

Introduction

Focusing on the Picture

Commenting on the role of the illustrator and illustrations in children's books in a letter from 1976, Tove Jansson describes a tendency she has noted in children's books: "The illustrations depict curiously artsy decorations and collages you could easily imagine on a cushion or a teapot. You can't enter their pictures. They don't say anything" (Österlund & Laukka, *Horisont* 2016:4, 23).

Jansson argues that the visual storytelling in children's literature needs to go beyond the decorative; it needs to be carried forward by a story, by a visual narration. In the autumn of 2016 a Nordic conference on the theme of "Focusing on the Picture" was arranged at the Swedish Institute for Children's Books, which addressed the role of the picture in children's books and discussed theoretical approaches to the topic. Picking up where the conference left off, *Barnboken* now publishes a number of articles related to this theme.

In recent decades we have witnessed a visual turn in culture at large. This turn is particularly evident when it comes to the reception of picturebooks. In addition, we see a growing interest in the use of ground-breaking hybrid forms of visual and textual narration in stories for children and young adults – not only in graphic novels, but also in the increased use of visual elements in children's and young adult novels. The visual turn creates partly new frames for narration and calls for a new visual literacy. As Kristin Hallberg pointed out as early as 1982, reading children's literature means interpreting text and picture as a whole. Coining the term iconotext, Hallberg drew attention to the interplay between these different modalities. What defines the interplay between text and picture today? What new terms describing the visuality of children's books will pave the way for new readings? These nine articles address the theme of visual narration in children's books.

In the first article of the theme, Elina Druker charts the establishment and expansion of picturebook research in the Nordic countries in general and in Sweden in particular. Druker shows how the field has changed over the years. She describes how picturebook research and its terminology began to take form in the 1980s, and examines the

consolidation phase of the 21st century. Druker also reveals the shift from debates over definitions to studies of individual authorships and also, gradually, a broadened view of the meaning of the term “literature”. In particular, she highlights the relationship between picturebook research and neighbouring research fields and media similar to, or bordering on, the picturebook.

The articles in question reflect that today’s research on the picture in children’s literature includes studies focused on media and genre, text and image analysis, digital media studies, reception studies as well as analyses of the field’s methodological and theoretical development. Another research area popular within the field today is the materiality of visual narratives, which includes trends in tinting, shading, book format, paper quality, and tactile elements. We also see a growing interest in interdisciplinary readings, where animal studies, gender studies, posthumanism, body studies, ecocriticism, and other perspectives are used to demonstrate new ways of examining pictures. The discussion of digital children’s literature is particularly lively at the moment.

The articles on the theme of “Focusing on the Picture” examine everything from the role of the picture in translated literature, readers’ comments online about visual narration, and fan art to imaginary pictures in readings of crossover authorships. The range of topics reflects the diversity of visual studies, in terms of both theory and material, within the field of children’s literature. The articles can also be seen as illustrative examples of contemporary picturebook research, and they give an idea of the visual repertoires prominent in late-modern children’s literature. They also address the influences from other picture media that can be found in children’s literature, and how to approach these through the use of interdisciplinary methods.

Using online reviews of Jakob Wegelius’ *The Legend of Sally Jones* (2008) and *The Murderer’s Ape* (2014) as their starting point, Lena Manderstedt and Annbritt Palo examine the status of the picture in readers’ comments online. Interestingly, their study of authentic online reviews and blog posts suggests very few readers comment on the visual narration, which raises the question of whether visual literacy is being neglected in education. While *The Legend of Sally Jones* is distinctly visual, *The Murderer’s Ape* also makes use of visual narration. The two works therefore lend themselves to analysis of how these aspects are discussed by readers who share their reading experiences online.

Maria Pujol-Valls compares the Spanish translation of Norwegian author Maria Parr’s novel *Tonje Glimmerdal* (2009) to the origi-

nal book, concluding that the re-illustrated Spanish edition is clearly aimed at a target group unfamiliar with Norway's topography. Using ecocriticism as her theoretical framework, she demonstrates how the illustrations in the original Norwegian edition favour close-ups of Tonje depicted in action-packed situations. The Spanish illustrations, on the other hand, zoom out and allow the idyllic snowy landscape to take centre stage while the protagonist Tonje becomes part of the landscape.

Moominvalley in November (1970), the last book in the Moomin novel series, marked the end of the relationship between Tove Jansson and the Moomin family. From then on, she wrote for an adult audience. Ida Moen Johnson argues that the thematic similarities between Jansson's texts for adults and the Moomin books can give rise to what she calls "absent illustrations". Moen Johnson thereby sheds light on an intriguing aspect of Jansson's illustrations, and on how pictures in texts can be read in general, as she suggests that readers familiar with Jansson's oeuvre imagine illustrations in her non-illustrated texts for adults. The non-illustrated book can be said to contain a visual void, which the reader potentially fills.

In his multimodal analysis of Martin Widmark and Helena Willis' *Schlagersabotören* (2012), Jonas Asklund examines the interplay between picture and sound in an illustrated children's novel with an accompanying CD. Asklund highlights how the auditory text presents the reader with clues needed to solve the mystery, and draws attention to the interplay between visual and auditory narration. The study is an example of the many possible approaches – in this case, intermediality studies – to multimodal children's literature.

Tuva Haglund studies the function of fan art – art created online by fans – in digital communities where readers create pictures based on their reading experiences and share their work online. The material consists of pictures of Linnéa and Vanessa in Sara Bergmark Elfgren and Mats Strandberg's Engelsfors trilogy (2011–2013) and of Hermione in J. K. Rowling's Harry Potter books (1997–2007). With the help of concepts such as affective hermeneutics, Haglund reveals how reader activity online is used to explore romantic relationships between the characters as well as to depict Hermione as black.

Ever since Kristin Hallberg coined the term iconotext in the early 1980s, it has played a central role in Nordic picturebook research. Here, Hallberg revisits the notion of iconotext in her analysis of the motif of the naked child in Mollie Faustman's children's cartoon "Tuttan och Putte" from the 1920s and 1930s as well as in her cause-ries under the pen name Vagabonde. Hallberg contextualizes Faust-

man's work by discussing it in relation to movements such as naturism and vitalism, and considers the motif of the naked child from an art historical perspective. By exploring the historical context of Faustman's depictions of naked children, the study offers a welcome depth to the relationship between nudity and childhood in contemporary culture.

Åse Marie Ommundsen and Rebecca Stubsjøen read the Norwegian picturebook *Når alle sover* (2011) by Nicolai Houm and Rune Markhus from a teratological perspective, focusing on how the monstrous – “the othered” monster – functions in the iconotext of a picturebook. The article discusses how othering can be seen as a platform for affects, and argues that the primary function of the monster is not to scare but to make room for “the other” in the narrative. Thereby, the picturebook monster is placed in a tradition of renegotiated monstrosity.

Moreover, Per Israelson explores how the past is pictured in the graphic novels *Maus. A Survivor's Tale* (1991) by Art Spiegelman and *Vi kommer snart hem igen* (2018) by Jessica Bab Bonde and Peter Bergting by reading these works from a posthumanist perspective. Applying concepts such as historiographical metafiction and practical past, Israelson dissects how media ecologies are formed, and problematizes the preconditions of historical fiction. Spiegelman's *Maus* is one of the most commented works within research on the graphic novel, and Israelson approaches it from an innovative angle.

Much remains to uncover when it comes to the theme of “Focusing on the Picture”. For example, has picturebook criticism changed over the years? How do illustrators and picturebook artists define their picture poetics? Tove Jansson's credo is that there needs to be a narrative depth: “In pictures for children, there should always be something left unexplained, a path where the illustrator/writer stops, but which the child continues down alone” (Österlund & Laukka, *Horisont* 2016:4, 22). The openness Tove Jansson stresses when it comes to the pictures of children's books is interesting to examine in a research context that does not stop, but instead continues to explore the conditions of visual narration from ever-new perspectives.

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