

Miroslav Jindra

Pedagogická Fakulta

Masarykovy Univerzity

e-mail: miroslav.jindra@mail.muni.cz

[Homosexual parenthood in children's literature

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.18778/0860-7435.28.05>

Abstract: Homosexuality in children's literature is still a controversial topic in many countries of the world. Not only are people afraid to talk about this theme with children, they do not know how. The history of this topic in children's literature dates back to the 80s of the 20th century, when the first books were published. In 20th century, human society went through many changes which were reflected in all the fields of art (theatre, fine arts, literature, etc.). Writers had a need to familiarise children readers with 'taboo topics' such as homosexuality, death, drugs, etc. They wanted to introduce homosexuals as ordinary men and women, who live their own lives with their joys and worries. Today, we can find three main themes in children's literature: coming out, the life of homosexuals and homosexual parenthood. Each theme has its own specifics and typical reader age group of children or youth. This characterisation can help us to deeper identify the topic. The literature offers children and youth better and easier cognition of the world with its differences.

The aim is to learn about the history of homosexuality in children's literature and go deeper into its individual themes, especially homosexual parenthood. Children need to know everything about life and have no taboos. Why are we afraid to talk about it?

Keywords: homosexuality, children, same-sex parenthood

Introduction

The discussion about different sexual orientation is becoming an increasingly acute issue, not only for adults, but also for children. Although homosexuality is accepted by law in many countries, we can find many people who are afraid of it. They do not want to accept this minority because it goes beyond the so-called norm. However, each one of us is a unique original being who is not and cannot be the same as someone else. The difference from established conventions creates fear of the unknown in people. They do not know how to accept the difference and how to work with it.

During the course of childhood, one gets to learn many new things and he or she needs to gain his or her bearings in a complex world of relationships. Children build family relationships of different forms. Not all family structures are formed from the traditional concept of a nuclear family: mother, father and children. At present, this traditional concept is broken and other family structures are appearing (single parents, stepfamilies, grandparent families, etc). This shift is also reflected in children's literature, where we find a special category for LGBT families.

The article describes the value of the LGBT family topic in children's literature against the background of socio-historical context. The aim is to offer a possible approach to categorise this issue based on themes of selected children's books. Within the topic of same-sex parenthood in children's literature, we can find different kinds of dominant literary elements, ways of literary mediation by writers, and target reader age. These factors lead to a categorisation of this topic into individual thematic areas and, at the same time, they help us to gain a better orientation, deeper insight and understanding of the issue. The main question of this article is: What specific themes appear in children's books dealing with same-sex parenthood and how are the themes communicated to a growing child? To answer this general question, it is necessary to use a literary-historical approach that involves a thorough analysis of significant titles from Czech and international works of intentional children's literature. In addition to selecting the corpus according to its historical context, meaning and intentions, another important criterion is the age range of the book's target reader. The aim is to include a representative sample of book titles reaching out to all ages of readers for whom this topic is intended to achieve a possible general categorisation. The main methodological tool is the content analysis of selected children's literature with regards to the historical development of the issue of same-sex parenthood. Theoretical anchoring to the socio-historical and political context of the issue is also included.

Homosexuality in children's literature

Literature for children and youth has evolved considerably over the centuries. This trend is particularly evident in the thematic focus of the production of children's books, which is based on the social, historical and educational dogmas of each era. Throughout history, a child has been perceived as an immature individual, who needs to experience the period of childhood very quickly and become a full-fledged adult to serve society. The thematic focus of children's literature reflected the moral and ethical subject of society, which was influenced by religion.

The 20th century has brought many historical events and social changes, which have influenced the creation of literature for children and young people. Authors have been speaking more openly to children, and they have been expanding upon taboo themes in their works. The socio-political climate, emancipation, feminism, modern pedagogy and psychological approaches contributed to social changes and reassessment of the world. 'This influence became keenly felt in the 1960s when upheavals in life-style, traditions, mores, and language, as well as protests against sexism and racism, brought a new realism to children's books. Taboos were erased as authors explored themes previously thought unacceptable.' (Elleman, 1987, p. 416). A new way of thinking about literature for children and young developed at that time. The writers re-evaluated contemporary themes of children's literature and they came with new topics like death, drugs, divorce, sexuality, gender, transgender, etc. (Susan Eloise Hinton: *The Outsiders*, 1967; Judy Blume: *Forever*, 1975; Judith Vigna: *I Wish Daddy Didn't Drink So Much*, 1998).

The topic of homosexuality in children's literature can be found explicitly expressed since the second half of the 20th century, specifically in 1969 when John Donovan's story *I'll get there. It better be worth the trip* was published. It's a story of thirteen-year-old boy Davy Ross who lives with his alcoholic mother and dachshund Fred, and he finds his own sexuality with his classmate Douglas Altschuler. Gradually, many books for children and youth appeared, openly talking about homosexual love, e.g. Inger Edelfeldt: *Duktig pojke*, 1977; Nancy Garden: *Annie On My Mind*, 1982; Linda de Haan & Stern Nijland: *Koning & Koning*, 2000, etc. The topic of homosexuality is an umbrella term for sub-sections of the issue, such as coming out, living in a homosexual relationship, same-sex parenthood, etc., which have their own specific characters and target reader age group.

Same-sex parenthood

For many years, there has been a strict pattern for family – one man, one woman and their children. It is a result of biological function and the ability to reproduce. This normativity of a nuclear family resulting from a heterosexual married couple is embedded in the minds of many people, who do not want to accept any changes. They are afraid of a new form of family because society encounters many myths in the public eye: myths about the sexual orientation of children in LGBT families, e.g. children who grow up with gay or lesbian parents will be homosexuals too, they will have a problem with their own gender identity, or that same-sex parents are sexual deviants, who adopt children to abuse them (Naidoo, 2012, pp. 7–8). People are afraid that the constructs of human society will be broken and they will lose their own identity. To them, family is always the union of man and woman.

In a modern concept, we can perceive family not just for its biological function, but more generally. Susan Golombok (2015) talks about new family forms, which include all non-traditional nuclear families headed by step parents, single parents, same-sex parents and other different family structures. The path to new family forms evolved during the 20th century and it came hand-in-hand with development and changes in society (Sloboda, 2016).

The ‘same-sex parents’ model is currently a very contentious issue. There have been many changes in legislation around the world. In 1989, Denmark was the first country in the world to enact registered partnership (*Lov om registreret partnerskab*, 1989). It was joined by other countries such as Norway (in 1993), Sweden (in 1994) or France (in 1999). There are currently 25 states in the world that allow registered partnership or marriages of gays and lesbians. In addition to the legal regulation of homosexual partnership (registered partnership or same-sex marriage), there is a desire of gays and lesbians to raise children. Although same-sex parents are permitted to raise children in some countries of the world (Denmark, Sweden, United Kingdom, Netherlands, etc.), the subject is still a source of heated discussions in many countries. In addition to the biological limitations, some people refer to the importance of the gender stereotypes in heterosexual parents. From this point of view, some people think that children lack a male or a female pattern in same-sex parents and, therefore, lose an important pattern of behaviour (Golombok, 2015). During the last 30 years, there has been much research (Goldberg, 2010; Nedbálková, 2011, etc.) that refuted claims of this nature.

In this post-modern society where children can experience or be a part of a different family structure, they need to have a safe environment they can understand. It is important to familiarise adults and children with the real life of same-sex parents and their children, who have the same problems as

heterosexual families. There are many ways of introducing children to this issue, e.g. through open discussions or works of literature. They will encounter this different way of life sooner or later.

Same-sex parenthood in children's literature

The current production of children's literature offers many different kinds of books and themes. Homosexuality in children's literature is still a very controversial topic with many enemies. This aversion, based on our society's historical and social constructs, is still ongoing. For some adults, it's a topic that should not have a place in children's literature. This stereotype is based on long-term constructs of human society. At present, these old-fashioned constructs have been broken, and completely new structures are being developed. It's important to introduce new concepts to children, and literature offers many ways of mediating 'strange' topics to them.

Children's literature involving same-sex parenthood is still a very controversial topic and it appears in intentional literature for pre-readers or young and older school-aged children. For very young children, it is important to have a safe environment. At the toddler stage, children need to feel a social affiliation to other people, they develop their social ties and acquire a consciousness of family identity (Vágnerová, 2012). This cognition is further developed at the school age, when children step into new social roles and social structures. This stage is the most suitable age to acquaint children with this different kind of family form.

We can trace the same-sex parenthood topic in children's literature back to the 1980s. In nearly forty years, it has undergone considerable changes in terms of genre and form. The ways of passing the issue to the child reader have also changed. A growing interest in this issue required deeper insight into children's thinking and adaptation to their needs and experience. In the 1980s and early 1990s, there was a focus on reality, without any elements of fiction with regards to the same-sex parenthood topic. Elements of fiction were gradually introduced to make the reading material more attractive to children. The topic began to shape new structures and ways that were mediated to children readers. Karleen Pendleton Jiménez (2004, p. 96) talks about three popular directions in children's books containing LGBT families: 1) LGBT issues overtly drive the storyline; 2) LGBT issues manipulate the storyline with clever twists, and 3) LGBT characters without any mention of LGBT and any distinct consequences. This is a very clear definition characterising the storyline of same-sex parenthood in children's books. But we can go deeper, and in addition to the thematic focus of the issue, we must con-

sider the place, genre and form. The structure will then be more complex and we will have better and deeper insight into the issue of same-sex parenthood in children's literature. The first question is about the place and content of the story. Does the story take place in a real environment? Are situations in the story real or are they fiction? These questions provide the first possibility of categorisation. In this context, we also ask questions related to the theme and mediation of the topic to the child reader. We need to know if the theme is direct or not, who or what is the mediator of the theme, and the type of conflict in the story.

When we combine all these aspects, we can use a classification according to the two most important elements: the story's environment and theme. For this reason, I suggest the following categorisation of the same-sex parenthood topic in children's literature:

- 1) Stories from a real environment describing common life situations of an LGBT family;
- 2) Stories from a real environment containing homophobic conflict;
- 3) Stories about the difference represented by an unreal character;
- 4) Unrealistic and fairy tales.

This helps us to better understand the development of the same-sex parenthood topic in children's literature, and thus we will get a deeper insight.

1) Stories from a real environment describing common life situations of an LGBT family

The first category describes the life in a homoparental family. These books are primarily intended for younger age groups of children and pre-readers. The main characteristic of these books is to introduce the same-sex parenthood theme to children in a positive way. Same-sex parenthood is displayed as a parenthood of heterosexual couples, without any highlight or emphasis to the difference. Individual story situations capture the everyday life of a family (cleaning, washing, vacuuming, etc.). Life in an LGBT family is the same as in a heterosexual family; that is the main theme of these stories. They are very playful, which is also supported by the rhythm of language and visual processing. The authors show another family structure possibility that children readers can encounter in their lives. These books are not just primarily about same-sex parents, but it goes deeper into the different family forms such as single parents, families headed by grandparent, divorced parents, etc. Children readers do not learn only about LGBT families in these stories, but

their meaning is thus shifted towards a more general understanding of different family forms.

In 1989, the picture book *Heather Has Two Mommies* by American writer Lesléa Newman (2016) was published. A little girl, Heather, lives in a small house with her biological mother, Jane, and Jane's lesbian partner, Kate. Heather helps her mother with housework, they cook together, play together and they have a lot of fun. One day, Heather starts going to school, where she plays with other children and she learns new things. The teacher, Ms. Molly, asks the children what their parents do for a living. They talk about each mother's and father's profession and Heather explains that she does not have a father. Ms. Molly has a task for the children. Everyone draws a picture of their family and Heather draws the picture of her two mommies. After this, Ms. Molly talks about different kinds of families because not everyone lives with a mother and father.

Ms. Molly looks at all the pictures. 'It doesn't matter how many mommies or how many daddies your family has,' Ms. Molly says. 'It doesn't matter if your family has sisters or brothers or cousins or grandmas or grandpas or uncles or aunts. Each family is special. The most important thing about a family is that all the people in it love each other.' (Newman & Cornell, 2016, pp. 26–27).

Newman very gently outlines the issue of lesbian parenthood through play and real situations. *Heather Has Two Mommies* is written in the same positive way as *Daddy's Roommate* (Willhoite, 1991), which is easy for children to understand. *Heather Has...* is also number 11 on the list of the 100 Most Frequently Challenged Book of 1990–2000 (American Library Association, 2018). A sense of gentle children's humour and a playfulness is typical in Newman's work, as evidenced by another book on the issue of lesbian parenthood, *Mommy, Mama, and Me* (Newman & Thompson, 2009a), or gay parenthood issue, *Daddy, Papa, and Me* (Newman & Thompson, 2009b). Both books are classified in the first level of reading for children. Their playfulness is strongly based on the rhythm of the language in relation to the visual aspect of the book.

The next important picture book in this category is *Molly's Family* by Nancy Garden (2004). The story is very similar to *Heather Has Two Mommies* (Newman, 2016) in the lesbian parenthood topic, the environment and the plot. The Open School Night is to take place in a kindergarten and children draw pictures of their families for this event. One of Molly's pictures shows two mommies, Mommy, Mama Lu and puppy. Her classmate Tommy looks at the picture and tells Molly that she cannot have two moms, it is not a family:

Tommy laughed. 'Molly says she has a mommy and mama,' he told everyone. 'But there's no such thing.'... 'And I have a daddy and a mommy,' Tommy said. 'No one has two mommies.' Molly tried not to cry. (Garden, 2004, pp. 14–16).

Molly is confused, some children have a different family form, but Molly is the only one who has two mothers. She does not want to have the picture at the Open School Night. Finally, Molly decides to exhibit the picture at the event. The readers can see Molly's strong feelings when she is the only one who has same-sex parents. She realises she has a different kind of family form than other children, but that a parent's love is still the same. Garden builds the story very well from the beginning to the end and captures the feelings of a small child. In the beginning, there is only one task: to draw a family picture. Suddenly, there is a break when Molly draws her two moms. This reality is impossible for her classmates because nobody can have two moms or two dads. It is a very strong situation, when Molly does not understand what happened and somehow loses her previous family concept. After having a discussion with her mothers, Molly regains her certainty and realises the true essence of family.

There even were different kinds of families in her very own class! Molly also remembered what Mommy had said about how she and Mama Lu had so much love they wanted to share it with a baby. 'And that baby was me.' Molly whispered. That made her feel warm inside. (Garden, 2004, p. 30).

The central theme of the story shifts from different family forms to the feelings and experiences of a pre-school child. Although Molly first encounters a misunderstanding of the cohabitation of her two mothers by classmates in kindergarten, there are no characters or situations that would be considered an attack on homosexual parenthood.

Gay parenthood is displayed in the picture book *Daddy's Roommate* by American writer Michael Willhoite (1991). It is a story of a little boy whose parents divorced the year before, and now his father lives with his roommate Frank. His father and Frank do everything together, work together, shave together, sleep together. His mother tells the little boy that his father and Frank are gay. The boy does not know what it means, and his mother explains: 'Being gay is just one more kind of love. And love is the best kind of happiness.' (Willhoite, 1991, pp. 26–27). The title of the book indicates the storyline. Frank is presented as a roommate, who lives with the boy's father. The boy and the readers do not know that the father and Frank are a gay couple. Illustrations play a significant part in this book; they bring new hidden meanings. The text describes everyday family situations. The pictures take this

text and further develop the story and illustrate the emotional side of individual situations and relationships. *Daddy's Roommate* shows gay life in positive way, without any negative figures or situations. The book has been awarded by the American Library Association, it is number two on the list of the 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990–2000 (American Library Association, 2018). Six years later, Willhoite came with a sequel – *Daddy's Wedding* (Willhoite, 1996), where father and Frank decide to get married and be a real family.

As we can see, there is no straight homophobic attack in these stories and the gay parenthood issue is displayed rather as a comparison to other distinct family forms. The child of same-sex parents, as the main character of the story, is confronted with the question of his or her own family form, which is different than others. The importance of same-sex parenthood is explained in examples of various kinds of family forms and their significance. Stories in this category are about the meaning of LGBT families that love and protect their children just as heterosexual families.

2) Stories from a real environment containing homophobic conflict

In the next category, we find situations which contain a homophobic conflict. This conflict is caused by a homophobic individual or a group of people. Stories take place in a real environment and display common situations from the family life of same-sex parents. The main storyline is similar to the first category, the main characters of the stories are also young children, but a character or group enters the story with a very conservative view of same-sex parenthood and they attack the same-sex parents or their children. Children encounter the figures that may be perceived as the antagonists, which together can be compared to the struggle of good and evil in fairy tales. That is one of the reasons why these stories are interesting for younger children. For older children, it is more about the security of the family environment and their identity within society. The focus on the theme and the form of its development cater to children readers ranging in age from pre-school to older pupils.

One of the first published books on the topic of gay parenthood was *Jenny lives with Eric and Martin* (*Mette bor hos Morten og Erik*) written by Danish author Susanne Bösche, illustrated by Andreas Hansen. It was originally published in Danish in 1981 and then in 1983 in English. In her book, Bösche (1987) presented a very controversial topic that caused considerable embarrassment and discussion. In the UK, the book heavily influenced the government decree from 1988, which came into force as Section 28 of the

Local Government Act 1988. It prohibited any promotion of homosexuality through teaching or publishing materials (*Local Government Act*, 1988). Section 28 was valid until 2003. *Jenny lives with...* is composed of a photo story about five-year-old Jenny, who lives with her two daddies Eric and Martin. Martin, Jenny's biological father, lives with his boyfriend, Eric, and Jenny in their house. Karen is Jenny's mother, who lives nearby. She has a very good friendly relationship with Martin and Eric and visits Jenny, Martin and Eric very often. The story's baseline is about common situations in their lives; it is a parallel to heterosexual parents and their children, presenting the same experiences. This comparison of same-sex and heterosexual parenthood is typical for the first books on this topic. The authors try to show same-sex parents in common life situations also experienced by heterosexual parents. The story by Bösche is realistic without any fantastic elements. At the beginning, the three main characters (Jenny, Martin and Eric) are introduced to us together with the basic information that they live together in a small house in Denmark. It is gradually revealed that Martin and Eric are a gay couple and they are raising Martin's daughter Jenny. In the next part, we see different situations from their life: Eric's birthday party Jenny, Martin and Eric going to a laundromat. In one situation, Jenny, Martin and Eric run into a homophobic woman named Mrs Andrews. She is disgusted by the gay couple, she is always angry whenever they meet her. "“Sorry! You gays! Why don't you stay at home so the rest of us don't have to see you? Ugh!” Mrs Andrews turns on her heel and marches off angrily down the street." (Bösche & Hansen, 1987).

Johnny Valentine's picture book *Two Moms, The Zark, and Me* (1993) presents the lesbian parenthood issue. The book represents lesbian parenthood with a fantastic element, which is portrayed by a brontosaurus. The little boy must deal with a homophobic family, when he gets lost in the zoo. He meets Mrs and Mr McFink, who want to help him find his parents. The McFinks are shocked when the boy says that he has two moms and no father. It is wrong according to them.

“Two moms? And no dads? I'm shocked!” said McFink. “It's wrong! It's a sin! Not at all how I think! The only true family's a family like ours: With a mom, and a dad, and two kids, and two cars. And a house, and a yard, and a dog (or a cat). You just don't have a family if you don't have all that.” (Valentine, 1993, p. 19).

They want to find another family with a mother and father. The boy runs away, and he is happy to finally find his moms with the help of an animal in the zoo. The animal is portrayed as a yellow brontosaurus, called Zark; she is the one who brings the fantastic element into the story. She is a tame and rare species that can speak. Although Zark is a fictional character, and it seems at

first as though it should be classified in the next category, she represents the protagonist as the boy's helper. She is not a metaphor of difference, which is typical for the next category. Valentine also uses rhythm of the language, which is complemented by caricature illustrations. The caricatures of Mr and Mrs McFink emphasise their negative characteristics and thus clearly define the little boy as the main character as well as other positive characters.

We find the same issue in the book *Een cavia en twee moeders*¹ by Pieter Feller (2015), originally published in 2013 in Dutch. It is a story for older school-aged children compared to the previous books in this category. It tells a story of Seb, a ten-year-old boy, who lives with his two mothers, his biological mother Lotte and Maartje. They moved from Amsterdam to a house in a small town. Seb experiences the first feelings of love, but also prejudice from his neighbour Annemarie. She sends a letter where she writes that Seb's mothers does not care about him. Fortunately, the school's headmaster does not believe this anonymous information, but he talks about it with Lotte. One day, Seb's guinea pig is lost and everyone tries to find it. Paul and his wife, Annemarie, also help in the search. Paul finds the guinea pig, then they have a little party. Annemarie knows that Lotta and Maartje are very good mothers to Seb. Feller tries to capture the issue of lesbian parents and their child complexly in the story. The story begins with preparations for Father's Day. Children have a task to create something for their fathers. But Seb does not have a father, so he helps another girl. Feller also suggests the missing male pattern that appears in the next situations. Seb loves his mothers, but he realises that he lives in a different family form. He is very close friends with his neighbour Paul, who replaces the missing male element in the family for him. The view of lesbian mothers is also important in the story; they must cope with feelings of difference while they try to create a safe place for Seb in a new environment.

Compared to the previous category, the second category points to the issue of the same-sex parenthood accepted by the environment. The writers do not use any metaphors, they work more with the feelings of the main characters of the story. Capturing feelings and emotions are the main focus of these books; this focus helps to understand to the main characters and situations of stories. Children have straight insight to this topic and they can identify with the main theme. The negative experience with homophobic individuals or groups represents a reality that children can encounter in their lives. The child reader is primarily approached through mediums of language and visuals.

¹ The book has not been translated into English. The English translation of the title would be *One Guinea Pig and Two Moms*.

3) Stories about the difference represented by an unreal character

Stories with an unreal character comprise the third category. These stories work with a real environment as in the previous one, but the element of difference is displayed by an unreal character. There are same-sex parents and their children, but this form of parenthood is not highlighted. The gay or the lesbian parents are perceived as an ordinary component of the story. Unreal characters act nonsensically in the story like an element from another fantasy world. Children readers are presented with humour and metaphoric overlaps, which are very close to them. The specific theme of gay or lesbian parenthood transforms to a more abstract theme of difference. Children are acquainted – in a non-violent and witty way – with the theme of difference like in stories with fairy-tale elements. It helps to understand the topic in a wider context, not only as a part of homosexuality. This kind of book can be found mainly in modern children's book productions. Since the emphasis is placed on the text (on a plot and language means), the books are designed more for younger and older school-aged children readers, although fairy-tale elements also refer to pre-readers.

German writer Markus Orths writes very gently and wittily about gay parenthood with an unreal character in his children's book *Das Zebra unterm Bett*² (2017), originally from 2015. It is the story about a difference that is mediated through the personified character of a zebra. One day, a little schoolgirl named Hanna finds the zebra under her bed. Hanna takes the zebra to school, but the headmaster does not want the zebra there because zebras do not go to school. Although Hanna has gay parents, there is no emphasis placed on that. As an animal, the zebra is an embodiment of a difference. She can speak, read and count, but she is still an animal. The use of the zebra as a symbol of difference brings a different view to this topic. The main conflict is not between homosexuals and heterosexuals like in the previous category, but Orths goes deeper to the general issue, which is the typical for newer children's book productions. The homosexual characters are still present in the story, but as complementary elements that support the main idea. The story environments are just as real as the situations, but the zebra character brings an attribute of the fantastic story and an animal fairy tale. Language playfulness is the next characteristic feature of this book. Playing with words and humour help to get closer to child readers.

² The book is not translated into English. The English translation of the title would be *The Zebra under the Bed*.

The next example of this category is the book *Jura a lama*³ by Czech writer Markéta Pilátová (2012). Jura is a little pre-school boy. He lives in the Jestřábničky Mountains with his two mothers, Jula and Jola. They keep sheep and they knit sweaters, scarfs, and make other things from sheep wool. One day, a big car brings llamas. The sheep are confused because they have never seen llamas before. They do not want to be friends with llamas and slander them. They think llamas have a hidden treasure high in the mountains. A little ram named Julek wants to find the treasure and he sets out on the journey alone. Everybody looks for the little ram and they finally find him in a mole burrow. The female mole called Krtka Brtka saved him from the bad weather. At the end of the story, the sheep and llamas become friends. As in *Das Zebra unterm Bett*, the topic of same-sex parenthood is generalised and we perceive a relationship between lesbian parents and their child as an added value to the story. If we were to remove the lesbian parents and replace them with a heterosexual couple, the main topic would still be the same – an acceptance of difference. The sheep represent the traditional conservative element of society which is disturbed by the advent of exotic animals. The sheep lose their certainty when the llamas arrive. They look, speak, and behave differently and so they cannot integrate into the sheep's group. Pilátová adds the adventure of the very young ram. He is the child who does not know anything about llamas, he does not hold any prejudices. He just wants to experience adventure, but the dispute of the sheep sends him to a dangerous place. Fairy-tale elements and Julek's adventure story are two main aspects which are attractive for children.

Both examples in this category show a gradual departure from the straight focus on the topic of same-sex parenthood to a more general theme of difference. It's caused by the form of topic processing and development of thinking about the topic in human society. The books use partially unrealistic elements which are closer to a child's thinking. A combination of adventure and fiction is very interesting for pre-readers as well as young and older school children, who can better understand the story. This approach opens up new possibilities for the topic, not only the issue of same-sex parenthood, but the acceptance of difference. It is a strong issue for the contemporary world.

4) Unrealistic and fairy tales

The last category uses the fairy-tale genre typical for pre-school children and a very young school-aged group. The short story and emphasis on vis-

³ The book is not translated into English. The English translation of the title would be *Jura and the Llama*.

ual processing are two main features of these books which also determine the target reader group. The books refer to fairy tales in an environment like a kingdom or the characters have features of unreality, e.g. animals act like people. They work with the theme of same-sex parenthood very gently without any homophobic conflict. This positive approach is important for this age group because the aim of these stories is to acquaint children with different family forms of gay or lesbian parenthood. The visuals support the story through an emotional capture of feelings; illustrations bring other meanings that may not be visible in the text. We could also call these books an introduction to the topic of same-sex parenthood for children.

Contemporary children's literature works more with fairy-tale elements, which is a closer form for children. The first example is a picture book by Linda de Haan and Stern Nijland *King & King & Family* (2004). The fairy tale about two kings, Lee and Bertie, and their honeymoon journey to the jungle. They experience various types of adventures and have a lot of fun. Bertie would like to have a child when he sees an animal's babies. They return home and the suitcase seems to be quite heavy. Suddenly, a girl jumps out. The kings adopt the girl and call her Princess Daisy. This fairy tale has an easy plot, which is strongly supported by illustrations. The pictures act as children's drawings with distinctive colours. Every detail of the pictures develops some information in the text and its hidden meanings. In addition, pictures make the story and its theme funnier. The text and the illustrations comprehensively communicate very gently and playfully with the readers. No social norms, rules or homosexual parenthood issues are addressed, everything is acceptable. This freedom opens up a space for childhood imagination. The characters of King Lee and King Bertie are indicated in the text part and further developed in the pictures. Solis has an opposite view to this point:

However, the story lacks complexity or any type of multifaceted perspective. Lamentably, the main character's sexual identities are not highlighted and explored, but mirror socially sanctioned moral models. (Solis, 2005, p. 254).

We can agree with that view if we looked at it only from the point of the written text. However, when we read picture books, it is not only a story; the visual side of books can also sometimes extend beyond the meaning of the textual part.

We perceive an illustrated book as a synthetic medium, as a comprehensive statement of textual and illustrated components. Both means of expression act in parallel, however, they may appear in two functions with each other: in the function of interconnection and in the function of anchoring. (Tokár, 2000, p. 243).

Another important aspect is the reader's target age group, which is composed primarily of pre-school or very young school-aged children in this case. *King & King & Family* is the continuation of the previous book *Koning & Koning (King & King)* by the same authors (Haan, L. de & Nijland, S., 2000). Haan and Nijland can capture the essence of the theme through graphic subdivision of the text, which is a component of illustrations. Together, it underlines the emotional colour of the story.

Another book dealing with gay parents in contemporary children's literature is the picture book *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson and Peter Parnell with illustrations by Henry Cole (2005). The book is based on a true story from Central Park Zoo in New York. Roy and Silo are two male penguins who do everything together. One day, Roy finds a stone that looks like an egg and they try to hatch the egg. But nothing happens. The keeper in the zoo helps the penguins and he put a real penguin egg into their nest. Roy and Silo sit on the egg and suddenly the eggshell cracks and there stands a little baby penguin. They call her Tango. A very easy and engaging animal story about love, desire for family life and acceptance. Roy and Silo do everything together, but they are still missing something.

...one day Roy and Silo saw that the other couples could do something they could not. The mama penguin would lay an egg... And then there would be a baby penguin. (Richardson & Parnell, 2005, pp. 14–15).

The desire to have a baby and be like every other penguin family in the zoo grows when they see other penguin couples. They do not want to be different than the others. They want to be a family like all the other 'heterosexual' couples. It can be perceived as one of the main motives of the story. The story is based on real events (from Central Park Zoo in 1998) and its adaptation to the child perception by the anthropomorphism of penguins and the book's visual processing provide a deeper understanding of the main theme to the children. Illustrations by Henry Cole support the written text describing the events. We can better identify with Roy and Silo when we see the feelings of happiness or sadness in their eyes in pictures. But the book topic is still controversial for some people.

The book has been criticized for its anti-family attitude and the promotion of homosexuality. It has been considered unsuitable for the age group and several requests have been made to deny its access for children. For example, the book was moved to the library section with the limited access in Shiloh (Illinois) in November 2006. (Jechová, 2011, pp. 103–104).

Although there are always a few individuals or groups who attack similar book themes, Richardson and Parnell managed to portray this topic

in a unique way. The importance of the book is in the means of mediation same-sex parenthood to children through an animal fairy tale. *And Tango makes Three* was awarded as a challenged book several times by the American Library Association and it has won the ASPCA Henry Bergh Children's Book Awards in the Fiction Environment and Ecology category in 2005.

Fairy tales reflect another view on the topic of same-sex parenthood, which also corresponds to the way text and visual processing work. The subject matter is especially written into short stories with a simple plot. The emphasis on the books' visuals is important for two reasons. It complements the content of the story, or deepens it even further, and it is a specific expressive means of communication that is illustrative and, therefore, also more understandable for very young children.

Conclusions

Children's literature offers many issues, which can help to explain different topics of the contemporary world to children. It is a specific artistic means of cognition that can safely familiarise children with various problematic or thorny issues. Through real or fairy-tale written stories, children become aware of the world and its values and they learn the basic ideas and principles of working in a human society.

At present, children are exposed to many different issues (e.g. family problems, divorce, drugs, sexuality, etc.) and adults perceive these issues to be inappropriate for discussion, or prefer to avoid them altogether. A good example is the topic of same-sex parenthood. After almost forty years, when the topic of homosexuality first appeared in children's literature, some people are still not ready to accept the same-sex parenthood subject as a part of children's literature, although children encounter the new family form more and more. Every child needs to be assured about the importance and essence of a family and it does not matter if the family composition is a child with heterosexual or same-sex parents. This is one of many reasons why it is important to write about this issue for children and to discuss it.

Often time, writers have a personal motivation to write these kinds of books. They are gays and lesbians or they have close relationships with people of different orientations. The writers want to show that there is no difference between a family with heterosexual parents or with same-sex parents.

Since the 1980s, the topic's development has undergone many changes and it also changed the way of being addressed in children's literature. In the beginning, the stories had a more realistic foundation in the story plot and environment. The plot of these stories only describes family life or it has

some homophobic conflict. The realistic look at same-sex parenthood in children's literature was the first step for a defence and acceptance of this family form by society. Sometimes, the realistic foundation was unfolded by fantastic elements because children could relate better. These stories shifted the themes of books that have reached a more general level, from the theme of same-sex parenthood to the issue of a difference. There are also fairy tales. They work very gently with the topic of parenthood, especially the desire to have a child and to create a full-fledged family. These stories further support an understanding of the topic by children who are able to identify with main characters and their story. Stories backed by fantastic elements and fairy tales have infiltrated into children's literature, especially after 2000.

We find many kinds of books with the same-sex parenthood topic for a wide age range of children. However, the whole category is primarily intended for children reaching an older school age through the themes and the way it is literarily and visually processed. In the advent of puberty, children change their thinking and personal themes move towards themselves to reflect their own sexuality. Although the period between pre-school and older school age is very extensive and every age level has its own specifics, the books with this topic are not strictly intended for each age category separately, but they permeate these ages. That is particularly apparent in pre-school and younger school ages.

In literature for pre-school and very young school-aged children, the topic represents everyday life in LGBT families, which share the same joys and worries as other types of family forms. The main characters of these stories are little children who are the focus of the story and we learn about the life in a homosexual family through them. There are two basic approaches that disseminate the theme of same-sex parenthood to the child reader: positive and negative. The first way is typical for very young children, it only describes everyday life. The rhythm of language and considerable visual expressions are used. The pictures or photos complement a story and relate other meanings or emotions through visual mediation, bringing the child reader closer to the themes. The child can then better identify with figures and the whole story. For this reason, picture books are the most widespread medium for these age groups. Examples are the picture books *Mommy, Mama, and Me; Daddy, Papa, and Me* and *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Lesléa Newman or fairy tales like *King & King & Family* by Linda de Haan and Stern Nijland.

While the pre-school children are mostly focused on the visual part of a book, the school-aged children have the skills to read a book. This ability allows them to get deeper into the theme and stories can be more demanding and can use metaphoric overlaps. An important aspect is also the level of

mental development in children. The plot can be more complicated and the story can develop into more general themes. Children of this age may be interested in stories with fairy-tale or unrealistic elements, but gradually, their interest begins to shift to real facts. These kinds of books for school-aged children are represented by *Een cavia en twee moeders* (*One Guinea Pig and Two Moms*) by Dutch writer Pieter Feller (2013) and *Das Zebra unterm Bett* (*The Zebra under the Bed*) by German writer Markus Orth (2015).

The historical development of the topic helps us to better understand the thematic plane and thus classify knowledge according to possible categories. Besides, the target reader group is also an important factor. There are many ways to categorise the topic of same-sex parenthood. The most appropriate method may be the application of a thematic plane and the environment used in the stories. It helps to describe this topic in greater depth and general context.

In today's world, we find many differences that a child must face. Literature is a safe means for children to understand these differences. It is also important to remember that children do not know any taboos. That is what adults do. Children openly ask questions and want to learn new things. Let us be inspired by them.

References

- American Library Association (2018). The 100 Most Frequently Challenged Books of 1990–2000. Chicago: ALA. Retrieved 27th September 2018 from: <http://www.ala.org/PrinterTemplate.cfm?Section=%3Cbr%20/%3Ebbwlinks&Template=/ContentManagement/ContentDisplay.cfm&ContentID=85714>
- Elleman, Barbara (1987). Current Trends in Literature for Children. [online]. In: *Library Trends: Current trends in public library services for children: 35* (3), 413–426. Retrieved 3rd September 2018 from: <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/4816826.pdf>
- Goldberg, Abbie E. (2010). *Lesbian and gay parents and their children: research on the family life cycle*. Washington, DC: American Psychological Association.
- Golombok, Susan (2015). *Modern families: parents and children in new family forms*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Jechová, Lucia (2011). *Survey of children's and juvenile literature*. Brno: MSD.
- Jiménez, Karleen P. (2004). Review of 'Mom and Mum are Getting Married!'. In *Journal of the Canadian Association for Curriculum Studies*, 2, 2, 95–98. Retrieved 4th September 2018 from: <https://jcacs.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jcacs/article/view/16905/15708>
- LOV nr 372 af 07/06/1989. (1989). Lov om registreret partnerskab. Retrieved 21st March 2019 from: <https://www.retsinformation.dk/Forms/R0710.aspx?id=59419>
- Naidoo, Jamie K. (2012). *Rainbow family collections: selecting and using children's books with lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer content*. Santa Barbara, CA: Libraries Unlimited.
- Nedbálková, Kateřina (2011). *Matky kuráže: lesbické rodiny v pozdně moderní společnosti*. Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství (SLON) ve spolupráci s Masarykovou univerzitou.

- Section 28 of the Local Government Act 1988 (1988). Prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material. The National Archives. Retrieved 24th August 2018 from: <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/1988/9/section/28/enacted>
- Sloboda, Zdeněk (2016). *Dospívání, rodičovství a (homo)sexualita*. Praha: Pasparta.
- Solis, Santiago (2005). Cripqueers and the Land of Make-Believe. In: *Contemporary youth culture: An international encyclopedia*, Vol. 2. (pp. 249–257). London: Greenwood Press.
- Tokár, Michal (2000). *Kapitoly z teórie knižnej ilustrácie*. Prešov: Prešovská univerzita.
- Vágnerová, Marie (2012) *Vývojová psychologie: dětství a dospívání*. Praha: Karolinum.

Children's books

- Blume, Judy (1975). *Forever*. Scarsdale, NY: Bradbury Press.
- Bösche, Susanne (Writer), & Hansen, Andreas (Illustrator) (1987). *Jenny Lives with Eric and Martin*. London: Gay Men's Press.
- Edelfeldt, Inger (1977). *Duktig pojke*. Stockholm: Bokád.
- Feller, Pieter (Writer) & Hoog, Niels de (Illustrator). (2015). *Jedno morče a dvě mámy*. Praha: LePress.
- Garden, Nancy (1982). *Annie On My Mind*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux Inc.
- Garden, Nancy (Writer) & Wooding, Sharon (Illustrator) (2004). *Molly's Family*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
- Haan, Linda de, & Nijland, Stern (2000). *Koning & Koning*. Medemblik: Gottmer.
- Haan, Linda de & Nijland, Stern (2004). *King & King & Family*. New York: Tricycle Press.
- Hinton, Susan E. (1967). *The Outsiders*. New York: Viking Press.
- Newman, Lesléa (Writer) & Cornell, Laura (Illustrator) (2016). *Heather Has Two Mommies*. Somerville, MA: Candlewick Press.
- Newman, Lesléa (Writer) & Romo, Adriana (Illustrator) (2002). *Felicia's Favorite Story*. Pennsylvania: Two Lives Publishing.
- Newman, Lesléa (Writer) & Thompson, Carol (Illustrator) (2009a). *Mommy, Mama, and Me*. New York: Tricycle Press.
- Newman, Lesléa (Writer) & Thompson, Carol (Illustrator) (2009b). *Daddy, Papa, and Me*. New York: Tricycle Press.
- Orths, Markus (Writer) & Dutková, Dora (Illustrator) (2017). *Zebra pod postelí*. Praha: LePress.
- Pilátová, Markéta (Writer) & Dutková, Dora (Illustrator) (2012). *Jura a lama*. Praha: LePress.
- Richardson, Justin & Parnell, Peter (Writers) & Cole, Henry (Illustrator) (2005). *And Tango Makes Three*. New York: Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division.
- Settlington, Ken (Writer) & Priestley, Alice (Illustrator) (2004). *Mom and Mum are Getting Married*. Toronto: Second Story Press.
- Valentine, Johnny (Writer) & Lopez, Angelo (Illustrator) (1993). *Two Moms, The Zerk, and Me*. Boston: Alyson Wonderland.
- Vigna, Judith (1998). *I Wish Daddy Didn't Drink So Much*. Morton Grove: Albert Whitman & Company.
- Willhoite, Michael (1991). *Daddy's Roommate*. New York: Alyson Books.
- Willhoite, Michael (1996). *Daddy's Wedding*. Los Angeles: Alyson Wonderland.

Homoseksualne rodzicielstwo w literaturze dziecięcej

ABSTRAKT: Homoseksualizm w literaturze dziecięcej jest wciąż kontrowersyjnym tematem w wielu krajach świata. Ludzie nie tylko boją się mówić o tym temacie z dziećmi, ale nie wiedzą jak. Historia zagadnienia w literaturze dla dzieci sięga lat 80. XX wieku, kiedy opublikowano pierwsze książki na ten temat. W XX wieku społeczeństwo ludzkie przechodziło wiele zmian, które znalazły odzwierciedlenie we wszystkich dziedzinach sztuki (teatr, sztuki piękne, literatura itp.). Pisarze musieli zapoznać dzieci z „tematami tabu”, takimi jak homoseksualizm, śmierć, narkotyki itp. Chcieli zaprezentować homoseksualistów jako zwykłych mężczyzn i kobiety, którzy żyją własnym życiem, z ich radościami i zmartwieniami. Dzisiaj możemy znaleźć trzy główne wątki związane z omawianym zagadnieniem w literaturze dziecięcej: ujawnianie się, życie homoseksualistów i homoseksualne rodzicielstwo. Każdy z nich ma swoją specyfikę i typową grupę wiekową dziecięcych lub młodzieżowych odbiorców. Przedstawiona charakterystyka może pomóc w podjęciu pogłębionej identyfikacji tematyki utworów. Literatura oferuje dzieciom i młodzieży lepsze i łatwiejsze poznanie świata z jego różnicami.

Celem artykułu jest poznanie historii homoseksualizmu w literaturze dziecięcej oraz zagłębienie się w tematykę poszczególnych utworów, zwłaszcza dotyczących homoseksualnego rodzicielstwa. Dzieci muszą wiedzieć wszystko o życiu i nie mieć tabu. Dlaczego boimy się o tym porozmawiać?

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: homoseksualizm, dzieci, homoseksualne rodzicielstwo