

Savolainen, Ilona: Discussion on child readers, aesthetic ideals and popular fiction in Finland, 1900-1959

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Reading may seem like a lonely activity, but in fact it is very social. Rules defining how, why and what to read are socially constructed. Children's reading have been central in many debates and moral panics concerning reading. A child reader triggers idealism, but also fear and anxiety. (E.g. Dolatkah 2011; Grenby 2011; Kauranen 2008; Mäkinen 1997.)

In this paper I approach children's reading from a historical perspective. I ask, *what kind of hopes and fears were attached to children's reading activities in Finland during the first six decades of the 20th century*. Was children's reading seen as useful, harmful or useless waste of time? I am especially interested in public libraries' role. In which ways libraries were supposed to limit or support children's reading?

In the beginning of the 20th century many thought that art gives a full and coherent sense of life unlike fragmented perceptions of everyday life (Haila 1934, p. 14–15). At the same time popular children's fiction was published in accelerating rate (Heikkilä-Halttunen 2000, p. 69–78). How was this aesthetic theory constructed in discussion on child readers and children's literature? Did the entertaining fiction aimed at mass audience of children fit into the idealistic conception of aesthetic experience as elevating and individualistic?

I use data ranging from newspaper and magazine articles to studies of children's reading practices and didactics of literature (e.g. Bruhn 1944 and Haila 1934). Data is analyzed qualitatively. Findings are discussed in relation to childhood studies, library history and history of reading.

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