected to the refugee issue is Pernilla Gesén's young adult book *Det här kalla landet* [This Cold Country]. It takes place in the fictional country, Nordland, which is heading towards economic collapse and where a xenophobic party is about to take power. The main characters are Noomi and Zahra. Noomi's family has been privileged but now must start being more careful with money. Her brother blames everything on the "moved people", refugees who have escaped from war. Zahra's family lives in a troubled suburb and are refugees. Noomi experiences a political awakening and gets involved in the xenophobic party the New Democrats.

Among the publications, racism is also depicted as being connected to other current societal issues, such as Sweden's systematic discrimination of the Sami people and police violence against black people in the USA. Charlotte Cederlund's *Gryningsstjärna* [Dawn Star] explores the relationship between the "big Swedes" and the Sami people. And in Angie Thomas's young adult book *The Hate U Give*, translated from English by Amanda Svensson, it is racism in the USA that is the focus. Starr witnesses her childhood friend being shot by a white police officer, who then is not sentenced for the murder.

Internet Bullying, Sexual Harassment and the #MeToo Movement

As Sbi has shown in previous Book Tastings, both the way of telling stories and the types of communication between the protagonists have changed along

with the rise of social media. Social media has also become a tool for abuse, both in reality as well as in literature. Bullying through social media is a regularly occurring theme in the publications. In Iben Akerlie's middle-grade book *Lars är LOL* [Lars is LOL], translated from Norwegian by Sabina Söderlund. Lars, who has Downs syndrome, is harassed on the internet on a secret blog. Harassment through coarse language in social media also appears in Emma Granholm's young adult work *På andra sidan reglerna* [On the Other Side of the Rules], and stalking in social media features in John Green's young adult work *Turtles All the Way Down*, translated from English by Carina Jansson.

There is also a lot of sexual harassment on the internet. In Fredrik Hardenborg's young adult work *I helvetet vet alla vem jag är* [In Hell, Everyone Knows Who I Am], Rosanna believes that she is chatting to a boy the same age as her and she sends naked pictures to him. He turns out to be an older man who threatens her by saying he will send the pictures to her school if she does not send even more naked pictures to him. Other young adult books that explore sexual harassment of girls on the internet include *#seriöstdeträckernu* [#seriouslythatsenoughnow] by Marie-Chantal Long and *Flickan på hotellet: ett fall för Alex Skarp* [The Girl at the Hotel: A Case for Alex Skarp] by Katarina Wennstam.

There are more books than usual that explore sexual harassment among the releases of 2017, and this topic became strikingly current this year with the #metoo movement. It is almost always girls who are abused. An example is Gro Dahle and Svein Nyhus's picturebook *Bläckfisken* [The Squid], translated from Norwegian by Nils-Aage Larsson, where Gullet suffers incest at the hands of her brother and finds the courage to tell an adult. But there is also a book that depicts the abuse of a boy. In the chapter book *Charlie säger nej!* [Charlie Says No!] by Alice Carlström, Frida Källhage, Jenny Ziegler and Emma Henningsson Nilsson, Charlie is inappropriately touched by an adult and learns to say no. The book is self-published and is just one of several examples of self-publications that aim to teach young children about consent.

The fact that the majority of people who experience sexual abuse are girls and woman has led to

public discussion about the male's role. In 2017, there was a non-fiction work published for young people about it, Hampus Nessvold's *Ta det som en man* [Take it Like a Man], which had the aim of questioning and changing the traditional man's role.

Health and Food

The world today as it is depicted in the examples above suggests that much is conflict-filled and stressful in children's and young adults' lives, and literature also offers ways of handling this. During 2017, a large number of books were published that are about how children and young people can improve their physical and emotional wellbeing. They teach yoga, meditation and mindfulness, point out the importance of getting exercise and using one's brain, and also question the norm of eating meat on a daily basis. In other words, the health trend has really reached works for children and young adults in 2017.

Josefine Sundström and Emma Göthner's *Fiffiga kroppen och finurliga knoppen* [Clever Body and Smart Head] was written on commission from Generation Pep (GEN-PEP), an organisation that spreads knowledge about young people's health, which was started by Sweden's Crown Princess Victoria and her husband Prince Daniel. It contains a fictional story about Saga and Samir and a non-fiction section about what happens in the body when we move.

A number of books encourage children to experience themselves and their bodies through meditation and mindfulness. Examples include *Fantasivandringar: magiska mysiga meditationer* [Imaginary Walks: Magical, Cosy Meditations] by Ingela Beausang and Matilda Wånggren and *Pluttens mindfulness* [Plutten's Mindfulness] by Maja Öberg and Anna Klingbjer. Anna-Karin Widehammar's *Yogasagor för barn* [Yoga Stories for Children] has stories with yoga movements and pictures that show how you are to do yoga, and in *Julias superkrafter – en bok om asperger/högfungerande autism* [Julia's Superpowers – A Book about Asperger's/High-Functioning Autism] by Malin Roca Ahlgren, the protagonist Julia uses yoga as a way of handling her Asperger's and autism. Ami Chen Mills-Naim's *Hitta din inre kraft: en bok till tonåringar* [Spark Inside: A Special Book for Youth] is a non-fiction work about what we should do to feel well, how we can

handle our thoughts, and how we can become happier. There are also several books that discuss how to exercise your brain, focus and get smart. *Bli hjärnsmart: lär dig snabbare och bättre!* [Be Brain Smart: Learn Faster and Better!] by Johan Rapp and Anders Worm and *Hjärnskap för tonårshjärnan* [Brain Tools for the Teenage Brain] by Malin Gutestam are two examples.

The meat norm is being questioned evermore in our society. And in 2017's publications for children and young adults, this norm has been questioned at its very foundation and to an extent we have not seen before. In very many books, children and adults are vegetarians or vegans. Soya sausages are grilled, veggie burgers are eaten, and oat or soya milk are drunk. In both text and pictures, children are eating vegetarian food without it being commented upon. Some of the many books where this occurs are Therese Henriksson's *Skrivtävlingen* [The Writing Competition], Sarah Vegna and Astrid Tolke's *Vibakar bullar* [We're Baking Buns] and Annika Widholm's *Trollspanarna* [The Troll Watchers]. There is also a non-fiction work for young children about veganism, *Min första veganbok* [My First Vegan Book] by Jannika Navjord, which introduces what vegans eat. In some books, the plot is about veganism. An example is Åsa Asptjärn's middle-grade work *Wursten och veganen* [Wursten and the Vegan]. Here Wursten meets Diana, who has just moved in and is a vegan, and gets her involved in a political action. In the middle of the night, they are going to break into a kiosk on the beach, where Wursten's brother Mårten has a summer job, and they are going to swap all the pork sausages for soya alternatives.

The Youth Barometer and Young Adult Literature

The summary above only gives a few examples of how books for children and young adults relate to and comment on the modern world. The ideas and opinions that the works offer are also to a great extent ones that are relevant for the young people of today.

Ungdomsbarometern (www.ungdomsbarometern.se), or the Youth Barometer, is an analytical company that gathers statistics about and writes analyses of subjects affected by what young people think, feel and do. Their studies, for example, show that young

people today are more politically engaged than they were at the beginning of the 21st century. Their confidence in political parties is low, but young people are very engaged in their individual choices. For instance, they make their own decisions about travel and food based on their own beliefs. Food choices are one of the most prominent identity markers for young people, along with living sustainably and healthily. The percentage of vegetarians and vegans among young people is higher than among adults.

Many girls, but even some boys, are very engaged in equality and feminism. 46 percent of girls identify themselves today as feminists, compared to 23 percent five years ago. Antiracism and environmental consciousness are other political viewpoints that girls identify themselves with. Boys are less interested in politics and identify themselves instead as gamers, sports fans, gadget nerds and computer nerds.

In light of the fact that girls dominate young adult books – 72 percent of the protagonists were female in 2017 – it is perhaps not surprising that internet bullying, sexual harassment, politics, xenophobia, activism and veganism are recurring themes in young adult works. The themes reflect their marked societal engagement.

Summary

As the overview above shows, literature for children and young people continues to challenge the majority norms. Those who create literature for children and young people encourage an inclusive perspective, an attitude that all ways of living, being and expressing oneself are okay. The writers and illustrators often have the aim of questioning or pointing out something in society that they want to change, and this is connected to current discussions in society here and now.

The Forest

Over the past years, Sbi has noticed a growing interest in depicting the forest in books for children and young people, and among the publications from 2017, there are around 200 titles where the forest plays a key role, both as a place and/or as a symbol. This is primarily true in Swedish originals. Despite urbanisation, the forest is still highly relevant for Swedish readers, who live in a country that is two-thirds forest.

The view of the forest has changed over the last few years, from the romantic idyll of Elsa Beskow to the more frightening (cf. Gunilla Halldén, *Barndomens skogar* [The Forests of Childhood], 2011). Today it has a number of different functions and meanings.

The forest is a particularly prominent environment in picturebooks, where it is often the obvious background against which an anthropomorphised animal can cope with everyday concerns. In Kitty Crowther's *Stories of the Night*, translated from French by Ulf Stark, the animals of the forest get help finding peace, and in *Vem ser Dim?* [Who Sees Dim?] by Maria Nilsson Thore, a little creature in the forest struggles to find a friend. In the humorous Pixi book, which is a miniature book, *Om du går vilse i skogen – tretton tips* [If You Get Lost in the Woods] by Minna and Mårten Melin and Johanna Kristiansson, the reader gets thirteen more or less doable tips for spending time in the woods.

In books for older readers, the forest often seems like a living being and rounded individual in and of itself, not seldom with revenge in mind. There are indications that people annexed the land of ancient creatures, for example, in the young adult work *Jorden vaknar* [The Earth Wakes] by Madeleine Bäck. In Tone Almhjell's middle-grade work *Törnspökets hemlighet* [The Secret of the Tower Ghost], the Rafsa witches threaten to take over the idyllic but sad Pildalen. The forest people in Holly Black's *The Darkest Part of the Forest*, translated from English by Ingela Jernberg, are dangerously tempting and want to take revenge for the intrusion of people into their territory. There is a similar theme in the young adult book *Tre feministiska sagor* [Three Feminist Stories] by Lilian Bäckman.

In some books, the forest seems threatening initially but then can be overcome: the path to self-knowledge is through the forest. Leo, a prepper, in Per Nilsson's young adult book *Damaskus Sölvesborg* [Damascus Sölvesborg] finds use for his catastrophe preparations when he and his classmate Nour end up spending an unplanned night in a lean-to after Nour sprains her foot. In the middle-grade work *De försvunna* [The Lost] by Cecilia Lidbeck, ten children, who do not know one another or the forest, are forced to manage on their own for several weeks after a bus accident. Danielle Younge-Ullman's young

adult work *Everything Beautiful is Not Ruined*, translated from English by Cecilia Falk, takes place at a camp where young people are expected to find out who they are and who they want to be. Here, as in *De försvunna* [The Lost], the protagonist has experienced something traumatic and they slowly, as they get to know the forest, find a sort of acceptance for both the forest and themselves. The forest can also be a place where children who have gotten into difficulty can find their only escape, as in the middle-grade work *Risulven Risulven* [Risulven Risulven] by Nina Ivarsson. Kaja in Katja Timgren's young adult work *Amanda & Ila: från och med nu* [Amanda & Ila: From Now On] also sees the forest as her safe place.

Over the last few years, there has been more discussion about forest usage and climate change. Since the forest is part of our collective consciousness, it constitutes a concrete picture of humans' crimes against nature. The threatened forest is depicted in multiple books. In the middle-grade work *Pax* by Sara Pennypacker, translated from English by Jan Risheden, a boy and his fox get into a life-threatening situation when the forest they live in becomes the location for a savage war. Logging is also a common theme. One example is the chapter book *Naturväktarna och skatten i Ekdungen* [The Nature Custodians and the Treasure in the Oak Grove] by Malin Nilsson and Johanna Arpiainen, in which twins Iris and Ivar chart the species in a small forest to try to stop the plans for building a new golf course there. In the picturebook *Julia räddar skogen* [Julia Saves the Forest] by Niklas Hill and Anna Palmqvist, Julia wants to prevent the forest in her area from being turned into a motorway.

In sum, it can be said the forest has long been used as a symbol for the growing child in children's literature: an irrepressible life force that takes the child from the safe home into the often-threatening adult world. It can symbolise healing, self-realisation, change and becoming an adult. In other depictions, the forest is a threat, often based on the premise that humans have consumed the earth's resources. The forest offers illustrators and authors the opportunity to depict children's emotions without having to use contemporary references. This makes the story timeless and universal.

Translations

Out of all the publications, 1,107 titles (44 percent) were translations, which is an increase of about three percent compared to the numbers in 2016, but this is actually a decrease since the production of Swedish originals has increased even more. English still dominates as the source language for translations and comprises 66 percent of the first printings of translations (64 percent in 2016).

Since Sbi began keeping figures regarding translation in 1999, English's overall dominance has decreased. In 1999, 83 percent of the translations were from English, but its dominance decreased gradually over the following decade. During some years in the middle of the 2000s, when the publication of Japanese comics increased markedly, the number was under 60 percent. In the last years, the number of translations from English has increased again and is now at 66 percent.

Otherwise, the geographical spread of translations is limited, as in previous years, to our Nordic neighbours and larger European countries. In almost all cases, the number of translations has decreased, particularly from German, Danish and Norwegian. The major exception is Finnish. 20 titles that were translated from Finnish are part of the *Mumin pixiadventskalender* [Moomin Pixi Advent Calendar], which has 24 so-called Pixi, or mini-format, books. Besides this product, there was not a single other translation from Finnish. It is notable, however, that there were some titles translated from Romanian, Russian, Czech and Urdu, languages that had not been represented last year. Still, there was not a single translation from, for example, Arabic, Greek, Icelandic, Japanese, Korean, Farsi or Hungarian, which have been represented in previous years. In general, there still are almost no translations from non-Western parts of the world.

Books translated from Swedish to other languages and published in Sweden increased by 60 percent. This particularly regards picturebooks by well-known authors and illustrators such as Inga Borg, Olof and Lena Landström, Astrid Lindgren, Stina Wirsén and Gunilla Wolde.

Book Tasting 2018

Summary

During the 2000s, the number of children’s books published annually has more than doubled, but in 2018 this number decreased for the first time since 2010. On the 28th of February 2019, the Swedish Institute for Children’s Books had received 2,308 children’s and young adult books published in 2018. That is 224 titles (nine percent) less than in 2017. However, the decrease is not the result of a general reduction in titles published, but is instead primarily due to changes in publishing strategies made by individual publishers. The statistics also show that Swedish originals continue to dominate among the children’s books published in Sweden.

In recent years, social issues have been a common theme in Swedish books for children and young adults, and in 2018 this was more prominent than ever. These stories primarily focus on drawing attention to injustice, making visible social and economic differences, and questioning power structures. Children’s role as full citizens with rights is emphasised, and children are encouraged to actively engage in issues that concern them. Put together, these children’s books raise an important question: is it time to listen to the children – for real?

Picturebooks continue to be the biggest category. The picturebooks of 2018 include a number of titles where the depiction of the body plays a central role. This is especially noticeable in Swedish originals, as compared to translations. The emphasis on body shapes and norms is characteristic of the socially oriented picturebook, which aims to highlight and normalise different types of bodies. For example, this includes the portrayal of skin colour, disabilities, body size, and age.

In this year’s Book Tasting, we also take a closer look at horse stories, and in particular themes of violence and cruelty to animals in horse stories, and also stories that address suicide and the death of a loved one.

A Decreased Number of Publications and the Swedish Children’s Books Market

By the 28th of February 2019, a total of 2,308 books for children and young adults that had been published in 2018 had been received by Sbi, which is a decrease by 224 titles (or 9 percent) from the previous year. The number of publications during the 2000s had more than doubled but 2018 was the first year since 2010 when we saw a reduction to the number of titles. The decrease to numbers is not caused by a general reduction by the publishing companies but rather is primarily because of changed publication strategies from individual publishers (see diagram 5).

Among the 20 publishers with the most releases (in terms of the number of titles), there are some that have increased their number and some that have decreased it. Those who increased it the most in terms of titles were Tukan, Egmont, Idus, Hegas, IKEA and Lilla Piratförlaget. In response to questions from Sbi, which were sent to a selection of publishers, it seems that generally, there was no particular reason for the increase but rather simply that the positive sales curve over the last few years creat-

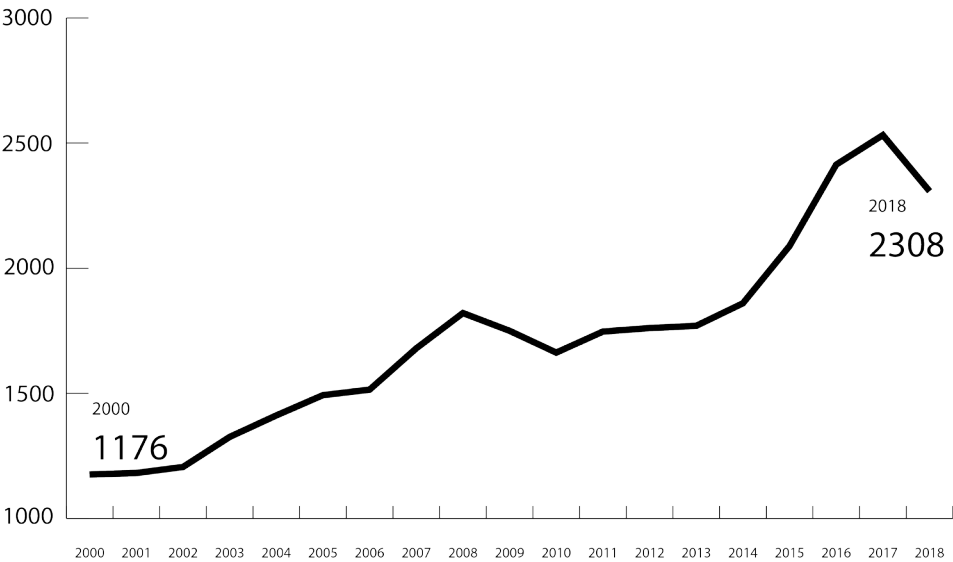


Diagram 5. Children’s and Young Adult Books published in Sweden 2000–2018. Source: The Swedish Institute for Children’s Books.

ed higher demand, which made it possible for these publishers to release more titles. The publishers who have reduced their number of releases the most were Bonnier Carlsen, B. Wahlströms, Lind & Co, Opal, Stabenfeldt, Modernista and Läsrörelsen. Some of them, such as Bonnier Carlsen, Lind & Co and Opal, have consciously chosen to focus on fewer titles.

In some cases, there were more specific reasons. In terms of the publisher that continues to release the most books, in regard to the number of titles, Bonnier Carlsen has released a decreased number of titles because they published fewer Pixi, or mini-format, books. In 2018, 110 of Bonnier Carlsen's titles were Pixi books, which is a decrease of 20 titles compared to 2017, when the publisher released 130. Pixi releases were 44 percent of the publisher's releases in 2018. The reason behind B. Wahlströms' big decrease is mainly that during 2018, the company published significantly fewer rereleases than the year before. Stabenfeldt has the largest reduction, which is equivalent to 80 percent of their total publications. This is because the publisher has chosen to focus on reprints rather than releasing new versions of old titles. Unchanged reprints do not get new ISBNs and therefore are not counted as new releases.

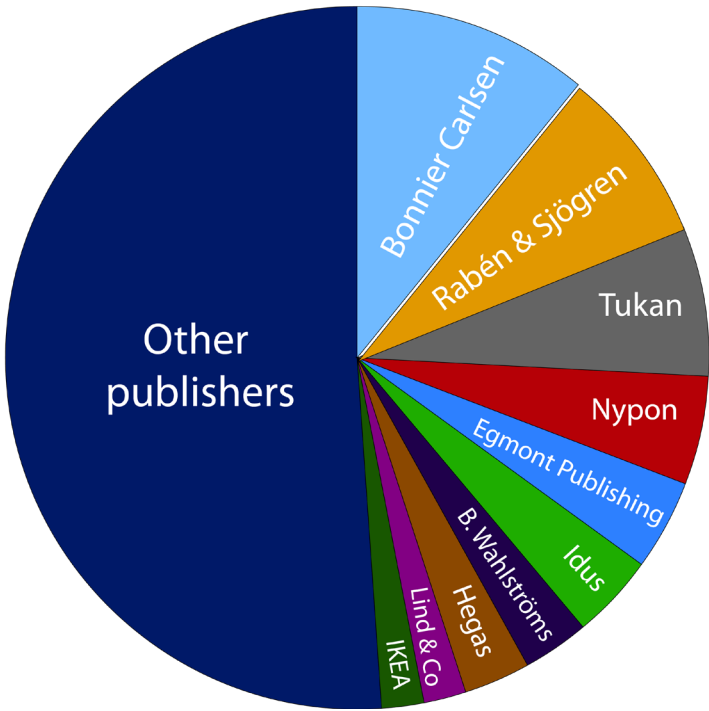


Diagram 6. "The ten largest publishers in comparison to the other publishers. Source: *Bokprovning på Svenska barnboksinstitutet: En dokumentation. Årgång 2018, 2019*, p. 52.

Lower on the list of publishers, we find Igloo Books, an imprint of Bonnierförlagen, whose releases decreased from 56 to 17 titles. The short-lasting imprint was established in Sweden in the spring of 2017 and then put on ice in 2018, which explains the significant reduction (see diagram 6).

According to statistics from Svenska Förläggareföreningen (the Swedish Publishers' Association) and Svenska Bokhandlareföreningen (the Swedish Booksellers' Association), the sales of books for children and young adults continued to increase during 2018, by 8.3 percent (see Wikberg 29). Given that the age category of 9–12 belongs to those with the highest number of sales and is the one that has increased the most over the last few years, it is notable that it is in the middle-grade category where we see the biggest decline (from 416 titles in 2017 to 288 titles in 218). The number of releases of picture-books, young adult works, comics and collections has also decreased. The other categories have seen a slight increase to the number of titles, but with the exception of the little category of song books, the increase has been marginal.

A development worth noting is that in 2018, we have seen the arrival of publishers with a particular focus on disabilities and variations to abilities, such as Funkibator and Dynamo – möjligheternas förlag [The Publishing Company of Possibilities], which respectively released eleven and two titles in 2018. These releases can be seen in relation to and as an extension of the norm-critical publications that have been produced by specialised publishers for around a decade, when publishers such as Olik, Vilda and Vombat were established. In previous Book Tastings, Sbi has noted that visibility in regard to both physical and psychological disabilities and variations to abilities has generally increased in children's and young adult works (see the section on Body Norms in Picturebooks).

Funkibator is not a regular publisher but rather an organisation, which provides a good example of the breadth of the Swedish children's books market. Self-publication has decreased in terms of the number of titles in 2018, but publication through publishing services has increased, which suggests that self-publication has to a great extent moved in that direction.

Politics, Societal Engagement and Injustice

Guest Writer Olle Widbe, University of Gothenburg

The distinguishing feature for societal engagement in the books for young people from 2018 is their strong desire to raise awareness of social differences as well as their belief that children should actively get engaged in issues that affect them. Children are depicted as citizens with rights, at the same time that class differences and other injustices that appear unwarranted differentiate children. Together, children's books ask the adult world an equally radical and worrying question: Surely it is time for children to get to help make decisions – for real?

There has been injustice across all time periods. The activist wants to raise awareness of them, influence others and, in the long run, create a better society (see the section Activism below). In current books for children and young adults, it is often about bringing to the fore the unequal relationship between children and adults as well as giving children a voice and thereby an opportunity to make changes. Last year's August Prize-winning picture book *Gropen* [The Pit] by Emma Adbåge portrays generational power structures at a school somewhere in Sweden. Behind the school, there is an overgrown pit with bushes and stumps, a disorderly place where gravel was once taken away. The children love to play in the pit during recess, even though the adults think they should swing or play with balls. For the adults, who "hate the pit", this is a threat, a dangerous disorder that disrupts their ideas about how children should play. For the children, it is a fun place, separate from the adult world, where they can play "whatever", for as long as they want.

Other books that question power structures are the middle-grade book *Förstörda bevis* [Destroyed Evidence] by Erik Fichtelius and Martin Widmark and the picturebooks *Dom som bestämmer* [Those Who Decide] by Lisen Adbåge and *Bosse & Bella och trumpna Donald* [Bosse & Bella and Sulky Donald] by Måns Gahrton and Amanda Eriksson. As in *Gropen*, those with power are depicted as illegitimate and it is shown to be possible to speak up against them. The authors and illustrators are moving here towards what has been called the wild zone, the defiant lawlessness where power can be challenged, injustice questioned,

people can become social actors, and new orders can take shape. In regard to the publications from 2018, we can agree with those who see the modern picture-book in general as an art form that accepts all sorts of dissidents; that is to say, people who actively work against the prevailing power forms. As far back as the 1970s, it was clear that picturebooks appealed to dissidents, when titles such as *När barnen tog makten* [When the Children Took Power] (1969) by Gunnar Ohrlander and Helena Henschen and *Sprätten satt på toaletten* [The Toff on the Toilet] (1970) by Annika Elmqvist first came out. The releases from 2018 show that children's books are still a starting point for revaluation and opposition.

One can see how children's books from 2018 combine the 1970s' political approaches with new artistic expressions in order to reveal class differences and social injustices in books such as the picturebook *Hemma hos Harald Henriksson* [At Home with Harald Henriksson] by Uje Brandelius and Clara Dackenberg. The book is about a girl who goes with her mother to visit their friend Harald Henriksson. The book offers a challenging and political sharpness through the contrast in the pictures, which reveal that the mother is there working as a cleaner. The book's clearest function is to create a class-consciousness in children and their parents. The Henriksson family has a framed poster with the heading "Progressive Posters 1967–79" in their hallway, and this makes a sharp connection to the left-wing politics of the 1970s. The poster is almost completely covered by Robin Morgan's stylised women's power symbol, the fist in the women's symbol, and the book in this way asks what can be seen as our time's apathetic view of economic and social injustices in light of the more radical and system-critical ideas from the 1970s.

Children's books offer particular opportunities for experiments with the relationship between text and image that can unite political and aesthetic radicality. *Hemma hos Harald Henriksson* [At Home with Harald Henriksson] is not radical by offering a solution or an alternative. Instead, the relationship between words and images shows economic and social differences that allow the reader to think beyond the prevailing system's apparently natural order.

Other books that explore class differences are

the picturebook *Hemma hela sommaren* [At Home All Summer] by Elin Johansson and Ellen Ekman and the chapter book *Kråke gör affärer* [Kråke Does Business] by Marie Bosson Rydell and Jessica Lindholm. *Hemma hela sommaren* [At Home All Summer] starts with the observation that some children get to travel to Thailand or Legoland on holiday, while others have to stay home. Making this inequality visible is depicted from a limited but also wise child's perspective. Being at home turns out to be pretty good, especially if you meet a classmate, who apparently did not travel to Thailand, in the forest. The plot of *Kråke gör affärer* [Kråke Does Business] also takes place during the summer break. Kråke is going to the amusement park Gröneberg, but his friend Ludvig cannot afford to come too. With a clearly pedagogical style, the story shows how Kråke and his friends get money for Ludvig's ticket by selling buns. At the end of the book, there are even some suggestions for what children ought to think about if they want to do business or go to an amusement park.

The function of these books is to raise awareness of the injustices that class differences and relative poverty can lead to. But unlike many of the political children's books from the 1970s, there is no clear enemy. The putative injustices are depicted as coming from the child's experiences and the reasons for them are, in many cases, hidden from the reader. In sum, it can be said that *Hemma hela sommaren* [At Home All Summer] raises awareness of class differences and offers the reader the chance to explore positive alternatives beyond commercialism and expensive travel. On the other hand, *Kråke gör affärer* [Kråke Does Business] offers a solution to the conflict that is more in line with the logic of capitalism: by learning to do business, economic differences can be overcome and everyone can afford to go together to the commercial amusement park.

A pressing question is climate change and the need for a more ecologically sustainable lifestyle, and this is also featured in children's books from 2018. Two examples are the picturebook *Annalisa och skräpmonstret* [Annalisa and the Rubbish Monster] by Angeli Sjöström Hederberg and Caroline Sellstone, with a foreword by Maria Wetterstrand, a former Swedish politician from the Green Party, and the chapter

book *Frallan räddar världen* [Frallan Saves the World] by Sara Ohlsson and Lisen Adbåge. Here, the emphasis is on not treating nature like a rubbish bin. In Mats Söderlund's dystopian young adult novel *Hotet* [The Threat], natural catastrophes have made large parts of the earth uninhabitable. There is a lack of water and it seems there will be a war about access to water. Even in books where the climate issue is not usually seen, it can now be found. An example is Jeff Kinney's *The Meltdown*, translated from English by Thomas Grundberg, from the middle-grade Wimpy Kid series. In this otherwise easy and funny book series, even Greg is now worried about climate change.

These and other books invite the reader to take part in shaping new ways of relating to nature and society and in acting to make changes. In a similar way, in her young adult work *Allt ska brinna* [Everything Will Burn], Sofia Nordin shows how two active high school girls fight against the world's ills and injustices, but also how they are fighting with themselves. Here it is clear that those who burn for change also risk getting burned.

Activism

Activism is perhaps the clearest theme in the books that depict engagement with society, and this is featured to a greater extent in the releases from 2018 as compared to previous years. It is worth noting that in 2018, it was 50 years since the key year for political protests, 1968, and that youth movements regarding, for instance, the climate and the environment have grown stronger in recent times. In this year, children and young people have become serious activists in Swedish books for children and young adults, and it is also the year when the climate activist Greta Thunberg started her school strike and became the leading figure in a global climate strike movement.

In many books, there are plots that start with revolutionary thoughts and protests. Opposition occurs through practical acts, often in the form of actions. Usually it is the children and young adults who have the desire to change, influence and rebel in these books, while the adult world and its representatives are the target. The books show a tendency towards a new collectivism and a belief that many together can make a change.

A number of books are about actions of various types. As mentioned above, it can be about climate issues and the destruction of the environment. Another example of this is the middle-grade book *Athena. Grattis världen! Jag är här nu!* [Athena. Congratulations, World! I Am Here Now!] by Elin Ek, in which Athena has started a Save the World Club together with her friends after they see a film about how the polar ice is melting. Armed with Post-It notes, they carry out various actions and even put forward a motion for political change that gets accepted in their city.

Related to the issue of the destruction of the environment are those books that discuss logging, which is the target of actions in some books. In Katarina Lönnby's chapter book *Götes gammelskog* [Göte's Old Forest], the animals in a forest get help from a boy and go to the king to get help stopping the logging. They succeed and the forest becomes a national park.

Animal rights activists appear in a few books, often connected to vegetarianism and veganism. In Milena Bergquist and Amanda Eriksson's chapter book *Lilla Na och djurkuppen* [Little Na and the Animal Coup], three children take part in actions against, among other things, a pet shop, where they let all the animals out of their cages. In Jannika Navjord's mini-format picturebook *Cirkus utan djur* [Circus Without Animals], Soya is saddened when a circus with animals comes to town and she sets up her own "nice circus", which, to the circus director's annoyance, is successful. The animals, on the other hand, are happy to be left alone.

Several books depict feminist actions to end the patriarchy. One example is Jennifer Mathieu's young adult work *Moxie*, translated from English by Carina Jansson, which is about Vivian, who attends a high school where the girls suffer from sexism and sexual assault. Inspired by her mother's youth as a Riot Grrl in the 1990s, she decides to make an anonymous fanzine, Moxie. Vivian places it in all the girls' toilets and encourages girls to protest against how they are treated at school. Activism for gay rights occurs in Anneli Furmark and Monika Steinholm's graphic novel *Närmare kommer vi inte* [We Won't Come Any Closer]. There is a Pride parade in the north Norwegian community where the book takes place.

Even in fantasy literature, activism occurs, often in the form of revolts against totalitarianism. Often these actions must take place in secret to make change happen. An example of this from 2018's releases is Philip Pullman's *The Book of Dust*, translated from English by Olle Sahlin, the first part of the prequel to the trilogy *His Dark Materials*. Alongside the main plot thread, which is about saving the infant Lyra, there is a political discussion about the corrupt government. A group of academics work in secret to decipher the golden compass and to fight for what they think is right. Another example is Rachel Heng's dystopian young adult novel *Suicide Club*, translated from English by Boel Unnerstad, a depiction of the future where it is forbidden to live unhealthily. Those who break the Ministry's directive to eat healthily, do breathing exercises and practise yoga are swiftly removed to re-education programmes. But there is a group of activists, the Suicide Club, who do what is forbidden: drink hot chocolate and eat ice cream. The novel can be viewed as a critique of the prevailing health trend.

Even writing books can be seen as an activist action. In several of the books from 2018, it is clear from the blurb on the back and from marketing information that the books were inspired by the authors' engagement in various issues and their desire to influence change. In the poetry anthology *Revolution Poetry*, for example, the introduction notes that "Revolution Poetry was sprung from a desire to be heard, to raise up, to make revolution and to create" and that it "grew out of justice pathos, the courage to dream and the belief in the collective". The non-fiction work *Skamlös* [Shameless] by Amina Bile, Sofia Nesrine Srouf and Nancy Herz is a contribution to the debate about immigration. The authors have gathered stories from girls and young women with experience of social control in minority environments. In the marketing materials for the book, it says that the authors "attack the structures and expectations that limit women's freedom and power over their own bodies and lives".

In 2018, activists even got their own non-fiction book: *Rebellens nybörjarbok: konsten att låta tillsammans* [The Beginner's Book for Rebels: The Art of Making Noise Together] by Kajsa Bornedal. It is about being

an activist, raising one's voice and organising to make changes through demonstrations and slogans.

Escape from War, Integration and Racism

Another aspect of societal engagement in literature for children and young adults in 2018 is seen in the many books that discuss refugees and issues of integration, often based on the large wave of refugees from the past few years. This type of story has been prominent over the past few years but in 2018, there is a larger focus on integration problems and racism than in previous years.

In regard to stories about fleeing from war and experiencing life in the new country, the total number of works about this has increased. There were significantly fewer picturebooks on this theme, but more books for slightly older children and young adults. A couple of examples of picture books that are about escaping from war are *The Day War Came* by Nicola Davies and Rebecca Cobb, translated from English by Helena Stedman. *Stjärnorna ser likadana ut överallt* [The Stars Look the Same Everywhere] by Marjan Svab and Saga Bergebo, in which the families are forced to flee from their bomb-ravaged homelands. In the autobiographical non-fiction work *Dear World* by Bana Alabed, translated from English by Maria Store, seven-year-old Bana and her mother write about their life in Aleppo during the war in Syria. The family tries to live their life as usual during the war, but after experiencing bombing and seeing relatives and friends die in front of them, they escape to Turkey. This book can also be said to have an activist angle. The last chapter is an appeal to the world and Bana talks about what it is like to live as refugees in a camp. The book is based on their actual Twitter messages.

Life in the new land can turn out differently for those who have fled. The middle-grade work *The Cardboard Palace* by Allayne L. Webster, translated from English by Anna Thuresson, is about life in a migrant camp. Jorge from Romania lives in a migrant camp in Paris. Like Oliver Twist, he joins a gang of children who steal from tourists and give money to their adult boss. The book depicts EU migrants' lives and the misery in the camp where he lives. In the chapter book *King kommer snart* [King is Coming

Soon] by Andrea Karimé and Jens Rassmus, a refugee boy longs for his dog, who was left behind in his native country.

Among the publications there is also a chapter book about migration rights, *Får mormor komma hit? En bok om migrationsrätt* [Can Grandma Come Here? A Book about Migration Rights] by Angelica Öhrn, Christina Hildebrand and Hedvig Wallin. Khalil is a refugee from Syria who has lived in Sweden for five years. He misses his grandma, who cannot come to Sweden. Khalil's teacher invites in a lawyer, who tells them about migration rights. The book offers multiple examples of people seeking asylum.

A number of young adult books have a plot where racism is an important theme. In Malin Stehn's *Inte din bror* [Not Your Brother], Abbe is torn between a friend with racist opinions and the fact that his family is taking care of an unaccompanied refugee boy who moved alone from Afghanistan. *På natten är allt sant* [In the Night Everything is True] by Lina Stoltz is a Romeo and Juliet story about two young people, Liv and Jemal, who fall in love with one another.

The problem is that they each belong to a gang, respectively the racist gang versus the immigrant gang. Here, xenophobia is normalised for Swedish youth, and the people around them also have racist views. In Samira Ahmed's *Love, Hate and Other Filters*, translated from English by Cecilia Falk, protagonist Maya Aziz is an Indian Muslim and lives in a small town where everyone else is white. She dreams about becoming a filmmaker but a terrorist attack changes everything because the apparent terrorist has the same last name as Maya. It leads to Maya and her parents experiencing hate crimes. Racism can also affect other minority groups. Ann-Helén Laestadius' *Inte längre min* [No Longer Mine] depicts discrimination against Sami people, and Siobhan Dowd and Emma Shoard's *The Pavee and the Buffer Girl*, translated from English by Helena Ridelberg, shows how Jim and his family, who are Irish travellers, experience racism in the town they travel to.

A middle-grade book that depicts Muslim girls' experiences from the inside is Christina Wahldén's *Falafelflickorna* [The Falafel Girls]. Protagonist Hawa starts a detective agency and immediately gets the assignment of helping girls who risk being married off.

The book depicts girls' experiences of culture clashes between Swedish law and the girls' own culture.

Body Norms in Picturebooks

Guest Writer Mia Österlund, Åbo Akademi University

During the last few years, Sbi has noted a growing interest in exploring body norms and body shapes in picturebooks. In the releases from 2018, there are many books where the depiction of the body plays a central role. Above all, this is in regard to Swedish originals. That the focus is on shapes and norms is part of the society-focused picturebook, which emphasises and normalises different types of bodies. Included here are depictions of skin colour, same-sex relationships, variations to ability, body size, gender and age.

How bodies are depicted is intimately tied to who is writing about the body and whose perspective it is depicted visually through. A major tendency is the first-person picturebook and particularly the visual I-perspective that is used in a number of picture books. The visual I-perspective means that the picture's point of view is the same as the protagonist's, so the reader sees the same thing as the main character, and the point of view is often marked with the help of a body part or something else that shows that the reader and the protagonist share this perspective. This approach was particularly common in 2018, which is notable because it is unusual. It strengthens the characters' subjectivity and agency and makes the design more complex. Some examples of picturebooks where this occurs are Hannah Arnesen's *Tågresan* [The Train Journey], Ebba Forslind's *Fastrarna* [The Aunts], Ann-Helén Laestadius and Jessika Berglund's *Pimpelfiske* [Ice Fishing], Björn Petersson and Linnéa Krylén's *Molnens melodi* [The Melody of the Clouds] and Per Nilsson and Lisen Adbåge's *Jag hatar kaniner och blommor och barn* [I Hate Rabbits and Flowers and Children].

In some books, there is a we-perspective in the form of a collective, sometimes in conflict with them, the others. For example, in *Gropan* [The Pit] by Emma Adbåge, which was mentioned above, children's and adults' bodies confront one another in a story about children's right to decide. *Dom som bestämmer* [Those Who Decide] by Lisen Adbåge is also based on the idea of a collective in conflict. Here,

children's bodies together create a mass, those who decide against those who do not (see the section on Politics, Societal Engagement and Injustice).

Bodies in picturebooks are primarily featured in city and home environments, but a number of books also offer broad landscapes. Anders Holmer's *Regn* [Rain] explores rain in its various forms, and here small bodies stand in relief against the landscape. *Kom hem Laila* [Come Home, Laila] by Eva Lindström uses the flowing landscape as a background for the proportionally small body.

The depiction of adult bodies too is central and surrounded by body positivism. A number of books are completely based on the adult perspective, such as Lisa Bjärbo and Emma Adbåge's *Samtidigt i min låtsasvärld* [At the Same Time in My Fantasy World] and Pija Lindenbaum's *Bidde det då?* [What became of it?], where the protagonists are adults. The depiction of adults is often linked to criticism of norms and an example of this is Sanna Borell's *Kedjan* [The Chain]. In this book, the aim itself is to bring together different bodies. The cover shows a chain of bodies, with much bodily variation. Regarding the first person, the story reads, "This is Svea. She is just big enough and just tall enough." Svea, in other words, is described as fitting the norm. Body positivism is present when the mother is shown naked, with a round stomach, cutting her toe nails. In *Samtidigt i min låtsasvärld* [At the Same Time in My Fantasy World], too, the mother's body is shown with its flaws from a body positive perspective. Large women's bodies that take up space in these and other picturebooks can be read as the child's gaze on the adult body, but also as a revolt against societal ideals.

Several picturebooks have the aim of educating readers about variations to abilities, diagnoses and health. Some examples are Karin Jacov and Jenny Sjödin's *Eli har en storebror* [Eli Has a Big Brother], Pia Hammargren, Sara Hansson, Jenny Tollstern and Theo Johannesson's *Rullstolskolan* [The Wheelchair School] and Josefin Ringbom's *Morfarn som aldrig blev stor eller: Min morfar har ADHD* [The Grandpa Who Never Got Big, or My Grandpa has ADHD]. There are also books with the aim of teaching children mindfulness and to find inner peace, and even animals try out poses and yoga positions, as in Lin-

da Bondestam's *God natt på Jorden* [Good Night on Earth]. The trend is indicative of a shift in the view of childhood, since being engrossed in something as well as movement previously were closely linked to children's bodies, but now are thought to be lacking. Such books often are published by smaller publishers and are strongly connected to trends that appear in blogs and on social media, such as yoga and body positivism.

The critique of the norm can be said to have become a norm itself among the publications and has developed into its own genre, with norms regarding middle-class, whiteness and sexuality being some of the friction areas. Alternative class depictions of childhood poverty and difficult living conditions appear in books such as the previously mentioned Uje Brandelius and Clara Dackenberg's *Hemma hos Harald Henriksson* [At Home with Harald Henriksson], Elin Johansson and Ellen Ekman's *Hemma hela sommaren* [At Home All Summer] and Charlotta Lannebo and Ellen Ekman's *Olle & Bolle handlar* [Olle & Bolle Shop], where the difficulty of everyday life for single mothers is depicted as much as it is for their children (see the section Politics, Societal Engagement and Injustices).

The inclusion of bodies other than white ones is a strong tendency in the publications (see the section Inclusion in Picturebooks). Sara Lövestam and Per Gustavsson's *Under mattan* [Under the Rug] depicts in the images a character of Indian origin, but the text does not refer to this. The same strategy is found in Jesper Lundqvist and Marcus-Gunnar Pettersson's *Rädslorna* [The Fears], where a dark-skinned man claims that he is too comfortable with his fears, but the man's origins are not commented upon. Even in books such as Ulrika Hjorth and Anastasiya Prosvetova's *Titta mammor!* [Look Mums!] and *Titta pappor!* [Look Dads!], which are about same-sex relationships, some of the people are dark-skinned.

The violated body and strategies for protecting the child's body from abuse are also themes in several picturebooks. An example is the *Lilla nej-boken* [Little Book of No] by Sarah Sjögren and Anna Forsmark, which is based on the article about childhood abuse from the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child. The raised palm on the cover signals stop and the child is expected to deliver a clear no when their

bodily integrity is violated. In the Norwegian book *Sesam Sesam* [Sesame Sesame] by Gro Dahle and Kaia Dahle Nyhus, translated from Norwegian by Nils-Aage Larsson, internet pornography is depicted explicitly. The book, which proved controversial, is an example of how present technology can be and of the discussion around consent, and it even opens up for a discussion about children's sexuality.

In sum, it can be said that body shapes and body norms are an active part of today's picturebooks and that the dialogue with prevailing societal discussions is prominent.

Inclusion in Picturebooks

In the Book Tasting from 2014, Sbi produced a study of the representation of dark-skinned people in picturebooks originally written in Swedish. The starting-point was the recent debates about diversity in books for children and young adults, which raised questions about how dark-skinned children can and should be depicted in children's books. The questions that shaped the study were: How common is it to find people with darker skin in Swedish picturebooks? How prominent are they in the books? Are they secondary characters or main characters? With dark-skinned, the study referred to people in books in comparison to those who had light skin colour. In uncertain cases, what was decisive was how the character was depicted in comparison to others in the same book. If this difference suggested an aim of depicting people with different skin colours, then the book was counted. The figures from this study were presented briefly in the Book Tasting report and a more thorough analysis was offered in the form of a lecture. The most important results from both are recounted here.

The study from 2014 only covered Swedish picturebooks, that is picturebooks that were originally published in Sweden, and not translations. In this year's Book Tasting, Sbi has followed up the study, but has chosen to look at both Swedish originals and translations, which means that the studies are comparable only in regard to the Swedish originals. In the cases where comparisons can be made, numbers and conclusions from the 2014 study are also given.

Re-publications and works published only in languages other than Swedish have not been included

(because this group primarily is comprised of works that previously have been published in Swedish and therefore the risk is that it would be included twice). Work that appear in the corpus more than one, such as books published multiple times in different languages, has only been counted once. As the study stipulated that there has to be at least one dark-skinned person in the book, books where there are no people have not been included, such as books with only animals, anthropomorphised animals or fantastical creatures. Even if some of these works showed an ambition to depict diversity, they have not been included.

In sum, the study from 2018 includes 384 picture-books, of which there is at least one dark-skinned person among the human characters in 168 works. That is, dark-skinned people appear in almost half of the works that depict people (44 percent). Of these, 123 are Swedish originals and 45 are translations, which means that the representation of dark-skinned people is significantly higher in the Swedish originals than in the translations. The depiction of dark-skinned people in the Swedish originals has more than doubled since 2014, where they only appeared in 59 titles.

In 2014's Book Tasting, Sbi showed that among the works where that included dark-skinned people, there were a number of titles where they were not active subjects but rather had roles similar to extras in films. They could be people in big crowds where the majority had light skin, or groups of children in preschools where there was at least one dark-skinned child among the secondary characters in the background. 101 out of the 168 picturebooks in the 2018 study fall into this category, divided into 73 Swedish originals and 28 translations. Again, there is a higher degree of representation in the Swedish originals and in terms of this, there has been a significant increase in comparison to the 2014 study, where there were only 18 such titles. Another difference in comparison to 2014 is that in 2018's picturebooks, we see a larger variety of skin colours depicted. In many books, there seems to be an aim to show a larger range of skin colours, with the effect that representation is more nuanced. From our perspective, this meant that it was harder to tell if a book should be counted or not than it was in 2014, which is why

the numbers that are presented here ought to be seen as approximate and not absolute.

The remaining 67 works (17 percent) are picture-books where dark-skinned people have a more important role. This can be divided into three categories: 1. Books where dark-skinned people are active secondary characters who interact with light-skinned protagonists, 2. Collective stories where all the people (at least four) can be said to be as important and where at least one is dark-skinned, and 3. Books with at most three main characters (usually one), where at least one is dark-skinned.

The figures from the 2018 study are divided in the following way based on these three categories: in 12 picturebooks, the dark-skinned people are active secondary characters (three percent), in 20 there is one dark-skinned person or more dark-skinned people in collective stories (five percent), and in 35 picture-books at least one out of a maximum of three protagonists is dark-skinned (nine percent).

As the table below shows, there are significantly more dark-skinned people represented in Swedish originals than in translations. Compared with the study from 2014, we can argue that the inclusion of dark-skinned people has generally increased significantly and that Swedish authors and illustrators are more inclined today than they were a few years ago to give a dark-skinned person their own story than a role as a secondary figure in a light-skinned person's story. But while the latter category has decreased by a lot, instead the number of dark-skinned main protagonists has increased from eleven to 26, and the inclusion in collective stories has increased from five to 14. (However, note that there are even active dark-skinned secondary characters in some of the books that have dark-skinned protagonists. Since every book is only counted once, they are only in the latter category.)

The representation of dark-skinned people in picture-books in 2018 (figures from 2014 in parentheses)

	Main characters	Collective characters	Active secondary characters	Passive secondary characters
Swedish	26 (11)	14 (5)	10 (25)	73 (18)
Translated	9	6	2	28
Total	35	20	12	101

It is worth noting that this summary shows that the aim of authors and illustrators seems to be consciously inclusive and non-problematising. Ethnic stereotypes only appear in a few cases and skin colour is in general not something that is discussed or problematised. Here there is a difference in comparison to works for older children and young adults, where racism is a theme (see the section on *Escape from War, Integration and Racism*).

The publishers responsible for the Swedish picture books with dark-skinned people in them in 2014 were, with few exceptions, smaller publishers and self-publishers, and a large number of the titles were published by publishers that had an inclusive perspective as part of their business idea. The 2018 study shows something else. A large number of the books from 2018 were published by large and medium publishers, such as Bonnier Carlsen, Rabén & Sjögren, Egmont, Natur & Kultur, Lilla Piratförlaget, Lind & Co, Opal and Alfabeta. Even some established smaller publishers, such as Hippo, Urax and Olika, are behind some of the titles. Otherwise, it is small publishers and self-publishers/publishing services that are responsible for these books. As opposed to in 2014, there are few publishers that have an expressed inclusive perspective, which means that this shows a broadening of interest.

Producing a more comprehensive study of the representation of dark-skinned people in children's and young adult works requires more resources. Very few such studies have been done, but there are some from English-speaking countries. Every year, the Cooperative Children's Book Center calculates how many children's books are published in the US that are written by and are about African-Americans, the North American indigenous people, Asians and Hispanics. Their figures show that the representation of these groups has significantly increased over the past years ("Publishing Statistics"). In terms of African-Americans, for example, the number of titles has increased from 94, in the lowest year, 2013 (3 percent), to 402 in 2018 (11 percent). A new research project in the United Kingdom shows different results. The study *Reflecting Realities – A Survey of Ethnic Representation within UK Children's Literature 2017* was financed by the Arts Council in England

and carried out by the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE). It shows that characters who were, according to their definition, "black" or who belonged to an ethnic minority group appeared in only 291 out of the 9114 children's books published in the United Kingdom in 2017 (4 percent). They were main characters in only one percent of the cases.

These studies show that representation can look different in different countries. How the figures in Sweden would look if all publications are taken into consideration is impossible to say, as Sbi currently does not have the resources to produce a study that covers the entire corpus of releases. However, the study that has been carried out of picturebooks suggests that, as with the American case, there has been a significant increase in a short time.

Horse Books

The literary genre of horse books can be broadly divided into three types of stories: the wild horse book, the classic horse book, and the tame horse book or the modern horse book. There have been no big changes in the genre over time, but rather these types of stories have dominated for a long time. In 2018, 41 horse books were published and most of them are the modern horse book type, which takes place in a stable-based environment and where the focus is on the relationship between the horse and the human. The number of horse books has decreased since the Book Tasting of 1995, which is when Sbi last studied the genre. Then, there were 50 titles. As the total number of publications was significantly smaller then (1263), that means that the number of horse books has decreased both in regard to the genre itself and in terms of the total number of publications.

The horse books from 2018 are represented in all of the main categories. Besides the 41 titles, there are also five non-fiction works about horses. Some of them are primarily activity books while others educate readers by offering specialised knowledge about horses, the care of horses and riding. Among the picturebooks – five in number – several can be categorised as "faction" and are about the protagonist wanting to start riding. It is a little unusual to have horse books among the picturebooks for very young children, but *Lullan och hästarna i stallet* [Lullan and

the Horses in the Stable] by Maria Andersson Keuseyan is one such example, and it is a board book. To finally be able to start riding is a common theme in the chapter books, where a large number of the 13 titles are easy-to-read books. The protagonists in the 18 middle-grade works often own a horse and may compete with it, while others dream about having their own horse. In the four young adult books, horse book plot are combined with the classic young adult theme of love. For example, in *Vänd rätt upp* [Turn Right Up] by Emelie Novotny, horse groom Ylva has romantic relationships with two people in the stable. The only horse book in the category of collections is *Illustrated Stories of Horses and Ponies*. It contains folk tales from different countries retold by Rosie Dickens, Susanna Davidson, Fiona Patchett, Rosie Hore and Katie Daynes, translated from English by Sara Jonasson.

The protagonists in 2018's modern horse books are often white heterosexual girls. A small number of titles are an exception, such as the middle-grade books *Vad som än händer* [Whatever Happens] by Katja Timgren, where the main character is homosexual, *Storm Horse* by Nicholas Garlick, translated from English by Ingela Jernberg, where the main character is a boy, and the chapter book *Malva och hästarna – samlingsvolym!* [Malva and the Horses – A Compilation!] by Malin Eriksson and Lisa Säfve Chantem, where both the protagonist and some other characters are dark-skinned. When it comes to class, there is at least some diversity. A number of protagonists are well-off and maybe even are given a horse even if they do not want one, as in the chapter book *Pysen & Petrine* [Pysen & Petrine] by Kirsten Sonne Harild and Inger Tobiasen. Other books depict children in harder circumstances. In *Storm Horse*, the orphan Flip experiences a big change when he moves to live with an uncle who has a different sort of life than he was used to. He becomes a victim of the neighbourhood bullies and the violence escalates when Flip saves a mysterious dark horse from drowning.

A theme that spreads across the horse publications from 2018 is in fact violence. Exercising disciplined violence is often part of handling a horse. Horses are also large and easily frightened animals, a combination that can be devastating if there is an accident.

This is something 15-year-old Lisa has experience of in Helena Dahlgren's middle-grade book *Jorvik kallar* [Jorvik is Calling]. Fear is deep within Lisa, after her mother dies in a riding accident, but she eventually conquers it. *Jorvik kallar* [Jorvik is Calling] is the only fantasy horse book from 2018 and is based on the online game Star Stable.

Just as with fantasy works, the realistic horse book allows the protagonists to move between different worlds. Through their struggles in the horse environment, they gain a strength that they bring with them into their everyday lives and school. But if their different worlds meet, the worst can happen. In *Vad som än händer* [Whatever Happens], the bullies turn against their victim's horses, a cruel and elaborate way of getting at the riders, and both horses and humans nearly end up badly.

Riding accidents and the anxiety that comes after them are recurring motifs. Sometimes fear turns into hate and violence against the horses. In Jenny Oldfield's middle-grade book *Storm Wind*, translated from English by Maria Fröberg, Kami sees a boy whip a young horse until it is bloody behind the stable. It turns out he is punishing the horse for hurting his father. This and other forms of animal abuse appear in several of this year's horse books, and it is often men who are the violent ones. The young adult book *De kallade mig MAD* [They Called Me MAD] by Camilla McKenna is another example. As with the classic *Black Beauty* by Anna Sewell from 1877, the book *De kallade mig MAD* [They Called Me MAD] is an explicit contribution to the debate about animal rights, and the use of the first-person from the horse's point of view appeals to the reader's empathy. Another horse-I that experiences difficult events is found in the young adult book *Ponnyn som kunde skratta och gråta* [The Pony Who Could Laugh and Cry] by Elisabeth Sommarström. Here, however, there is a twist: in the horse's body lives a girl's soul, the girl who rode the horse when she died in an accident.

Explicit depictions of direct violence in horse books for somewhat older readers primarily raise awareness (and in some cases explain the background to) humans' violence against horses in reality. Passive violence can be just as devastating. Not taking care of one's animals is a variant of this and in the mid-

dle-grade book *Indra Larssons inte helt perfekta hästliv* [Indra Larsson's Not Totally Perfect Horse Life] by Lin Hallberg, not taking care of the horses properly can be seen as the owner's revenge on the horses after her daughter was injured in a riding accident.

When a protagonist finally saves a horse from violent men (people) or tames a wild and violent horse, the person matures as a human being, suggest several researchers (see, for instance, Ashman). But it is not always so serious in horse books. In books for younger readers, there are numerous examples of the authors and illustrators using humour to lighten potentially violent and thereby scary scenarios. In the picturebook *Mulle på ridskolan* [Mulle at Riding School] by Lena Furberg, Mulle the horse has the power. The pictures, which show one experience of being thrown off as worse than the next, are filled with both the horses' and the children's joy in movement – and are crammed with children who never get tired of getting back up again.

Death and Suicide

Death is a relatively common theme in books for children and young adults and rather many children and young people have to deal with the death of someone close to them in 2018's books. In some cases, a sibling, parent or grandparent has died in an accident or of old age. In other cases, there is a suicide, which is difficult to cope with. Grief and redemption are, not surprisingly, prominent themes in these works, but there are also books where death is depicted as a reality and an accepted part of life. In the chapter book *Jag heter Beata* [My Name is Beata] by Katarina Kieri and Anna Sandler, eleven-year-old Beata has a brother who is dead, which she herself realises is unusual, but at the same time she is used to it because that is how it has been her whole life. Lisa Hyder and Louise Winblad's chapter book *Majken Majken* [Majken Majken] is about seven-year-old Majken's life and how it is what is happening now, with a move in progress, that takes up Majken's attention rather than the fact that her mother has died.

There are also books where the death of someone close to them is the main theme. This is usually about a parent or the older generation rather than children and siblings, but even here there are examples of the

latter. Lena Forsaeus and Mia Nilsson's chapter book *Ballonger mot himlen* [Balloons to the Sky] is about when Nils' sister Majken dies, and the graphic novel *Kattvinden* [The Attic] by Helena Öberg and Kristin Lidström describes through flashbacks a time when tuberculosis took the lives of many young people.

The middle-grade book *Så mycket kärlek kan inte dö* [So Much Love Cannot Die] by Moni Nilsson and Joanna Hellgren is about Lea, whose mother is dying from cancer. The book depicts the mother's last months of life. The portrayal of illness where death is a threat that does not become a reality also appears in some books, such as the chapter book *Mitt fönster mot rymden* [My Window Towards Space] by Oskar Kroon and Josefine Sundqvist, in which Gurkan's father gets cancer but survives.

Redemption and thoughts about making the most of the last part of one's life characterise books that describe the relationship between a grandchild and a grandparent who is going to die. In Ulf Stark and Kitty Crowther's chapter book *Rymlingarna* [The Fugitives], Lill-Gottfried realises that his grumpy grandfather would want to experience a last day in his house in the archipelago before he dies. He plans an escape from the hospital so his grandfather can die in peace. In the middle-grade book *Grandpa's Great Escape* by David Walliams and Tony Ross, translated from English by Klara Lindell, a grandfather and his grandchild also run away. Jack takes his grandfather, a Spitfire pilot, on a last big adventure before his grandfather dies. In the chapter book *Till morfar om du blir hungrig* [For Grandpa If You Get Hungry] by Nicolas Jändel and Helena Willis, Elliot grieves for his grandfather, who is suddenly gone.

Several books are about how life is affected when someone takes their own life. In the comic series *Vi skulle segla runt jorden* [We Were to Sail Around the World] by Anna Sundström Lindmark and Elisabeth Widmark, Agnes' depressed father commits suicide, and now Agnes and her mother must find a way forward. In two books, humour and stand-up comedy are an escape for the protagonists, who also have experienced the suicide of a relative. In Karl Modig's young adult work *Döden är inget skämt* [Death is No Joke], it becomes clear between the lines that Josef's brother has taken his life. At first Josef does not want

to accept this, and instead tries to laugh it off. He has just finished secondary school and spends much of his time writing stand-up jokes and performing them. Another character that uses humour to handle suicide is Sasha in Jenny Jägerfeld's middle-grade book *Comedy Queen*. Sasha's mother has committed suicide and in order to avoid turning out like her mother, Sasha makes a list of what she can do to be as different from her mother as possible. Since her mother was depressed, Sasha will be a comedy queen. She too decides to become a stand-up comedian and, in the end, it is her stand-up appearances that liberate her from her grief.

Translations

868 translated titles were published in 2018, which is a decrease from 2017 of 159 titles. The number of translations has decreased gradually during the 2010s and is now down to 41 percent of the total publications. Even if the publication of both Swedish and translated books has decreased as a consequence of the overall decreased number of publications, there has been more of a decrease to translations, which means that the Swedish publications continue to strengthen their dominance (see diagram 7).

Counted in terms of totals, it is above all books translated from English that have decreased. Even if this decrease is 134 titles, it is still small percentage-wise, given the overall decrease (from 66 percent in 2017 to 63 percent in 2018). Even the number of titles from the larger European languages and the other Nordic languages have in all cases decreased. The noticeable reduction in terms of Finnish titles is because in 2017, there was a Moomin Pixi calendare-published, where 20 of the 24 books were translated from Finnish. The only Nordic language that has increased somewhat is books translated from Swedish and published in other languages in Sweden, an increase of 22 titles (16 percent). The increased number of refugees who have come to Sweden over the last years is a contributing cause of this.

There are still few translations from other parts of the world than the West. It is, however, worth noting that there were five titles translated from Japanese and three from Greek, languages that were not represented last year.

translated by B.J. Epstein

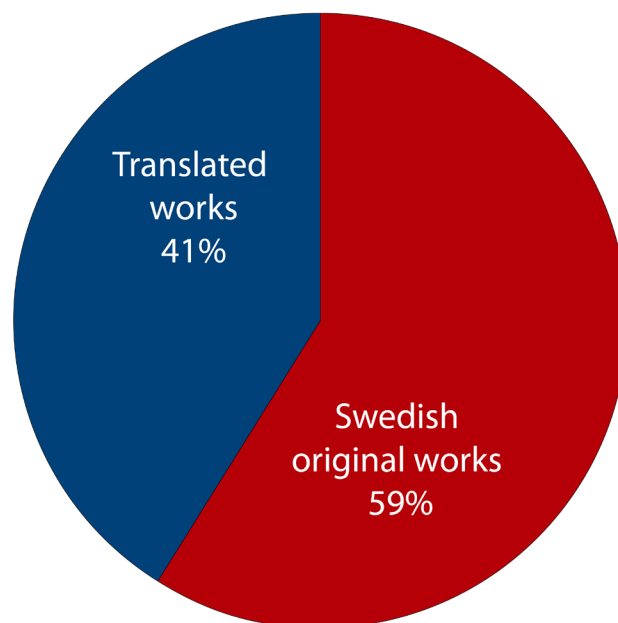


Diagram 7. Comparison between Swedish originals and translated children's and young adult books published in Sweden 2018. Source: *Bokprovning på Svenska barnboksinstitutet: En dokumentation. Årgång 2018, 2019, p. 37.*

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