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# Enchanting encounters in ordinary writing for children

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## Abstract

We invite you to explore with us the enchanting affects that move us, through ordinary moments in writing for children. Enchantment shows how we are entangled with the world, that which surprises us and builds a sense of wonder. A wind in the trees, a gentle smile, a look of horror. The smell of fresh coffee and the final words of a manuscript. We explore enchantment as mundane but gendered experiences which entail a promise and a potentiality, one that is part of power relations, and where an ethical possibility to engage in the world differently emerges. This paper shows how enchantment is not a detachment from, but a connection to the world. Through interviews with children's writers, we ask how enchanting affect can help us to see work through a different ethical lens.

## KEYWORDS

affect, childhood, creative labor, enchantment, writing

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

This paper starts with a story from the perspective of a children's author on a day like many others. This literary approach is associated with "writing differently" (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2023; Pullen et al., 2020), writing with affect, and explores how creativity can emerge from being open to the world. Drawing on interviews with children's authors, this article asks how enchantment can be an affect which binds us to one another, inspiring while also drawing connections and lines between us. Entangled with the world around us, the children's authors we spoke to

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The empirical work was conducted while Nina worked at Åbo Akademi University, Finland.

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evoked a sense of wonder which they felt emerged in specific moments of their writing. This article draws on these interviews to ask what this means for writing differently in academia, and the ethical implications of seeing the world through an enchanting affective lens.

We invite you to join us as we meet our author, sitting in her kitchen, writing:

Normally she would work from her study, but this morning the sun lights the room and the smell of a fresh pot of coffee makes her linger in the kitchen. The kitchen is a bright yellow, and dirty dishes and cornflakes on the floor are leftovers from a rushed family breakfast. She might not even touch the cup next to the laptop but the smell draws her into writing. Quickly new words appear on the screen. She notices the wind in the trees from her kitchen window and weaves this image into the storyline of a nonbinary young hero desperately trying to save their village from the unfortunate werewolves.

Leaning back from her computer, she rolls her shoulders, looking left and right to stretch her neck. She smiles to herself remembering how she used to write one-handed and breastfeed at the same time. At least it's easier now her child is in daycare. She really should finish this chapter, since she promised to send the draft manuscript next week to her publisher, but there are other things to do. It is time to plan next week's school visits, and she is not looking forward to yet another group of unruly tweens. Although she knows that her teacher training will come in handy, she worries. Yet, these school visits always give her new ideas, and they are honest reminders of who her readers are. Her agent always encouraged her to do them too, to earn some income and maybe sell a few extra books.

Her cat suddenly appears, crosses the room and goes out the cat flap into the garden. She wondered what adventures the cat would have, how far she would roam and who she might encounter. Picking up her coffee and the computer, she hopes to put in at least another hour or two this evening when her kid is asleep.

This is a paper about affective encounters in the everyday work of children's authors, where writing for children is a "vocation" (as described by our participants). We ask you, our reader, to be open to a sense of wonder the authors expressed when describing their work. In the process of their writing, affective intensities emerged in the connections made with their readers through the text. Creative work in the form of writing can be seen through shifting objects, boundaries and impressions. Writing for children shapes concepts of childhood and girlhood (Hunter & Kivinen, 2016; Kivinen & Hunter, 2019; see also Griffin et al., 2017; Kavanagh, 2013; Langer, 2002; Rehn, 2009; Russell & Tyler, 2002). It can also be complicated, messy, and gendered as an occupation dominated by women, while also very precarious in the sense of being both low-paid and insecure. Yet many consider this a profession worth pursuing.

In the fictional narrative above there is an entanglement of ideas, bodies, objects and atmospheres that offer a vibrant context through which writing can move. As an affective experience, the act of writing shapes the writer as well as the written text. As an object, children's books create worlds, narrate adventures, and offer advice and support. They are culturally significant in many parts of the world, forming part of a society's shared customs and education (Grey, 1998). A children's book is also often shared, presented as a gift, and read out loud. There are always many possibilities in readers' encounters with a book, and as such children's books would be what Vachhani (2012) calls "affective objects." Reading can bring bodies together as an "intercorporeal" experience, for example, when hearing a book read out loud. These experiences are set within pre-existing ideas of how books are read, used and circulated. The fictional narrative at the start of this article is based on our interviews with children's authors, interviews in which we were struck by how authors engaged with their work with a sense of imagination and wonder which intertwined with their everyday lives. The fictional text also opens up a discussion on how affective experiences become gendered through understanding writing as situated practice (Gherardi, 2019).

In this study, we interviewed children's authors about their working lives and saw how affect sometimes flows and surges within the work of an author. When writing about affect, we focus on intensities within assemblages related to the process of writing. Between the pen, paper, computer, coffee, people, atmospheres and imaginations, for the writers in this study sometimes, something would flow and sometimes this "thing" would surge (Ahmed, 2004; Bennett, 2001; Stewart, 2007). Writing is not detached but in the moment, formed in connections to the world through changeable linkages between human and non-human bodies, into an assemblage where there is: "a something snapping into place, if only for a minute" (Stewart, 2007, p. 88).

The practice of writing demonstrates the capacity of bodies to affect and be affected (Massumi, 2015). In this paper, we specifically draw on enchantment (Bennett, 2001) as an ordinary affect (Stewart, 2007) to explore writing for children as mundane wonder in everyday life. In many ways, this article is a story in itself, combining literary fiction with interviews from children's authors. We start the story by setting the scene and discussing what we mean by enchantment as affect and writing affect, before we discuss how we approached the interviews and writing this article. We then explore segments of our interviews connected to mundane moments of enchantment for children's authors, before discussing the implications for writing differently and ethical encounters. The discussion presents two arguments: first, enchantment can be seen as an attunement to intensities which allows a greater connection from authors to others, their work and materialities. Secondly, enchantment presents a form of feminine writing. Enchantment can therefore be analyzed both through gendered experiences and as a feminine approach to writing that transcends instrumental objectives. In both writing about affect and writing affectively, we hope that the reader will be enchanted by the entanglement of words and the world, and also reflect on the ethical implications of feminine writing as a way of being open to others through this experience.

## 2 | WRITING AFFECT

Affect begins with a sense of movement: a new sense of light, smell, wind, or feeling a force in an encounter (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). It is the capacity of the body for affecting and being affected, a passing over a threshold: "When you affect something, you are at the same time opening yourself up to being affected in turn, and in a slightly different way than before" (Massumi, 2015, p. 4). Affect asks how bodies around us imprint, impact, shape and scar an intersubjective self. In the fictional account, objects, colors, smells, tastes and sensations become bodies that shape how she writes: they enter and exit her range of perception. The specificity of these encounters is important: "different affects make us feel, write, think, and act in different ways" (Probyn, 2010, p. 74). Familiarity sets the author at ease, the body setting into writing and creating. There are also various intensities to the moments (Stewart, 2007) which may be affective traces (Stewart, 2007, see also Bell & Vachhani, 2020), affects which linger longer and perhaps are associated with memorable objects (Ahmed, 2004). The specifics of these intensities are also framed through gendered structures and expectations from motherhood and feminine work (Acker, 1990). These gendered intensities shape the writing experience as a process, intensified by writing within the home and about childhood. There are other gendered intensities too: for us as academic writers on enchantment, our gendered positioning as feminist academics speaking with women. Gendered intensities are also not without their power relations, as the capacity to affect overlaps with competing intersectionalities between who has a voice, who they write for and whether the words are read.

Stewart positions affect as intensities experienced in the ordinary and mundane of everyday life. These "ordinary affects" occur in subtle encounters but they are significant in their intensities of experience (see also Ashcraft, 2017; Linstead, 2017). Affective moments might be ordinary, like in the fictional account at the beginning, but they are potentially full of meaning and circumstance. Stewart uses Deleuze and Guattari's (1987) concept of assemblage to point to interconnected relations between people and things.

The ordinary is a shifting assemblage of practices and practical knowledges, a scene of both liveness and exhaustion, a dream of escape or of the simple life. Ordinary affects are the varied, surging capacities to affect and to be affected that give everyday life the quality of a continual motion of relations, scenes, contingencies, and emergences. They're things that happen.

(Stewart, 2007, pp. 1, 2)

Ordinary affects unravel and remerge as connections, formed in the present but also looking forward, with dreams and expectations: "they literally hit us or exert a pull on us" (Stewart, 2007, p. 4; see also Waterton & Watson, 2015). Tracing the moments where the assemblage moves or is moved, we can ask in what ways writing pulls or pushes the writer as well as the reader.

In Stewart's work, there is a sense that what is ordinary is also what holds potential and promise, threats and misunderstandings. Just as in the fictional morning, the coffee may hold promise, the breakfast cereal a reminder of family commitments, and breastfeeding suddenly emerges as a memory, as affects pulling on the writer. Stewart repeatedly refers to vagueness and the unexpected in the ordinary, of encounters which pull in directions the subject may not have intended to go. How we are moved depends on what moves us or what we are trying to move, depending on the nature of the force being enacted (Seigworth & Gregg, 2010). These may be eruptions of affect, in what Stewart refers to as "rogue intensities" (2011, p. 44), of the fragments left behind or that roam at the edge of the ordinary. It is these intensities in the ordinary we want to explore, to ask how encounters might lead to flows and eruptions of affect. Massumi (2015) argues the circumstances under which affect may unfold can be modulated using relational techniques, such as habits, training and skills, when learned, are enacted through embodied reactions. That is to say, Massumi argues that we can at least to some extent construct circumstances in which affective encounters can happen, for example, by maintaining routines and work practices where we can be attuned to affect (Stewart, 2011). It is in this dynamic between the routines and the unexpected that "something" happens in our fictional account, where the words appear quickly on the page, where the cat has imagined adventures out into the night or where unruly tweens may bring excitement or anxiety in the upcoming school visit.

### 3 | ENCHANTMENT

Writing and reading children's books, like all encounters, have a specificity to them through a collection of human and non-human which come together to produce "something." Picking up a book may bring memories flooding back: the look and feel, the smell of the pages and the weight of it. Children's books may have a particular enchanting affect. By enchantment, we refer to a specific affect that is part of ordinary experiences, even within a world where work may be structured to remove or hide enchantment and magic (see reviews of disenchantment in Backsell and Schwarzkopf (2023), Bell et al. (2021), Bennett (2001), Endrissat et al. (2015)): "To be simultaneously transfixed in wonder and transported by sense, to both caught up and carried away, enchantment is marked by this odd combination of semantic effect" (Bennett, 2001, p. 5). For example, when we have presented our work to an audience as part of the project we have noticed enthusiastic reactions. Often there is a sense of excitement in discussing children's books: memories from long ago continue as an association with texts, which may produce a sense of wonder. There may be even a sense of nostalgia, remembering past times with important individuals, with nostalgia being a cultural practice embedded in power relations that "orders events temporally and dramatizes them" (Stewart, 1988, p. 227). The nostalgia of childhood smooths over events, framing them within a particular point of view and giving new importance within the cultural context in which they operate while also remembering them at a distance (Stewart, 1988).

Bennett (2001) frames enchantment as an affect, as part of our entanglement with the world, that which surprises us and builds a sense of wonder. Bennett rejects the narrative of a disenchanting world, instead arguing that enchantment is a fundamental affect in the familiar. "To be enchanted is to be struck and shaken by the

*extraordinary that lives amid the familiar and the everyday. ... The world has become neither inert nor devoid of surprise but continues to inspire deep and powerful attachments.*" (Bennett, 2001, p. 4) For Bennett, affects are both ordinary, in that they occur as part of our day-to-day lives, but also extraordinary when they assemble into meaningful but surprising or even uncanny connections. She presents enchantment as affect emerging from the connection between the everyday and wonder, where this state of wonder opens up the potentiality of the unexpected. Events unfolding may create the extraordinary in the ordinary, the ability to be shaken and moved by the sheer beauty, wonder or unexpected occurrences (Bennett, 2001).

Enchantment as an affective experience is both being in the moment yet also feeling a sense of suspension of normality: "Enchantment entails a state of wonder, and one of the distinctions of this state is the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement" (Bennett, 2001, p. 5). Enchantment becomes a mood of being in the moment, formed in connections to rather than being detached or beyond the world. Separate dimensions come together into changeable connections and linkages between both human and non-human objects, into an assemblage where affect occurs. Wonder includes joy and fear; and is more than a simple state of happiness. For example, Lois and Gregson (2019) note the difficulties of being a professional writer, and how creative workers may use "aspirational emotional work" as a way to manage their dreams and identities. They describe how authors in their study spent a prolonged period of their career in the aspirational stage, where they wanted to be published but faced frequent rejection, and how they used emotional capital to manage this stage (see also Lois & Gregson, 2015). Enchantment also impacts bodily movement, drawing out how the body is affected, potentially suspended, within this state. "What moves us, what makes us feel, is also that which holds us in place, or gives us a dwelling place. Hence movement does not cut off the body from the 'where' of its inhabitants, but connects bodies to other bodies: attachments take place through movement, through being moved by the proximity of others." (Ahmed, 2004, p. 11) For Ahmed, and following Bennett's work, attachment is what moves us but also makes us remain or stay still, what allows us to dwell in a space and relate to others and with objects.

Enchantment is an opportunity to be open to possibilities. Bennett viewed rationality and enchantment as not necessarily opposites but that there can be a sense of wonder in the most structured, efficient processes (Backsell & Schwarzkopf, 2023; Bennett, 2010). Bell et al. (2021, p. 256) have argued that enchantment can lead to a different way to view organizational activities, where we can see "ethics as a material, affect-laden practice of enchanted entanglements" that can lead to different approaches to research (see also Kenny, 2010; Vachhani & Pullen, 2019) If we consider enchantment as having the potential to reimagine work (Endrissat et al., 2015), it is a chance to feel a sense of wonder through our connection to others, and in doing so find meaning in their work by affecting others and being affected. It suggests that we are open to these encounters, and how they shape us in the moment. We know that affect occurs within gendered relations (Ahmed, 2004), however, the discussion around enchantment (Bennett, 2010) including within organisational contexts (Bell et al., 2021; Endrissat et al., 2015) tends to overlook how affective connections such as enchantment may produce and reinforce gendered relations.

## 4 | METHODOLOGY

Our fictional narrative at the beginning of this writing is a fragment of a potential morning in the work of an author. It is an amalgamation of different accounts bringing together experiences from the interviews as well as our voices. As a fictional account, the words weave together moments, bodies and objects in an affective assemblage within which the writing happens. Encounters with objects (live and inert) produce "something" (Stewart, 2007) through which the words on the page begin to appear. It is that "something" that we call affect where we want to explore further how writing children's books unfolds. Recent studies on children's literature have already been influenced by new materialisms, especially feminist approaches, understanding childhood as assemblages of materials,

moments, persons and discourses (García-González & Deszcz-Tryhubczak, 2020). Expanding this body of literature, we look at writing as a practice where bodies and creativity come together to, potentially, produce a book, article, blog, or other various forms of “finished” writing (Gibbs, 2015). Affect can be seen here as intensities, entanglements and enchantment which underpin these experiences of writing. Our encounters and discussions with children's authors about their creative labor brought us into their world of stories, adventures yet often precarious circumstances. This paper grew out of numerous conversations about the affective encounters with the authors, conversations about our own childhood memories and nostalgia, laughter and grief.

We aimed to gather a range of experiences of authors writing for children, including authors of different ages and backgrounds, new and experienced authors and writers for children of different ages (pre-school, middle and young adult). In identifying authors, we browsed through book catalogs from different publishing houses, followed news and reviews of children's books, identified winners and nominees for children's literary awards and made use of social media and word of mouth to ask for volunteers. We also went to book fairs and recruited authors from the bookstalls. Finally, we also asked our interviewees to recommend other authors to interview and in the end, we managed to speak to authors from different backgrounds, ethnicities, genders, ages and socio-economic perspectives. Many authors had second jobs in related fields (e.g., journalism, education and the arts) or also wrote books for adults.

Altogether we interviewed 40 authors of children's books, 19 in the United Kingdom by one of the authors and 21 in Finland by the other. Our study consisted of 31 participants who identified as female and 9 who identified as male, which to the best of our knowledge is reflective of children's writing as a gendered occupation (Acker, 1990). The UK and Finland both have strong traditions of publishing books for children (e.g., Tove Jansson in Finland and Roald Dahl, Beatrix Potter and J.K. Rowling in the UK). In both countries, many new children's books are published each year, ranging from established household names to up-and-coming authors. Our interviews lasted between one to 2 h, and were mostly one-to-one, except for three interviews, which included multiple authors who wrote together (see also Lois & Gregson, 2019). The interviews in the UK were conducted in English; in Finland 14 of the authors were interviewed in Finnish and 7 in Swedish.

We prepared an interview guide using open questions about writing practices, the profession and the publishing industry. The interviews were similar to an unstructured conversation that allowed the interviewee to also steer the discussion. We used the guide to check all areas were covered at the end of the interview and ensured a degree of consistency between the interviews in the UK and Finland. The interviews were recorded and transcribed and the Finnish and Swedish interviews were translated into English. Pseudonyms were used for all of our participants and care was taken to remove identifying details.

Interviews provided a way to explore the intensities of affect, in particular with interviewees with writers from whom language is the very tool they master. Although affect is pre-subjective, feelings after the event can describe affect, although only ever partially expressed through language (Massumi (2015): see also Johansson and Jones (2020) on using memory work in “writing differently”). Most of the authors were enthusiastic to speak to us, keen to share their experiences and elaborated at length about both their joyful and painful experiences. Timm Knudsen and Stage (2015) argue that affective methodologies can focus on moments, either in situ or remembered affect. In this case, we felt that there was a double encounter in the data: firstly, the authors' recollection of affect featured heavily in their accounts; and secondly, the interview itself was an affective encounter. In our study, the researcher and the participant were part of a conversation that was often deeply personal and this encounter brought proximity of the body and affective qualities (Timm Knudsen & Stage, 2015). Approaching these interviews as affective encounters helped us understand the experiences of writing books, as well as the conversations themselves, in addition to asking of us to be open to new possibilities in how we viewed creative work.

Bell et al. (2021) argue Bennett's theorization on affective enchantment can benefit qualitative research in several ways. Firstly, it can allow the researcher to be open to novelty or disruption; second, it asks the researcher to reflect on deep and meaningful attachments in the study; and third, it allows for an exploration

of embodied, affective encounters including with material objects. We designed an approach that would embrace the rich content within the interviews and “Be attuned to affect, sensation or atmosphere” (Beyes & Steyaert, 2012, p. 57). We especially noted affect, feelings and moods that emerged paying attention to key words like “joy” and “pain.” Affects were thus traced in the analysis through assemblages, rhythms, ruptures and trajectories (Stewart, 2011; Wetherell, 2012). Assemblages and rhythms were observed as affects came together into patterns, while ruptures and trajectories were often unexpected affect which unsettled or took the participants in new directions. We looked for moments in the authors' accounts where there was “vibrancy,” or where intensities particularly spoke to us (Bennett, 2010). The results we present below can be seen as segments, or enchanted moments, where authors discuss being connected through a sense of openness to possibilities which extend beyond instrumental approaches to their work. We hope that this adds to what Kociatkiewicz and Kostera (2023, p. 5) refer to as “another way of academic expression” by exploring enchanting affects as a topic of interest in its own right, but through a writing style that aims to weave together pieces of interviews rather than presenting a completely coherent, holistic and closed narrative about creative labor.

## 5 | ENCHANTING ENCOUNTERS IN WRITING

In this section of the paper, we will present enchantment as an entanglement of bodies, materiality, dreams, and sometimes joy and pain. Seeing enchantment as affect, we look at everyday flows of intensities in their writing as enchanting encounters. These affective encounters shaped connections between the writers, their books, children and discourses of childhood (see also Griffin et al., 2017). In these enchanted moments, the ordinary in the sense of writing as an everyday activity and the extra-ordinary come together.

### 5.1 | Imaginary worlds

Writing means that you're not only absenting yourself physically from everybody else and spending time in another world that they can't join you in. But when you come down—finally get yelled at and all the alarms go off and people are cold on the stairs dying of hunger and slipping into hypoglycaemic comas because you haven't fed them in three days. When you finally come down to make that meal you're still in that world and they're trying to talk to you. You're thinking: it wouldn't work because the dragon wouldn't do that.

(Betty, UK)

Reaching out from the page words draw us into imaginary worlds of fiction, building connections to characters and places. These worlds can be similar to our worlds, grounded in descriptions of contemporary life or flights of fancy in fantasy and science fiction. Writing for children requires authors to imagine a world seen from the perspective of a child where buildings can be huge, animals can be both scary and cute, and human beings are potentially unreliable. For Betty, a journalist and a single mother, writing for children required her to “absent” herself from the material objects and social relations in her life and to instead emerge into a world of fiction she had created. While emerged in a world of dragons, for a moment nothing else really mattered until the voices of small children brought her back to her home. The everyday was paused and excluded, replaced by the intensities of the pleasure of writing and imagining other possibilities. While she tried to maintain the connection to the imaginary, as a writing mother of both children and dragons, the co-existence of these two worlds became impossible. The imagined possibilities rupture and the enchanted encounter imploded.



## 5.2 | Nostalgia and the rewriting childhood

Children's authors are often keen readers, and bookworms, whose love for literature runs deep. Their passion for literature, the joy and warm memories of reading as a child and teenager, all were part of their encounter with their own writing. The act of writing provides the possibility of passion and enchantment, and an escape: "what I want to do is for someone to read my book and feel the way I did when—the excitement and the passion that I did particularly when I was a child" (Diana, UK; similarly discussed by Donna, Gwen and Barbara, Finland). Affects re-emerge, circulated from the author's memories into her work with the hope that children would have similar affect while reading her words.

Writing for children was important. Oscar (Finland) described freedom as one of the reasons he wanted to write for children: "Perhaps it's that the writing is limitless or that your imagination is used so broadly. [...] The characters, worlds, stories, inventing and developing them, perhaps there is more space for that when writing for children and teenagers." For Oscar and many of the writers, the stories the authors were writing provided a space where wonder could occur.

I love fantasy literature so much myself, that ultimate escapism. So it feels stupid, if I'm an author and I can write anything, why would I write about the life of a 30-year-old woman in [her hometown] when I'm already living it. I'd rather go somewhere else. It is a kind of therapy for myself too, always, tales and adventures. It is wonderful to immerse yourself into them.

(Paula, full-time author, Finland)

Writing presented authors with affective experiences of stepping outside of daily life. Paula talked about using writing to live a different life, one in which she felt immersed in the adventures. Many authors spent a significant amount of time building the worlds of their novels. The worlds could be drawn in sketches and scribbled in a notebook, but also emerge almost without thought into their text. For fantasy writers, these fantastic worlds allowed them to play with social norms, perhaps using this to reimagine gender, sexuality and ethnicity. On the other hand, realist writers might explore how to create mystery in a world where everything can be answered using a mobile phone.

Karen (Finland) argued that writing for children, and specifically teenagers, was special because "For teenagers, many things are completely new every day. So, in a way, this joy of discovery is prevalent in [my] books for teenagers." We as adults might have forgotten what it felt like to fall in love for the first time, but by writing about the life of teenagers, Karen revisits the intensity of being a teenager and the first encounters with your body in becoming and the lived experience of growing up. Joy in the discovery opens up new avenues and directions, these encounters which might be ordinary for adults become associated with joy and intensity for teenagers. Karen wanted to connect with this joy of discovery in her writing, seeing the writing as having the potential to take teenagers somewhere new.

## 5.3 | Entanglement of materiality, embodiment and writing

This is disciplined work, when you sit by the computer, sometimes you have a feeling that this is not working. Luckily the fridge is near, and coffee is near. Then you just have to tiptoe to have some coffee and then go back. I have noticed that if you force yourself to just write something, at some point it starts moving. Even if you wouldn't believe it. That feeling you have, sitting by the computer and nothing works, and then suddenly you notice that it is one o'clock and I have achieved something. You need to force yourself. It doesn't just come, now a ghostwriter is writing.

(Sandra, Finland)

Dedicated writing was serious work and required time and space. Interestingly, writing quite often involved an affectual relationship with the material objects in their preferred writing space. For some, the notebook was important, for others the writing desk with the familiar objects, the view from the window, or the ease of access to coffee as most authors wrote at home or a coffee shop. This familiar, everyday entanglement seemed to be reassembled each day for flows of intensities to emerge.

Serious and disciplined writing relied on these structures and the embodied practices of writing. Sandra had been a full-time author of children's books for decades, and yet writing could be a struggle. As an experienced writer, she trusted that if she pushed herself to keep on writing at some point it would work, almost of itself. She uses the word *ghostwriter* to indicate a sense of loss of time and space, an almost out-of-body experience, and of words magically appearing on the screen. Immersing herself in the story, she was writing so intensely that she did not remember writing at all. In a similar sense, Betty talked about the character moving in her writing as if it was not up to the writer but instead, the plot would be shaped by the character's actions. The writing moved by itself, bringing Sandra and Betty with it.

## 5.4 | Moving toward and away

Writing is often about movement: observing movement, being moved and moving others through your writing. Writers capture in words the world around us, the magical world of fairy tales, and the sometimes-brutal realities of growing up. Writing fiction for children in particular emphasizes how an author through her text can reach out and touch the lives of not only children and teenagers but also their parents and family. A story can move slowly or quickly, backwards and forwards in time, or toward or away from something. Or just encouraging us to stand very still and observe the moment as it passes us by.

Iris, a full-time author, captured this sense of movement in her description of her writing practices.

I write at my desk and it is important what I can see. Usually, I place the desk by the window in the different places where I have lived, so I can watch the trees and have some interaction with living nature. It can be a city view too, but something happens there. That is important. That something moves there and moves in my head and gets impulses. Colours. The wind. All that. That I am in a quite peaceful state and then now and again I get up and go out for a walk. Now I'm describing that state of writing when you are already in the text. This is really focused writing.

(Iris, Finland)

Iris's sense of being moved is described here through connections to nature, as seen through her window. The window provided a see-through boundary between the writing space inside and the natural rhythm and movement in the trees beyond the window. Keeping her eyes on the text kept her transfixed in the writing but lifting her gaze through the window reminded her of the world outside which she could join at any time.

Encounters with things in the world were important in forming stories. "It's a mixture of reading, a mixture of life experience, a mixture of just listening and looking and sitting in cafes and people watching really. I mean I think to be a writer you're an indefatigable collector of anything." (Hannah, UK). School visits were often an important way of supplementing an author's income, but also provided ample opportunities to talk to and observe children. During school visits, Sandra (Finland) said she would gather ideas for her next book, and she would "steal flyers from the tables... everything that is not nailed to the floor." Authors seemed to be pulling together objects and observations into their writing, drawing on being affected by these objects. Encounters were both part of the world but also detached from it: observing, watching and collecting from it. This was an in-between space, a crossing of a threshold between bodies and materiality that were both present but also full of potential of what they could transform into.

I'd have had to channel that fantasy somewhere. I find that I tell stories to myself all the time. It's like a form of lucid dreaming. I see someone on the street and before I know it, I've invented a whole narrative about where they're going and why they look so sad and what it is that happened to them that day and who they're going to kill with a sword later on [laughs].

(Betty, UK)

Betty described this as a “lucid dreaming”: interaction based on being both in the world in observing it, but also seeing the fantastic, the unlikely, and the potential of events or persons that are being observed. She argued that “there is something vocational about, a bit like being a nun or something in that it's a way of seeing the world. It permeates who you are” (Betty, UK).

## 5.5 | Stolen time, in-between time

Many authors had limited opportunities to write, juggling multiple jobs and home life such as childcare commitments. For these writers, time for writing was associated with feelings of both joy and shame, for example, how Emma (Finland) talked about writing as “stealing time” or grabbing the few moments to write “fast and furiously” (Betty, UK). Typically, the authors' first works would have been written in the evenings and nights, on vacation and parental leave.

Barbara wrote her first children's book during parental leave: “I had time for myself. It actually felt like that [laughing]. You shouldn't say things like that, but it felt like that. But I remember holding the baby and writing with one finger” (Barbara, Finland). Not being at work allowed her to write her book, but she felt guilty about not giving all her time to her baby. Since then, her children's books have been written in her spare time, although other writing was also part of her day job. “I have written most of my books in the evenings during my holidays on summer nights. With a bottle of cognac within reach [laughter]. That is my method. And it is very ... nice.” Barbara's description of her everyday practices of writing hints toward a deliberate movement toward creating a space in which she could be different and alone. This space also contained a routine, locating the writing during her summer holiday, writing at night, and with objects around her, which might help to create affect.

That [writing] is intoxicating. When you get those two weeks, when you can absolutely get lost in something and you are living in another world for two weeks and the book starts to come together, there's a kind of magic to it. There's a magic too that envelops you where you write things and you suddenly realise, that's why I wrote that. I knew he [the character] was going to show me [laughs].

(Betty, UK)

Betty was a full-time journalist who also wrote children's books in her “between” time. The writing could be “intoxicating,” as she later described “when you're really lost in a book it's got tendrils deep into your head” (Betty, UK). The term intoxicating was also used by Oona (UK) in discussing the sense of freedom that she felt, having shifted from being a teacher to a full-time writer. Affect shaped a deep bond between the writer and the process of writing, one where there was a co-construction between the writer and the text which Betty described as “addictive.” The affect pulled her back so that although she could not afford to be a full-time writer, she spent all her spare time including her holiday writing children's books. However, Gwen (Finland), a full-time author, also talked about how she could dream about uninterrupted writing time but realized this was an illusion and that she was “interrupted all the time, it is difficult to keep that world there all the time.”

## 5.6 | Mundane writing and ecstatic moments

Jenna found writing the first version of a manuscript “extremely painful,” although other opportunities emerged such as during the editing process where she had “ecstatic moments”:

Especially the first version that I write is extremely painful because I don't like it. I like editing when the enormous text is ready and you start chopping it into pieces, thinking and analysing and that is fun. I can handle the boring part of the writing because I know it will be followed by the fun part. I really don't enjoy all parts of writing, but the whole package. It is not continuously ecstatic. But you have ecstatic moments.

(Jenna, Finland)

Emma (Finland) also mentioned that when writing dark scenes, she would scare herself and she liked doing it. Diana talked about sending the finished book to the publisher as a moment with particularly intense affect:

When I finished {book title}, I sent it off and then sat on my bed and cried and we were actually planning to have a little celebration and I was [makes crying noise] ... Thank God it's gone. Thank God for that, I couldn't believe it. I love it and I hate is the answer.

(Diana, UK)

## 5.7 | Writing a series or repetitive writing

It takes time to write a book. Even the limited number of words in a picture book for small children takes time. Writing a series added a sense of predictability, the characters and settings were already set and the plot determined. This can bring financial security and might be faster to write, although they often also bring associated pressure to meet tight deadlines (Alison, UK). A successful series of pre-teen books might finance the writing of a side project. Those side projects could be freer but insecure as there is no guarantee that books without a commission will sell.

Some authors displayed more ambivalence and detachment toward commissioned writing for a series:

What I've been doing for the past two, three—two and a half years is to write eight publisher-led novels, which are not novels that I have a strong connection to. They're not books that I particularly want to put out. I did and I think of them as professional writing. As far as I'm concerned the right—they're someone else's... no one's really bothered about plot holes or about the quality of the writing. There's just no pleasure in doing something if you don't do it well. At least that's how I feel about writing.

(Naomi, UK)

Similarly, Roland (Finland) referred to his writing as an unemotional practice of “hitting the keyboard” but where he cherished a “bloody good sentence.” Rather than appreciating a book as a whole or daily writing, he talked about how it was these good passages that made him stop his writing and appreciate what he had accomplished. Karen stated that: “I've done this job for a long time so I know when I need to start a new series for adults or children, there is nothing special to it. When a series is running, there will be a new part as planned” (Karen, Finland) and a few minutes later she contrasted writing for series with other books where she felt a greater connection:

You get attached to some places [in your books when writing a series]. But in other series, you are glad that you've got them [the characters] more or less to grow, to be grown up and adults so you can get rid of them and let them go on on their own.

(Karen, Finland)

## 6 | DISCUSSION

The joy of your work. How important it is that writing still is the best thing you want to do. Difficult, as it should be, aspiring to achieve art ... but great joy. I wanted to add this because the talk about writing is often coloured by shades of pain and despair. I view the nature of writing differently, regardless of the different feelings that you have while writing. Writing is organic, interesting and being an author is wonderfully free, although getting an income is not self-evident.

(Iris, Finland, in an e-mail after the interview)

Writing was formed through connections to others, especially the readers, mediated through ideas of childhood. Through this entanglement, affect was embedded in being in the world, in ordinary experiences grounded in materiality, embodiment and routines. The children's authors expressed a sense of enchantment connected to specific aspects of their writing experiences, including the spaces and material objects, memories and dreams, and their own family or friendships. Enchanting moments were ordinary but where "something" ruptured the intensities (Stewart, 2007; see also Hancock, 2020). This discussion is organized in two parts: first, we show how enchantment emerged in writing as encounters, emerging as an attunement to intensities which allowed a greater connection to others, their work and materialities. Second, we argue enchantment presents a form of feminine writing which contrasts with detached masculine writing (Höpfel, 2007; Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2023). Positioning the interviews as feminine writing opens up potential and possibilities, and allows us to reflect on the ethical capacity for openness through being in the world.

### 6.1 | Enchantment in writing

Enchantment in Bennett's work entails a state of wonder, a surprising encounter that is both pleasurable and uncanny: "a sense of strangeness emerges with a sense of familiarity" (2001, p. 106). Bennett (2001) argues for the pursuit of a life in which we experience moments of enchantment. For the children's authors, writing included a sense of movement, sometimes to places she did not expect to go, giving a sense of crossing a threshold that produced her as a writer as much as she produced the text (Massumi, 2015). A character in their book could take on a life of its own, driving the story in new and unexpected ways. At other points, enchantment came from being in the world, in finding small points of wonder in everyday life that could be collected and drawn on in writing. Finally, sometimes writing took them out of their world, separating them from their family or other responsibilities by creating imaginary worlds. These writing encounters were moments of enchantment, a sudden sense of wonder before they shifted back to the ordinary. Being enchanted was not constant but emerged and re-emerged within various arrangements of the assemblage. This assemblage was shaped by connections with objects, such as their computer, the outside environment and imaginary readers of the text (see also Bell & Vachhani, 2020; Hancock, 2020).

These enchanted encounters could be unpredictable and spontaneous. Yet the authors seemed to enjoy and even pursue these moments. They formed routines and assembled objects around them to make enchantment possible. Massumi (2015) discusses how relational techniques can modulate affect, where reflexes,

habit, training and skills can become pre-subjective ways of encountering others. Similarly, Bennett also argues enchanting moments can be artificially cultivated and intensified by what she calls “artful means” (Bennett, 2001, p. 10). Authors pursued moments of enchantment and cultivated them, reproducing the assemblage of objects, times and spaces where they recalled the affect. Creating opportunities for wonder may be important as part of the pursuit of a more ethical positioning of being open, as she notes: “my contention is that enchantment can aid in the project of cultivating a stance of presumptive generosity (i.e., of rendering oneself more open to the surprise of other selves and bodies and more willing and able to enter into productive assemblages with them)” (Bennett, 2001, p. 131). For Bennett, ethics comprises of both a moral code and an embodied sensibility which uses movement to enact these codes. Enchanting affect propels people to be open to others and have care and concern for them through the small acts in which wonder might appear.

Ordinary affects were connections that both grounded the authors in the world around them, while also providing a sense of suspension. The wonder which the authors expressed, and corresponding joy, pain, guilt, intoxication, love and hate, came from the daily affects of writing, the simple “hitting of the computer” or putting pen to paper. Vogel (2009) argues that Stewart uses the expression “or something” in her texts to reveal different interpretations of encounters and the fluidity of the ordinary affect and the potentiality of that moment. This follows Bennett’s work that enchantment “the marvelous erupting amid the everyday” (Bennett, 2001, p. 8) through which we may be aware of our intersubjectivity. The process of writing was ordinary and yet also took the authors away from their daily lives to think of other worlds and possibilities which could occur. However, these moments of enchantment were like drops of wonder in the ordinary practice of writing, or life with unfolding encounters in the unremarkable everyday (Vogel, 2009).

The authors purposely formed structure and routine into their lives. For some the comfort of their chair and the safety of their home were important; for others, it was a connection to materiality like a notebook, computer, the familiar coffee shop or a changing view from the window. These reoccurring materialities provided a sense of stability and order to working lives and attunement to enchantment. “Affective practices unfurl, become organized and effloresce with particular rhythms” (Wetherell, 2012, p. 12). The routines and repetitions produced rhythms in their working day, to produce order and context within which affect could emerge. The routines, order and sense of direction also pointed toward shifting their mindset toward an enchanted state. Bennett notes that to hope for an esthetic-affective approach to ethics (drawing on Foucault) is also a call to engage in the “self-discipline necessary to assemble one’s affects into an esthetic sensibility and to render sense-perception sensitive to the amazing specificity of everything around us” (Bennett, 2001, p. 149). By this she means that it is not enough to want to be open to an esthetic, affective world which we are part of, we need to take action to discipline the self to become open. For our authors, repetition was one example where they worked to create conditions through which they could become open to enchantment.

Routines within work practices are a form of repetition, but where each repetition alters slightly, shifting the assemblage into potentially new directions. “In this spiral repetition, the “same” repeats but with a twist” Bennett (2001, p. 126) and it is being attuned to these twists where there is a potential for “something” to emerge (see also Pullen et al., 2017). Routines can be described as producing an “enchanting refrain,” where repetition produces something surprising (Bennett, 2001, p. 6): in this case, trust in repetitive routines allowed enchantment to occur which could move the authors and their writing in unpredictable ways. Enchantment was thus achieved both by design and by accident (cf., Bennett, 2001; Hancock, 2020; Michels & Steyaert, 2017). As such, we argue that the extraordinary lay in between the ordinary in the sense of routines and structure: “the everyday is unremarkable, is what occurs between things—a time of routine and familiarity... one that looks past the sensational and the spectacular to the still lives bobbing in its wake” (Vogel, 2009, p. 258).

## 6.2 | Feminine enchantment

Writing for children for many of the authors was not an abstract audience, but children as lived bodies with whom they interacted, some daily. This could be through childcare, raising their own children through storytelling and reading from books, or working with children in performing their work in schools or libraries. It has been long noted that childcare as an occupation is gendered (Acker, 1990; Murray, 2000), and broadening this to the cultural and educational “care” of children through writing also appeared to (re)produce gendered experiences. Childhood for many authors was through connections which they made to memories, persons and objects which then drove their work. Many but not all of the women interviewed intertwined their narratives, through themselves, their children and being a woman (see also Katila, 2019). Our finding supports Alacovska's (2017) claim that the genre of writing can have a gendering power, influencing writers' sense of identity, by examining how childhood gendered the enchanting affect of writing.

Writing for children was thus gendered in a number of ways. Writing for children reflected a different encounter with the world, both in the real worlds through which they wrote and the imaginary and fictional worlds in which their writing took place in. Pullen, Helin and Harding (2020, p. 10) have argued that “Writing is life blood, oxygen and procreation,” it is about creating and forming words and ideas that will go out into the world. Enchantment as an affect we see as feminine, as in it was less about controlling and rationalizing a process of writing but instead about exploring and co-producing along with the written text. We purposely use the term feminine (as opposed to female) to suggest enchantment was about viewing the world “differently,” drawing less on the rational processes of writing as an occupation to seeing writing as a vocation, a “life blood” (Katila, 2019; Pullen, 2018; Pullen et al., 2020). When the text flowed, it also took the writer with it, allowing for characters to take on a life of their own. (Extra)ordinary moments of enchantment reflect in a way of “writing differently” (Vachhani & Pullen, 2019), and lines of potentiality through enchantment (Ahmed, 2010; cf., Bell et al., 2021).

There was a trade-off for many of the authors between the freedom to write anything they wanted and the security of a book contract, especially for the more predictable writing of a series. Freedom was part of the enchanting affect but came at the price of insecurity. Bell et al. (2021) propose that enchanting encounters can provide opportunities for a different type of ethics involving openness to others through affective experiences (see also Vachhani & Pullen, 2019). Critically reflecting on our interviews, enchanting entanglements were a double-edged sword: in seeking affective experiences in their writing, writers had to negotiate the power relations of the publishing industry and the real impacts this had on their livelihood and way of being.

Enchantment shares a similarity to the promise of happiness, in that the authors orientated toward the potential of enchantment. Ahmed (2010) discusses how happiness can be a promise, an ideal affect which is never quite secured. Successful authors had more space and time to establish routines that could lead to an enchanted affect. Authors who struggled to get published or who spent significant time working in another job discussed how their writing took on a different type of routine and use of time, one of making do, writing “fast and frantically.” There was hope in their writing, firstly for success for their books (Lois & Gregson, 2019), but also, and sometimes more importantly, of another way of being. This potential embedded in writing practices creates opportunity, similar to Pouthier and Sondak's (2021, p. 402) findings where affective pathways created emancipatory potential for relating to others in “joyful and authentic ways.” This partially explains why authors may find both pleasure and pain within their work and yet seek to write despite the significant precariousness they experience.

Bennett is keen to stress that just because a person experiences enchantment, this will not inevitably lead to ethical outcomes. However, she does argue that being open makes it more possible. Being attached to the world gives us the capacity to appreciate life and to be generous toward other bodies (Bennett, 2001). We argue that enchantment is a way of recognizing our attachment to the world around us, and in particular enchantment created a way for authors to connect with others, including children as the main audience of their work. Being open may also cause ruptures and trajectories which create the unexpected or surprising. Enchantment in writing is a form of writing differently, sharing in common with Kociatkiewicz and Kostera to aim to step outside of conventional

approaches. "Writing Differently, can help us do away patriarchal epistemology: detachment and linearity are distortions and aberrations in understanding human beings and their worlds" (2023, p. 16). We feel enchantment allows writers to step outside of instrumental, rational processes of storytelling to instead express creative writing by embracing affect. In academia, feminine enchantment can also challenge what knowledge we see as important and help us articulate different experiences, including recognizing the gendered contexts in which writing occurs.

## 7 | CONCLUSION

What does it mean to be moved by writing? Maybe enchantment does not need to be something fantastical, but that "something" where wonder emerges from something ordinary, everyday and routine. Writing as enchantment allows freedom, a different way of being and engaging with the world. Seeing writing through the lens of affect theory as emerging everyday intensities, the authors in our study were able to connect to their work and to the people they wrote for. Fotaki et al. (2017, p. 6) argue "Affect theory therefore provides interesting and potentially fruitful provocations for critical organization scholars" because it allows us to explore feminist and critical perspectives on the experiences of work. Through exploring the everyday intensities which the authors discussed, we have opened up a different way of understanding how work is meaningful even when it can be precarious and insecure.

In this paper, we have focused on enchantment as a way to understand how authors, despite limited opportunities and insecure rewards, continue writing for children. Using Bennett's understanding of enchantment as affect, writing is performed in an assemblage of materiality, abstract concepts, imaginary world and everyday observations which forms affect that is both pleasurable and challenging and includes a promise of another way of being. In particular, recognizing this as a promise of enchantment helps us to understand why authors of children's books will continue to repeat affective practices.

Enchantment was central to their writing, in moments that both sustained and ruptured. Rather than seeing these moments as radical points of transformation, we argue that they appear in the mundane, ordinary practice where affect creates both order and potential for deviations. Enchantment simultaneously connected the writing subject to the here and now and to a potential "or something" (Stewart, 2007). This potentiality reveals the multiplicity of connections between the writing subject, the world she is writing, the reading subject, discourses of childhood and other non-human objects (Duff & Sumartojo, 2017). This was not writing in isolation, but writing intersubjectively between the author, ideas of childhood and the materiality of their worlds. At several points, these connections moved the authors, for example, experiencing connections between objects, experiences, memories and nostalgia, especially around childhood (Bell & Vachhani, 2020; Vachhani, 2012). Adding to the discussion on affect and organisations, we present a view of enchantment grounded in ordinary affects. (Extra)ordinary moments of enchantment were therefore a non-regular flow of affective experience providing opportunities for a different way of being a way of "writing differently" (cf., Bell et al., 2021; Vachhani & Pullen, 2019). This enchantment in the everyday experience entails a promise and a potentiality, one that is nonetheless part of power relations which produce insecurity and precariousness, but where an ethical possibility to engage in the world differently may open up. Enchantment as affect thus is not a detachment from, but a connection to the world.

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The authors declare no conflicts of interest.



## DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

Research data are not shared.

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