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OLGA BUKHINA ORCID: 0000-0002-6187-8074
International Association for the Humanities

A Child as a Flâneur and a Voyeur: The Imaginative Space of Streets and Museums

Abstract: This article discusses a representation of the relationship between a child and a big city in American and European children's and teens' literature. In many books, a child or a teen is portrayed as a contemporary flâneur, an idle city walker. Following Eric Tribunella's adaptation of Walter Benjamin's definition of a flâneur to children, the article explores various book representations of the big cities as they are seen through the eyes of a child. The city dweller perceives her environment as an exciting, even though sometimes threatening, place. Acting as a flâneur and a voyeur, a child develops a complicated relationship with the streets and museums of the big city. Enormous walking (and transportation) possibilities of the city are very attractive for youngsters. The hidden wonders of the big city mesmerize the curious minds of children and teens, making them natural voyeurs. Children are capable of combining the aimless gaze of a flâneur with the precise attention of a voyeur. Often, a city becomes one of the very important characters in a book, and a child forms a partnership with the city. In spite of the notion of adults that the city is a dangerous place for children, children immensely enjoy the city spaces, streets, parks, and museums. Museums particularly work as symbolical places of safety and exploration. Contemporary children and teenagers enjoy even more freedom to be city flâneurs and voyeurs due to the newly acquired speed of movement, including the use of bikes, scooters, and public transportation. With the main focus on New York City as one of the most striking example of a big city in children's books, the article also discusses the literary representations of other megalopolises and large cities, such as Moscow and Minsk.

Keywords: children's literature, city, flâneur, museum, teens' literature, voyeur.

> New York blends a gift of privacy with
> the excitement of participation.
>
> E.B. White, *Here is New York*

Often, a big city is considered to be an inappropriate place for children. The city can be dangerous and inhospitable. Both people and cars could be threatening to a child's well-being. She needs a supervision to roam the city, parents and other adults insist. Nevertheless, millions of children are big city dwellers, and the wonders of the big city are regular attractions and magnets for a curious mind of a child and a teenager. The intense communication opportunities are one of the important features of the big city. At the same time, the city is a place of solitude where a person can be almost invisible. In children's and adult literature, the city is often, though implicitly, present in the book; it serves as a backdrop for the plot's events and the characters' adventures. But in some books, the city acts quite explicitly; it becomes a character, if not a main protagonist, at least, one of the very important ones. In children's books especially, it partners with a child/teen protagonist(s). It could lead or mislead her, help her to achieve her goals, or trick her into even more city adventures.

This article will discuss a representation of the relationships between a child and a big city in American and European children's and teens' literature. I will mainly focus on New York City, but I will also show how other major cities play a significant role in children's and young adults' literature providing a playground for a contemporary flâneur, an idle city walker. As we see, the streets and parks of Moscow or Minsk also provide a perfect book setting; a teen may feel herself free and powerful because a big city is not judgmental and accepts a growing person as she is. The choice of New York as a main focus is justifiable since it is "one of the most iconic cities on the planet. New York isn't just an individual city, although it is unique. In many ways it is the City, with all the aspects of urban life seen in Houston or Shanghai, or in storied cities throughout history, even going back to Babylon" (Rosenbaum 2014: 454).

The city is a dangerous place, but it also offers protection and accommodation. A well-known New York fighter for a better city, Jane Jacobs, in her book *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (1961), in the chapter entitled "The use of sidewalks: assimilating children," claims that the city is the best place for children. She is sure that "shooing the children into parks and playgrounds is worse than useless, either as a solution for the streets' problems or as a solution for the children" (Jacobs 2016: 87). So, let a child and a teen walk in the streets of New York and other major cities and be equal to adults in this pleasurable occupation. The idea of a flâneur who idly and lazily walks in the city was conceived by Charles Baudelaire and was further elaborated in Walter Benjamin's reading of Baudelaire's texts. In his 1935 essay "Paris, the Capital of the Nineteenth Century," Benjamin states: "The flâneur still stands on the threshold – of the metropolis as of the middle class. Neither has him in its power yet. In neither is he at home. He seeks refuge in the crowd" (Benjamin 2002: 10). "Refuge in the crowd" is the most important notion that we will be discussing in this text. Benjamin's focus is, of course, on adults: "An intoxication comes over the man who walks long and aimlessly though the streets. With each step, the walk takes on greater momentum" (Benjamin 2002: 880). As we will see later, "long and aimlessly" is another important concept. Even though Benjamin does not talk about children, he nevertheless stresses the youthfulness of that process, its intrinsic connections to childhood. Benjamin emphasizes that "it is all the same to him [flâneur] whether it is the childhood of an ancestor or his own" (Benjamin 2002: 880). The notion of Benjamin's flâneur has been regularly exploited in the analysis of adult literature.[1] To my knowledge, the first scholar who recognized a flâneur as an image of a contemporary child wandering about the city, and especially about New York City, was Eric Tribunella in his seminal article "Children's Literature and the Child Flâneur." He defines a flâneur in the opening lines of his article as follows: "One of the key figures in literature of the city is the flâneur, the idle wanderer or man about town, defined primarily by two activities: strolling and looking" (Tribunella 2010: 64). Tribunella elaborates on the relationship between a flâneur and a city: "The flâneur, exhibiting qualities of both the convalescent and the child, approaches the city with this keen sense of interest that enables him to see through its filth, incoherence, and chaos to its beauty and diverse possibilities" (Tribunella 2010: 67). He insists that "(t)he child is central to the conception of the flâneur, who strolls the city streets gazing critically and with wonder, as a child might" (Tribunella 2010: 67). An ability of looking around and making mental observations as well as seeing the hidden "treasures" of the city, sometimes in the places where adults see nothing interesting, grants a child the voyeuristic qualities that we will be discussing later. As soon as the big city becomes a character in a children's book, a child-flâneur and a child-voyeur occupy the prominent positions in these books, and the city plays the role of their partner and adversary.

A PLAYGROUND FOR THE SMALL ONES

New York provokes many writers to assign it the role of a hero as well as use it as a book's location. Even books for very small children are often set in the city environment with the goal to familiarize children, its dwellers or its tourists, with the life of the city. One of the most famous authors of this picture book genre is the Czech writer Miroslav Šašek with his many books about different cities, from Paris, London, and Rome to New York, San-Francisco, and Washington, DC. His book about New York, *This is New York* (1960), presents a tourist point of view of the City. Both the narration and the illustrations move through the city streets and tourists' attractions without looking deeply into the real city life. A tourist gets what a tourist needs. A very different, and more authentic view of the City was given by one of the pioneers of American picture books, Lucy Sprague Mitchel.[2] It is an insider's look, but a look that is appropriate for small children. Mitchel's *Here and Now Story Book* (1921), with the important help of the black-and-white illustrations of Hendrik Van Loon, portrays a story of an immigrant boy. He comes, as we learn later, from Russia. Boris explores (without his mother, but with her blessing and advice to be careful) the city streets, and, of course, he gets lost and becomes increasingly confused. He sees the horse wagons and cars and trucks, and he needs to wait a long time to cross the street at every street corner. He does not move fast enough which is a torture for a boy. He discovers the subway, but he does not know how to ride it. As a naturally born flâneur, he watches people around him buying a ticket for a nickel (do not forget, this was a long time ago). He sees where people deposit their tickets to get to the platform. He learns on the go; he constantly observes; he is all eyes and ears. Sounds are especially important for Mitchel. She uses a lot of onomatopoetic words and expressions. The subway cars are making a most terrible noise: "Rackety, clackety, klang, klong!" They stop with the hiss: "Yi-i-i-i—sh-sh-sh-sh!" As a reward for his bravery, Boris finds the Park and plays happily there, and in the end, he is able to return back to his mother by taking the elevated train. Now he is an experienced rider and knows how to buy a ticket. His English abilities are still limited, but he miraculously recognizes the familiar name (or rather numbers) of his stop, Fourteenth Street.

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[1] For example, in *The Flaneur in Nineteenth-Century British Literary Culture: "The Worlds of London Unknown"* by Isabel Vila-Cabanes, and in *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth Century American Literature* by Dana Brand.

[2] See Stanton 2014: 7–22.

When Boris grows a bit older and speaks a bit better English, he starts exploring Manhattan on a very different scale. He walks it, he rides it, and he discovers the East River, the Hudson River (he first insists on calling it the West River), the Harlem River, and the Harbor. He knows about the Harbor already; he arrived there from Europe as a little child. He makes an amazing discovery that New York is an island, and he becomes its avid explorer. "Boris, he went out again / To find the country wide! / And he went north and north he went / To Harlem River's side. / Again he turned himself about / And went the other way / And he went south and south he went / And there the harbor lay!" (Mitchel 1921: 268). He watches, observes, and maps the city; he occasionally talks to the city inhabitants to get some extra information about his enormous playground, Manhattan. As the Russian researcher of childhood and children's literature Ekaterina Asonova notes: "The perception of the city in one's childhood is always similar to a fairy tale or a myth: habitual children's movements around the city are marked by some little images, monuments, and familiar pictures in the stores' windows" (Asonova 2017: 12).[3] The true geography that requires the names of the streets comes later. Mitchel herself writes about the necessity of geography in child's life. In her book *Young Geographers: How They Explore the World and How They Map the World* (1916), she notes that up to four or five, "the child's environment was essentially local and predominately personal" (Mitchel 1991: 13). Later, a child is able to acquire much broader scope and comes to the stage Mitchel identifies as "map-thinking." Mitchel speaks about the different stages of map-thinking in a child's development (Mitchel 1991: 27–29). A flâneur, of course, does not need a map to wander, but this wandering certainly creates a map in a child's mind.

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[3] Translation is mine.

Margaret Wise Brown, a student and a friend of Lucy Sprague Mitchel, also tried to capture the hustle and the bustle of the big city in *The Noisy Book* (1939) illustrated by Leonard Weisgard. The role of the city explorer is assigned not to a child, but to Muffin the Dog who temporarily cannot see due to the bandage over his eyes. In the city clearly identified as New York, Maffin needs to play by ear in a very direct meaning of this expression. He wanders and explores; he absorbs various noises: "Men hammering / ban-bang-bang / automobile horns / awuurra awuurra / horses hoofs /clop clop clop clop." (Brown and Weisgard 1939). Later, Brown's "noisy books" moved outside of the city to enjoy the country noises and seashore noises.[4] Often, characters of picture books have much more freedom of movement around the city than their readers/peers. Thus, the spirit of "flâneurism" in picture books promises enormous walking and transportation possibilities that are so appealing for a real child. A goal of a journey is present, but the process of a journey is much more important than the goal, and the goal may never be attained. A good example of such city wandering is a small book written by Amos Vogel, a founder of the New York Film Festival, and illustrated by the famous writer and illustrator Maurice Sendak. In *How Little Lori Visited Times Square* (1963), Lori, a little boy, in order to get to Times Square rides consecutively the subway, a bus, a taxi, the elevated train, a boat, a helicopter, a horse and wagon, a pony, an elevator, and in the end, he rides a turtle. Still the goal is never reached; he never gets to Times Square: "And this was four months ago. And nobody has heard from them since..." (Vogel and Sendak 2001). So, Lori and his turtle end up as perpetual flâneurs of New York.

To introduce the image of a voyeur, I will use the first of several iconic children's books by Kay Thompson (text) and Hilary Knight (illustrations) about a girl named Eloise who lives in the Plaza Hotel on the South-East corner of Central Park. Its six-year old protagonist reveals the features of a voyeur rather than a flâneur. In the first book, *Eloise: A Book for Precocious Grown-ups* (1955), Eloise's life is pretty much constricted to the hotel grounds. Since she is an extremely curious girl, she makes the point of observing everything in her hotel. She is a narrator of her own story, and she admits: "I spend an awful lot of time in the lobby. For instance every day I have to go to the Desk Clerk and see what's happening there" (Thompson and Knight 1969). She knows all secret places and spaces; she knows everyone who lives there and works there. She is a lonely and mischievous child; her parents are often absent, and she does not like her nanny too much, but this gives her the desirable freedom to snoop around and to explore everywhere. Only later does Eloise venture into outdoors, as, for example, in the second and in the fourth sequels, *Eloise in Paris* (1957) and *Eloise in Moscow* (1959).[5] In the latter, she becomes a true flâneuse, and Eloise's abilities to move freely drastically exceeds these of her readers. This little girl has elaborate (but safe as they should be in the children's book) adventures that even a teenage protagonist could envy. I will not be commenting on the authenticity of Eloise's Moscow impressions, a country of snow, human crowds, and the black caviar. Even though there are some adults present, it is Eloise who always defines the drift of her flâneuse's movement. Eloise never, especially in Moscow, gives up her voyeur's attitude. The multiple spy moments in the book reflect general political relationships between Russia and the USA in the height of the Cold War. At nights, the girl spies on the Soviet spies in the National Hotel, and Hilary Knight illustrates this experience with oversized key holes and a multitude of scary eyes.

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[4] For more detailed account of life and writing of Margaret Wise Brown see her biography written by Leonard S. Marcus (Marcus 1999).

A PLACE FOR FUTURE WRITERS AND ART EXPERTS

A flâneur and a voyeur act even more authentically and with more freedom of movement in books for tween. Louise Fitzhugh's *Harriet the Spy* (1964) has a very recognizable New York City setting – the Upper East Side around the eightieth streets, and Carl Schurz Park, a little park on the East River. "Fitzhugh provides detailed information about Harriet's location and movement, emphasizing Harriet's practice of strolling the city streets" (Tribunella 2010: 74). Harriet is full of curiosity about life and people who surround her. She aspires to become a writer and, at the same time, a spy like Mata Hari, an infamous German spy during World War One. Harriet the Spy is a true heiress of Eloise who never travels anywhere without her telescope. After school, Harriet explores, always alone as a flâneur and a voyeur should, her neighborhood during the "spy route" she developed. "While Harriet travels a far shorter distance than we might expect of an adult flâneur, she does prove remarkably free to roam unsupervised, despite her status as a child" (Tribunella 2010: 74). Most of the "stops along her spy route...are within a few blocks of her home or school" (Tribunella 2010: 75). She also writes extensive notes about all that she sees, and she observes various oddities of her classmates and neighbors. That, of course, does not end well: other students discover the notebook, form the "Spy Catcher Club," and find their way to make Harriet's life miserable. Jenny Bavidge in her chapter "'City Will Sing.' Natural New York," from the collection *Children's Literature and New York City* calls Harriett a "proto-flâneur." Bavidge states that Louise Fitzhugh' Harriet and Mona in Elizabeth Enright's *The Saturdays* (1941) "are proto-flâneurs, wrestling some agency from the situations of the streets and forging their own space for self-definition" (Bavidge 2014: 58). I would grant Harriet a status of a fully accomplished flâneuse because she develops her own deep and unique relationships with the city. Even though her wandering has as its purpose to acquire experience for a future writing career, observation is always the most important part of her expeditions. Harriet succeeds in her goal, and after a long and complicated conflict with her classmates and friends, she is appointed (by an understanding teacher) to be the editor of the class newspaper, a perfect starting position for an aspiring writer. She does not stop roaming the streets because she constantly needs new materials and new observations. Eric Tribunella, who first connected the idea of a flâneur with children's literature, remarks on a very important feature of children's books in their relationship to the cities they describe: "Moreover, while New York might be immense and overwhelming, Harriet's route carves out a knowable section or neighborhood, thereby making the city more manageable for her, and perhaps for the reader. This kind of geographic specificity is one of the conventions of New York children's literature" (Tribunella 2010: 75). It is very important to scale the city to the needs of a child; it does not preclude a child from covering much broader territory of roaming around as we will see in the next book discussed.

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[5] Curiously, a contemporary American bestselling author Amor Towles uses the same scheme in his recent novel, *A Gentleman in Moscow* (2016). A grown-up Russian nobleman, Count Alexander Rostov, is restricted to dwelling in the hotel in Moscow for political reasons. He gets to know everyone in the hotel, and he spends a lot of time with a little girl Nina who also lives in the hotel and is constantly snooping around in the best Eloise's style. Nevertheless, Count Rostov and Eloise live in different Moscow hotels.

It has become a common practice to use the characters of the book *From the Mixed-up Files of Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler* (1967) by E.L. Konigsburg as the exemplary models of children-flâneurs. It tells the story of suburban siblings, Claudia and Jamie, who ran away from their Connecticut home, and spent a week living in the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York. It is Claudia who conceived the adventure; Jamie, the younger brother, is a faithful companion and a "money bag." Claudia herself is not an unprepared romantic girl; she knows very well that the adventure cost money. She also knows that she does not like heat or cold and a lack of comfort, and therefore, "she decided that her leaving home would not be just running from somewhere but would be running to somewhere. To a large place, a comfortable place, an indoor place, and preferably a beautiful place. And that's why she decided upon the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York City" (Konigsburg 2013: 5). During the course of their New York adventure, two kids sleep in the museum bed, wash in the museum fountain, and hide a violin in the Ancient Roman sarcophagus. The detailed description of the museum objects which were so fascinating for Claudia and Jamie is provided in the Leonard S. Marcus' book *Storied City: A Children's Book Walking-Tour Guide to New York City* (2003). Among them are the royal writing table, and "the full-dress display of medieval weaponry and warrior apparel that appeals more to romantic Claudia than to pragmatic Jamie" (Marcus

2003: 63–64). Claudia and Jamie not only dwell in the museum and explore its interiors, but they also stroll the City aimlessly and with pleasure together with its permanent inhabitants and tourists. "New York is a great place to hide out. No one notices no one" (Konigsburg 2013: 31), confessed Jamie approving his sister's choice of a hiding place. "Jamie, a true child of the suburbia, is trying to find his way in Manhattan with its already rigid grid with the help of a compass" (Bukhina 2017: 27).[6]

Claudia is a curious voyeur; she is very attracted to the idea of secrets, and indeed, with some help from a mysterious Mrs. Basil E. Frankweiler, the children are capable of unveiling the secret of a small statue in the Museum and attributing it to Michelangelo. This is possible only if a child watches the world not just with the aimless gaze of a flâneur, but with the precise attention of a voyeur. The geographic scope of Claudia and Jamie's travel is much broader than the Harriet's. "Like other New York children's novels, this one is quite specific about the locations and routes taken by its characters, putting the child protagonist in intimate contact with the city's streets" (Tribunella 2010: 81). The Metropolitan Museum and the New York Public Library, Central Park and the Rockefeller Center provide a perfect playground for these two kids, completely unsupervised and totally on their own. What a horror for modern parents who are now afraid of letting children step out on the streets of the big city alone. Nevertheless, the book of E.L. Konigsburg is still exceptionally popular. The book is a Newbery Award winner and a long-term favorite of New York (and not only) children. In 2017, the fiftieth anniversary of the book was celebrated in the Metropolitan Museum of Art with various activities for kids and tours of the museum featuring the places described in the book (Sauer, 2017; Tolentino 2017).

Eric Tribunella builds his case and introduces the child-flâneur using the characters from four books. They are Louise Fitzhugh' Harriet and E.L. Konigsburg's Claudia and Jamie as well as Elizabeth Enright's Mona and Virginia Hamilton's Junior Brown of the Newbery Honor book, *The Planet of Junior Brown* (1971). A child-flâneur is "responding to the city with the amazement or imagination of the artist or writer" (Tribunella 2010: 88). Indeed, Harriet is a writer, Junior Brown is a painter, so Claudia and Jamie are not the only kids who develop a close relationship with art. They are also not the only ones fascinated with New York City museums. Relationships between a child and art, and between a child and museum objects become a pivotal point of two more American books we will be discussing before moving to a different part of the world. Not just the attribution of an art piece, but saving a museum treasure is the mission of another city dweller, James, a protagonist of the 2008 Elise Broach's *Masterpiece*, a New York Times bestselling middle grade mystery novel. James is a lonely boy, a son of divorced parents, and his adventures started when he met Marvin, a water beetle who lives in James' apartment in Manhattan. Together, the boy and the beetle will walk the city streets and the museum spaces, sometimes aimlessly, and sometime with the urgent goal. James and Marvin love being introduced to the Metropolitan Museum of Art. Not like Claudia and Jamie, James lives in the City, very near the Museum, and he can go there on a regular basis. First, he goes there with his father, an artist, but through the twists and turns of the plot, he becomes a frequent visitor, and more than just a visitor. Through the combined efforts of James and Marvin, and because of a rare among water beetles ability to draw, both the boy and the beetle have been bound together around a project of finding a thief who is after the Albrecht Dürer's drawings exhibited at the museum. James and his beetle friend learn to walk slowly around the museum as the museum flâneurs who do not yet know what they are looking at, but learn to admire the variety of art objects as they are passing past them. Marvin the Beetle is also a voyeur by nature; he spends most of his time spying on people who live in the apartment because he tries to make some sense out of their behavior which is not an easy task. He does not understand why people argue, or why they need to divorce. (The beetles do not divorce. Marvin's mother claims that it is because the beetles have no lawyers!) Marvin does not keep a diary; even though he can draw, he does not write. And he keeps his observations to himself. The book ends with the promise of more wonders of the city for both, the boy and the beetle. *Masterpiece*, which is written forty years after E.L. Konigsburg's book, clearly refers to it and situates itself in relation to its famous predecessor allowing the city and the museum to open up to a child again and suggesting "a new alliance between the city and the child" (Bukhina 2017: 28).[7] A very special relationship between a child and a museum exists, of course, not only in literature; it is a quite real phenomenon. As one of the frequent museum goers reminisces about her childhood in the collection *Musei i deti: vospitanie pokolenii* (*Museum and Children: Educating New Generations*, 2010), "I needed just to leave this world behind me for some time; and that was enough for obtaining some energy for the next week. In the end of the week, I again was impatiently waiting for and dreaming about a new meeting with the Museum" (Naumov and Korostelina 2010: 182). Other participants of this memoir collection about The Pushkin State Museum of Fine Arts in Moscow express very similar feelings.

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[6] Translation is mine.

As the greatest lover of New York, an American writer and the author of *Charlotte's Web* and *Stuart Little*, E.B. White, said, "(t)here are roughly three New Yorks. There is, first, the New York of the man or woman who was born here, who takes the city for granted and accepts its size and its turbulence as natural and inevitable. Second, there is the New York of the commuter.... Third, there is the New York of the person who was born somewhere else and came to New York in quest of something" (White 1999: 25–26). We already saw a few New York born characters, Muffin the Dog, Eloise, Harriet, James, and Marvin the Beetle; Claudia and Jamie may be considered commuters, Boris of *Here and Now Story Book* clearly belongs to the third category of these who came to New York seeking a new life. The same may be said about both protagonists of *Wonderstruck* (2011), a novel written and illustrated by Brian Selznick. This thick and beautiful book combines two stories, one of a boy named Ben (this story is written), and another of a girl named Rose (this story is mostly told through the expressive black-and-white drawings). After the death of his mother, a local librarian, Ben who grew up in Minnesota, sets himself on a journey. He goes to New York City to find his father about whom he knows practically nothing, only his name, Danny, and some old telephone number. Ben was born with the hearing loss in one ear; he becomes totally deaf after an accident. In New York, he finds refuge at the Museum of Natural History. He, just like Claudia and Jamie, stays there for several nights and explores the museum in its day and its night appearances. Similar to Muffin the Dog who is blindfolded for a day and needs to use his ears instead, Ben is able to use only his sight when he wanders through the wonders of the museum in the footsteps of his father and his grandmother both of whom he never knew. New to a full deafness, Ben cannot really communicate with people when he explores the museum and the streets of the city and tries to find the bookstore that may show him the way to his father. He is not an aimless flâneur; he has the goal. At the same time, he just walks through the enormous city trying to take in its scope and complexity. From the story of Rose, a deaf girl, we learn that she grew up in New Jersey where she felt unhappy and trapped, and therefore she ran away to New York City. She finds herself in the Museum of Natural History and never returns back home. Her love for the museum became her profession. It is very important that the life of Rose who is deaf from birth is expressed not through words and dialogues, but through images only. At the end of the book, Ben, together with Rose, who is actually his grandmother, explores another museum. In the Queens Museum of Art, they look at the miniature City panorama built by Rose. Ben learns that, indeed, Danny is his father and a son of Rose. The intimate connection between the life time secret of Ben's birth and the Museum as a place where one may seek and find the truth is clear. The relationship of the child with the indoor and outdoor spaces – museums and streets of the big city – is the main theme of the novel. Selznick uses a similar paradigm and lays out the indoor and outdoor cityscape in his earlier and better known book *The Invention of Hugo Cabret* (2007) which won a Caldecott Medal in 2008.[8] There, the action moves between the streets of Paris and the secret spaces of the Montparnasse railway station. There is also a museum theme in the book; Hugo's father works at the museum, and the plot is heavily based on saving a museum object, the Automaton. In *Wonderstruck*, the indoors and outdoors merge in the last scene that is set during the blackout of 1977; Ben and Rose are watching the city darken and the stars from the roof of the Queens Museum of Art. We will see later that the theme of a blackout as a special time in the city was developed in another book for teens, *A Hundred Hours of Night*, published in 2014.

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[7] Here and in the next quotation, translation is mine.

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[8] Both Selznick's books were adapted for the screen: "Wonderstruck" was directed by Todd Haynes (with the screenplay written by Selznick) and came out in the Fall of 2017; "Hugo" (based on *The Invention of Hugo Cabret*) was directed by Martin Scorsese and came out in 2011.

FASTER AND FASTER, SCARIER AND SCARIER

Moving to a different part of the world we will be introduced to two other big cities and their representations in the books for teens. These are Minsk, Belarus, and Moscow, Russia. Ekaterina Asonova claims that "the city landscape and the specific features of the city organization" are very important in contemporary Russian prose for teenagers (Asonova 2017: 13).[9] The City as a character of the book that has an enormous influence on the "fate" of human protagonists is a very special plot device of the novel written by a duo of Belarusian writers, Andrei Zhvalevskii and Eugeniia Pasternak. These prolific children's and teens' authors write their books in Russian and publish them in Moscow, but their books are often set in Minsk. Zhvalevskii and Pasternak collaborated on over a dozen books for teens and pre-teens; they are now among the most popular writers in the contemporary Russian and Belarussian children's literature scene. In their recent novel *Siamtsy* (*The Siamese Twins*, 2017), two teen protagonists, Jan and Geula, are producing a video blog together. When they film for the blog, they wear one oversized sweater with two openings for two heads pretending to be the Siamese twins. Their blog is quite successful. Jan and Geula are very good friends, but they constantly argue, and eventually they get into a serious quarrel. At the most upsetting moments, Geula takes long walks through the city without a particular aim or purpose. Jan is not a keen walker; he prefers to ride his bike around the city, also randomly. They are both moving around the city rapidly. Minsk portrayed as a helper and a healer. The city has its own agenda; it seems to believe that Jan and Geula were meant to be a couple, not just "business partners." While Geula and Jan are trying to figure out what do they feel towards each other – love or animosity, the city already "decided" their fate – they should be together. The trajectories of their striding and biking are constantly crossing; this is one of the ways the city communicates with the reluctant youngsters. Spring winds, the street orchestra, or the branches of the trees tapping at the windowsill also become the means of communication for the city. An almost human nature of the city is expressed in the book very directly: "Minsk was upset but was trying to stay calm. It was nervously moving the rain clouds around, just like people would twist a pencil; it was swaying the tree tops as if it was some finger-tapping. It breezed in and out unevenly and was not all the time very adequate. For safety, the city dwellers were seeking refuge closer to the walls of the houses; they were suffering from the headaches, and they are blaming the magnetic storms for everything" (Zhvalevskii and Pasternak 2017: 128). In the end, Geula and Jan got together – to the full happiness of Minsk which expresses this with the help of the brass orchestra.

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[9] Here and in the next four quotations, translation is mine.

Similar relationships with the city are seen in the book of a Moscow author Nina Dashevskaia *Ia ne tormos* (*I Am Not a Dunce*, 2016). Its protagonist Ignat is another teenage who explores his city constantly. He does not like walking, and he constantly needs a speed of rollerblades, a skating board, or a scooter. He dashes along the streets and long embankments of Moscow. He is no longer a slowly moving child-flâneur of the 1960s and 1970s. He is the product of his time when everything moves rapidly. But he possesses the same curiosity and the same power of observation. "Young travelers prefer roaming a city or a museum and not just tagging along behind a teacher or a guide; they like to seek their own perspectives and points of view and to look for their own answer to the questions" (Solovei 2017: 48). Ignat is not planning particular voyeuristic escapades, but being a very sensitive person, he is constantly looking around, listening carefully, and is ready to act. He hears the music through the open windows of the musical college that transforms in his head into lines of poetry. His voyeurism helps him to become a bit of a good Samaritan: he brings a cup of coffee to an older girl in distress; he helps his former primary school teacher who is now old and lonely. He stops his constant movement when he sees an elderly man who falls on the street. This all is possible only because he is very attentive to things that are too small and insignificant for others. The unity with the city helps Ignat to gain some confidence in communication with the others – as many children-flâneurs, he is a lonely kid. The intimate connection with the city is an important theme for Dashevskaia. In her previous book, a collection of short stories, *Okolo muzyki* (*Near the Music*, 2015), one of the characters, a young musician, "measures the city with his feet. In all directions. And soon there will not be any street that he did not touch, from the beginning to the end, with these soles of the feet" (Dashevskaia 2017: 114). The protagonist of another short story in the collection, also a boy, gets constantly lost; the city geography is not his strong point, but he easily remembers music. He plans to write a symphony about the city in order to map it and to remember its streets. The different parts of the symphony will be inspired by the city streets and bridges, by the river and the parks; so, he will remember these streets, because as he puts it, "I will describe the city with the notes; it will be like a symphony. I will not get lost in my own symphony" (Dashevskaia 2017: 104).

Clearly, the twenty first century shapes a flâneur quite differently, and New York City is again in the middle of this new development. Two books, *Extremely Loud and Incredibly Close* (2006) by Jonathan Safran Foer and *Honderd uur* *nacht* (*A Hundred Hours of Night*, 2014) by the Dutch author Anna Woltz, are the newest additions to the collection of New York portraits though the eyes (and feet) of a child or a teen. Both books present the city in a moment or in the aftermath of distress. In the Foer's book, it is the events of 9/11; nine-year old Oscar searches for the last message from his father who was killed during the terrorist attack. A mysterious key from his father's closet takes this lonely boy with many fears and phobias around the city in search of truth.[10] Trying to uncover a secret, Oscar, like Harriet the Spy, is able (despite his clearly autistic tendencies) to meet a lot of people and to look into many New York places and spaces he otherwise would have never been able to see. The city that keeps its secrets becomes a principal personage of the book, precisely because it is the city in a very dramatic and harrowing moment of its history. Another difficult moment for New York City, even though not as tragic and devastating as the events of 9/11, becomes the setting of *A Hundred Hours of Night*. Emilia de Wit, its heroine, is also full of phobias; she is afraid of all possible bacteria and germs. A conflict with her parents, especially with her father, a school principal who writes inappropriate emails to one of Emilia's classmates, pushes her to run away from home. Emilia, a fifteen-year girl, travels alone from Amsterdam to New York (New Amsterdam) just in time to hit the major blackout of the Fall of 2012, right after the Hurricane Sandy, when the half of Manhattan lost its power grid. She is thrown together with two young New Yorkers, Seth, her peer, and his eleven-year-old sister Abby, who are also temporarily unsupervised by their mother. The fourth member of the group is a seventeen-year old school drop-out Jim. They huddle together in the Seth's and Abby's apartment, and later they roam the streets to buy some food and water. They need to walk many city blocks in order to find electricity to charge their phones. Again, the Metropolitan Museum of Art provides a safe (and in Emilia's case, a clean) space to hide in plain sight. "The museum feels like an oasis. The floors are spotless and there's not a trace of mold on the walls" (Woltz 2016: 67). Emilia, a daughter of a famous artist herself, is eager to be around art. But the silent galleries of the museum cannot help her for too long. Emilia is really upset with her father for a horrible sex scandal he brought on himself. She wants to be lost in New York, to become invisible, to look without being looked at. The darkness helps, even though Emilia is not very happy when she needs to navigate the dark street without any street lights. Another anchor of safety for Emilia is the Statue of Liberty at the background of the stormy skies in the wake of the Hurricane Sandy: "The giant woman made of gray-green metal stands on her own island, a crown on her head and a burning torch in her right hand, triumphantly raised aloft. As if she's just won some kind of contest" (Woltz 2016: 97). The Lady of Liberty truly reassures a city newcomer like Emilia. The city is clearly a character in the book; it is a friend who hides you and provides healing care to a suffering soul. One of the reviewer calls the book "a love letter to a city that shines when the chips are down" (Kirkus Review 2016).

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[10] A very successful movie adaptation (directed by Stephen Daldry and written by Eric Roth) came out in 2011.

CONCLUSION

The books I already mentioned do not, by any means, exhaust the list of New York-centric children's and teens' reading. In many of them, we will see the city streets, but instead of a museum as a safe and sacred space it could be a library as in 1951 classics *All-of-a-Kind Family* by Sydney Taylor, or again, the Statue of Liberty as in *Caperucita en Manhattan* (*Little Red Riding Hood in Manhattan*, 1990), a Spanish pre-teens' novel by Carmen Martín Gaite.[11] Young Adult classics which focus on the city include J.D. Salinger's *The Catcher in the Rye* (1951); among books for younger kids, Peter Sís' *Madlenka* (2000) stands out. Plenty of books about New York City for all ages are available to a child reader. Talking of mid-twentieth-century New York when a lot of classical books were written, many researchers stress that the city was much safer then. "Portrayed as a child's friend, complicit in young person's independent navigation of its spaces, the city becomes a central character with which all the children in the novels develop a special relationship as they enjoy and learn from its spaces" (Sawyer-Fritz 2014: 87). More contemporary writers clearly portray a much less idyllic picture of the city, but still allow their characters to wander the city streets. Revisiting the streets of New York, Moscow, or Minsk in the twenty first century, we, along with contemporary American and European authors, see these cities as a less relaxed and more disturbing venue. It could be even scary for a book character who still goes on the flâneur's "long and aimless" walks around the town. "The character of the global or postmodern city also encourages the development of flexible, multifaceted textualities. The figure of the tourist-*flâneur* invites speculation about the possibilities that come with the freedom to roam, observe, and report in an environment that is often designated as unsafe and alienating" (Mallan 2012: 71). The space of danger and the space of healing overlap and comingle in the contemporary teens' novels which are much more complex, diverse, and manifold than the classics of the last century. A contemporary flâneur needs to navigate the city not at its best moments but in time of distress such as the time following 9/11 or the hundred hours of the 2012 blackout.

As it is clear from the Walter Benjamin's notion of a flâneur, the latter has enough free time, and he needn't work every minute of the day light. Free time to spare is also one of the attributes of a child. When childhood, as Philippe Ariès claims, established itself as a part of human condition, and as a separate period of human life with its long duration that does not end in puberty (Ariès 1965: 26), a child acquired the time and ability to develop her own relationship with the world. The big city embraces the child who wants to be alone and, at the same time, with other people; the city helps the vulnerable teenage who wants to hide in plain sight among its crowds; it provides a possibility of combining freedom and solitude, "refuge in the crowd." A child-flâneur, as we saw, is often alone, and she is a lonely child. Despite the idea that the city is a dangerous place for children, they still enjoy the city spaces, streets, parks, and museums. The museum symbolically becomes a place of safety and a space where the child is able to unveil many hidden secrets, about museum objects and about herself. The city and its museums are enabling child characters to be real explorers. As time goes by, a contemporary child/teen receives even more freedom to be a city flâneur. The newly acquired speed of movement makes a huge difference. The skate boards or the roller blades are more and more used instead of slow strolling. The speed of life that changed drastically broadened, of course, the very meaning of the word "flâneur" to include not only a pedestrian, but also a cyclist and a skate boarder. That is equally true of children's books and of real life. In contemporary books, a flâneur could be older than she was forty or fifty years ago. This is an appropriate response to the notion of the dangerous city that requires a more sophisticate roamer able to meet the city's challenges. Twelve-year old Claudia and eleven-year old Harriet give way to fifteen-year old Emilia and to teenagers Jan and Geula.

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[11] This book is not yet available in English, but it has already been translated into other languages, for example, into the French, Polish, and Russian.

Flâneurism and voyeurism are moving through children's books hand in hand. A child-voyeur will probably never leave a children's book. Children are intrinsically curious about the world around them, and they always would try to reach what seems to be hidden from them. Watching life, openly or in a spy manner, a child learns about the world, and at the same time, she opens herself to the world of imagination and interpretation and acquires the ability to tell a story about it. The city provides a perfect entry into the world of art, writing, and storytelling for a child, for a character in the book, and for a reader. The best children's books are drawn from children's imagination, and the city as an imaginative space speaks through these books in a very loud voice. As Dr. Seuss eloquently puts it, positioning his hero, who likes to imagine city wonders even when they are not there, in the very heart of Manhattan: "And that is a story that no one can beat, / When I say that I saw it on Mulberry Street" (Dr. Seuss 1989).

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