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**From “Let them read” to “Let them not read”: Controversies on the values and virtues of children literature through its development, its legal framework and its schooling in France (20<sup>th</sup>-21<sup>st</sup> centuries)**

To distract or to educate? Specific literature, confiscated literature or recovered literature? Legitimate or illegitimate literature? Children’s books, and especially albums, have always been somehow threatened on their borders. They must stand out from learning treaties and textbooks but also from playful objects, please adults (those who buy them) and talk to children, and finally fulfill two aims that are difficult to reconcile: an educational asset and an aesthetic one (Prince, 2015). In a fragile and highly concentrated overall climate, children’s publishing is doing well, and is even the driving force of the book market. The globalization movement has not spared it, but it has rather enriched it because the dissemination of translated books has not (or not yet) led to a standardized and aseptized production. These paradoxes of children’s literature seem to be a characteristic that has become ontological. From the outset, youth productions have been concerned with transmitting values with a clearly stated educational aim, which has adapted to the different developments in people’s ideas about children and their education. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the common history of children’s literature and pedagogy was marked by a pendulum swing: the emergence of the new education movements, a moralizing discourse reflected in the 1949 law on children’s publications, liberation from a moral straitjacket with collections of albums that oppose conventional and educational literature, advocate the absence of taboos and the recognition of the child in its entirety. The beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has seen violent controversies reappear around children’s books, which have been politically instrumentalized and widely reported in the media. Epistemologically focused, our paper will present, based on selected examples, some of the controversies and polemics that have plagued youth publications in France since the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

**Keywords:** France; 20<sup>th</sup> century; regulation; education; values

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