

Comedy in German Children's Literature

Admittedly, comedy is not a specifically German phenomenon - some would even say the opposite. Creating and having fun are part of an aesthetic potential which has been exploited in children's literature in various eras and cultures. Within this global framework, however, specific cultural and literary traditions can be identified. Internationally successful classics of children's literature such as Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter* or Wilhelm Busch's *Max and Moritz* make clear that specific forms and functions of comedy can be found in German children's literature. Looking at the history and presence of comic forms, genres and media types one can find central positions, historical moments and trends that characterize the development of German children's literature in general: from didactic literature towards a wide variety and complexity of aesthetic forms in the 20th and 21st centuries. The different narrative strategies employed to make child readers laugh – in other words, the functions and scope applied to elements of comedy – refer to another important point: The connection between specific images of childhood, the cultural view on childhood and the modernization of children's literature.

In this paper, Ute Dettmar starts with a brief survey of historical traditions, especially the picture story and its forms of visual comedy. Based on theoretical approaches to comedy, humor and the culture of laughter which have characterized in particular German research into children's literature, she then considers forms and aesthetic developments by using selected examples. She addresses different narrative strategies and discusses the underlying changing cultural constructions of childhood. Finally, current literary developments of German children's literature will be discussed, including the growing importance of intermedial references and the comedy success stories increasingly rooted in a global entertainment culture and a society ever more dominated by visuals and the media.