

Climate, Fantasy, and Horror: Book Tasting 2020

In 2019, the number of children's and young adult books published in Sweden decreased for the second year in a row. This is shown in the Swedish Institute for Children's Books' Book Tasting report that is presented today. This year's report includes examinations of climate and environmental issues in children's literature, audiobooks, and fantasy. Other prominent themes in the children's books of 2019 are depictions of sex and sexual assault, the naked body, collectivism, and horror.

For the second year in a row, the number of children's and young adult books published in Sweden decreased. On the last day of February the institute had received 2,217 printed children's and young adult books published in 2019, which is 91 titles (4 percent) less than 2018. Potential factors behind the decrease include changes in publishing strategies made by individual publishing houses, recent years' debates on the so-called over-publishing of children's and young adult books, and the increase in digital publishing. The most noticeable change in 2019 is the continued decrease in the number of translated titles published. The overall decrease is a result of the decrease in translations. The predominance of original Swedish works is thereby strengthened, and statistics indicate that out of the total number of children's books published the share of translations has not been this low since the mid-1900s.

As part of this year's Book Tasting, three guest writers were invited to examine different themes. Ann Steiner (Lund University) takes a closer look at the audiobooks of 2019. Her overview shows that the publishing of audiobooks for children and young adults has increased significantly in recent years and that recordings of older titles dominate among the audiobooks. Lydia Wistisen (Stockholm University) focuses on environmental issues in the children's and young adult books of 2019. Climate change, environmental protection, and recycling are prominent themes, and she finds them in books of all categories and for all ages. Malin Alkestrand (Linneaus University) examines the fantasy works of 2019. She argues that they continue to be characterized by issues of power and the fight against evil, but also notices the promoting of other values. She sees a traditionally conservative genre beginning to take an interest in questions of norms and normativity.

In addition, this year's Book Tasting includes an overview of what subject headings can tell us about children's books as a whole. We also explore the following themes: sex and sexual assault, the naked body, (dis)abilities, integration and cultural clashes, collectivism as well as horror, thrillers and ghost stories.

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 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 report is available for downloading on the institute's website. Due to the current situation, this year's lectures and exhibition will be presented digitally through short film recordings. These will be published on the institute's website in May 2020.