

CFP for a Special Issue of *The Lion and the Unicorn*: “#ReflectingRealities and Inclusive Youth Literature in the U.K.”

The Lion and the Unicorn: “#ReflectingRealities and Inclusive Youth Literature in the U.K.” Guest editors: Dr. Melanie Ramdarshan Bold, Breanna McDaniel, and Josh Simpson

Conversations surrounding inclusive youth literature in the UK have amplified in the last couple of years after the publication of several reports highlighting the dearth of characters and authors of colour in books for children and young adults.

In 2018, the Centre for Literacy in Primary Education (CLPE) published *Reflecting Realities*. CLPE describes *Reflecting Realities* as “the first UK study looking at diversity in children’s literature” and which aimed “to quantify and evaluate the extent and quality of ethnic representation and diversity in children’s publishing in the UK. This process involved analysing submissions of all children’s literature published in the UK in 2017 that featured Black or minority ethnic (BAME) characters to determine to what extent they were represented.” Among the findings were that only 4% of the 9,115 children’s books published in 2017 featured BAME characters, while only 1% had a BAME main character.

This *Reflecting Realities* report was followed by two studies by Dr Melanie Ramdarshan Bold, which examined authorship in the children’s and YA market. The first article “The Eight Percent Problem: Authors of Colour in the British Young Adult Market (2006–2016),” published in 2018, found that only 8% of YA books published in the UK between 2006-2016 were by authors of colour and only 1.5% were by British authors of colour. The article also found that the majority (90%) of bestselling YA books feature white, able-bodied, cisgender, and heterosexual protagonists. The second report, published in conjunction with the BookTrust, looked specifically at authors of children’s picture and middle grade books in the British market over the same length of time (2007-2017). Similar to the YA market, fewer than 9% of the authors were people of colour and fewer than 2% were British people of colour. Both studies saw a decrease in the representation of authors in 2016/2017, despite the increase in conversations about inclusivity in the publishing industry. Qualitative research (interviews with British authors of colour) highlighted some of the common barriers authors of colour faced, which can be expressed as a negative cycle (see p.13 of the BookTrust report).

Other industry reports also demonstrate that the cultural industries -- that is, the gatekeepers who are responsible for cultural output (including publishers and librarians) -- are made up of the dominant demographic groups. Consequently, we want to explore what the results of these studies mean for youth literature and the wider community that creates, curates, disseminates, and consumes it.

In response to these specific findings, the 2019 REIYL conference was established with a CFP that centred considerations of the literary climate for texts by and about people of colour in the UK. This call is a general extension of the original CFP and the panel topics for the conference convened in August 2019.

Possible topics include:

- Social media activism in UK children's and YA publishing and scholarship
- Critical engagement with youth literature from countries and locations outside of the "mainstream Western canon"; destabilizing the very concept of "mainstream" youth literature
- Representations and intersections of identities in youth literature in the UK, particularly within the diasporic communities collected there -- for example: race/ethnicity, gender, disability studies, immigration status, language, religion, sexuality, and class
- Data collection on books featuring people and cultures that are typically marginalised and stereotyped, and on archives and collections histories including who holds this information and where it is held.
- New critical approaches to integrating critical race, disability, feminist, gender, religious, post-colonial, queer, and other theories of youth literature in international children's and young adult literatures
- The role of gatekeeping in the twenty-first century and beyond
- How alternative forms of writing, publishing, reading, and curation can speak to the rising demand for inclusive youth literature
- What does it mean to write authentic, inclusive youth literature?

Essays should be sent to the guest editors at submissions@REIYL.com by **15 September 2019**. Submissions should be 15-20 pages (4000-6000 words). Accepted articles will appear in issue 42.2 (2020) of *The Lion and the Unicorn*.

Each of the above reports/articles cited can be accessed at

CLPE's Report, 'Reflecting Realities'

<https://clpe.org.uk/library-and-resources/research/reflecting-realities-survey-ethnic-representation-within-uk-children>

'The Eight Percent Problem: Authors of Colour in the British Young Adult Market (2006–2016)'

<https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12109-018-9600-5>

Booktrust Report on 'Representation of people of colour among children's book authors and illustrators'

<https://www.booktrust.org.uk/globalassets/resources/represents/booktrust-represents-diversity-childrens-authors-illustrators-report.pdf>

'Publishers failing to improve racial and regional diversity, survey finds'

<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2019/jan/16/publishers-failing-to-improve-racial-and-regional-diversity-survey-finds>