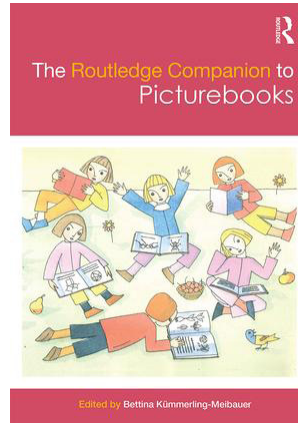


KÜMMERLING-MEIBAUER,
BETTINA (ED.)
**THE ROUTLEDGE
COMPANION TO
PICTUREBOOKS**
London: Routledge, 2018 (525 pp.)



The Routledge Companion to Picturebooks (2018), edited by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, is a landmark volume in the history and development of international picturebook studies. The 500 page companion is an ambitious and encyclopaedic volume encompassing a wide range of subfields within picturebook studies. (Nota bene, in this research field the term picturebook is spelled as one word to underline the cooperation of visual and verbal narration.) In her excellent introduction, Kümmerling-Meibauer maps this international and interdisciplinary field. She lays the ground for the volume by discussing the choice of cover picture for the volume. Tom Seidmann-Freud's avant-garde painting of a Utopian children's republic may seem plain at first glance, but it accumulates meaning in her contextualizing reading. Kümmerling-Meibauer shows how concepts of childhood are communicated via picturebooks, and dwells on basic questions such as "what exactly is a picturebook?" (3). She states that there still are many blank spots on the international picturebook map. This volume surely maps the terrain in a thought-provoking and manifold way while offering up-to-date views on key ideas, significant terms, and current debates.

The companion has a clear transnational scope, visible in most articles, and actively seeks non-European interfaces. Nordic picturebooks are therefore represented to quite a large extent, although some of the names and titles are misspelled, something which could easily have been avoided. Whether this goes for names and titles in other languages as well is hard for me to say. Besides mapping the emerging concepts and debates in the field, the companion com-

prises a long list of canonical picturebooks and titles worth further study. Thus, the volume is useful as an orientation in the publishing of picturebooks, although examples of male picturebook artists tend, at times, to overshadow the work of their female colleagues. A more gender-sensitive selection of examples could have been done.

Elina Druker and Nina Christensen are among the Nordic scholars who contribute to the companion. Druker's entry, "Collage and Montage in Picturebooks", traces the historical roots and recent developments of this technique, comparing it to Gilles Deleuze's concept of assemblage. Christensen's essay "Picturebooks and Representations of Childhood" examines how children are portrayed in picturebooks, and draws on a range of scholars from Jacqueline Rose to Marah Gubar. Her findings include prospective, retrospective and parodic childhoods, as well as intriguing stylistic devices such as visual palindromes, here represented by Norwegian picturebook artist Stian Hole's *Annas himmel* [*Anna's Heaven*]. Both Druker's and Christensen's contributions originate in their earlier research and are well anchored in a range of contexts, as well as thoroughly backed up by excellent examples.

Divided into five parts, the 48 entries in this companion map this research field in a rich and impressive way. The first part introduces relevant concepts and theories, starting with the chapter "Author-Illustrator" by Kerry Mallan. This chapter is followed by entries on paratexts, page layout, materiality, hybridity, seriality, interpicturebook, metafiction and more. In addition, topics such as gender, ideology, emotions, and canon formation in picturebooks are presented. These introductory entries are fruitful since they not only map territories and show the diversity of both material and research, but also aim to develop the methodology further. For example, in his entry "The Education of a Picturebook-Maker" Martin Salisbury suggests that it would be better to use the concept of auteur rather than illustrator since the term "illustrating" does not sufficiently cover the work visual artists do when it comes to visual narration. This concept, he argues, would help raise the status of picturebook-makers.

Part two deals with different picturebook categories, such as early-concept books, *Wimmelbooks*, abecedaria, pop-up books, and wordless, postmodern, crossover, adult, and digital picturebooks. Nordic scholar Åse Marie Ommundsen boldly argues that the category of "picturebooks for adults" differs from "crossover picturebooks". Drawing on her previous research, she pinpoints Nordic picturebooks as forerunners of this category, and highlights what is at stake when the picturebook makes use of an adult perspective.

Ommundsen's provocative entry sheds light on where the blurry borders of the picturebook medium could, and should, be drawn. Part three continues to map interfaces by comparing picturebooks to nearby formats such as artists' books, photography, comics, arts, and movies. These entries are especially fruitful since they show how picturebooks are intertwined with modernity. Part four collects essays on domains such as the education of illustrators, art history, developmental psychology, linguistics, media studies, picture theory, narratology, and translation. Finally, part five discusses adaptation and remediation, concluding with an entry on merchandising and franchising.

One of the companion's main achievements is that it shows how similar concepts and terminology have been discovered and coined within parallel contexts, and how rich picturebook research is since it invites, and is informed by, nearby fields such as art history, film, photography, and comic studies. For example, typological aspects such as minding the gutter when creating a picturebook spread are compelling. The necessary meta language of picturebook studies is carefully presented and explained, thereby offering a plethora of ways of understanding picturebooks, as well as specific tools to analyse and interpret them. Materiality and hybridity are also central concepts explored.

A major challenge is to succeed in representing a transnational perspective on picturebook studies. Some entries might even stir up the reader. For me, this is what Karen Coats' entry "Gender in Picturebooks" does when she chooses to discuss gender drawing on cognitive studies rather than ideological and feminist research. Due to the language barrier, the absence of references to Nordic picturebook scholarship is obvious. For example, in a Nordic context Swedish-language non-normative picturebooks are the new mainstream, and therefore the take on gender in Nordic picturebooks is completely different from the views on gender presented in the English-language material Coats discusses. For instance, choosing Sarah Hoffman's, Ian Hoffman's and Chris Case's *Jacob's New Dress* published in 2014 rather than Swedish Pija Lindenbaum's *Kenta och barbisarna* [Ken and the barbie dolls] published as early as 2007 therefore seems odd, since Lindenbaum's picturebook gave rise to a range of Nordic picturebooks featuring boys in dresses. Moreover, queer studies are marginalized in the companion and, despite the transnational scope, many geographical areas are rendered quite invisible. One of those is Finland, which is represented exclusively by a senior generation of scholars (Riitta Oittinen's "Picturebooks and Trans-

lation”), overlooking more recent scholarship on picturebooks by scholars such as Sirke Happonen, Susanna Ylönen, Jaana Pesonen, and myself. In addition, some entries are burdened by an urge to underline the didactic, cognitive and emotional benefits of picturebooks, which does not add much to the thrilling and thought-provoking aesthetics of this hybrid medium that keeps transgressing its limits in unexpected ways. Soundscapes, fluorescent books, folded pop-up books, digital picturebooks – the options seem infinite. Yet, many entries end with a brief comment on digital picturebooks, merely stating that new technology changes the field rather than expanding on how. Despite the best of intentions, the development within certain countries is overlooked, such as the vivid discussion among Nordic scholars on digital picturebooks that includes recent research by Lisa Nagel, Ayoe Quist Henkel, Sarah Mygind, Elise Seip Tønnessen, Lin Prøitz and others. When reading this volume, I filled the margins with exclamation marks noting equivalent Nordic picturebooks and studies left out of the discussion. This bears witness to the dilemma of writing an international encyclopedia. It also suggests a field in transition, and an ongoing paradigm shift that has not completely entered picturebook research yet.

The breadth and the ambitious scope of *The Routledge Companion to Picturebooks* cannot, however, be fully transmitted in a single review. The articles in the companion are indeed carefully anchored in compelling picturebook material, and each chapter offers a voluminous list of references, which makes the volume perfect for teaching purposes. The generous lists of references also provide excellent sources for further research. It is evident that this well-written and pedagogical companion will inspire new studies and help diversify this manifold, complex and growing field of research further.

Mia Österlund
Associate Professor of Comparative Literature
Åbo Akademi University