

Children's Literature and the Avant-Garde

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Volume 5

Children's Literature and the Avant-Garde

Edited by Elina Druker and Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer

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Introduction

Children's literature and the avant-garde

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What is avant-garde?

The term avant-garde originally referred to the vanguard, literally speaking to the 'advance guard' of an army. Although the origin of the term has been debated, the expression avant-garde articulates the idea of the vanguard as ahead of their time, advanced and progressive. Initially used as a term to designate progressive and politically engaged art and literature, the notion of avant-garde first became established in France at the end of the nineteenth century, then also in other Romance languages, such as Spanish and Italian, and subsequently in other European countries. Originally attributed to concepts of historical progress and social revolution, the term avant-garde has been transferred to history of art and literary studies and is used to describe those intellectuals, authors, publishers, artists, and groups of artists who, through experimental and radical reformation, aim to push the boundaries of what is accepted as a norm. Thus, the avant-garde constitutes a dense network of groupings, movements, and tendencies that aspire to achieve an eradicated renewal of artistic forms as well as to establish a completely new conception of art and its position within the society.

Conceptualized as a counter-project to traditional and bourgeois culture and art, the avant-garde encompasses various art movements of the twentieth century, such as Constructivism, Expressionism, Dadaism, Surrealism, *Neue Sachlichkeit* (New Realism), *De Stijl*, and Pop Art. These art movements not only left their marks in the arts and literature, but also impacted on mainstream culture and, in the long run, on children's literature.

What distinguishes avant-garde movements is the general belief in the historical progress of art, which in a next step leads to the questioning of the conceptualization of art as a unified organic work. Consequently, avant-garde artists turned towards the material aspects of art and strived toward merging disparate materials, which gave rise to collage and montage, but also to the creation of so-called "ready mades" and "objets trouvés" (Klinger 2004; Adamson 2007).

Additionally, the withdrawal from traditional aesthetic principles and the merging with mainstream design which are typical for many avant-garde movements were proclaimed in avant-garde manifestoes. These manifestoes usually served to establish a close cohesion among certain avant-garde artists who stuck to a programmatic approach and attempted to connect their artistic endeavors with current political and ideological issues (Poggioli 1968; Krauss 1999). It is no wonder, then, that a number of avant-garde artists showed a deep interest in contemporary intellectual movements and academic schools, such as the Structuralist Prague circle, the Formalist School in St. Petersburg and Moscow, and Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language. Also Sigmund Freud's and C.G. Jung's psychological essays exerted a great influence on the emergence and progression of avant-garde art (Klinger 2004; Webber 2004).

The Second World War made an important incision in the continuation of the avant-garde. Nevertheless, some avant-garde artists of the interwar period carried the avant-garde tendencies of the 1920s and 1930s over to the period after 1945. For this reason it has become accepted in academia to distinguish between historical avant-garde and Post-Avant-garde or Neo-Avant-garde. This distinction already indicates that the avant-garde itself has been subjected to a process of historiography. What was considered as innovative, ahead of the times, and provoking lost its shock effect as time went on. Yet contemporary artists and authors have attempted on various occasions to renew eminent avant-garde ideas of the first half of the twentieth century, and to advance avant-garde concepts and art programs, thus contributing to a still ongoing discussion on the impact of the avant-garde on our modern times (Beekman 2007).

The avant-garde is a very heterogeneous phenomenon. Some avant-garde movements were prominent throughout Europe and even worldwide, while others disappeared very quickly. Partly competing avant-garde movements alternated in rapid succession, instigating a battle of "isms". Seen from an international perspective, the notion of avant-garde reveals some terminological and conceptual difficulties, since it is interpreted differently in individual national contexts. Also, with the exception of some artists belonging to the Italian Futurism, the artists of the avant-garde movements usually did not denote themselves as "avant-gardists". They employed other categories, such as "new art", "young art", "modern art", and even "ultra-modern art" (Fähn timers 2007). This attitude changed by the late twentieth century, when some artists expressly started to characterize themselves as members of the avant-garde and critics and scholars increasingly assigned the term avant-garde to the radical art movements of the twentieth century.

At the same time, the phenomenon is described with different terms. While the notion of avant-garde is quite common within the German, Austrian,

French, and Italian contexts, the situation is different in the United Kingdom, where scholars often assign avant-garde movements to the category Modernism. The same applies for the Nordic countries, where the label avant-garde as a self-description has only been used to a limited extent, although it has become more familiar since the turn of the millennium (Bäckström & Børset 2011). Finally, the notion of avant-garde gained a foothold relatively late in East European art history, since it was semantically occupied by the concept of the political avant-garde postulated by the Communist party (Bru 2006). The situation becomes even more complex if one takes the diverse avant-garde concepts in non-European countries into consideration. Due to the large migration flows within Europe, but also from Europe to other continents and countries, such as the USA, Mexico, South Africa, and Japan, avant-garde artists impacted on art movements in these respective countries as well (Benson 2002; Van den Berg 2006). They triggered new and sometimes even hybrid avant-garde concepts that merge European avant-garde ideas with traditional and folkloristic art trends.

Seen in this light, attempts to define and describe what is and what is not avant-garde are necessarily problematic. Scholars have debated whether the notion and concept of avant-garde has become diluted. The British scholar Paul Wood sums it up:

‘Avant-garde’ became pervasive as a synonym for ‘modern art’ during the boom in culture after World War II [...] ‘Avant-garde’, then, became not just a synonym for modern art in the all-inclusive sense of the term, but was more particularly identified with artistic “modernism”, and hence shorthand for the values associated with that term. (Wood 1999: 10)

Wood hereby refers to the fierce post-war debate on the significance of the avant-garde as a theoretical and historical concept. While in the 1960s some critics, such as the influential cultural theorist Arnold Gehlen (1963), claimed that the avant-garde was obsolete, Peter Bürger’s benchmark study *Theory of the Avant-garde* (1984 [1974]) marked a new start. Bürger generally determined that the avant-garde is a concept that touches on all art forms and claims authority as an overarching blow to academic and non-academic institutions that would rather preserve traditional views than encourage the emergence of innovative artistic efforts. Bürger thus contributed to the rehabilitation of the historical avant-garde – with a simultaneous devaluation of the Neo-Avant-garde.

In his influential *Faces of Modernity* (1977), Matei Călinescu describes the avant-garde as “a self-consciously advanced position” (97) in politics, religion, literature, and art, a description that is equivalent to the idea of vanguard but also insinuates an attitude of avant-garde as a strategy. According to Călinescu, the

concept of the avant-garde is often seen as opposite to both high and mainstream forms of art, and is instead considered to be driven by the ideals of the autonomy of art or true art, views that are challenging – and possibly irrelevant when applied to children's literature.

Nevertheless, the different understandings of the avant-garde in different historical and geographical contexts and the failure to reach agreement on a commonly accepted definition of the term caused Paul Mann (1991) to postulate the "Theory-Death of the Avantgarde". Mann stated that the avant-garde has been replaced by Postmodernism, which has adopted the forms, practices, and procedures of the avant-garde (Murphy 2003; Foster 2004). Marx (2004) even goes a step further in claiming that contemporary art since the 1980s tends to stand aloof from the avant-garde, denoting this tendency as "arrière-garde". In accordance with these statements, several critics have also indicated that the notion of avant-garde has progressively been losing its sharp contours, since it has become a buzzword in fashion, advertising, and other commercial domains.

Despite this scientific controversy, the historical and theoretical investigation of the avant-garde has been experiencing a renaissance since the beginning of the twenty-first century with the foundation of the international research society "European Avantgarde and Modernism" (EAM) in 2008 and other related research projects in Europe. One aim of these different research groups and projects consists in establishing avant-garde as a scientific term; another goal is to investigate the overarching impact of different avant-garde movements on the conceptualization of art and literature in our modern times. In contrast to Bürger, contemporary scholars do not necessarily assume that there is a definite split between the historical avant-garde and the post-war avant-garde, but consider the latter as an uninterrupted continuation of the former (Van den Berg 2005). Recent research in avant-garde studies focus on the genealogy of avant-garde movements, as for instance, the afterlife of Surrealism in Pop Art and COBRA, an international artist group in the 1950s, whose name is an acronym of the first letters of Copenhagen, Brussels, and Amsterdam (Schmidt-Burkhardt 2005). Moreover, they investigate the mutual relationship between avant-garde art and programmatic statements expressed in manifestoes and exhibitions. Viewed from this perspective, the avant-garde might be regarded as a spatial-temporal network that has constituted an artistic alternative to hegemonic art since the beginning of the twentieth century, with peaks in the 1910s and 1920s and again in the 1950s and 1960s, and which still lives on in contemporary art (Van den Berg & Fähnders 2009, introduction). Hence, the avant-garde is not a bygone era, but might be regarded as an open project with an immediate relevance to the present.

Avant-garde and children's books

As is obvious from this short overview, the theoretical discussion on the definition and function of the avant-garde is still ongoing and the existing studies are far from exhaustive. When it comes to the relationship between avant-garde and children's literature, the situation is even more fractional, since avant-garde studies generally disregard avant-garde children's literature, while children's literature research, with some exceptions, has not paid much attention to the avant-garde topic. In fact, within the realm of children's literature the question of what constitutes an avant-garde work is possibly even more complex than within avant-garde studies in general. Children's books that are considered cutting-edge and revolutionary in one regional, cultural, and ideological context may seem diluted and overdone in another environment. While avant-garde children's literature was both supported and legitimized in Russia after the October revolution in 1917, similar attitudes and artistic explorations in many other countries were private, sometimes isolated experiments or were not recognized as such at all.

As this volume demonstrates, different social, historical, and ideological developments have led to various examples of what we might consider expressions of the avant-garde in children's literature. Considering the material that is presented and examined here, however, it is clear that a rigid definition of the avant-garde – with a focus on the artistic experience alone – is generally ineffective, and even more so when dealing with children's literature, where not only artistic but also ideological, pedagogical, and social ideas are inseparable from the artistic expression (Nel 2002; Olson 2012).

Avant-garde ideas about children's literature often reflect a general desire to break free from artistic boundaries and labels, but also from previous norms in children's literature and traditional constructions of childhood, similar to the concept of "radical children's literature" explained in Reynolds (2007). How, then, does the idea of the avant-garde apply to children's literature? Many researchers have noted that the avant-garde has often been used as a strategy, where the position of the avant-garde is created consciously by the artist, even when some of these artists and their work later became part of the established art world. As Paul Mann argues in *The Theory-Death of the Avant-Garde* (1991), "[t]he avant-garde consistently defines itself both in terms of and against definitions imposed upon it" (9). Avant-garde can be seen as a self-proclaimed exception, but the definition also contains a contradiction of its own: while avant-garde was originally used to describe cutting-edge movements, ahead of their times, these movements cannot, in a contemporary setting, be described as such but should be defined as historical avant-garde. These questions further complicate, but also broaden, the discussion of the avant-garde within children's literature.

Although the impact of avant-garde art on the development of modern children's literature in different European and non-European countries has been demonstrated in several exhibitions,¹ the topic has, so far, not been extensively and comprehensively investigated. What is especially lacking is a study that shows how these mutual influences not only touch upon single authors and illustrators, but also cross national borders in a multifaceted way. While we have profound knowledge of the impressive impact of Russian avant-garde artists on the emergence of Russian avant-garde picturebooks and children's books,² little has been written about comparable influences in other European countries,³ let alone the reception of the avant-garde in non-European children's literature.⁴ Yet, many renowned artists belonging to avant-garde movements in these countries created aesthetically demanding works for children, ranging from picturebooks to poetry, fairy tales, and novels for children. These artists most often relied on new insights spawned by educationalists and psychologists who were mainly influenced by Reform pedagogy and equivalent pedagogical movements (Bordes 2007; Higonnet 2009; Deppner 2011; Kümmerling-Meibauer 2013). These educational and psychological ideas led to an increasing interest in the child's surroundings and educational background, thus embracing all cultural events and constructs that belong to children's culture in general, such as films, theater, toys, architecture, furniture, and clothing. In this respect, the German Bauhaus played a seminal role since the heads of the art classes were encouraged to foster the creation of furniture, clothes, toys, books, theater plays, and everyday objects for children.⁵ Several catalogues and monographs even focus on the development and history of avant-garde

1. See, for instance, the exhibition catalogues of Pérez (1998), Rowell & Wye (2002), Hollein & Luyken (2004), Dehò (2007), Michielsen (2010), and Kinchin & O'Connor (2012).

2. See Kuznetsov (1991), Lévêque & Plantureux (1997), Steiner (1999), Rosenfeld (1999), Noever (2006), Pankenier (2007, 2014), Lemmens & Stommels (2009), Karasik (2010), Bird (2011), Rothenstein & Budashevskaya (2013).

3. See Kårelund (1999), Christensen (2003), and Druker (2008) on the impact of Modernism and avant-garde on Nordic children's literature, and Stark (2000), Tost (2005), Neuner-Warthorst (2006), Heller (2008), Noever (2009), and Kümmerling-Meibauer (2015a) on the influence of Modernism on Austrian, German, and Swiss children's literature.

4. An exception to this rule is the studies by Nel (2002), B. Will (2007), Op de Beeck (2010), and Leppanen Guerra (2011).

5. See C. Will (1997), Siebenbrodt (2004), Hollein & Luyken (2004), Droste (2006), and Bergdoll & Dickerman (2009).

toys.⁶ Although these artists and their books frequently played a decisive role in the development of children's literature, they are often disregarded in histories of children's literature in general, and in studies focusing on the aesthetic and narrative changes in children's literature over the course of time in particular. There are multiple reasons for the neglect of avant-garde children's books: first, the authors themselves often regarded their works for children as by-products not worthy of further consideration. Second, many critics and scholars show a tendency to focus on the respective artist's works created for adults. Third, avant-garde children's books were usually printed in small editions⁷ and were accordingly more expensive than common children's books, thus they have been considered marginal in the field of children's literature. Today, these books are rare collectibles, appreciated by connoisseurs, librarians, and collectors.

It is uncontested that avant-garde works for children paved the way for the modernization of children's literature starting at the beginning of the twentieth century. They introduced new aesthetic and narrative concepts into children's books and can therefore be considered milestones in the history of European and even non-European children's literature.

Aims of this volume

Children's Literature and the Avant-Garde intends to fill a gap in children's literature research that has often been bemoaned, but has not yet been tackled. It arises from an international conference "Children's Literature and European Avant-Garde", which took place at the University of Norrköping, Sweden, in September 2012 and was funded by the European Science Foundation. The eleven chapters in this volume discuss the mutual impact of avant-garde movements, ranging from Art Nouveau, Expressionism, and Constructivism to Surrealism and Pop Art, on the development of children's literature in different European countries, but also touch upon the impact of European avant-garde on North American children's literature.

An issue discussed in several chapters is the afterlife of avant-garde art and literature in modern children's literature published after the Second World War, as for instance the emergence of Pop Art picturebooks in the 1960s and 1970s, and

6. See Antonio Vitali: *Spielzeugdesigner* (1994), Huygen & Teutenberg (1994), Pérez (1997), Ligtelijn (1999), Bellasi et al. (2002), Stales & Pérez (2010), and Bordes (2012).

7. The Soviet avant-garde book production is an exception to this rule. Cf. the chapter by Albert Lemmens and Serge Aljosha Stommels in this volume.

the increasing impact of Surrealism on today's picturebooks. Since very little has previously been written on children's literature and the avant-garde, a great deal of previously unknown material, hidden in archives and libraries and for a long time forgotten, has been discovered as a result of the work for this volume. These discoveries demonstrate that the investigation of the subject opens up new insights into the interrelation between literature for children and avant-garde art. A particularly striking result of the chapters presented in this study is the finding that the development of avant-garde children's books goes hand in hand with a broader awareness of contemporary political, cultural, and social issues, leading to revisions of traditional concepts of childhood. While several examples of avant-garde children's literature in this volume can be described as political and ideological, demonstratively rejecting the aesthetics of mainstream children's literature, others exhibit connections to commercial art (like poster art or pop culture). What we see are seemingly opposite goals and expressions.

The contributions cover multifaceted aspects of the relationship between children's literature and European avant-garde. Some of the chapters are distinguished by their broad encyclopedic knowledge, giving a fascinating overview of the development of avant-garde children's books in different countries. At the same time, other chapters focus on the major contributions of individual artists in this realm, thus creating quite complementary views on the book's topic. All contributions are characterized by a historical perspective, but the underlying theoretical framework and the discussion of pedagogical, artistic, and ideological aspects demonstrate a range of methods and thus reflect the various historical and cultural backgrounds as well as the complexity of the relationship between avant-garde movements and children's literature. As a result of the multiple approaches and materials in this volume, the concept of the avant-garde is studied within a larger context of ideological and artistic creativity, and as a consequence, the vanguard position is emphasized as both an individual and a collective act. What is manifested in these children's books is a general idea of progression and change – change in norms and mindsets, and changes that can be traced to movements within arts, education, social systems, and ideologies. *Children's Literature and the Avant-Garde* demonstrates that even when not recognized or labeled as such by their contemporaries, the various avant-garde movements within children's literature – in some cases legitimized and strongly supported by society and in other instances private and marginalized – have been fundamental for the modernization of children's literature. Sometimes defying the social or cultural context, new attitudes and aesthetic and narrative concepts are introduced into books for children, approaches that create pathways through new terrain in children's literature.

Hence, *Children's Literature and the Avant-Garde* can be considered as a first step towards the investigation of the complex and mutual influences of avant-garde

movements on children's literature in different countries, thus presenting an outstanding opportunity to discuss recent research on this topic from a number of theoretical and historical points of view. The volume is divided into three sections, each focusing on different historical and theoretical aspects of the avant-garde in children's literature. The chapters are chronologically arranged, encompassing more than a century from the end of the nineteenth century up to the beginning of the millennium.

The first four chapters examine the close connection between topical nineteenth-century views on childhood and their impact on art and the rise of avant-garde children's literature in the twentieth century. In her chapter, Marilyn Olson shows that the art critic and social reformer John Ruskin paved the way for the intersection of children's literature with future avant-garde movements, which are mostly built on the child's pristine attachment to art. This aspect is of utmost importance for the changed attitude of avant-garde artists towards children, since children's art and the child's perception of the world influenced their own art works as well as their efforts to collaborate with children.

The chapters by Elina Druker and Samuel Albert treat the development of vanguard tendencies in the artwork of two prominent artists of the first half of the twentieth century, namely Einar Nerman from Sweden and Sándor Bortnyik from Hungary, both of whose children's books are influenced by commercial graphic and poster design. Druker and Albert demonstrate that the analysis of modernist picturebooks for children has to acknowledge the interplay between children's literature, popular culture, and European avant-garde movements in order to describe the specific and intricate processes of renewal in picturebook art.

Kimberley Reynolds focuses on the relationship between historiography and avant-garde by discussing the reasons for the non-consideration of British avant-garde children's books in British histories of children's literature. This chapter shows that only a broad approach that combines cultural history, literary history, and book history is able to investigate the intense discussion on the role of children's books within a national discourse. The result is a specifically British variation of the avant-garde, which is described as a 'conservative' or 'romantic' Modernism. This chapter comes full circle with the first one, since both emphasize the eminent role of social criticism and art education within a British context, although encompassing almost half a century.

The four chapters of the second section focus on the overarching impact of the Russian avant-garde on Russian, Dutch, Danish, and US-American children's books from the 1920s until the end of the 1940s. Sara Pankenier Weld juxtaposes the infantile art of the avant-garde with avant-garde works that actually involve an infantile audience by relating works by Kazimir Malevich, El Lissitzky, and Vladimir Lebedev to children's drawings, perception, and cognition. This celebration of the

infantile, like other primitivisms in modern art, proclaims a return to fundamental concepts, such as the square and other minimal geometric components. Hence, this chapter not only relates to the first chapter on John Ruskin's considerations of child art, but also represents a solid basis for the ensuing chapters that show the significance of exhibitions of Soviet picturebooks for the recognition of Russian avant-garde concepts in north-western Europe, and the development of comparable societal and educational models in leftist circles in the Soviet Union and the USA.

Albert Lemmens and Serge-Aljosja Stommels have reconstructed an exhibition of early Soviet picturebooks that was on show in Amsterdam in 1929 by thoroughly studying the Amsterdam exhibition catalogue, the children's book catalogues of the Soviet publishers, and contemporary reviews in Dutch journals. Their chapter illustrates that the perception of avant-garde children's literature has been significantly influenced by exhibitions in different European countries and that their reconstruction and investigation definitely contribute to a better understanding of the reception of avant-garde children's books.

While the exhibition in Amsterdam resulted in the translation of several Soviet picturebooks into Dutch and the encouragement of Dutch picturebook artists to engage with the Russian avant-garde, Nina Christensen explores the impact of Russian picturebooks that were displayed in Copenhagen in 1932 on the aesthetics and the childhood images expressed in Danish picturebooks published in the 1930s and 1940s. Furthermore, she relates these picturebooks to contemporary Scandinavian views of childhood and education, thus delineating the emergence of a new perception of picturebooks in Denmark.

Evgeny Steiner focuses on the creative artworks and educational programs of Soviet avant-garde artists and of modernist leftist artists and progressive educators in Western Europe and the USA in the 1920s and 1930s. Steiner emphasizes the similarities of the concepts of the Soviet "New Man" and the American "New Generation", which share many characteristic features despite officially proclaimed ideological differences and which influenced the emergence of a new type of non-fiction picturebook that focuses on the depiction of modern life.

In addition to addressing the aesthetic and political impact and the reception of the Russian avant-garde in Soviet, Dutch, Danish, and American children's books, all four chapters demonstrate that a comparative perspective contributes to a re-evaluation of the diverse strands of avant-garde children's books within a European and even a non-European context.

The last three chapters study the afterlife of early twentieth-century avant-garde movements in post-war children's literature in several West European countries and the USA, showing how the respective artists and writers have relied on prewar and interwar avant-garde experiments.

Sandra Beckett's chapter spans the period from the 1920s into the twenty-first century, showing the lasting influence of different avant-garde movements, such as Constructivism, Surrealism, and Pop Art, on French children's literature. The continuous reference to the avant-garde, even in recently published children's books, bears witness to the innovative spirit of the avant-garde in French children's literature and also testifies to the boundary-crossing aspect of this genre, addressing children as well as adults.

Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer investigates Pop Art picturebooks from seemingly disparate countries, such as Finland, France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the USA. Characterized by the artists' radical attitude towards childhood and traditional picturebook art, these picturebooks from the 1960s and 1970s refer to various prewar avant-garde movements and cross the boundaries between popular culture, children's literature, and modern art. While Beckett in her chapter focuses on the French branch of Harlin Quist, Kümmerling-Meibauer concentrates on the situation in the USA, where Harlin Quist first established his publishing house. Thus, the significance of this exceptional publisher is analyzed from different angles, highlighting his impact on French and US-American artists in the 1960s and 1970s.

The last chapter, by Philip Nel, turns towards contemporary picturebooks that attempt to explain Surrealism to younger readers as well as children's books that deploy avant-garde strategies. By pointing out the ways in which avant-garde children's literature is both theoretically dubious and a politically empowering genre, Nel asserts that the seminal idea propagated by avant-garde artists of disrupting the perceptual habits reveals a paradoxical approach, since children's perception and world knowledge is usually not fully developed.

Nel's chapter closes the circle of argumentation on the close relationship between avant-garde art, childhood images, and children's literature, thus drawing a line from the late nineteenth century until the present. Consequently, the compositional principle of the volume expresses the ongoing attractiveness of the avant-garde within children's literature and how different avant-garde movements have clearly contributed to the critical scrutiny of traditional concepts of childhood and art for children. Moreover, the volume also demonstrates that a comparative approach towards the study of the mutual relationship between children's literature and the avant-garde is a fruitful undertaking. Last but not least, since modern children's literature in many European and even non-European countries has demonstrably been influenced by avant-garde arts during different time periods, the topic of this volume reveals a timeless approach which certainly broadens our knowledge of the historical and theoretical context of children's literature, and hopefully stimulates further research on this complex and exciting issue.

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PART 1

**Vanguard tendencies since the beginning
of the twentieth century**

CHAPTER 1

John Ruskin and the mutual influences of children's literature and the avant-garde

Marilynn S. Olson

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This chapter traces some nineteenth-century ideas, here tied to the art critic/social reformer John Ruskin, which connect children's literature and culture with the future avant-gardes. Ruskin praised the energy of early art in the cultures he loved, celebrated the potential influence of improved nursery books, recognized the positive aspects of the grotesque which, in that era, were a regular feature of children's literature and entertainment, and contributed his inspiration to the Arts and Crafts movement, a contributor to the development of the picturebook ideal synthesis of image and text.

The intersection of children's literature and the avant-garde allows for many areas of mutual influence, hardly fewer than the intersection of the avant-garde and childhood, itself. If we define the avant-garde as “an organized grouping with a self-conscious, radical, collective project of overturning current orthodoxies in art and replacing them with new, critical practices”, as Tim Barringer and Jason Rosenfeld do in their discussion of the “Victorian Avant-garde”, we can see that the collective project could easily correspond to the didactic purposes we are familiar with in children's literature (Barringer & Rosenfeld 2012: 9). For example, members of such a movement can contribute to children's literature simply by using the existing forms of children's literature to attempt to reshape or form children's vision and thereby, perhaps, to revolutionize and improve society. This practice might also unsettle the forms of children's literature, and a moral purpose, though probably present, might be more or less emphasized. These avant-garde innovations might go on to become contributions to the still fluid ideals of, say, the picturebook, or remain outside any children's literature mainstream. In contrast, the avant-garde artist might think of childhood as an inspiration rather than an entity to be educated into more radical thinking. An artist defining childhood, for

example, as “spontaneous” or untouched by societal conditioning, might produce something literary in an expectation of pleasing that taste in a child, with an eye to other adults who see childhood in this way and value avant-garde expression. Or an artist might take inspiration from a tradition in children’s literature – nursery tales, for example, or alphabets – and create new kinds of artwork around it. This essay suggests a few disparate possibilities by looking at some nineteenth-century roots that I believe contribute to the intersection of the avant-garde with children’s literature, a topic I began to explore in an earlier volume (Olson 2012). The present chapter looks at childhood as a touchstone for the overthrow of Academic standards in painting, at children’s books and their influence on those who became avant-garde artists and thinkers, and at the power of the Victorian avant-garde to influence the ideals of the twentieth-century children’s picturebook.

John Ruskin (1819–1900) was both an art critic and a social critic (many of whose discussions of society came in the form of discussions of architecture) during the years when the Academy still set the standard for the ideals and expectations of what a painting might be. He was a substantial influence upon one of the earliest avant-gardes, Pre-Raphaelitism, an English art movement, and with the Pre-Raphaelites had a great influence on the revival of the printing arts in the late nineteenth century and the Arts and Crafts movement on an international scale. As a writer and lecturer, Ruskin was willing to teach anybody anything. Indeed, the varied ways in which he is regarded as either inspired revolutionary or hide-bound reactionary has to do with the great number of his vehement essays and the impossibility of agreeing or disagreeing with all of them. Most of those thinkers influenced by Ruskin may have drawn on one favorite work. For example, William Morris and the incipient Labour party particularly valued a few chapters in the *Stones of Venice* (1851–1853). Mahatma Gandhi chose *Unto this Last* (1860). Those who decry him might particularly deprecate works on the role of God or morality in art or women in society, but are unlikely to disagree with his stance on environmentalism or the use of color. He wrote a good deal on childhood and education, as well as art, because he was interested in children’s literature and children’s welfare. He published a memoir of his own childhood, *Praeterita* (1885–1889), as a means of tracing early influences and reassessing his own upbringing. He created curricula for and taught a wide variety of young people: the Winnington Hall schoolgirls, Alice Liddell (drawing), the Working Men’s night school, the St. George’s School (a utopian rural project), Oscar Wilde (among other Oxford undergraduates), and diverse members of the public in his several lecture series. He also made modest contributions to children’s literature and was a frequent correspondent of Kate Greenaway.

Cited or not cited, Ruskin’s passionate words were felt in an enormous number of later nineteenth- and early twentieth-century works and became accepted

knowledge in many fields in many countries. They still are. More than ever. For this reason, it appears to me to be legitimate to point out some of the things that Ruskin encouraged and some of the things he explained about the intersection of the avant-garde and children's literature. Ultimately, in this case, they concern the dismantling of the Academy standards in painting and the creation of the picture-book ideal.

The condition of childhood

As art critic Robert L. Herbert noted, Ruskin valued “the condition of childhood” in the periods of art that he loved. He preferred “archaic and fifth-century Greek sculpture to Hellenistic; early Byzantine sculpture and mosaic to later; early to High Gothic; Giotto to Masaccio; Pisano to Ghiberti; Florentine quattrocento painting to High Renaissance; cinquecento Venetian to Baroque” (Herbert 1969: xi). Using an arc for the artistic productions of a civilization that resembled that of the birth, life, death of an organism, at a time when many people – with a heightened awareness of biological evolution – applied this arc to nationhood, Ruskin noted that “The feebleness of childhood is full of promise and interest, – the struggle of imperfect knowledge full of energy and continuity” (Ruskin 1849: 125). In spite of Ruskin's yoking of art to nature and nature to God, the praise of energy, the preference for the abstraction of the early period to “naturalism for its own sake”, can be seen as offering encouragement for a new beginning and new value for those aspects of art not aiming at illusion. The term “primitivism”, a term that sometimes includes childhood as a site for exploration and a source for non-Academic techniques, is a concept related to Ruskin's philosophy.

Moreover, Ruskin was critical of the Academic method of treating color in works of art, and he used the example of childhood to propose different methods. For example, one of the aphorisms (XL) that precede his drawing instructions in *The Laws of Fésole* (1877) is “‘Please paint me my white cat,’ said little Imelda. ‘Child,’ answered the Bolognese Professor, ‘in the grand school, all cats are grey’” (Ruskin 1877: 49). In his chapter on Zodiacal Colors in that volume, he directly criticizes the fashion that sublimity should be conveyed by gloomy coloring by noting:

The things which are naturally pleasant to innocence and youth, will be for ever pleasant to us, both in this life and in that which is to come; and the same law which makes the babe delight in its coral, and the girl in the cornelian pebble she gathers from the wet and shining beach, will still rule their joy within the walls whose light shall be ‘like a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal’.

(Ruskin 1877: 115)

Ruskin's assertion that the Academy was wrong-headed in its color theories, suggested the need for change and – in this case – a child as touchstone. As Alison Smith notes, the definition of the Pre-Raphaelites as an early avant-garde is based, in part, on their development of new methods for treating color in their paintings, such as omitting earth-colored underpainting on their canvasses and using unmixed pigments (Smith 2012: 18).

Ruskin's explicit explanation of the “innocent eye” appears in *The Elements of Drawing* in 1857:

We *see* nothing but flat colours; and it is only by a series of experiments that we find out that a stain of black or grey indicates the dark side of a solid substance, or that a faint hue indicates that the object in which it appears is far away. The whole technical power of painting depends on our recovery of what may be called the *innocence of the eye*; that is to say, of a sort of childish perception of these flat stains of colour, merely as such, without consciousness of what they signify – as a blind man would see them if suddenly gifted with sight....

We go through such processes of experiment unconsciously in childhood; and having once come to conclusions touching the signification of certain colours, we always suppose that we *see* what we only know, and have hardly any consciousness of the real aspect of the signs we have learned to interpret. Very few people have any idea that sunlighted grass is yellow. (Ruskin 1857: 18–19)

Although, as Herbert notes, Ruskin's ideas were not really identical to those of the Impressionists, his discussion of “flat stains of color” and how to apply them was suggestive enough that Monet could claim in an 1879 interview that “ninety percent of the theory of impressionist painting was in ‘Elements of Drawing’” (Herbert 1969: xiii), and this inspiration for an early avant-garde movement was explained by the example of the uninstructed child. The Impressionists and Rousseau were both focused upon painting the colors seen in Nature, rather than applying them to conceptual forms, but the expanded use of color that Ruskin suggested, in architecture, for example, following pre-Renaissance practice, did nevertheless suggest the delight in color that many people associate with childhood preferences and avant-garde experimentation.

Influence of improved printing for children

In the second place, Ruskin was aware that pictures matter to child lives. He had copied the George Cruikshank illustrations from the Grimms' *Household Tales* when he was ten (Ruskin 2003: 67), and was interested in analyzing how he had personally learned to make his own pictures after this early apprenticeship. Late in his career, Ruskin celebrated the potential influence of improved color printing

that had recently become “in the command of every nursery governess” (Ruskin 1883a: 117). The most famous of such illustrations in England were those produced by color-printer and engraver Edmund Evans, whose “toy books”, in association with George Routledge and Ward Lock had revolutionized children's publishing and contributed greatly to the success of Walter Crane, Kate Greenaway, and Randolph Caldecott (Engen 1976: 17–18). Two years after his “Fairy Land” lecture, Ruskin's version of *Dame Wiggins of Lee*, with additional illustrations by Kate Greenaway, was also printed by Evans. The influence that Ruskin expected from being exposed to good quality illustrations may be said to be a general social reform: children's lives can be improved when they are able to see beautiful pictures – and when their own wretched vacant lots can be returned to the pre-Industrial Revolution cleanliness and order of a Greenaway *pastorale*.

But Ruskin's belief in the power of illustrations on a child can extend to the influence of any accessible picturebooks on the childhood of people who became artists, some of them avant-garde artists. It is probable that Ruskin did not anticipate that exposure to Kate Greenaway's illustrations of quaintly dressed children would produce an Aubrey Beardsley, but both Beardsley and Max Beerbohm are widely noted as having been influenced by Greenaway's art in their childhood days (Felstiner 1972: 38; Tenny & Shefrin 1993: 2; Slessor 2004: 12–13). As Catherine Slessor notes, “Stylistically, the illustrations are unusually flat, oversimplified and decorative, but these qualities were to form the basis of Beardsley's mature technique” (Slessor 2004: 13). The influence of accessible images on developing artists must be limitless, but three more examples demonstrate some of the possibilities.

Henri Rousseau, for example, is well known to have taken a number of the animal figures in his jungle paintings out of a children's photographic book of zoo animals: *Bêtes Sauvages* (le Pichon 1982: 161–169). Using his imagination to paint them in color, rather than black and white, and put them back into the jungle that he felt they had come from, the animals pose with trees rather than in fenced enclosures. In fact, Rousseau's superior fancy was performing the same task that a child's would in order to understand something about the animals staring out of the photos in the hands of their keepers, but his formal techniques ally him with modernist art.

The English painter, Sir William Nicholson, who, like Beardsley and Beerbohm was born in 1872, was a lifelong admirer of Randolph Caldecott. He also was devoted to “fat little brown volumes” of Dumas as a child. According to Marguerite Steen, Nicholson “had great difficulty in learning to read, until he came across pictures whose captions he wanted to understand” (Steen 1943: 28). The dramatic black and white illustrations in such volumes might have been an early suggestion about the possibilities of light and shadow that Nicholson used throughout his career, beginning with his early avant-garde posters and wood-engravings.

Similarly, the illustrations to the works of Jules Verne were internationally famous. As Robert Louis Stevenson noted in 1876, “Every one knows, of course, that the *Voyages Extraordinaires* are illustrated, and every one has admired the designs of De Neuville and Riou” (Stevenson 1976: 389). Although he mused in his review over the issue of whether viewing the pictures for *Twenty-Thousand Leagues under the Sea* before reading from the beginning of the novel might not undermine the narrative, he stated that the illustrations “are a source of much delight”. Marion Durand and Diana Wormuth in their discussion of French children’s book illustrations call them “pictures that dreams are made on”, illustrations that, in fact, inspired the Symbolist movement in both literary and artistic production, as well as enthralling countless children for whom the Giant Squid was an unforgettable memory (Durand & Wormuth 1969: 88). Barbara Larson, for example, suggests in *The Dark Side of Nature* ways in which viewing these imaginative drawings inspired the artist Odilon Redon to produce such famous images as “Cactus Man” (Larson 2005: 165–170). When we strive to define and articulate touchstones for excellence in the picturebooks offered to children, we proceed from the assumption that early images are important. The avant-garde painters of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century grew up at a time when improved reproductive methods had greatly increased the number of illustrated nursery books, and it is reasonable to take this early influence into account.

All avant-garde artists were once children with a child’s eye and a child’s vulnerability to early experiences, and some reflected this early period in their artwork. As I will discuss later, many of the picturebook illustrations of the nineteenth century contained elements of satire and rebellion against established institutions. These might well be unconsciously taken in by a child especially attuned to pictures and help to form its adult sensibility. The ability to see childhood culture itself as grotesque, however, and to see the grotesque as a means to freedom and reform, is an adult and conscious choice. When avant-garde artists approached innovation in art, they might also have been influenced by Ruskin’s commentary on breaking away from the classic tradition with the help of grotesque forms. As Frances S. Connally suggests, to Ruskin, the grotesque could be a means to transformation and truth. (Connally 2003: 166, 171).

Children’s literature and culture as purveyors of the grotesque

As a theorizer of the grotesque, Ruskin brought prominence to this artistic form and, perhaps, made it more visible to a culture that does not seem to have seen it in the same way that we do. He discussed the grotesque in a number of works, among them *Modern Painters IV* (1856), in which he discussed “Modern

Grotesque”, by which he meant particularly the popular caricaturists of his day; *The Stones of Venice II* (1851–1852), in which he made his famous comparisons between medieval and contemporary artisans in terms of the ornamentation of gothic buildings; and in his lecture series on *The Art of England* (1883b), in which he again discussed contemporary English caricaturists in more detail. Although Ruskin's general discussion of “Modern Grotesque” sees the caricaturist as limited in scope, particularly in regards to beauty in painting, Ruskin nonetheless praises the spirit of the grotesque in connection both with reform of institutional and human corruption and with social freedom. That the leading art critic of his time should take the popular art form of his day so seriously, as he also did the children's literature of his time, speaks to Ruskin's role as a social critic as well as an art critic. Understanding the intersection of children's literature and avant-garde art, in fact, may depend upon this kind of currency with both high and popular art forms.

The grotesque contributed to avant-garde art in many ways. As Connally notes, “The grotesque figures prominently in romantic, symbolist, expressionist, primitivist, realist, and surrealist vocabularies, but it also plays a role in cubism and certain kinds of abstraction” (Connally 2003: 1). When looking at some of the images that inspired grotesque avant-garde productions, it is relevant to realize that a robust thread of violent and grotesque images was part of ordinary nineteenth-century child life, a site with which every painter would have some acquaintance. Some of the most distinctive motifs used by avant-garde artists in the fin-de-siècle were borrowed from playthings and pastimes of the most conventional, tradition-bound, childhood nature, so that it appears to have taken conscious thought to perceive them as unconventional and rebellious. Indeed, the nature of children's culture as a repository of cast-off traditions, united with its perceived status as “untouched” by social conditioning, made it a particularly rich source of subversive images when rightly perceived.

As Philip Thomson (1972) notes, the perception that the grotesque depends upon a clash or encounter between opposites entered our commentary about the grotesque with the writings of Wolfgang Kayser (1963) in the later twentieth century. Sometimes this surprising set of qualities is inherent in an object or pastime itself; sometimes it depends upon the contrast between a fondly tender view of childhood and its actual nature. Dolls, for example, frighten many people because they can easily be imagined as small petrified people or fetishes capable (behind their static faces) of thinking or acting, as for example the disturbing mother doll in the Russian fairy tale “Vasilissa the Beautiful”. Or they have the painful quality of enduring when their child does not. Their stylized faces, like those of the African masks from Benin, suggest ways of perceiving and painting humanity in an innovative, static form. Too, dolls can be played with in a way that strongly

contrasts with the limited intentions of the toymaker, thus contrasting one vision of childlike innocence with another vision of imaginative childhood violence, as in, for example, Saki's short story "The Toys of Peace" (1919). The Nutcracker or Wooden Tony or the Tin Woodman of Oz are contemporary fictional depictions of the ability of humans to become metal or wood, a grotesque situation that fin-de-siècle painters duplicated metaphorically by giving human portraits inflexible, simplified mask-like faces: forms that could sometimes connote social commentary about the state of paralyzed people in a changed and broken world (see Figure 1).

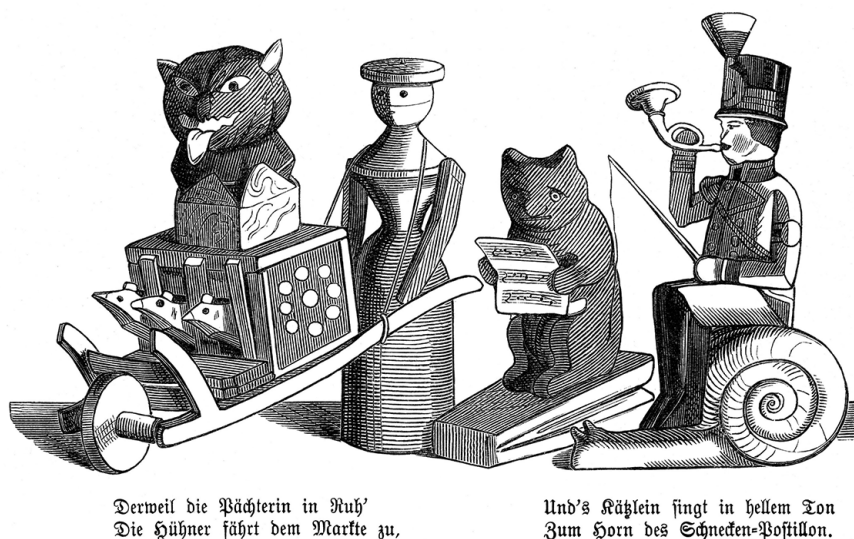


Figure 1. Illustration by Eduard Ille from *Die Freunde aus der Kinderzeit*. München: Braun & Schneider, 1858

Children's entertainments based upon the *commedia dell' arte*, such as Punch and Judy and the pantomime harlequinade, similarly contributed to fin-de-siècle artistic motifs. Hallowed by tradition, the puppets with ugly, misshapen faces acted out murderous, energetic plots (see Figure 2).

The pantomime, including actors in characteristic harlequin costumes much used on child and adult models at the turn of the century, was similarly violent and surprising. As Dieter Petzold (2006: 182) has remarked, we do not really know whether children respond to this kind of grotesque in the same ambivalent way that adults do, but that they enjoy it was usually taken for granted in this era. G.K. Chesterton, who was a champion of this kind of robust childhood pleasure, said:

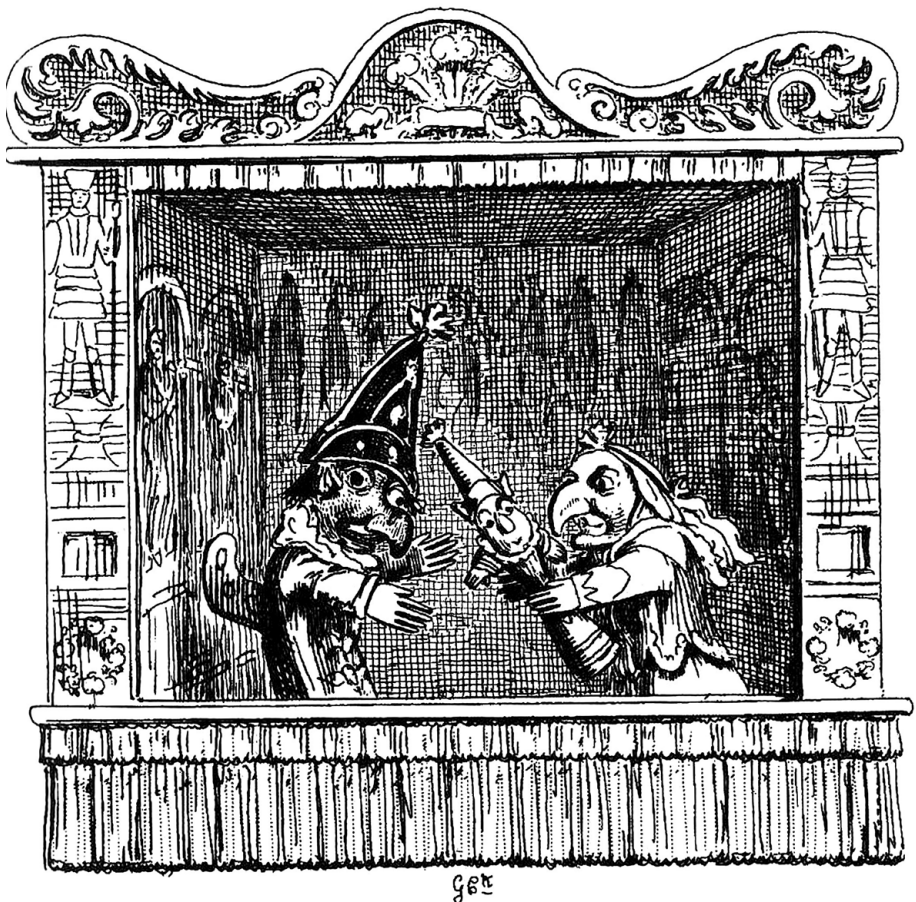


Figure 2. George Cruikshank illustration from *The Tragical Comedy, or Comical Tragedy, of Punch and Judy* (1832) by John Payne Collier

In imagination there is no illusion; no, not even an instant of illusion. For no split second even then did I believe that people had cut in two a live man – even if he was only a policeman. If I had believed it, I should have felt very different. What I felt was that it was right; that it was a good and enlarging and inspiring thing to see; that it was an excellent thing to look down on the strange street where such things could be seen; in short, I could say then, with a quite undivided mind, that it was a very good Christmas present to go to the Pantomime.

(Chesterton 1950: 58)

But it should be noted that Punch and Judy are not more violent, nor do they provide more grotesque imagery, than the awful warning books available on many nineteenth-century nursery bookshelves that included crude drawings of highly

exaggerated situations intended to cause children to avoid risky or naughty pastimes (see Figure 3).

The parodies of these books – Alice’s drink-me bottle scene in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, some of Lear’s books, and the masterful *Struwwelpeter* – are not much more extreme than the warning books themselves, which must have always caught some of their readers in the grotesque balance between horror and hilarity. These examples could be perceived as traditionally appropriate – the kinds of pastimes passed down to children and associated with simpler, sterner times. So, too, could the grotesque and violent folktales, which were conveyed with renewed vigor to children in this era. And they are also not more grotesque than the contemporary religious works that were still being produced for children (*The Fairchild Family*, for example), in which violent deaths are detailed in order to teach children to curb their passions and avoid the sins leading to hell and family discord. The idea that such imagery has the power, drawn from simpler times or unformed sensibilities, to overthrow an irrelevant status quo connects children’s literature with the avant-garde. It was a connection – that the grotesque can be transgressive – that Ruskin helped along.

One of Ruskin’s reasons for praising the grotesque had to do with its ability to rightly describe a changeable and imperfect world that classicism would have



Figure 3. Illustration “The Dunce” from Elizabeth Turner: *The Cowslip, or More Cautionary Stories in Verse*. London: J. Harris, 1811

smoothed over: "in all ages and among all nations, grotesque idealism has been the element through which the most appalling and eventful truth has been wisely conveyed" (Ruskin 1904: V, 134). This reasoning about the power of the grotesque to capture truth is an aim of many effective avant-garde productions. Chesterton echoes this judgment on the efficacy of the grotesque in his study of Robert Browning, noting that many truths about his own time (and not only appalling truths) are best conveyed by roughness, ambiguity, and homely detail. Contrasting Browning's probable treatment with that of Tennyson's description of villagers "larking" at the beginning of *The Princess*, he says:

He would have spared us nothing; he would not have spared us the shrill uneducated voices and the unburied bottles of ginger beer. He would have crammed the poem with uncouth similes; he would have changed the metre a hundred times; he would have broken into doggerel and into rhapsody; but he would have left, when all is said and done, ...the impression of a certain eternal human energy. Energy and joy, the father and the mother of the grotesque, would have ruled the poem. (Chesterton 1903: 148)

Ruskin's enthusiasm is also based upon the grotesque's ability to reform. Charles Baudelaire's related idea that it arose out of the "estranged world" and could be "a subversive force in oppressive times" (Swain 2004: 7) similarly allies the grotesque with the avant-garde, as well as going some way to explain the extreme popularity of the grotesque caricature in the Victorian period.

Ruskin's commentary on grotesque cartooning included two ideas that may help to explain its nineteenth-century tie to children's literature. In the first place, he posited that the ability to produce first-class caricature was inborn in gifted children: "No teaching, no hard study, will ever enable other people to equal, in their several ways, the works of Leech or Cruikshank.... The power is, in the masters of the school, innate from their childhood" (Ruskin 1889: 387). Drawings of teachers or classmates on book margins or slates are the most obvious examples of this skill (the image of young Alexander Pushkin sketching a cartoon of Alexander I is a notable example). In fact, there were a great number of caricatures produced of drawing masters pasted up around studios in this era. *Overcoming All Obstacles*, a volume about the women students at the Académie Julian, includes a number of such images, including vindictive cartoons of famously difficult and class-conscious student Marie Bashkirtseff as "wart-encrusted" and fat (Weisberg 1999: 71–73). William Nicholson's precocious ability to capture a likeness was rewarded in this cultural moment, as well. As Steen notes, "his formula for Bussell, the Latin master, had gone through Magnus [grammar school] like an epidemic; it was so beautifully simple, any one could copy it, and it flourished on walls and wainscotings like the victory V" (Steen 1943: 29). Ruskin's commentary

about inborn talent, then, also seems to point to a very convenient “subversive force in oppressive times” found in any location where young people were being reared. There was, however, a substantial public market for caricature in the nineteenth century, and so there were also many people attempting to cultivate the ability in order to supply the humor magazines and be commissioned to do book illustrations.

The vision of the world that Ruskin hoped to encourage for children was not a grotesque vision (“Children should laugh but not mock” (Ruskin 1976: 128)), but his commentary on the grotesque in *Modern Painters* aligns it closely with the intention of didactic texts and lessons offered to children:

When the powers of quaint fancy are associated (as is frequently the case) with stern understanding of the nature of evil, and tender human sympathy, there results a bitter, or pathetic spirit of grotesque, to which mankind at the present day owe more thorough moral teaching than to any branch of art whatsoever.
(Ruskin 1889: 387)

He also noted, quoting a French reviewer, “The hatred of vice is only another manifestation of the love of innocence” (Ruskin 1883a: 343).

While not all examples of the grotesque that adults and children of the nineteenth century took in as daily fare were so constructively intended, this intention is certainly present in such grotesque avant-garde paintings as Marc Chagall’s “To Russia, Asses and Others” or “The Drunkard”, as well as many other turn-of-the-century images intended as societal rebukes. Ruskin’s 1851–1852 discussion of the grotesque aspects of gothic architecture, the quaint gargoyles and other carvings that form part of the decoration of great cathedrals, for example, also firmly associated grotesque ornamentation with the need to overthrow oppressive economic systems. As Connally reminds us, for Ruskin the “ugly goblins” were important because of the creative freedom enjoyed by the sculptors in medieval society:

They are signs of the life and liberty of every workman who struck the stone; a freedom of thought, and rank in scale of being, such as no laws, no charters, no charities can secure; but which it must be the first aim of all Europe at this day to regain for her children.
(Connally 2003: 166) (Ruskin 1903: X, 193–194)

Ruskin’s alliance of the grotesque with truth, with social and economic critique, with morality, with pre-Academic art standards, and with childhood reinforced some of the associations already in place in Victorian society, as well as making others more obvious. It also offers some explanation about an aspect of children’s literature in the nineteenth century that could be said to form, as well as reflect, a spirit of rebellion in the children to whom it was given.

Political caricaturists as children's book illustrators

Discussion of the effects of growing up with grotesque images is particularly pertinent to Ruskin's time and children's culture because many of the famous European illustrators combined political cartooning with children's book illustration, and their work in the one field was very like their work in the other. As Stephen Prickett has noted,

Cruikshank had given shape to the fantasy of his age by his brilliant illustrations to Grimms' fairy tales in 1823. He had been brought up in the tradition of the eighteenth-century caricaturists Hogarth and Gillray, and had begun his career as a cartoonist during the Napoleonic wars.... The ravings of Buonaparte became the model for the raging Rumpelstilskin. (Prickett 1979: 47)

Grimms' *Household Tales* contained the Cruikshank illustrations that Ruskin learned to copy as a child, and for which he wrote an introduction later in life (1868).

Michael Hancher's work on the John Tenniel illustrations to the *Alice* books matches images known from the books by Lewis Carroll to their origins in political caricature: "Tenniel renewed in the *Alice* books imagery that was already established in *Punch*" (Hancher 1985: 6). The picture of the lion and the unicorn flanking Alice and the plumcake (Carroll 1871), for example, is very like an image used for discussing international allies (as well as others about English/Scottish relations). The image of Alice and the tree branch pose of the Cheshire Cat (Carroll 1865) is very like an image of Abraham Lincoln as a treed raccoon (Hancher 1985: 8, 25).

In his essays for a Randolph Caldecott centenary exhibition, Brian Alderson, like Prickett, traces the English narrative illustration from Hogarth, noting his influence on the humorous movement and spirit of Caldecott illustrations as well as the improvements in technical reproduction and contributory talents that preceded Caldecott's remarkable contributions (Alderson 1987: 39–41). But the spirit of Hogarth is not only humorous and lively; it is sharply critical of social mores and grotesque in their depiction. A nineteenth-century American contemporary, James Parton, echoing the association that Ruskin mentioned between the grotesque and the teaching of morality, also noted a shift from the eighteenth to nineteenth century in the kind of satire that was popular. He claimed that "comic art, which the amelioration of manners has purified, has done much in its turn to strengthen and diffuse that amelioration" (Parton 1878: 274). Still, the critical lens that children, as well as adults, were invited to use on the political and social mores of their times remained. And it was a phenomenon arguably more obvious in the illustrations of children's volumes than in the children's texts that accompanied them. Anne Lundin's work on the reception of famous Victorian picturebooks,

for example, reveals an eager adult audience for the Randolph Caldecott picture-book illustrations, an audience that followed Caldecott from earlier adultstream publications to the toy books: “To the *Times*, the *Mad Dog* was nothing less than a ‘treasure-house of art...surely the most wonderful work that any firm has ever issued... for a shilling’” (Lundin 2001: 136). This adult audience apparently reinforced the desirability of the edginess of the grotesque in children’s books, a trait that Caldecott had already been praised for in earlier work.

The taste for caricature was notable in many European countries in this era. Like Cruikshank, Jean Ignace Isidore Gérard Grandville was a seminal caricaturist of the early part of the century, producing work for children as well as adults. His most influential works were *The Metamorphoses of the Day* (1829) and *Scenes from the Private and Public Life of Animals* (1842), which were satiric lithographs of scientifically-accurate insect and animal heads on fashionably clothed society bodies (1981). Grandville was also an illustrator of such works as those of Aesop and La Fontaine, as well as *Gulliver’s Travels* and *Robinson Crusoe*. Bryan Holme notes that he was an influence on hundreds of subsequent illustrators, including both Tenniel and Lear (Grandville 1981: 5–7). Grandville also worked for *Le Charivari* (1832–1937), a French magazine satirizing political and social mores.

The English humor magazine, *Punch* [subtitled “the London Charivari”], was founded in 1841. Thereafter, it employed a great body of caricaturists, many of whom Ruskin discussed and many of whom regularly illustrated popular children’s works. John Tenniel, John Leech, and Richard Doyle (who illustrated Ruskin’s *King of the Golden River* (1851) and some of Edmund Evans’s most famous color illustrations of fairyland), all contributed both political caricatures and children’s book illustrations to the public (see Figure 4). In 1845, the German-language *Fliegende Blätter*, one of several international spin-offs from the *Punch* idea, was founded, thereafter employing Eduard Ille as well as Wilhelm Busch, whose *Max and Moritz* (1865) is a famous ancestor both of comic strip art and the picturebooks of Maurice Sendak in the twentieth century. The list of illustrators who produced political and social satire, as well as well-received children’s book illustrations, also includes Gustav Doré. Florence Upton, illustrator of the Golliwogg books, also published some cartoons in *Punch*.

Caldecott’s toy book, *An Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog* (1879), was defined as a high spot in his artistic career by contemporary critics, as well as later by Sendak (1988: 149). A brief review of the story may illustrate some of the qualities that picturebooks and social caricatures could share. Its narrative is a satiric poem (1766) by Oliver Goldsmith about a dog that dies as the result of biting a gentleman of negligible social usefulness (“The naked every day he clothed/ When he put on his clothes”). In this case, then, as in the case of the less-cited *An Elegy on the Death of the Glory of her Sex – Mrs. Mary Blaize* (1885) (a woman of dubious



Figure 4. Drawing on letter from Richard Doyle to his father, December 17, 1843. Mr. Punch is urging the importance of a *Punch Magazine* deadline, at the same time that the elves are urging his work for the Christmas market. The Pierpont Morgan Library, New York. MA 3315.51, purchased on the Fellows Fund with special assistance of Mr. and Mrs. Walter H. Page, 1974. Used by permission of Pierpont Morgan Library

virtue pretending to respectability), the actual toy book narratives come from the less “ameliorated” adult satire of the eighteenth century. The basic situation of the dog dying rather than the gentleman is social satire of a humorous kind. Caldecott’s famous embellishments to the tale, however, and his plentiful narrative illustrations greatly enhance the grotesque fancy and satiric edge involved. The illustrations of the dog’s corpse being carried on a stretcher surrounded by a formal funeral cortege of grieving canine mourners or discovered by dismayed friends are such embellishments (see Figure 5).

So, too, is Caldecott’s enhancement of the extremely cheerful community excitement over the prospect that the respectable gentleman is about to die. He heightens the pain of the situation by pictorially supplying the cause of the madness of the dog (jealousy of another pet’s being given attention), which undermines some of the social satire on the gentleman, while strengthening its didactic application as an “awful warning” about jealousy. Caldecott targets society more consistently in his illustrations to Aesop with “modern instances”, in which, for example, he portrayed the “lion’s share” as taking place at a contemporary shareholders’



Figure 5. Illustration by Randolph Caldecott from *An Elegy on the Death of a Mad Dog*. London: George Routledge, 1879

meeting (Caldecott 1883). Or in *The Great Panjandrum Himself* (1885) which has a pseudonymous caricature of an academic as the hero. His celebrated children's books contain, in fact, many images that direct criticism at public morals and social customs with illustrative skill that found world-wide admiration.

Many picturebooks of the nineteenth century were looked forward to and read by an audience with an appreciation for the vigor possible in line drawings, as well as a taste for caricature as an approach to social reform. Praising "rhythm" and

emphasizing “kindliness” as one will, the stance of the caricaturist is that of a rebel against the status quo. Such pictures are not simply a matter of identifying social shortcomings; they can be a statement that life is grotesque. And utilizing the grotesque can be a subversive force, as Baudelaire noted, in oppressive times. Because of the degree to which children's book publishers incorporated the popular culture of the day, the spirit of the avant-garde seems to have been taught and encouraged in the illustrations of children's books. As Parton noted of Mrs. Trollope, “Seeing caricatures from childhood has induced a habit in many persons of surveying life in the spirit of caricature” (Parton 1878: 276).

Roots of the picturebook in total design

The ideal form of the picturebook as it developed in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries has an organic wholeness dependent upon resonance between word and image. Although there are many contributors to this children's literary form, avant-garde experiments in more than one country were part of this evolution. Among these contributions, Ruskin's influence on the early avant-garde movement, Pre-Raphaelitism, deserves a mention. Children's picturebooks owe a debt to these innovative thinkers, as well as to the Arts and Crafts movement to which a number of them belonged.

In *The Stones of Venice*, Ruskin made some famous statements that linked the purchase of household objects to tacit support of oppression and slavery. The reason had to do with the soul-deadening factory work that had produced the domestic goods, a result of the modern division of labor in manufacturing:

It is not that men are ill fed, but that they have no pleasure in the work by which they make their bread, and therefore look to wealth as the only means of pleasure. It is not that men are pained by the scorn of the upper classes, but they cannot endure their own; for they feel that the kind of labor to which they are condemned is verily a degrading one, and makes them less than men.

(Ruskin 1851–53: 163)

Ruskin's subsequent advice to buy things that skilled workers could use their intelligence and creativity upon, rather than those mass-produced in a factory, and his contrast of the creative liberty of cathedral builders in the medieval period to the estranged workmen in factories of his own day had a great influence upon William Morris, a young artist and poet. Morris adopted Ruskin's desire for social betterment, his glorification of the medieval period, and his view that handmade items for daily use have the potential to “become the subjects of exquisite invention” (Ruskin 1851–53: 166).

Morris's initial inspiration in his pursuit of excellence in handcrafted work was the medieval manuscript pages that he examined extensively in the Bodleian. He saw in the pages not only a statement about the contented and meaningful lives of the monks who had executed them, but also insight about beauty coming from unity of purpose. As Rosalind Ormiston and Nicholas Michael Wells note, "The delicacy and refinement of each curve and sweep of colour were a reflection of the subject being illustrated and acts of worship in themselves. This unified sense of subject matter and technique had a profound effect on Morris's understanding about the satisfactions of art and craftsmanship" (Wells 2010: 16). It also had a profound effect upon the international ideals of interior decoration and architecture in the decades around the turn of the century.

In 1861, following within a few years of Morris' artistic help with the decoration of the Oxford Union Hall with Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Pre-Raphaelites, Morris co-founded the firm of Morris, Marshall, Faulkner & Co., Fine Art Workmen in Painting, Carving, Furniture and the Metals, a firm that he carried on later as Morris & Co. In addition to the individual beauty that resulted from the application of the fine arts to traditional craftsmanship, the firm uniquely coordinated the interior and exterior of buildings and every aspect of their interior decoration. The furnishings were made to contribute to the composite vision in the way that Morris had understood the medieval book.

It was in the Red House that the first tangible expressions of comprehensive, living design were revealed, with glasswork, metalwork, carpentry, painting, wallpapers, tapestries, carpets, wall hangings and tiles all harnessed together into the service of the total interior design. (Ormiston & Wells 2010: 38)

Morris is considered the founder of the Arts and Crafts movement in its early years, with Ruskin noted as a major influence on his vision. It became an international phenomenon very quickly, leading to other "total design" movements such as Art Nouveau and Bauhaus. It also produced the important children's book illustrator Walter Crane.

Morris' determination to put art to the useful task of making the details of daily life more beautiful for all of society encouraged a blending of high and low art forms as artists of all kinds took on practical work for homes and commercial uses. "It would be well if all of us were good handicraftsmen in some kind, and the dishonor of manual labour done away with altogether" (Ormiston 2010: 17). Many painters of this era worked for theatres, for example, as well as experimenting with the creation of posters and other paperwork, as well as executing stained glass and objects for domestic use. The willingness of fine artists to undertake children's literature – a concern central to this volume – is due to many factors, but the belief that people's lives are improved by exposure to art, and that, in turn, the

healthfulness of fine art depends upon an interaction with popular arts encourages this undertaking. Ruskin's reflection upon children's materials had, moreover, increased the dignity of children's literature. Children's literature is an obvious place to start when attempting to reform society through art.

Morris' emphasis on total design is also a contribution to the ideal that many scholars hold up as a standard of excellence in the picturebook, as well as a socially conscious approach to architecture and domestic space. The examples of the English painter William Nicholson's picturebooks, *Clever Bill* and *The Pirate Twins*, in the 1920s are milestone examples of what total design can accomplish when every aspect of a volume – the pictures, story, lettering, binding, and design – are the outcome of a single vision (see Figure 6). And lithographic mass production of the handmade designs achieved the popular dissemination that was one of Morris' goals in a way that the beautiful but expensive Morris & Co. furnishings could not.



Figure 6. Original page design from William Nicholson's *Clever Bill*. London: Heinemann, 1926. ©Desmond Banks. Used by permission of Desmond Banks

Near the end of his career, Morris' own unified vision moved from total room design back to books, with the medieval-inspired decorated pages of the fine arts books published by his Kelmscott Press, founded in 1891. Walter Crane's *The Decorative Illustration of Books* (1896) explains the aspects of coordination of detail

that make the elaborate pages of the Arts and Crafts book so balanced and distinctive. As Michael Joseph (2012) notes, the Morris press also moves the book from an apparently transparent purveyor of ideas to an artifact that must, itself, be examined and interpreted.

In terms of the picturebook, however, as distinct from the decorated book, earlier Pre-Raphaelite experiments also bear investigation. The Pre-Raphaelite practice of painting subjects taken from contemporary literature had already had the effect of putting words and texts together, as well as raising questions about the contribution of each medium to the viewer's interpretation. As Elizabeth Nelson notes, Ruskin wrote to Alfred Lord Tennyson (who was miffed about images of the Lady of Shalott) to try to persuade him that a painting was necessarily only one interpretation of a literary text and its interest lay in the subjective view (Nelson 1985: 15–16) (Ruskin 1904: 36, 265). Dante Gabriel Rossetti, a notable Pre-Raphaelite and an editor and reviver of William Blake's hand engraved poetry-within-print books, also did book design work that Morris credited as an influence on his later endeavors. Rossetti attempted to convey meaning by a combination of words and image – and, indeed, to convey other arts, such as music, in paint. As Jerome McGann notes of Rossetti's poetry in *Dante Gabriel Rossetti and the Game that Must Be Lost*:

First, he was preoccupied with the materiality of text and graphic design. Second, ... his whole approach to aesthetic practice was programmatic and self-conscious. These interests drove Rossetti to pursue expression simultaneously in different media, and ultimately to think at the level of vehicular form.

(McGann 2000: 66)

McGann describes Rossetti's careful work in overseeing the interaction between his poetry and its accompanying artwork in terms that also apply to children's picturebooks.

In every case Rossetti is careful to preserve the distinct integrities of picture and text. So in his "Sonnets for Pictures," for instance, we always have to deal with three aesthetic events: the picture itself, the sonnet itself, and the liminal event that emerges from their dialectical relation.

(McGann 2000: 72)

This relationship, which would require the person reading the sonnet in a book to consult the artwork that was meant to complete it, is more directly experienced in his gallery paintings, which were displayed in frames of his own design that contained poems set into or affixed to the frame. As is frequently noted, the earliest painting, *Girlhood of Mary Virgin* (1849), was accompanied by two sonnets written on gold paper, which were eventually inscribed more permanently on his revised version of the frame.

The picture and word combination of this gallery piece duplicates in many ways the form of the “one-picture-per-page” children's picturebook format noted as a convention by Perry Nodelman and Mavis Reimer (2003:276). Rossetti's two sonnets, in fact, span a range of didactic and interpretive functions that we might find in children's literature. One sonnet was to explain the symbols arranged around the room in which the young girl sits in the painting in the way that Rossetti intended them to be understood. Referring to areas of the painted surface he notes, for example:

These are the symbols. On that cloth of red
I' the centre, is the Tripoint, – perfect each
Except the second of its points, to teach
That Christ is not yet born. (rossettichive)

Thus, he subscribes to the idea that a combination of words and images is important to the teaching process (a variation on Comenius' dictum in *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (1658)), and that the idea of the painting must be understood before the function of the image has been fulfilled. Offering written instruction in this way is opening the audience to include both children and those generally uninstructed in the kinds of symbols used in religious paintings. It is the kind of interpretation that one might formerly have depended upon an Academy reviewer to provide (rather than the painter), or an educated audience might be expected to handle. Like the work of Holman Hunt, who also sometimes put explanations on his paintings, and like work of Morris and Ruskin, Rossetti's children's schoolbook approach also demonstrates the didactic aim of societal reform.

The other sonnet attached to the painting interacts in a less prescriptive fashion. Rossetti presents information about the girl, Mary, whose qualities he praises:

Her kin she cherished with devout respect:
Her gifts were simpleness of intellect
And supreme patience. From her mother's knee
Faithful and hopeful; wise in charity;
Strong in grave peace; in duty circumspect. (rossettichive)

But since the painting is before us, we have complete freedom to determine both which virtue in the string of qualities we might be viewing, as well as whether the painter has actually conveyed those qualities as we expect them to look, a point that his various critics have felt free to treat subjectively. Since Mary is an historical person, there are potentially many reasons to dispute the necessity, for example, of seeing her as “simple of intellect”, or reasons to discuss why he did not use an

accurate setting. The painting and this poem, more than the other, interact in the liminal space to relay a narrative. Insofar as Rossetti is describing what the best of girls should be, though, it is not far from the message of a moral work such as *The Elegant Girl, or Virtuous Principles the True Source of Elegant Manners* (1816), and combining poem and image is an example of the mental work that we all bring to a picturebook page. The structured poetic form (like the couplets in “Elegant Girl”) reinforces the discipline being encouraged.

Although simple and inexpensive by Arts and Crafts standards, Rossetti’s book designs, in turn, were detailed and thorough:

I suppose the inscription at the back of the rough-bound copy sent is from the real block. If so, I don’t like it. The O of Poems is monstrously big & makes all crooked. The O of Rossetti is too big also. The gold seems a good colour.

(Rossetti 2004: 451)

The unity of Rossetti designs extended to the decoration on endpapers and quality and color of paper. Elizabeth Helsinger reinforces the relation of these designs to the allied total design of domestic spaces:

After [his wife’s] death in 1862 he turned to the task that was to absorb much of his time and money for the rest of the decade: furnishing and decorating the large house he leased for twenty years in Chelsea. He made his book designs, like most of his picture frames, at the time when he was also constructing interiors for himself and his friends and clients.

(Helsinger 2008: 180)

Thus, in some ways the picturebook intersects with the reformist principles intended to improve the lives of workers and resuscitate art. The Arts and Crafts book, in its combination of media to convey meaning, in its unified ideal, in its insistence upon the reader separately noticing and analyzing the images and materials being used and in its general revival of the printing arts contributes to the evolution of the picturebook in children’s literature. In its upholding the social importance of disseminating art, and in its belief that fine art will be better art if it interacts with objects of daily use, it also legitimates a children’s book project as a medium for avant-garde experimentation.

In making the ideal of the printed book a variant of the ideal of the perfected Victorian home, Pre-Raphaelite experimentation also situates the ideals of design within the living space most important to a young child’s life. But whereas the complementary beauty of total design rooms evokes the irony (that Morris was also aware of) that his designs (however much a source of satisfaction to the craftspeople) were the purview of the wealthy in an era of economic desperation, a picturebook can be a more serviceable avenue to a better world.

John Ruskin’s words offered guidance to artists of the various avant-gardes who wished to invent new artistic forms for their visions of a changing world. His

evocation of childhood as a test of the Academic standard suggested childhood as a site for resistance. His perceptiveness about the popular culture work being done in his own time and of the grotesque as a form with an energetic and reformatory legitimacy demonstrates the degree to which the nineteenth century prepared for the artistic future. The importance he placed on the materials being offered to children is tied to his role as a social critic (and inquiring memoir writer), but also has the effect of bringing the children's book to an intersection with the manifestos of the aspiring artistic rebel.

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CHAPTER 2

Einar Nerman – From the picturebook page to the avant-garde stage

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This chapter analyzes recurring motifs and techniques in the Swedish artist Einar Nerman's picturebooks *Crow's Dream* (1911) and *Knight Finn Komfusenfej* (1923). By comparing Nerman's books for children with his caricatures, dance and theatre productions during the 1910s and 1920s, an interaction between different media, but also between mass culture and the avant-garde, is demonstrated. The chapter shows that Nerman's innovative picturebooks are influenced by international commercial graphic design and that his books for children also function as a starting point for new ideas that are transmitted to other areas of art like modern dance performances or stage design.

Caricature artist, painter and performer

The Swedish artist Einar Nerman (1888–1983) had a long career as a caricature artist and commercial graphic artist in both Europe and the United States but was also interested in avant-garde ballet and theatre. His illustrations, posters, and picturebooks show continuous interplay of different forms of art and media. In this chapter, I will analyze recurring motifs and techniques in Nerman's early picturebooks *Crow's Dream* (1911) and *Knight Finn Komfusenfej* (1923) as well as in his commercial works and dance performances during this time period. By discussing his picturebooks as a part of his artistic work alongside caricatures, dance, and theatre productions, I aim to demonstrate an interaction that has been overlooked in previous research, a dynamic relationship that takes place between picturebook aesthetics and other areas of the arts. This kind of interaction between different media from both high and mass culture will also raise questions about the concept of the “avant-garde”.

Einar Nerman was born in an upper middle class family in Norrköping, Sweden. Like his older brother Ture and his twin brother Birger he was already

interested in theatre, literature, and arts at a young age. At the age of fifteen, Nerman dropped out of high school and moved to Stockholm to study painting at the Artist's Union School (Nerman 1929: 29). In 1908 he moved to Paris, together with a handful of fellow students from the Union's third school (1905–1908). He first studied at the Académie Colarossi and later attended Henri Matisse's art school in 1909–1910. Several of his friends were strongly influenced by Expressionism and artists like Van Gogh and Cezanne. This young Swedish group of artists was called “De Unga” (The Young) and their first exhibition in Stockholm in 1909 has been seen as a turning point in Swedish painting. Although Nerman participated in joint exhibitions with “The Young” in both 1910 and 1911, he was remarkably uninfluenced by the new ideas and movements within painting – such as, for example, Matisse's colorful fauvism – ideas that became influential for many of the young artists in his generation. Instead, he found his inspiration elsewhere. What is focused on in his description of the Parisian years in his early memoir published in 1929 is not so much the art studies, but rather his passionate interest in the social life in Paris, the Parisian Boulevard theatres, the opera, and the ballet.

After returning to Stockholm he quickly established himself as a caricature illustrator and a commercial graphic artist, working on magazine illustrations, book covers, and posters for films and theatre and selling his caricature portraits of actors, dancers, and artists to entertainment and satire magazines like *Söndagsnisse*, *Figaro*, *Strix*, and *Kurre*. Among his graphic design works one could mention the theatre posters and playbills created for the famous Swedish cabaret artist Ernst Rolf, who opened his fashionable and extravagant theatre cabaré *Fenix* in Stockholm in 1917. During the 1910s Nerman also danced professionally and cooperated with different dance ensembles. At *Fenix*, he met several British actors and artists, for example the British actor and entertainer Ivor Novello, who encouraged Nerman to move to London. Nerman did so, and in the beginning of the 1920s he started to chronicle the theatrical and social scene for the weekly society and gossip magazine *The Tattler*. For a short period he was also assigned to the *Eve*, where his contract required a monthly page of caricatures. During this decade he became internationally famous for his caricatures, and he drew for *The Tattler* until 1930. Later, he was employed by the *New York Journal-American* and drew for the newspaper for nearly ten years, portraying current Hollywood stars and celebrities like Alfred Hitchcock, Spencer Tracy, Joan Crawford, and Greta Garbo. After his return to Sweden he successfully continued to make his living as a portrait and caricature artist and as a dancer in different small dance ensembles.

With the growth of the picture press in the nineteenth century, caricature was brought into the public arena and became exceedingly popular; it was a common

feature on both the editorial pages and in the entertainment section. Being caricatured was considered a sign of celebrity status, but the caricature artists also often became famous themselves (Jaffe 2005:5). Similar to American artists like Ralph Barton, Rea Irvin or John Held, Jr., whose cartoons and caricatures appeared during the 1920s in magazines such as *Vanity Fair* and *The New Yorker*, Nerman can be seen as part of a new generation of caricaturists and artists, many of whom had connections to theatre and who worked in a distinctly different way from that of political cartoonists. These young artists focused on the fashionably famous and the emerging urban culture and entertainment, a development that expressed changing trends in art and publishing (Newton 2012:65–67). In her article about cartoons and caricatures in magazines like *Vanity Fair* or *The New Yorker*, Leslie Newton writes that these “smart” magazines can neither be considered avant-garde publications nor ordinary daily newspapers and are thus “neither associating entirely with High nor Mass culture but cultivating their own corner of modernism” (Newton 2012:65).

Nerman’s numerous caricature drawings and portraits drawn with pen and ink in *The Tattler*, *Eve*, and the *The New York Journal-American* are characterized by quick, bold pen lines and a strong sense of movement. His method of working was, however, quite systematic, based on quick sketches during performances, meetings with the artist in question after the show during which more sketches were created, and a final version of the image drawn afterwards. He demanded to always see or meet the person portrayed and did not create any portraits from photographs (Berg 2013:78). Nerman strongly stylized his portraits. Body movement, expressive and flowing arrangements of figures and objects, and visually striking compositions were essential to his expression.

Crow’s Dream – An animal revolution

Although Nerman hardly mentions his picturebooks in his different autobiographical works (see Nerman 1929, 1996), during his first twenty years as an artist he illustrated and wrote more than twenty picturebooks and created numerous illustrations for the Swedish children’s book series *Barnbiblioteket Saga* (Bergstrand 1993:213). It is apparent that in creating and confirming his artist’s identity as a painter, caricature artist, and performer, he chose to emphasize his position in the international arena among famous artists and performers. Creating books for children is not an occupation that would strengthen this image or artistic identity. There are, however, several connections between his picturebooks and his other works, both motif-wise and technically.

One of the most palpable similarities between his caricatures and picturebooks is demonstrated in Nerman’s debut book *Kråkdrömmen* (Crow’s Dream, 1911), a

picturebook that expresses the artist's interest in a stylized illustration style and expressive body language. The story satirizes human society by reversing the conventional order between humans and animals. The main character, the crow, flees from his cage in the zoo in Stockholm and becomes the leader of the animals, who take over the town. Several years before Orwell's *Animal Farm* (1945) or Kästner's *Die Konferenz der Tiere* (The Animals' Conference, 1949), Nerman wrote and illustrated a story about an animal revolution. After the uprising of the animals, the zoos display humans instead of animals and pets change places with their owners.

Nerman's humorous manipulations of roles and positions of animals and humans can be seen as an early expression of animal rights ideas. An idea that is conveyed through the switched roles in this story is that animals should not be viewed as property only, exploited for entertainment or used as food. The motif is, however, also part of a carnevalesque tradition of animal-human depictions and is reminiscent of the French artist Grandville's developments of the animal fable and his animal-human hybrids in the middle of the nineteenth century, especially in *The Public and Private Life of Animals* (1876). His illustration "Les Poissons d'Avril" ("The Fish of April", or "April Fools") in *Un Autre Monde* (Another World, 1844) depicts fish who are fishing for people by using wealth, titles, and honors as bait.¹

In Nerman's interpretation of the motif "Les Poissons d'Avril", we see a man being caught by a fish. The royal palace in Stockholm is depicted in the background. The smiling fish, a bass, looks pleased with his catch, sitting on the top of the stairs on the right side of the image, as if it has evolutionarily reached a higher level than the human being, while the man hanging from the hook on the bottom left side of the picture is depicted with an astonished, empty facial expression. Again, Nerman strongly stylizes the characters, concentrating on facial expressions, posture, body language and movement, and investigates geometric, decorative flat shapes and lines in different ways.

1. There are, naturally, numerous earlier illustrated examples of the interaction or similarities between animals and humans, for example, the Italian scholar Giambattista Della Porta's *De humana physiognomonia* (1583), which investigates ideas about "physiognomy" and behavior associated with physical appearance in both animals and human beings. The illustrations in this book depict human and animal heads side by side, implying that people who look like particular animals have those creatures' traits. Although not actually switching places with each other, the idea of humans as animals or animals as humans is expressed in these scientific images, where human beings resemble animals but where, consequently, the animals are also presented with human qualities.

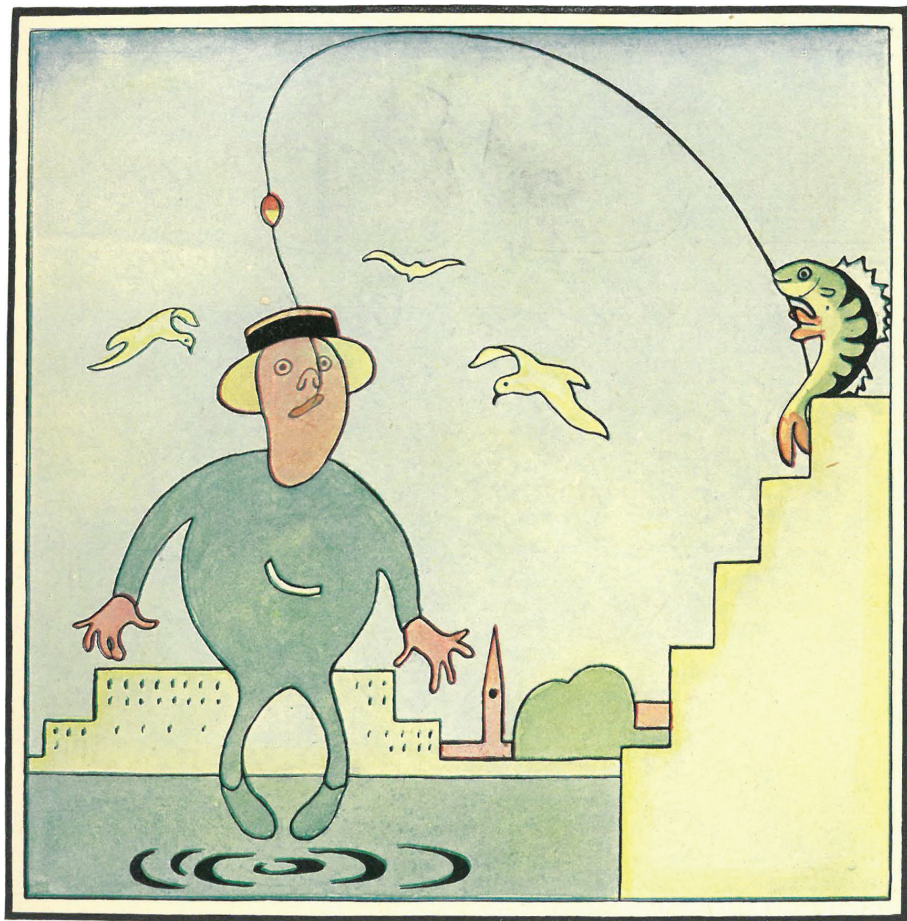


Figure 1. Illustration by Einar Nerman from *Kråkdrömmen*. Stockholm: Ljus, 1911. © Einar Nerman / BUS 2013. © Einar Nerman / BUS 2013

Thomas Theodor Heine's or Aubrey Beardsley's work can be seen as inspiration for Nerman's debut work (Bergstrand 1993: 213). But the influence of contemporary magazine illustrations is also evident here, especially in the use of the black surfaces and contour lines. The Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles had become fashionable even in the daily press and magazines at the turn of the century, with sharp, flowing contours and contrasts between black and white surfaces. This kind of contrast is also created in Nerman's *Crow's Dream* through the use of dynamic, fluid outlines and flat surfaces of color. These connotations are especially prominent in the introductory image with the crow in his cage, drawn in black against a pale yellow background. The interest in curved, flowing contour is evident throughout the book,

but the images also feature strongly stylized forms and geometric shapes like circles, arcs and semicircles. These geometric forms are repeated in different ways: in the background settings and in architectural details, but also in the way the characters are portrayed. In a dramatic scene where a rabbit and a lobster have taken over a restaurant kitchen and are about to cook the people working there, caricatured human bodies against a black background are used to strongly reduce and simplify the expression, emphasizing the colors and further accenting the nightmarish image.



Figure 2. Illustration by Einar Nerman from *Kråkdrömmen*. Stockholm: Ljus, 1911. © Einar Nerman / BUS 2013

Crow's Dream is a large, square book that is composed in such a way that the story can be read as an animal revolution, or – as the left part of the double spread continuously indicates – as a dream. While the regular order of animals

and humans is portrayed in small black drawings on the left-hand page together with handwritten, rhymed text, color illustrations are placed on the right-hand page in regular, square tableaux, telling the story of the animal revolution. The layout can be explained by restrictions in the printing technique, where the use of color illustrations was only possible on the right-hand page. It is, however, also an arrangement that creates a thought-provoking conflict between the two parallel images on each spread.

The transition from the ordinary world to the dream visions takes place in two stages. Besides the indication of a dream in the title, a first signal of a changed vision is suggested in the way the main character is portrayed. In the first illustration the depiction of the crow is more anatomically correct, while a sudden transformation takes place in the second scene when he escapes from his cage: the crow's appearance and body movements are expressive, animated and cartoon-like as he is depicted running towards freedom.

Secondly, while the first image in the book depicts the crow as a black figure against a pale yellow background, a burst of color is suddenly introduced on the fourth spread, coinciding with the moment of the actual coup, where people and their roles are taken over by the animals. From this turning point in the story, not only are the positions of the animals and the humans reversed, but their posture and behavior are also switched. An elderly lady inside a bird cage is happily looking out through the bars of the cage, while her three parrots sit around a coffee table drinking coffee in a sophisticated manner. The old lady's body language resembles that of a bird and her fingers are spread out like wings. Even in the scene from the zoo, the displayed humans are portrayed with unintelligent facial expressions while the three foxes and two crows observing them are portrayed with humanlike postures. Here, a sign is displayed above the cage: "Dear pets, please, do not disturb the humans".

Darkness and light

If a caricature can be described as a method to humorously capture the features and body language of a person through exaggeration, reduction and the hyperbole are methods that are also applied in *Crow's Dream*. Fluid lines and geometric forms are used as the base for human figures in a comical and parodying manner. The body language can be described as pantomime-like – extravagant and exaggerated. Besides influences from caricature, the dramatic aesthetics resembles dance or theatre in different ways. Repeatedly used silhouettes and flat forms are frequent elements in Nerman's illustrations and are especially prominent in his theatre posters from the 1910s. Silhouette forms are often used to fluctuate between static, symmetric compositions on the one hand and more dynamic, fluid

forms and dramatic movements and patterns on the other. This kind of technical contrast between thin ink lines and black or white surfaces is used by many magazine illustrators working with black-and-white illustrations.

In Nerman's poster art and picturebooks, printed either with one contrast color, black and white or in multiple colors, this silhouette method is used to create striking contrasts between different colors as well as between surfaces of color and black or white shapes. It is also a method to express striking lighting and contrasts between darkness and bright light. The art historian Andreas Berg suggests that the use of the silhouettes in Nerman's work can be seen as an expression of the radical change in the urban landscape that occurred when electrical advertisement signs were introduced in Stockholm in 1909 (Berg 2013: 72).

The fascination with darkness and light can also be seen as part of a lifelong interest in theatre and dance, expressed in several ways in Nerman's images, such as through exaggeration of movement and gestures, use of spectacular lighting, and stage-like compositions. While Nerman uses scene-like tableaux in his first picturebook, his later books gradually approach a more condensed expression with connections to his poster art from the same period. Here, the influence of *Plakatstil* can be traced, a movement that emerged in Germany in the beginning of the twentieth century. Compared with the complexity of Art Nouveau, *Plakatstil* strived for simplicity and a more modern and striking expression, using large letters, simplified forms and objects, and prominent colors. The dynamic compositions and geometric (rather than organic) shapes in Nerman's posters show the influence of poster art like Thomas Theodore Heine's *Plakatstil* in the German magazine *Simplicissimus*, a magazine Nerman mentions reading during his student years in Paris.

The interest in precise compositions and gradually increasing simplification of form is demonstrated in *Den lustiga a-b-c-boken* (The Funny ABC Book, 1920), where the artist develops and further streamlines his illustration style. The previously dominant contour lines are not used here; the shapes are clear and sharp, often based on geometric forms. The backgrounds in this book are flat, which emphasizes the bright and unshaded colors. While the images in *Crow's Dream* include some decorative, ornamental details, a radical simplification and reduction of form and style is prominent in *The Funny ABC Book* and is also characteristic of Nerman's later works.

From stage designs to picturebooks

While *Crow's Dream* demonstrates connections to poster art and caricature illustrations, Nerman's work within dance, pantomime, and theatre is also increasingly manifested in his picturebooks. Besides portraying actual dance performances

and dancers – for example, Isadora Duncan in 1906 – Nerman danced professionally for several years. After returning from Paris, he studied first at Elin Svensson's Theatre School in Stockholm in 1912 and in 1913 he attended the Anna Behle Institute of Dance, also called "Plastikinstitut", based on Duncan's new dance style. During a period of nearly ten years Nerman performed in and collaborated with different theatre and dance productions, both within mainstream entertainment and within avant-garde dance.²

After creating his second picturebook *Per Svinaherde* (Per the Swineherd, 1912), based on Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale, Nerman transformed the story into a pantomime ballet performance. For this show he designed the costumes, stage décor, and choreography in collaboration with Anna Behle. The production was bought by the Royal Dramatic Theatre in Stockholm, but it was first performed, strongly altered, several years later in 1921. The idea of transferring folkloric motifs and aesthetics to pantomime or modern dance was expressed in the production of *Per the Swineherd* but also in another small dance production, *Marionetten* (Marionette), with which Nerman toured between 1915 and 1919 (De Groote 2002: 36). In a photograph from the performance Nerman is seen as a Pierrot-figure and Gabo Falk, a dancer trained at the "Plastikinstitut", is dressed in a top hat and a striped hoop skirt dress. Their gestures and facial expressions are doll-like, exaggerated, and mechanical.

Some of the ideas demonstrated in the pantomime dance *Marionetten*, like the automata and the doll-like characters, are used in another dance production five years later. Together with the composer Kurt Atterberg, Nerman created a stage production *De fåvitska jungfrurna* (The Wise and Foolish Virgins), a parable about ten virgins who participate in a wedding and await the coming of the bridegroom bearing torches. The music was composed by Atterberg, Nerman created costumes, scenery, and choreography and together they wrote the libretto. In 1915 Nerman had visited the Nordic Museum in search of inspiration and had seen a painted wall hanging from the late eighteenth century by the artist Nils Svensson, depicting the parable. In this folklore tapestry the ten girls were drawn with identical features, with hoop skirted dresses and holding flaming swords. Nerman thought that the symmetrical and repetitive artwork had choreographic potential (Näslund 2009: 193) and used the naïve composition and the fixed movements in different ways in his modern dance productions.

The ballet about the wise and the foolish virgins was produced by the *Les Ballets Suédois* at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris in 1920 by a predominantly Swedish dance ensemble, functioning in the heart of the French avant-garde. Led

2. Nerman (1929: 143–159).

by Rolf de Maré and Jean Börlin, the ensemble performed highly innovative dance productions throughout Europe and the United States between 1920 and 1925 with compositions, costumes, and settings created by artists such as Fernand Léger, Erik Satie, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Pablo Picasso, and Giorgio de Chirico. One of their most important pieces, in terms of historical and avant-garde importance, was the famous *La Création du Monde* (The Creation of the World, 1922), often cited as the first jazz ballet. It was based on an African legend, with set and costumes by Fernand Léger, music by Darius Milhaud and choreography by Jean Börlin. Similar to the contemporary *Ballets Russes*, the goal of *Les Ballets Suédois* was to realize the aesthetics of painting on stage, “to transfer something of the beauty found in these paintings into dance”, as Rolf de Maré stated (Arthur 2012). The kind of combination of free dance, pantomime, film, painting, poetry, poster art, and music in the ensemble’s productions has been described as an intercultural cross-section of avant-garde performance in inter-war Europe (Baer & Ahlstrand 1995:95).

Les vierges folles was the most popular performance in the repertoire of the ensemble and was performed a total of 375 times (Banes 1994:75). It tells a story about wise and foolish virgins who are supposed to lead a princess to her future consort, an adventurous journey due to the foolishness of some of the virgins. A photograph of the performance from 1920 depicts the dancers Jenny Hasselquist and Jean Börlin, the bride and groom in the play, together with the virgins. The costumes and set, designed by Nerman, consist of voluminous dresses with extravagant head pieces and a set with folkloric decorations. In the photograph, the dancers are placed in a symmetric arrangement around church steps so that their bodies and costumes create a strikingly organized, symmetrical, and decorative composition.

When discussing the aesthetics used in *Les vierges folles*, two other productions at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées are relevant as well: *Nuit de Saint-Jean* (Midsummer Night’s Revel, 1920) with set and costumes by the famous Swedish painter Nils de Dardel and music by Hugo Alfvén, and the pantomime-ballet *Offerlunden* (The Sacrificial Grove, 1923) by Algot Haquinius and Gunnar Hallström. While the fascination with folklore is wittily combined with modernist aesthetics and sharp geometric forms in Nerman’s scenery, the later plays are based on a national romantic style, with traditional folkloric elements and motifs. Both these methods were, however, perceived as exotic and naïve by the international audience. Sally Banes describes these specifically Swedish performances in her *Writing Dancing in the Age of Postmodernism* (1994) as “ballets deriving from Swedish folk art and traditional dances, whose bright, naïve décor and homely peasant mood had a direct, unsophisticated appeal for the spectator” (Banes 1994:75). In his study of *Les Ballet Suédois*, Pascale De Groote emphasizes that the productions could be seen as “ways to escape into a playful and innocent world, far from reality and modern life” (De Groote 2002:37).



Figure 3. Jean Börlin and Jenny Hasselquist as the bride and bridegroom in *Les vierges folles*. Photograph from a performance of Ballets suédois, Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, Paris 1920. Rolf de Maré Collection, Museum of Dance, Stockholm. Used by permission of Dansmuseet Stockholm

The décor and the costumes of *Les vierges folles* are described in detail in a review from 1923 by an American critic at *The Boston Evening Transcript*:

The set consists of merely a grey drop, in the centre of which is painted a quaint church- façade broken by a doorway hung with black curtains. The virgins are all dressed in bobbing, bouncing, hoop skirted dresses, with little tight basques, and high, black stovepipe hats; the wise ones in green and the foolish ones in orange; each carrying her lamp in hand. [...] [T]he whole action of the piece is presented with deliciously and delicately nonsensical steps to the most charming and danceable of tunes.³

The caricatured and stylized choreography and costumes were described by one critic as “mechanical”, similar to toys or porcelain figures, and the dancers’ rhythmic movements and their expressions as doll-like with “glassy-eyed stares”, while another critic compared the decorations and costumes to “new toys, tasteful and light-hearted” (DeThomas 1920).⁴ The language of movement seemed to relate to the gently ironic touch of both Nerman’s and Atterberg’s naïve style (Näslund 2009: 196). The composer described his aim with the melody as follows: “The character of the melodies is generally grave, but the choreography should be made comic and burlesque, and the naïve character of the whole thing should be emphasised” (Näslund 2009: 196).

Rather than merely an interest in folklore, it seems that Nerman’s décor and costumes, with their exaggerated, geometric forms, like the round forms of the dresses and the tall stovepipe hats, as well as the rigid, “mechanical” and monotonous body movements and choreography, have connections to performances with Dada or explicitly surrealist tendencies expressed in other productions by *Les Ballets Suédois*.

Three years after the success with *Les vierges folles* Nerman published the picturebook *Riddaren Finn Komfusenfej* (Knight Finn Komfusenfej, 1923), which in different ways resembles this kind of aesthetics. Here, the artist develops his refined style further, working with striking geometric forms, while telling a rather traditional, cumulative fairy tale of a knight who is searching for a princess. Similar to many of Nerman’s caricature portraits from this period, a certain distance is created by the parodistic, and at the same time decorative, exaggeration. This kind of distance can be traced in many of Nerman’s picturebooks, where the reduction of the

3. Unidentified critic, possibly Florence Gilliam. The Swedish Ballet: Its Repertory and Its Accomplishment, *Boston Evening Transcript*. September 1, 1923, quoted in Baner (1994: 75).

4. DeThomas, Maxime. Les mises en scène et les décors. *Comoedia*, Paris, November 20, 1920, quoted in De Groote (2002: 37).

characters is fundamental to the aesthetics. A certain detachment between text and images is prominent even in this story. A fascination with Swedish folkloric decorations, patterns, and color schemes is expressed here, but this imagery is combined with symmetrical, almost mechanical compositions and sharp, simplified forms. The elegantly stylized and analytical illustration technique stands in contrast to the content of the fairy tale as well as the many folkloric elements included.

At the same time, the spatial construction of *Knight Finn Komfusenfej* brings to mind the set of a theatre play. In fact, the book shows several similarities with the stage and costume designs that he created for the stage production *Les vierges folles*. The compositions in the picturebook *Knight Finn Komfusenfej* are characterized by stylized and reduced forms and symmetrical images. Repetitive and static compositions are recurrent. The characters are depicted in unmoving arrangements, placed against a white backdrop with their bodies and faces turned towards the reader. The description of the dresses and their color scheme in the review in *The Boston Evening Transcript* also shows a correspondence regarding the dominant colors – orange, green, and black, in the stage production and in Nerman's picturebook. Similar to the virgins in the stage production, the princesses in the picturebook are drawn with hoop skirts in orange, green, and yellow. They wear cone-shaped head pieces and the knight is depicted with a black stovepipe hat similar to the hats in the performance.



Figure 4. Illustration by Einar Nerman from *Riddaren Finn Komfusenfej*. Stockholm: Svensk läraretidning 1923. © Einar Nerman / BUS 2013

Nerman used folkloric patterns as inspiration for his rhythmical, repetitive choreography in the avant-garde performance *Les vierges folles*. Some material from the dance production has been preserved in Rolf de Maré's collection, including Nerman's stage model in paper and wood painted with gouache colors, as well as stage and costume designs. The similarities between these designs, drawn with ink, pencil, and water color, and the picturebook *Knight Finn Komfusenfej* are striking. The strong emphasis on geometric forms is particularly interesting. The characters depicted in the stage and costume designs are extremely reduced in form and are drawn as symmetrical, geometric shapes like squares and semicircles.

Certain details and visual elements from the ballet are nearly identical in the picturebook. In the stage production a church is shown in the background, surrounded by symmetrical Swedish folklore "kurbits" decorations with distinctive forms of stylized fantasy plants with large floral and leaf bundles. The same image is also used in the picturebook with slight alterations. Even here, the color scheme of the book is the same as in the stage production *Les vierges folles*: yellow, green, and orange with an emphasis on black lines and accentuated black details. A small but significant detail that is also transferred to the picturebook is the marked, black horizontal line at the bottom of each of the stage designs, used to indicate the size and the placement of the characters as well as the scenery on the stage. This black horizontal line can be found in almost all the illustrations in the picturebook and has no narrative or aesthetic function – it is clear that this element is a remnant from the stage designs.

The interaction between picturebook aesthetics and other visual media takes place in two directions in Nerman's production. In 1912 the artist used his picturebook *Per the Swineherd* as inspiration for a pantomime ballet. Three years later he tested the idea of the naïve doll-like figures found in the late eighteenth century painting *The Wise and Foolish Virgins* in his pantomime ballet "Marionetten" and then developed the idea in the stage performance at *Les Ballets Suédois* in 1920. While the reduced and strongly stylized expression in his stage and costume designs can be seen as a parallel to his picturebook aesthetics from the same period, the stage and costume designs for *Les vierges folles* are also, finally, used as the basis for the picturebook *Knight Finn Komfusenfej*, published three years later.

Mass culture, children's literature and the avant-garde

How, then, should we define Einar Nerman's picturebooks in relation to the avant-garde? The concept of avant-garde is primarily applied to artists, authors, and composers whose works of art are opposed to mainstream cultural values and often include forceful social or political implications. While Nerman's caricature

portraits can hardly be described as avant-garde – quite the opposite – he made some contributions in the field of avant-garde dance. His early picturebooks are highly innovative but show connections to both mass-market aesthetics and the avant-garde. Furthermore, the stylistic innovation in his picturebooks has in previous research – most likely due to his strong connections to mass culture – been mainly perceived and described as merely stylistic innovation.⁵

In the beginning of the previous century the magazine industry was quick to take visual mannerisms from art movements such as Art Nouveau and Art Deco, and, in a similar manner, the 1930s advertising industry was influenced by avant-garde movements, such as Surrealism and Constructivism. This kind of superficial stylistic innovation within the commercial field of graphic design could be described as market-driven fashion trends – style without substance. An essential question within avant-garde research should be raised here concerning the concept of the “avant-garde” in contrast to “high” or “mainstream” forms of art. Clement Greenberg sees the avant-garde as works of art in opposition to “high” and “mainstream” culture and rejects all artificially manufactured, mechanical mass culture produced by industrialization. While avant-garde is considered to be driven by the ideals of true art, cultural products produced by sectors of manufacturing that are profit-driven are described by Greenberg as “kitsch”, or in Walter Benjamin’s, Theodor Adorno’s, and Max Horkheimer’s words, as “mass culture”.⁶

Einar Nerman was constantly, and seemingly effortlessly, moving between commercial entertainment and the avant-garde, between mass-market culture and marginal art movements. For most of his life, he earned his living as a caricature artist and graphic designer, an occupation connected to the theatre and movie industry as well as commercial publishing houses. But despite this position within mass culture, he was also part of the avant-garde scene in Sweden, with connections to artists around innovative movements like “The Young”, Anna Behle’s pioneering Institute of Dance, and, most importantly, the dance group *Les Ballets Suédois* in the heart of the French avant-garde of the 1920s. Last but not least, he was Sweden’s first male free dancer (Näslund 2009: 193) and made his living for several years as a dancer. According to Pierre Bourdieu’s ideas he can thus be considered part of seemingly opposing cultural, social, and economic “economies”. He did not merely participate in the restricted field of high culture and arts, defined by Bourdieu as the “anti-‘economic’ economy of pure art”, a system of exclusion,

5. See, for example, Bergstrand (1993:213), who in her study of the early Swedish picturebook (1900–1930) states that Nerman was initially innovative but gradually became merely decorative.

6. See Benjamin (1963), Greenberg (1939), and Horkheimer & Adorno (1947).

where the producers of art produce art only for other producers of art (Bourdieu 1992: 142). Instead I would propose that Nerman moved between different oppositional and marginalized strands of art and culture. We might even say that his symbolic capital, to use Bourdieu's term, was thus activated both in the margins and within the mainstream, both in areas of mass culture and the avant-garde.

The developments taking place in Nerman's early picturebooks and illustrations during the 1910s and 1920s are not representative of Swedish picturebooks in general, but they point to a later development in the field. The organic and decorative idiom – with links to Art Nouveau – that characterizes his early work developed during the 1920s towards simplification and rationalization of the form on the one hand, with an interest in folklore and the exotic national romanticism on the other. His books for children foreshadow what is described as “the 1940s picturebook Modernism in Sweden” and have, at the same time, very little in common with it. During the 1930s, Functionalism, also called International Style, was gradually established as the dominant design style in Sweden. It was introduced at the Stockholm Exhibition of 1930, which had a great impact on the architecture and design in Sweden.⁷ The functionalist ideas expressed in the exhibition radically stressed purpose, quality, practicality, and ideas about good form and design, as well as ideas about the new modern society, values that also permeate picturebooks during the 1940s. These principles are not in line with the kind of trend-sensitive and decorative aesthetics applied by Nerman. By the time of the post-war modernist turn in Swedish children's literature, Nerman's innovative aesthetics did not suit the current ideas of Modernism within picturebooks. The expressions “deliciously and delicately nonsensical” or “tasteful and light-hearted”, used by the critics about *Les vierges folles*, are descriptions that could be used to define Nerman's expression in general, but are, at the same time, descriptions that are hardly compatible with the ideas and changes taking place in post-war Swedish children's literature. His carefree, decorative illustration style with strong connections to the commercial world and the entertainment industry quickly became out-of-date during the 1940s, an era when the graphic design in Sweden can be characterized by “nysaklighet”, with parallels to the German “Neue Sachlichkeit” or “The Swedish Grace”, as well as functionalist ideas.

As I have shown, Nerman's innovative picturebook illustrations have strong connections to international commercial graphic design. Throughout his entire production of picturebooks he strives to reduce forms to their basic geometric shapes and plays with striking primary colors against a white or black background.

7. For a discussion of modernism in different fields of art and design in Sweden, see Widenheim & Rudberg (2000).

The bold imagery with distinct, simplified forms is often composed to create silhouette-like effects, similar to stage sets or brightly lighted stages. While expressive and humorous facial traits and expressions are crucial for caricature and are fundamental in some of Nerman's earliest picturebooks – for example *Crow's Dream* – this is a feature that is toned down in his later books, where he rather focuses on body movements and forms, again, similar to pantomime or dance.

The motivation for his aesthetic experiments has an entirely different background and context than the later modernist development in Nordic children's literature, where the idea of "modern books for children in a modern age" is fundamental (Hallberg 1996: 37; Druker 2008: 12). In describing the 1940s modernist turn in Swedish children's literature, the symbolic position of the child is fundamental; it concerns both the aesthetics and ideas around the modern child and the role and the position of children's literature in Swedish post-war society. In fact, Einar Nerman's reluctance to be associated with children's literature might be part of the reason that he has not attracted more interest in children's literature research.

I would thus like to propose that Nerman's picturebooks are especially interesting *because* of their peripheral position in his artistic production. More or less separated from the field of children's literature, Nerman worked with aesthetics that are connected to modern print culture, entertainment, modern dance, and the avant-garde. When working with picturebooks, he uses the same kind of decorative, stylized approach as in his other works. While traces of Art Nouveau and Art Deco styles are evident in the early picturebook *Crow's Dream*, an interest in folklore and modern dance is expressed in *Knight Finn Komfusenfej* ten years later. It is evident that the picturebook medium offers the artist a space for creative freedom not always present in his more commercial works. Also, compared with the black-and-white printing techniques in magazines, picturebooks allow a more extensive use of color. Elements and expressions from his other areas of interest – theatre, ballet, and the arts – are expressed in the picturebooks. While never a main focus in his work, children's literature becomes a field of artistic exploration for Nerman. As I have demonstrated, Nerman's picturebooks sometimes function as a starting point for new ideas and motifs that are transmitted to other areas of art, from the picturebook to the theatre stage, a transmission that can be seen as a parallel to Rolf de Maré's idea of realizing the aesthetics of painting on stage.

The connections between different fields of art and culture demonstrated in Einar Nerman's production suggest that defining Modernism in Swedish children's literature is possibly more complex than previously described and that it was initiated earlier than the 1930s and 1940s. While the modernist turn in Swedish children's literature is often placed around 1945, with the emerging young generation of authors and artists, such as Astrid Lindgren, Lennart Hellsing, and the Finnish-Swedish Tove Jansson, it is quite clear that this kind of fixed turning

point should be re-evaluated. Einar Nerman's picturebooks might not represent a tendency per se, but his early work demonstrates highly interesting connections between picturebooks and other visual media, between children's literature and the avant-garde.

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CHAPTER 3

Sándor Bortnyik and an interwar Hungarian children's book

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This chapter examines the origins and various versions of the only children's book known to have been produced by the Hungarian modernist artist Sándor Bortnyik. A member of the radical modernist *Ma* group, Bortnyik spent the years 1922–1925 in Weimar, though not at the Bauhaus. When he returned to Hungary, he brought with him the new German ideal of the *Gebrauchsgraphiker*, a graphic artist who reconciles the commercial with the artistic, an idea which informed his work throughout the 1920s. A critical and influential figure in Hungarian poster and advertising design as well as the founder of an influential private art school, Bortnyik transferred to his children's book, eventually published in Hungarian, German and English, the aesthetics of poster advertising, producing a book which, in the end, could, like an advertising poster, wordlessly transmit its idea.

Introduction

In the beginning was the illustration. In the mid-1920s, the Hungarian printing house *Ifjúság Kiadó* (Youth Publishing) published a children's book, *Potty és Pötty, kalandos utazása* (Spot and Dot's Adventurous Journey). The cover lists no author, but does state "it was drawn by Sándor Bortnyik". Well known for his paintings, graphic works, and poster designs, Bortnyik produced only this one children's book; as a book designer and illustrator he worked on other children's books – providing, for example, illustrations for the Dante Press's 1931 *The Adventures of Baron Munchausen* – but those illustrations reflected someone's words and ideas, unlike the images of *Potty és Pötty*. Within a decade of its Hungarian publication, two further versions of *Potty és Pötty* appeared, one in German, *Die Wunderfahrt* (1929), and one in American English, *Tatters and Scraps: Two Paper Dolls in Toyland* (1933): three versions of the same book, utilizing the same images, but with completely different texts deriving from the identical set of images. In this Chapter

I seek to locate this solitary children's book within Bortnyik's larger artistic career – one not usually associated with children's literature, to consider the variations among the publications, and, finally, to show how the book, as Bortnyik designed it, wordlessly demonstrated his own avant-garde aesthetics as they were evolving in the 1920s.

Publication variations

Despite numerous different printings the book is relatively rare today. In Hungary, the original country of publication, the national catalogue lists a single copy of the book, in the library of the Országos Pedagógiai Könyvtár és Múzeum (National Pedagogical Library and Museum). It seems to be found nowhere else in the country, at least not in collections whose catalogues are available electronically. That library copy, an example of what was sold in Hungary, differs slightly from the later German and English versions. The story, written by László Harangi, is shorter; there are fewer pages, but the presence of the endpapers indicates that this was deliberate, not simply that pages fell out due to use. The book is also printed on board, not on the paper of the German or American versions. The Deutsche Nationalbibliothek (German National Library) holds the copy of the book which served as the model for the version recently reprinted by the Leipzig-based Manuscriptum Verlagsbuchhandlung. A third, American English language version can only be found in two libraries in the United States: the St. Louis City Library and the Lawrence University Library. Albert Whitman & Company, the book's American publisher, is still in business and still publishes children's books. In the company archives there is a copy of the book, but as yet no material has been located which either explains how they came to publish this volume or why a volume published under their imprint was, curiously, printed in Germany.

The three different versions, Hungarian, German, and American, share a number of similarities. Though each book bears a different and unrelated title, all three have similar covers: an image of a boy and a girl walking on a path, each carrying a kite. While not taken from the text, the image is consistent with the story and was obviously drawn by Bortnyik (Figure 1). All three versions have a similar organization: an internal text on the left facing an illustrated page on the right. In addition to these three different books in three different languages, there is a fourth, intriguing version of the book in the collection of the Cotsen Children's Library at Princeton University. It is a second, different, and unique Hungarian version of the book, apparently an artist's copy. The book cover differs from that of the other three versions (Figure 2). Rather than the artist's illustration relating to the story within the book, this volume has a dark blue fabric cover with an

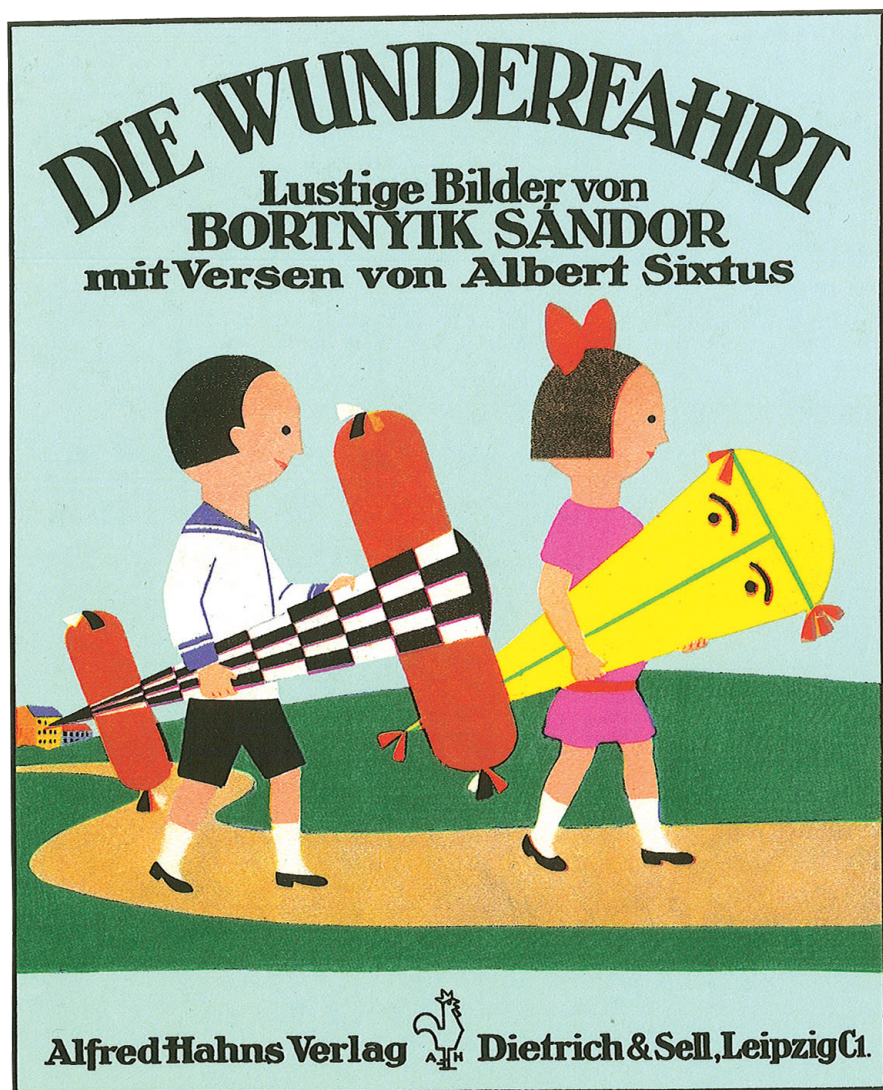


Figure 1. Cover by Sándor Bortnyik for the German edition *Die Wundereahrt* with verses by Albert Sixtus. Leipzig: Alfred Hahns Verlag, 1929. Reprint Leipzig: Manuscriptum Verlagsbuchhandlung, 2002

abstract design, visually similar to the covers of the *Bauhausbücher* series designed by Moholy-Nagy at the Weimar Bauhaus. In the center of the cover, about two-thirds of the way up, is a lighter blue square. In the top left, written in white in a modern typeface, is Bortnyik's name and below, in much larger type, the title: *Potty és Pötty*. Running from the left side along the top of the light blue square is a

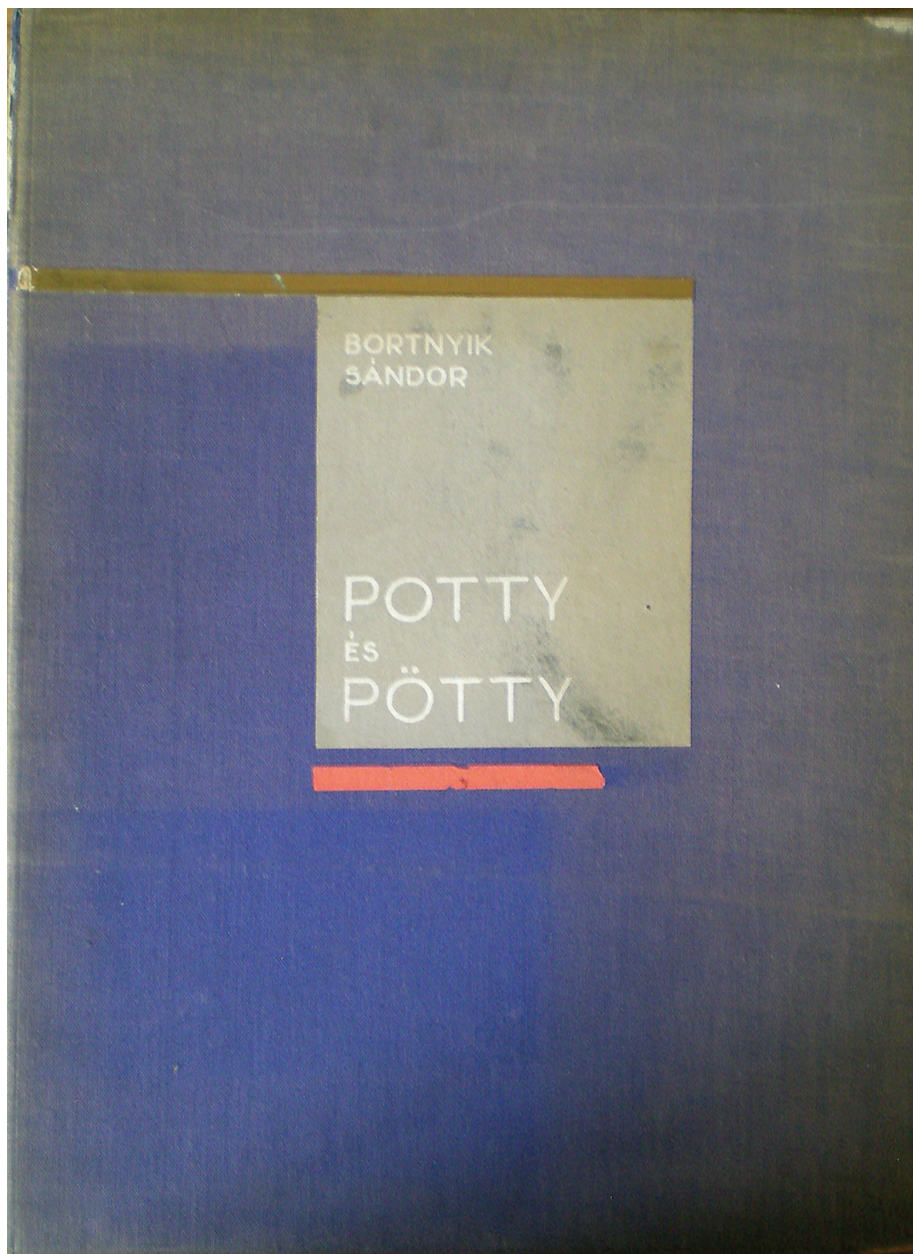


Figure 2. Cover of Sándor Bortnyik: *Potty és Pötty, kalandos utazása*, Budapest: Ifjúság kiadása, n.d. Used by permission of the Cotsen Children's Library, Princeton Library

narrow gold strip and below the light blue square, commencing on its left side and stopping about two-thirds of the way across, is an equally wide red strip.

This volume lacks a printed text. The dealer who sold it to the Cotsen Library no longer has any material relating to the purchase or the provenance, though the book was definitely acquired in Hungary. Accompanying the book is period typescript labeled as the text for the book. In content, authorship, and form, this text differs from that of the commercially published Hungarian version. This manuscript is entitled *icurka, picurka, csodálatos utja/földön, vizen, égen most nemrégén* (Itsie's and Bitsie's Miraculous Journey/on Earth, on Water, in the Sky, and Not That Long Ago), although the book cover itself clearly bears the title *Potty és Pötty*. The typescript states: "Bortnyik Sándor drew the pictures, Szép Ernő wrote the text". There is a well-known Hungarian author by that name, who, born in 1884, would be a contemporary of Bortnyik's, but he is not known for children's verse nor is there any evidence of a connection with Bortnyik (Tezla 1970:542–547), though the name is a rather common one. Intriguingly, the typescript uses no capital letters, a conceit common to documents produced at the Bauhaus, thus perhaps evidence of a continuing relationship with a Bauhaus acquaintance.

The book

The book contains 19 images which illustrate the story of a young boy and girl. While flying their kites, they are carried off by the wind and land in a magical country of bright colors and simplified geometrical forms. They come upon a castle, occupied by a King and his court. Invited in, the children take tea with the King; afterwards they all attend a theatrical performance and then visit a carnival. The children bid the King and his court good-bye and fly homeward in an airplane. Holding balloons, they jump from the airplane and gently waft to the ground and return home. This last scene is the only one signed by Bortnyik, in the lower right corner.

Although the books have identical images in the identical order and, despite certain commonalities necessitated by the images, the written stories which accompany these images differ significantly. All three relate the story of a boy, a girl, and their adventure; all incorporate and reference figures and objects clearly visible in the illustrations. But the ways these objects fit in the stories differ greatly. The two Hungarian versions and the German version are in simple rhyme. However incredible the adventures are in all three books, the boy and girl are spoken of as actual children. The American version of the book relates the images as the story of two cut-out paper dolls and their adventures in "Toyland". It is not just insipid,

but lacks the lyricism of any of the other versions and makes bizarre factual errors. One egregious example is the last image, where the woman running out of the apartment to greet the returning children is described in the text as a “little girl”.

Within the images, there are no specific clues as to the time of the story, though airplane and automobile make it obvious that the story takes place in the present day, the mid- to late-1920s. Any indication as to precisely where the children are from or where the story takes place seems to have been scrupulously avoided. The lack of geographic specificity further emphasizes the universality (at least an American and Western European universality) of the story. The children's clothing: a sailor suit shirt and knickers for the boy and a dress for the girl are common children's clothing at the time. Similarly, the garments of the King and the Wizard lack specific symbols or markings. The Hussar perhaps could be thought of as fixing the story in Bortnyik's native Hungary, but the decoration and style of his uniform is so general and so non-descript that it is impossible to clearly and convincingly associate him with a particular country. Only the girl wearing a Dirndl and the boy in Lederhosen who appear in one image seem to carry specific regional associations, with Bavaria or Austria, but little else in any of the other images supports these locations. The backgrounds are non-descript as well; there are no great or recognizable geographical features. The architecture portrayed in the stories, the castle, the theater, the background houses, though completely modern, is so generic as to preclude any clear national or stylistic association. There is one detail in which regional difference could be inferred, but there too, Bortnyik seems to deliberately and knowingly avoid it. Until the Second World War, Austria and Hungary were left-hand traffic countries, while Germany was a right-hand traffic country. The cars which Bortnyik illustrates, the children's blue car and the King's red car, are only a single passenger wide, obviating the need to place the steering wheel on one or the other side.

Two further features of the book's various versions are curious: the naming of the author and the dating of the volumes. The Hungarian version, unsurprisingly, not only correctly spells Bortnyik's name but also employs Hungarian name word order: family name followed by the given name. The cover of the German version does have his name spelled correctly, including the accent, though the title page hyphenates his name, listing him, mononymously, as Bortnyik-Sándor. This mistake is further reproduced in Aiga Klotz's reference book, wherein the author is filed under the name Sándor rather than Bortnyik (Klotz 1990: 430). The cover of the American version lists him as Bortnyik Sándor, without the hyphen, but curiously maintains the Hungarian name order, as if they did not realize the difference between English and Hungarian names.

Neither Hungarian volume, the commercial version nor the artist version, has a publication date, and the catalogue *Magyar Könyvészet* (Hungarian Books

in Print) for this period is incomplete. Both books were certainly produced after Bortnyik's return to Hungary, meaning no earlier than 1926, but probably slightly later. The German version dates to 1929, presumably after the Hungarian version had been published, while the American version has a clear publication date of 1933. But while Chicago, the home city of the publisher, is listed on the title page, on that same page it also clearly states that the book was "Printed in Germany". In all four books, whatever their variations, Bortnyik's illustrations are a constant.

Sándor Bortnyik: Biography and activity

In order to understand the significance of this book, both for Hungarian interwar Modernism and the career of Sándor Bortnyik, it is important to understand his artistic evolution. Bortnyik was born in 1893 in the Transylvanian town of Marosvásárhely (Târgu-Mureș in Romanian), which, at the time, was part of the Hungarian-controlled portion of the Austro-Hungarian Empire. Self-taught as an artist, Bortnyik's first recognized artistic success was winning an advertising poster competition sponsored by the Budapest-based Savoly perfume factory. In 1910, he left Transylvania and moved to Budapest – where he would be based for more or less the rest of his life – and began working as a package designer for Savoly. In Budapest he began his formal artistic education in 1913 by enrolling in the independent art academy run by the painters József Rippl-Rónai, Károly Kernstok, and János Vaszary. All three are leading figures in Hungarian modern painting though none is profoundly radical in his works. While studying at the academy, Bortnyik befriended a fellow Transylvanian artist, János Mattis-Teutsch.

In 1916, Bortnyik designed his first commercially published poster, an advertisement for the *Országos Mozinap* (National Movie Day), a fund-raiser for the Hungarian National Red Cross, which featured a horn-blowing soldier on horseback, silhouetted against a night sky. In that same year he had his first work displayed in the *Nemzeti Szalon* (National Salon), an association of artists and art enthusiasts. In its own exhibition and meeting space in downtown Budapest, the association regularly organized shows of both established and novice artists. In 1918, Bortnyik began to move in the circle of Lajos Kassák and his *Ma* group, which included the artists Béla Uitz and Iván Hevesy. Following this association with Kassák, Bortnyik's works turned radical – visually and politically. Through Kassák's strong international connections with other movements and artists, Bortnyik gained a familiarity with the avant-garde movements of neighboring countries and their artistic variants, especially the Expressionism of Germany and the Cubism of France, but also the new Constructivism of Russia. His works at this time show his political focus. Two examples are the paintings *Vörös Mozdony*

(Red Locomotive) and *Vörös Gyár* (Red Factory) (both 1919). From their titles, with the emphasis on “red” as well as their pointed subject matter – the harsh products and literal engines of industrialization which create, nurture, and repress the urban proletariat – the paintings’ leftist political meanings are easily understood. At the same time, Bortnyik was experimenting with a very dark palette. His works of this period tend towards monochromism, whose weight is made even greater by the tightly painted surfaces. There appears to be no background: the contents of the image are pushed forward to a plane just in front of the viewer. The unrelenting visual pressure the images present reinforces the urgency of their messages. Bortnyik’s increased political radicalness appears in his graphic work as well, works more suited to and suitable for mass publication. He moved toward a visual simplification similar to that of his painting, creating a single plane of activity, but one with a vastly increased complexity of content. While in his paintings he sought to use color figuratively, in his graphic works the stark binary simplicity of black and white prevails. Typical of this period are two of his works for the eponymous journal published by Kassák and his cohort, *Ma*: a linocut of Lenin which graced the cover of a 1919 special edition and the poster for an exhibition of graphic works sponsored by the magazine (Figure 3).

Created solely in black and white, with no intermediate tonalities, the image presents a powerful and dynamic vision of the Soviet leader. The background is a series of vertical white strokes on black which seems to crackle with energy, while Lenin’s face itself is reduced to a series of discrete overlapping planes. The highlights of his face – the sheen of sweat on his immense brow and the hollows beneath his eyes – are all emphasized by short comb-like black strokes. Similar shapes are used in the poster for the Seventh Graphic Exhibition of *Ma* (Figure 4), but the rigid and massive seriousness of Lenin’s figure, so effectively presented in black and white, is here made almost light-hearted through the use of curves. The lettering, again binary black on white (or white on black), already demonstrates Bortnyik’s interest in typography and its use in poster design. At the top of the image, two flattened figures, their heads turned towards each other, straddle the two letters of the magazine’s name, *Ma*; the shapes of their legs echoing the forms of the letters. Below them, in thick black letters, are details of the exhibition. The three rows of lettering all curve upward slightly, echoing the curve of the dark bottom of the poster, on which is written in white letters the location and date of the exhibition.

The radicalness of the *Ma* group led to their support of the short-lived Hungarian Soviet Republic (21 March – 1 August, 1919), in which Kassák briefly served as a street poster censor. With the total failure of that socialist experiment, which had paradoxically criticized and then suspended publication of the journal, and with the subsequent rise of the White Terror – the right-wing absolutist

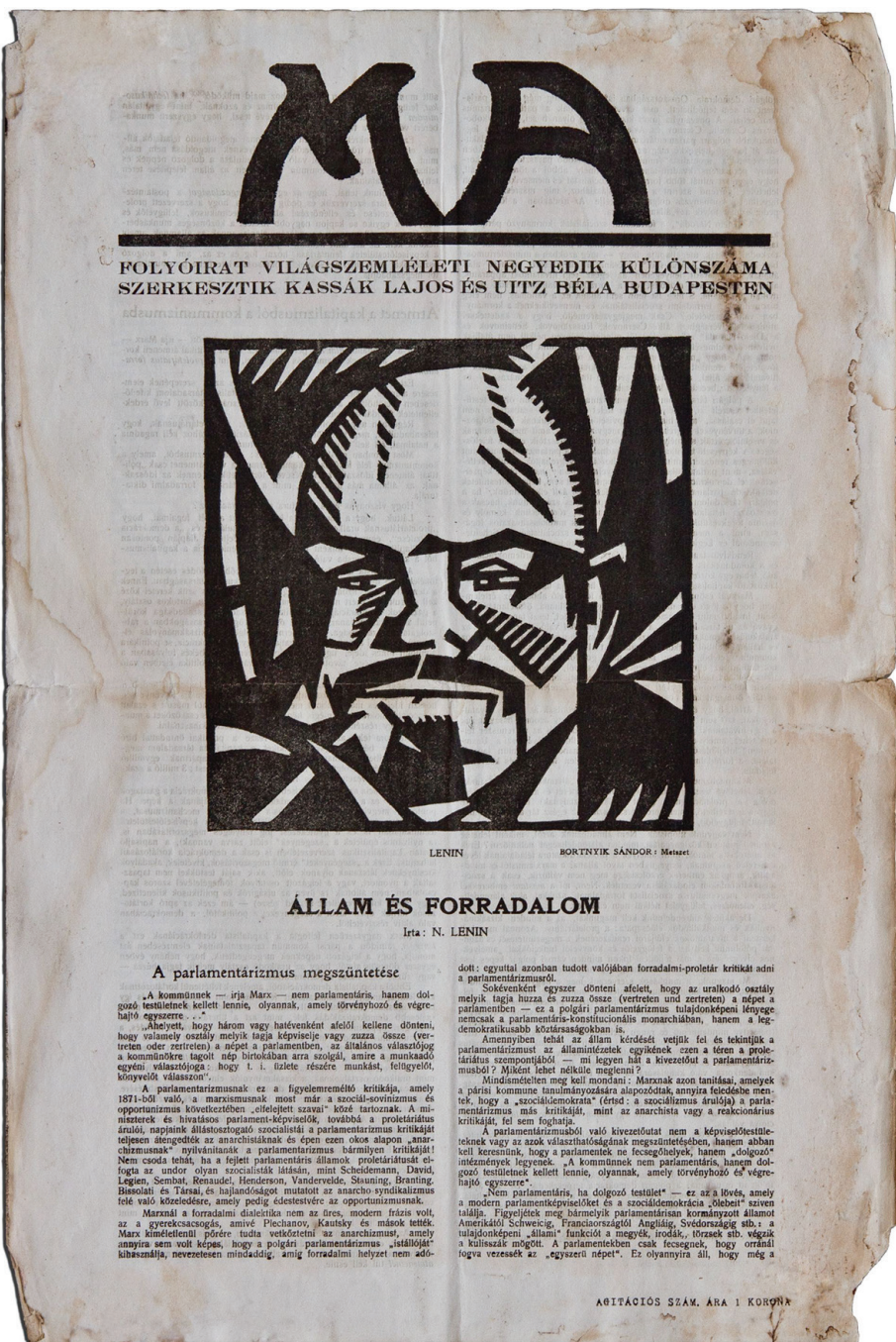
Figure 3. Cover by Sándor Bortnyik for a special edition of the journal *Ma*



Figure 4. Poster by Sándor Bortnyik for the Seventh Graphic Exhibition of *Ma*

political order under the Regent Admiral Horthy, which followed the Hungarian Soviet – Bortnyik, Kassák, and most of the *Ma* group, as well as numerous others, now politically suspect, were forced to leave the country. Many, as Bortnyik and Kassák did, found refuge in nearby Vienna. From that other capital of the now-dissolved Austro-Hungarian Empire, Kassák and the *Ma* circle continued their artistic agitation. Kassák produced the journal in exile and also published a series of books, mostly novels, for which Bortnyik designed covers and produced illustrations. Under the auspices of the *Ma* group, Bortnyik published an album of 6 images, the so-called *Bortnyik Album*, examples of what Kassák termed *Képarchitektúra* (Pictorial Architecture). These new images, though a change from Bortnyik's previous work, are understandable as part of his artistic evolution. They are a vibrant return to color, but color no longer used emotionally as in his earlier paintings like *Vörös Gyár* or *Vörös Mozdony*. The previous dark, foreboding, and ominous palette of reds, greens, and oranges is now brighter. The subject matter has changed as well; more accurately, it has disappeared completely. The six images which constitute the album consist of geometric shapes, enlivened here and there with numbers, letters, and sometimes whole words; the images look to the work of both the Parisian Cubists and the Russian Constructivists, but follow neither closely. There is a mechanistic aspect to the images; they resemble small devices with levers, linkages, and off-centered gears.

Bortnyik's colleague Iván Hevesy harshly critiqued the album in the Hungarian literary journal *Nyugat*. "The pictures," he wrote, "resemble nothing and remind of nothing" (Hevesy 1921: 102). They are the results of the abstraction with which Bortnyik had successfully experimented earlier, but as Hevesy continued, the results were "ethically void, formalist games, a sad and visionless dead end" into which Bortnyik, once a most promising artist, had sadly staggered. Hevesy blamed Vienna: "[i]t is the Viennese influence, the present-day Germanic spiritual anarchy which diverted this process [Bortnyik's artistic development]".

Bortnyik in Germany

In 1922, shortly after the publication of the album, Bortnyik broke off his relationship with Kassák and with the *Ma* group over emerging intense ideological differences. After the ideological break – though without abandoning their friendship – Bortnyik left Vienna for Germany, settling in Weimar, home of the recently founded Bauhaus. Never formally a student of the Bauhaus, Bortnyik was nonetheless an avid and active participant in the school's social and artistic life. He attended lectures, he welcomed visitors from the school into his studio, and he participated in the van Doesburg-organized Congress of Constructivists and

Dadaists in Weimar (Neumann 1993: 80). Bortnyik's contacts and experiences in Germany were a significant influence on his artistic development and spawned a number of friendships which outlasted his stay in Weimar, especially among the Hungarians studying there: Farkas Molnár, Andor Weininger, Marcel Breuer, and László Moholy-Nagy, who had begun his tenure at the Bauhaus in 1923 (Gaßner 1986: 346–347).

Bortnyik's Weimar sojourn lasted from 1922 to 1925. While there, he continued to produce graphic works, exhibiting in Herwarth Walden's Berlin gallery, *Der Sturm*, along with his Weimar colleague Moholy-Nagy, his old Budapest acquaintance János Mattis-Teutsch, and László Peri. In Weimar Bortnyik also began painting more avidly, producing works which reflect his maturing style and the influence of the Bauhaus. Works of this period, such as *The New Adam* (1924) and its pendant *The New Eve* (1924), show a continuation of his revived interest in color. In these works there is a social awareness, more so than in any since the heady years of the Hungarian Council of Republics, but it is a social awareness no longer fixated on the bright promise of the radiant socialist future but rather a disenchantment with the Weimar urban present. In *The New Adam*, a fashionably dressed figure, with rouged cheeks and slicked-back hair, wearing plaid pants and a nip-waisted doubled-breasted jacket with a pocket square, holds in one gloved hand a cane and in the other gloved hand a straw boater. His head is tilted slightly to his right, as if staring off at something in the distance. He stands on a box with a wind-up handle on the side and is framed by two clear planes which seem to emerge towards the viewer. Behind him rises a red plane on which is mounted a mechanical drawing of a fly-wheel engine with a governor. In the left distant background a *Neues Bauen*-style house is clearly visible, with an open window fronted by a balcony composed of a series of white planes. With its stark but clearly urban background with a Bauhaus-influenced building, crisp chromatic planes strongly reminiscent of El Lissitzky's *Prouns*, and the dramatically isolated figures, the pair of images reflect a growing maturity of the artist and an assimilation of a variety of foreign works.

Return to Hungary

In 1925, Admiral Horthy, Regent of Hungary, announced a general political amnesty. Political exiles were allowed to return and resume their lives and livelihoods in Hungary, provided they forswore political activity. A flood of exiles, including Sándor Bortnyik and Lajos Kassák, returned home. Despite the stringent conditions of return, Bortnyik's attitudes and political opinions still remained on the left; in his art and artistic undertakings he continued to demonstrate,

though perhaps not as vociferously, the leftist politics which had guided him before his return. Political restrictions limited his expression, but not his activities. Indeed, with the return to the country and language of his birth, his fields of artistic endeavor expanded: from painting and graphics, Bortnyik turned to a variety of other art forms. Together with other politically neutered radicals, such as Ödön Palasovszky, Farkas Molnár, and Iván Hevesy – a former *Ma* associate – he was a founder of the *Zöld Szamár* cabaret, a Dada-influenced theater for which he designed stage sets as well as costumes. And he resumed work in his first love: graphics.

Bortnyik's return coincided with a cultural and economic revival of Hungary, which had been devastated by the First World War, losing the flower of a generation on the battlefield and two-thirds of its territory in the Trianon Treaty. Every sector of the Hungarian economy had suffered, but by the mid-1920s, the economy was in an upswing. New firms, replacing those in now-foreign territories, emerged and required advertising. Hungarian publishing was also hard-hit by the First World War. In 1890, 27 books, 1% of the books published in Hungary, were children's or youth books. From that point, the numbers increase: through the 1890s the average is 47 a year, rising, after the turn of the century, to 65 in 1905. The sheer destructiveness of the war and the concurrent total mobilization can easily be seen in the fact that in 1915, a total of 12(!) children's or youth books were published in Hungary. After the war, the numbers begin to climb slightly. In the period 1925–1933, the average was 189 a year, though the bonanza year of 1928 saw 244 books published (Komáromi 2005: 60–61).

By the late 1920s Bortnyik had become one of the most active and influential graphic artists in Hungary and Europe. His work was a reflection of the new German approach to graphic design, the idea of the *Gebrauchsgraphiker*, the graphic artist who designs not just for aesthetics, but also for commercial profit (Bakos 1993: 9–10). But his professional work was not limited to posters alone; he was also quite active as a book designer. In 1928, along with Moholy-Nagy, Farkas Molnár, Imre Kner, Róbert Berény, and several others, he was a founding member of the *Magyar Könyv- és Reklámművészek Társaság* (Hungarian Book- and Advertising-Artists Society). It is interesting to note that while book design comes first in the organization's title, most of the materials displayed at exhibitions organized by the society and most of the work done by its members was advertising, not book design. One of the stated purposes of the society was to “encourage and support Hungarian graphic and applied arts but especially Hungarian advertising and book design” (Nameny 1930: 44). Bortnyik was also a cofounder and the artistic director of a short-lived avant-garde journal, *Új Szín* (New Color), and a frequent visitor and exhibitor at the Mentor Bookshop, a bookstore and exhibition space which was the home of the interwar Budapest avant-garde. In 1929 Bortnyik

founded a private art school, *Műhely* (Workshop),¹ whose instruction and ideals were modeled on those of the Bauhaus, which Bortnyik had witnessed first-hand in Weimar. Newspaper advertisements of the period for the school refer to it as “The Hungarian Bauhaus”. Among the lecturers at the school was Alice Hermann, a pioneer in advertising psychology and a well-known contributor to the journals *Reklamelet* (Advertising Life) and *Magyar Grafika* (Hungarian Graphics) as well as the author of *A reklám lélektana* (The Spirit of Advertising), one of the first books on the psychology of advertising. Bortnyik, in addition to running the school and the studio class, as well as his own commercial studio, lectured on painting, advertising, and graphic design. Despite a relatively short life of only a decade and a small body of students, the school had a large impact on art in Hungary. In this period, from his return to Hungary until the Second World War, Bortnyik was extremely active as a poster designer and theorist. Indeed, though he continued to paint, most of his attention was devoted to poster design and commercial advertising. Alone, and later in concert with Róbert Berény, he produced scores of posters and triumphantly participated in a number of international poster shows, including those in Munich (1929), Bolzano (1930), and the Milan Triennale of 1933. In 1933 he founded, edited, and published the journal *A Plakat* (The Poster).

Hungarian modernism and its origins

It is an impossible task to create a universally applicable definition for the avant-garde and Modernism; their definitions are both relative and ever-changing, contingent upon equally time and place (Spielmann 1988: 66). In considering the work of Bortnyik, we must frame it within a fundamentally Hungarian-based definition, even as the artist himself traveled from Budapest to Vienna to Weimar and eventually back to Budapest. The definition for Hungarian Modernism or a Hungarian avant-garde also evolves over time, as the political and cultural situations change. Overall, I use the term Modernism to describe a philosophical and artistic stance which recognizes – and often celebrates – the innate artificiality of art; locating art not in the product but in the production. At the same time, it completely rejects the Renaissance-derived ideal of the credible illusionary creation to instead embrace an approach which elevates the materiality of the artwork.² The avant-garde is

1. Despite the significance of the undertaking, it has as yet received little attention. To date, the best consideration of the school, its organization, and its influence is Bakos (2003).

2. This definition, while not quoting Kassák directly, is based on a close and repeated reading of his work, and that of his cohort, in the journal *Ma*.

then defined as the extreme forward edge of Modernism, the region of visual and aesthetic experimentation, moving forward from and building on Modernism as it evolves. In the case of Hungarian art, both before and after the First World War, both Modernism and the avant-garde are closely tied to the figure of Lajos Kassák, the foremost artistic theoretician of his day.

Kassák and the Hungarian avant-garde as a whole were fascinated by the poster and its artistic possibilities and celebrated it from early on (Bakos 2009: 304–305). In the first issue of *Ma*, Kassák published an article: “The Poster and the New Painting” (Csaplár & Kassák 1999: 5–6), in which he discussed the relationship between the poster and the emerging styles of modern, more abstract painting, claiming the poster as the new and modern heir to painting. Over the next decade and in a variety of arenas, Kassák gave verbal form and support to the visual innovation and importance of the poster and poster art in Hungary. But he also very quickly connected the printed book to the poster form as well, eventually considering poster design, book design, and typography as three aspects of the same aesthetic. While the poster is not as complicated a product as the book, or perhaps precisely because it is not, the poster artist, according to Kassák, has to more closely and carefully consider the relation of the image and the text to the surface. These questions of typography, of layout, and of format, as well as the relationship between the two types of printing, preoccupied many members of the *Ma* group, including Sándor Bortnyik.

The poster evolved from a simple informational sheet – a convenient way to spread news – to a marketing tool, and to an artistic product in and of itself. As this transformation accelerated in the later nineteenth century, when the technology for the mass production of the paper and printed images rapidly developed, the aesthetics of the poster changed as well. In the 1880s and 1890s, the poster emerged as its own design field, with its own artistic aesthetic; by the first decades of the twentieth century, poster design was recognized as a separate and distinct field from painting and other graphic arts, though one nonetheless still closely related. In 1911, the city of Budapest founded the *Budapest Székesfőváros Hirdető Vállalata* (Budapest Capital City Advertising Company), which leased spaces for posters on public property but also designed and published its own advertising materials, demonstrating the economic importance and ubiquity of poster advertising.

Numerous reasons stand behind the modernist fascination with the poster, a fascination evidenced by the many modern artists who design posters. The poster is a symbol and symptom of its age, an age of industrial commodification; both object and its advertisement are mass produced and mass marketed. In the late nineteenth century, posters, initially designed as temporary, disposable objects, began to cover the walls and hoardings of the expanding city to inform the population, only to then be covered over with newer, more immediate posters: obliterated

and effaced, but not destroyed. Perhaps even more than the poster-covered wall, the condition of modernity can be expressed by the wall with posters peeling off of it, exposing those underneath, a visual archaeology of the recent past. The poster's ubiquity, the poster's flimsiness, and the poster's essentially commercial purpose combine to make it a medium attractive to modern artists.

Bortnyik's posters of the inter-war period demonstrate a well-conceived aesthetic approach. This interest – and skill – in poster design happily allowed Bortnyik to find work in advertising, a field in which he became a nationally recognized leader, but which he also saw as allowing him to remain faithful to his artistic ideals, despite government strictures (Bakos 2009: 205). Though each poster represents a solution to a unique problem, there are certain commonalities among Bortnyik's poster works: a reliance on a bright, bold, and simple palette; the use of a limited number of simple geometric forms: circles, squares, and triangles; a flattening of the image to emphasize the two-dimensionality of the medium; and the reduction of writing to a minimum, often a single word or phrase. These fundamental constructive elements are often combined with a geometric organization, often employing a diagonal composition, which adds visual dynamism to the objects.

Emblematic of the popularity of poster advertising at this time is the Hungarian advertising campaign of the Modiano cigarette company. The company, based in Trieste, formerly part of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, was still heavily reliant on that market, now broken up into numerous smaller countries. In 1922, under the direction of Sokrates Stavropoulos (Bakos 2009: 208), a novel advertising campaign was initiated in Hungary. Rather than creating a single recognizable commercial presence, by a single artist, as had been common, Stavropoulos regularly commissioned different artists to design Modiano posters, which changed every six weeks or so. Thus, the product's name, not its graphic representation, remained in the public's mind (Bakos 1994: 14).

After his return from exile, Bortnyik designed a number of posters for Modiano, which are representative of his work in the interwar period. An example of this work is his 1926 Modiano poster. On a broad red band at the base of the poster stands the single word "Modiano", of which the "M" is extremely tall while the apex of the "A" rises slightly above the other letters. Capping the apices of the "M" are two stylized heads facing each other: yellow circles with cursory noses, a single black dot for an eye, and small red mouths. Each is smoking a cigarette, the lit ends of which are touching. From the two cigarettes rises a single, caricaturish curl of smoke. Three years after this poster appeared, Iván Hevesy, the same colleague of Bortnyik's who had been so critical of the Vienna album, now lauded his poster work, stating: "...they contain a lot ideas that have a lot to do with the poster and the pictorial: the idea of color, the idea of shape, the idea of construction, the idea of composition" (Bakos 2009: 219).

Modernism and its relationship to graphic design

In considering book and magazine production, it is necessary to distinguish between a modernism of content and a modernism of design. Content modernism refers to the actual literature or text; turn of the century Hungarian literature had a stylistically and subjectively profoundly modernist stream, one aware of and responsive to literary trends in Western Europe. Hungarian writers such as Dezső Kosztolányi, Endre Ady or Mihály Babits were producing literature whose content, structure, and focus was starkly modern. These works though were being published in journals such as *Nyugat* (West), the leading Hungarian literary journal, whose form and format were rather old fashioned. Stylistically and typographically, little distinguished the literary modernist journals from their more conservative contemporaries or even the journals of the previous generation; literary modernism had far outstripped graphic modernism. It was the novelist, labor activist, and self-taught artist Lajos Kassák, one of the leading avant-garde artists and theoreticians in Hungary, who began his remarkable career in 1915 with the publication of the journal *A Tett* (The Act), a journal which introduced into Hungary experimentation with varied composition such as organizing the page structure diagonally, using different typefaces on a single page, and employing crude hand-drawn images with finished, polished pages. The journal was quickly banned by the authorities for disseminating materials from countries with which Austria-Hungary was then at war. Almost immediately, Kassák began another journal, the powerfully influential and long-lived *Ma* (Today). The journal printed translated content from artists and theoreticians from all over Europe; the contributors included: Fernand Léger, Hans Richter, Ljubomir Micić, Richard Huelsenbeck, and N. Punin. Kassák's engagement with modern art was not just theoretical, but practical as well. Through *Ma*, Kassák supported a program of art exhibitions throughout Hungary. This new journal continued and expanded the innovation of *A Tett*; the modernity of form of *Ma* was matched by the modernity of content.

Potty és Pötty: Illustrations and text

Because *Potty és Pötty* was seemingly designed without a text, the idea of textual modernism does not seem to play a role in its creation; it is the images which determine the stories, however different they may be. A close examination of a scene common to all the versions, the King and the children taking tea, reveals how the different authors approached, with varying degrees of success, the same image. Centered in the foreground is a table, whose long edge faces the viewer and which is covered by a simple white tablecloth, the edges of which are decorated with small

red squares. At either end of the table sit the children; the boy eating cake, the girl sipping coffee from a spoon. There is a slight sense of depth to their bodies but their heads are reduced to simple circles. Centered on the far edge of the table sits the King, who faces the viewer full-frontally and whose body lacks any sense of three-dimensionality. In front of the King is a bowl of fruit, on either side of which is the children's teatime repast: slices of cake, cups of coffee, and tumblers of lemonade with straws. The objects around the table, both animate and inanimate, are arranged symmetrically; only the places of the coffee and cake are switched left and right.



Figure 5. Illustration from Sándor Bortnyik: *Potty és Pötty, kalandos utazása*, Budapest: Ifjúság kiadása, n.d. Used by permission of the Cotsen Children's Library, Princeton Library

The floor, of lighter and darker green rectangular tiles, leads the viewer's eye to the background, which is elevated on three steps. In front of a wall pierced by three windows stands, to the right, facing the viewer, a Wizard dressed in a simple black gown, with zig-zag decoration on the sleeves and hem, a pattern repeated in the frilly collar and on his pointed hat. While there is a sense of mass to his body, there is no three-dimensionality; his head, too, is reduced to a simple circle. To the left are three identically dressed pastry chefs facing the Wizard and walking towards him. From left to right, they are incrementally taller; each carries a tray: two with cakes, and one with two bowls of ice cream.

This image, typical of the entire book, clearly relates to Bortnyik's poster work. Both the book illustrations and his poster work employ a simplified palette, bold geometric shapes, and an elimination of detail for the sake of greater visual impact. One significant difference between the illustrations and the poster work is the lack

of text. By definition, for advertising, a name or a concept must be included in the image, to differentiate the product from the competitors. In the case of Bortnyik's book, a fundamental aspect of its modernity is its lack of text, its sole reliance on the visual. Unlike advertising, where the word generates the image, here, the image generates the word.

The power of this artistic stance can be seen if we compare the stories associated with this single image of the children dining with the King. When closely read, the differences in the story and the varying levels of literary value and sophistication of the different language variations are immediately obvious. In all the texts presented below, the original spacing and punctuation are preserved. The Hungarian (Harangi) text reads:³

Őfelsége, szíves szóval,
tartja őket minden jóval.
Három kukta egyre hordja
a tortát, a kávé,
a gyümölcsöt, a fagylaltot,
jeges limonádét.

His Majesty, with a kind word,
offers them all sorts of goodies.
Three chefs each bring more
cake, coffee,
fruit, ice cream,
iced lemonade.

The Hungarian (Szép) text reads:

fejedelmek legfőbb gondja,
fejedelmi jó ozsonna.
volt is annyi fagylalt, torta,
három cukrász estig hordta.

The Ruler's greatest concern
is his subject's afternoon tea.
There was so much ice cream and cake,
three confectioners brought it out until evening.

3. All translations are by the author; capitalization, or the lack therefore, is preserved in the original.

The German (Sixtus) version:

Mit König Weißbart sitzen sie
am Tisch im hohen Saal.
Wie herrlich schmeckt nach langer Fahrt
das reiche Mittagsmahl!
In gleichem Schritte kommen jetzt
drei Köche flink herbei
mit Torten, Eis und Sahnenschaum –
welch feine Leckerei!

With King Whitebeard they sit
at the table in the great room.
How wonderful, after the long trip,
does the glorious luncheon taste!
In lockstep, three chefs enter now,
with cakes and ice cream and whipped cream –
such wonderful tasty treats!

And the American version, by an unknown author:

The King himself took Tatters and Scraps to dine with him at the castle. Tatters sat at his left, and Scraps sat at his right.

They were very, very hungry after their long ride, so they ate and ate – all the things they liked best.

Three chefs brought in the dessert. One carried a tray with two big dishes of ice cream – one for Tatters and one for Scraps. The second chef carried a big cherry tart, while the third chef carried a chocolate cake nearly as big as he was himself.

It should be noted that the four texts are separate and independent; they are not translations. Indeed, the various authors seem to be either ignorant of the other versions, or deliberately ignoring them. Despite their different languages, all four of the texts are similar in content, since they all have as their basis the same set of images, with the same characters, in the same sequence.

In the case of this particular image, texts refer to the cake and ice cream which feature so prominently on the table in the foreground, as well as to three chefs in the background, whose increasing heights add not only a sense of motion but also a touch of comic relief. In the case of this image, and ultimately the book as a whole, the generative relationship between text and image is the inverse of the

usual relationship. Rather than the artist illustrating a text which has been already written, here the artist and his creativity are given primacy, with the author creating a text for already-existing images. By its very nature, this inverted relationship underscores the significance Bortnyik placed on the power of the image, as evidenced in his poster work.

Bortnyik and children's books

A question which remains unanswered is why Bortnyik produced a children's book. He was well aware of the role that such literature was considered to have in forming socialist ideology (Borbély 1974: 127–129). During the Republic of Councils, despite a limping economy and material shortages, the production of children's magazines continued, because of the critical function they were understood to play, though Bortnyik did not have a role in them (Benkőné Bartha 1971: 188–189). But Bortnyik's book has no clear ideological bend. Though he was a leftist and continued to be even during his period of politically imposed silence in the 1920s and 1930s, teasing out any traditional Marxist-Leninist ideology in this book is a futile activity.

The publication of *Potty és Pötty* is interesting because it is both a novel endeavor and a novel arena for Bortnyik. Though from 1918 onward he had regularly illustrated books or designed their covers, it was not until *Potty és Pötty* that Bortnyik was responsible for an entire book: design and content. Until this book, his book design work had been for modernist literature, and those aesthetic ideals manifested in his work up to this date – in his poster designs and in his paintings – inform this printed work.

Despite Bortnyik's significance as an artist and this book's unique place in Bortnyik's oeuvre, it has received no attention from art historians. The two major Hungarian retrospectives of Bortnyik's work: one towards the end of his life, the other posthumous (Pénzes 1969; Borbély 1977), ignore it. The artist's own, hand-written biography of 1949, in the archives of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences Art History Research section (fond number: MKCS-C-1-30), make no mention of this work. And even today, it is not the Hungarian version of this book which has been reprinted, but the German.

Conclusion

Though after his return to Hungary Bortnyik did continue to paint and explore other artistic media, he devoted much of his energy and talent to advertising and

poster design. In Weimar, along with Fred Forbát and Max Buchartz, he founded an advertising agency *Neue Reklame-Gestaltung* (New Advertising Design) and pursued that artistic and professional interest after his return to Hungary (Gaßner 1986: 348). By the time Bortnyik published *Potty és Pötty*, in 1927 or 1928, he was immersed in his new role as Hungary's premier *Gebrauchsgraphiker*, a role which was only reinforced by his critically successful participation in the 1927 Mannheim show *Graphische Werbekunst: internationale Schau zeitgemäßer Reklame* (Graphic Advertising Art: International Show of Contemporary Advertising), at which he, Berény, Kassák, and others exhibited. The images of *Potty és Pötty* bear a striking resemblance to Bortnyik's poster and advertising work of the time. While the story figures exist in an obviously three-dimensional world, they are two-dimensional. The colors of the world they inhabit are broad, flat, and uninflected. It is a world with sharp geometric shapes and a world with no letters. On the billboards of the theater wall, their type is simply straight, short, black lines, a similarity which only serves to underscore the theoretical stance Bortnyik took in poster design in this period of his career, 1927–1930. Though he did not write much on his poster theory, it is readily discernible from his work. In his posters of this period, from 1925–1930, Bortnyik employs a simplified visual vocabulary. The figures and objects in the works are hard-edged, often almost disturbingly geometric. Human beings are reduced to large triangles topped by circles. The flatness of the printed surface is emphasized by a lack, or minimal use, of perspective, though shading is frequently used. The lettering, often minimal, is aligned vertically, horizontally or at a 45-degree angle. The goal of his posters was to communicate, with as little text as possible, an underlying idea, be it the superiority of Modiano cigarette paper or the tastiness of Kathreiner Malt Coffee. Bortnyik's posters were the embodiment of the Bauhaus dream of a universal visual language: a language which, without text, could clearly, succinctly, and universally communicate.

The design idea underlying this book can be discerned by closely considering the four versions, especially the artist's version; this is the volume which most clearly expresses Bortnyik's intentions, from its abstract cover to its lack of internal text. The variations of the other volumes, their different languages and different stories, underscore the ultimate power of the images on which they are based. The artist's version represents perhaps the purest manifestation of Bortnyik's aesthetic vision, a commercially based one, but one now applied, momentarily and effectively, to a children's book. His artistic vision is that of a book stripped of letters, a book stripped of words, leaving only images to tell the story.

In the end was the illustration.

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CHAPTER 4

The forgotten history of avant-garde publishing for children in early twentieth-century Britain

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This chapter considers the British interpretation of avant-garde, here called ‘romantic Modernism’, as it was manifested in children’s literature during the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s. Since all of the children’s books featured in the chapter as well as their writers and illustrators have been neglected by standard histories, the chapter is an exercise in literary recovery as much as an analysis of individual texts. It demonstrates interaction between writing and illustration for children and avant-garde arts and letters in Britain during these years.

Recovering Britain’s lost avant-garde legacy

On the basis of the small group of early twentieth-century children’s books that feature in historical surveys, it has come to be a truism that for most of the last century, British children’s literature eschewed the avant-garde. In fact, as this chapter will show, throughout the 1920s, 1930s, and 1940s an eclectic range of avant-garde texts, from Surrealist fantasies through experiments with somatic and stream-of-consciousness writing, were produced by both small independent presses and major publishing houses. Indeed, given the primacy of the British-based Arts and Crafts movement in such avant-garde centres as the Bauhaus, and the fact that as early as 1898 the influential art journal *The International Studio* was focusing attention on British children’s book illustration, it is striking that this avant-garde activity has been so thoroughly forgotten.¹ That it has is no doubt

1. See Olson (2012) on the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement on the avant-garde. The winter 1938 number of *The International Studio* carried a feature titled “Children’s Books and Their Illustrators” on the design of children’s books by its editor, Gleeson White.

connected to a general tendency in interwar Britain to turn away from the most extreme forms of avant-garde activity and the universalizing strategies associated with pure abstraction in favor of fusing avant-garde aesthetic philosophies with ancient and vernacular art forms. As Alexandra Harris documents in *Romantic Moderns: English Writers, Artists and the Imagination from Virginia Woolf to John Piper* (2010), whether drawing on early Celtic carvings, traditional folk arts or fairgrounds, there was a specifically British response to avant-garde arts and letters in which overthrowing convention and reinvigorating the arts was achieved through re-engagement with tradition and reconnection with place. As the following examples from forgotten children's novels and picturebooks demonstrate, this 'romantic Modernism' both informed and found original expression in British children's literature.

The contribution of children's writers, illustrators, and publishers to the development of British avant-garde activity may have been forgotten, but their efforts to use arts and letters in new ways to new effects stands comparison with children's books from countries such as the former Soviet Union, where an avant-garde tradition is more obvious and highly regarded. Whether for adults or children, most of those involved in the British avant-garde were attracted to art forms associated with psychology and interiority such as Surrealism, Imagism, and Symbolism rather than to more wholly cerebral and abstract approaches such as the various forms of Cubism, Futurism, and experiments in pure color. Even Vorticism, the most purely abstract avant-garde movement in Britain and which celebrated modernity in the form of mechanization and energy, had its roots in Imagism and Symbolism. Vorticism, however, was short-lived and unlike Constructivists, Futurists, and Dadaists elsewhere in Europe and North America, Vorticists had no discernible dialogue with children's literature. By contrast, literary Modernism was a particularly powerful cultural force in British publishing, and as the recovered novels and picturebooks discussed below reveal, children's books provided fertile ground for modernist writers and illustrators. For the purposes of this discussion, then, the term 'avant-garde' refers to the British context in which literary Modernism was pre-eminent and where overthrowing the traditions of the past focused on the rejection of Victorianism. Often this involved exploring ancient but predominantly local forms of primitivism on the one hand, and aspects of the personal past as it relates to subjectivity on the other. Where revolutionary arts and letters elsewhere often despised figuration and other forms of direct representation, in Britain these were retained, though they were moderated and reinflected through emphasis on patterns and symbols to make romantic Modernism the idiom and *modus operandi* of the British avant-garde.

Surrealism and British children's fiction: Jean de Bosschère *The City Curious* (1920)

Jean de Bosschère's *The City Curious* (1920) is one of a pair of illustrated narratives by this Belgian-born author-illustrator. Its companion, *Weird Islands* (1921), makes more specific references to the impact of modernity on perception, but uses the same narrative and visual devices developed in *The City Curious*, so only the first novel is discussed here. When *The City Curious* was published, de Bosschère (1878–1953) had been living in London for five years. Although in one sense he was living in exile, having left occupied Belgium in 1915, like many artists and writers at the time, de Bosschère identified more with those who shared his artistic vision than with his birthplace. In 1920 he was living in London and moving in modernist circles that included Ezra Pound and T.S. Eliot, two other writers-in-exile who chose to make their homes in England. Although he evidently wrote *Weird Islands* in English (no references are made to a translator), his first novel was “retold” in English by the writer, illustrator, criminologist, and journalist F. Tennyson Jesse.² The two may have met when Tennyson Jesse was working as a war correspondent in Antwerp.

The City Curious tells the story of Smaly and Redy, a childless couple who set off on a quest for three daughters to live in the three empty bedrooms in the beautiful home they have created. Although the basic plot has much in common with traditional quest and fairy tales (between 1917 and 1918 de Bosschère illustrated two volumes of traditional tales from Flanders, so was well versed in such stories), the book is in fact a vehicle through which he explores his interest in Surrealism. Indeed, *The City Curious* anticipates the call in the first Surrealist Manifesto of 1924 for artists to return to the unrepressed condition of childhood, “the most fertile [condition] that exists” (Breton 1924: n.pag.). Both the writing and the illustrations make use of a wide range of Surrealist devices at the levels of imagination, illustration, and the modes of telling. For example, the narrative develops in a largely associative rather than a logical manner, leaping from one set of events to another or drawing conclusions in ways that resemble automatic writing.

The City Curious was immediately recognized as an example of avant-garde writing for children. It was reviewed in *The Little Review* (1920), one of the foremost

2. Fryn – (short for Fryniwyd her own contraction of Wynifried) Tennyson Jesse (1888–1958) was one of the few women reporters to travel to the front line. She wrote about the invasion of Belgium for *Collier's Magazine* among others: see http://www.greatwardifferent.com/Great_War/Antwerp_Colliers/Antwerp2.htm

English-language periodicals for publishing and reviewing experimental writing: the same volume in which *The City Curious* was reviewed reports on the arrest of the publisher and ensuing court case following serialization of James Joyce's *Ulysses*. The review was written by John Rodker, a British modernist poet, writer, and publisher of modernist work. Rodker refers to it appreciatively as a "sinister little story" with "equally sinister decorations", referring to the many illustrations drawn and painted by the author. What Rodker means by "sinister" soon becomes apparent. Smaly and Redy's travels comprise a series of strange episodes including having their mouths replaced by beaks. At one point, Smaly sees that his wife's hands are wet and for no obvious reason assumes that they are covered in blood. Then he realizes "that poor Redy's hands were crying with fright" (de Bosschère 1920:7). The disturbing and dreamlike quality of this incident is typical of *The City Curious*. Although there is a discernible narrative arc – the couple's quest is completed and they return home with three little girls to fill their empty bedrooms – the story develops through a series of uncanny and absurd events. Fish fly through the air, objects that are normally inanimate are alive and bizarrely endowed with legs, eyes, and the ability to speak, while characters are liable to melt or morph into unexpected forms.

One of the most violent incidents in the story concerns a prisoner whose three daughters eventually become the girls that Smaly and Redy take home. In a scene reminiscent of Heinrich Hoffmann's *Struwwelpeter*, the prisoner has his head cut off by an executioner wielding a huge pair of scissors. The prisoner then carries his own head to a magician's house where in a macabre but comic scene it is re-attached. Having suffered and survived his punishment he is not, as might be expected, set free, but re-imprisoned. Like a character from Kafka, the prisoner is tattooed with epigrams that say more about him than he does himself; indeed, he rarely speaks, though his story is told by others. Much of the prisoner's back story is told by an old crow. In an elaborate moment of diegetic embedding she tells Smaly and Redy the prisoner's story up to the point when he arrives in the land where he is imprisoned. When she reaches that moment she is automatically silenced because his presence is part of that country's history and only the official Historian can tell it. Such temporal shifts and self-reflective devices added to critiques of authority (the ruler of this land where the only history is the official history is the tyrannical 'Despoiler'), characters made from found objects, and the book's absurdist conclusions about the arbitrary nature of existence make this a fully avant-garde rather than a romantic modernist text.

Childhood recaptured: Child art and children's literature in Britain

Where Jean de Bosschère's novel flaunts its allegiance to avant-garde movements, Enid Bagnold's *Alice and Thomas and Jane* (1930) develops a more subtle and

playful use of avant-garde techniques to overthrow that bastion of British children's literature, the late-Victorian/Edwardian family. Running to more than 100 pages, this is another lengthy illustrated work made up of a series of linked episodes featuring the three eponymous children. It is largely through the illustrations that Bagnold, who as a young woman had studied drawing with avant-garde champion Walter Sickert, incorporates a radical aesthetic based on children's art and imaginations.

Prior to the book's publication, children's art had been a subject of much interest in progressive fine art circles. Outside Britain, a pantheon of avant-garde artists including Kandinsky, Klee, Matisse, Picasso, Miro, and Dubuffet collected artwork by children and sometimes exhibited children's drawings and paintings alongside their own.³ Children's art was given a showcase in Britain by Bagnold's friend Roger Fry, who wrote about and mounted a widely-publicized exhibition of children's drawings at his Omega Workshop in 1917 (Fry 1917).⁴ By 1930, when *Alice and Thomas and Jane* appeared, Herbert Read, self-proclaimed anarchist, advocate for avant-garde art, and the doyen of British art criticism, was writing about the relationship between child art, primitive art, and avant-garde creativity. Despite increased interest in children's art, British artists and writers rarely acknowledged children as artists or returned the favor by creating artworks for them. Bagnold was highly unusual, then, in having a child, her nine-year-old daughter Laurian, contribute to the work of illustrating a children's book.⁵ Laurian provided nine, which is approximately a quarter, of the illustrations for the book. For the remainder, Bagnold clearly based her own drawings on Laurian's rather than encouraging Laurian to imitate her. Bagnold's drawings, though slightly more detailed and displaying greater control of some aspects of drawing and design, use a similarly naive style. Perspective, focus, and palette all enhance what is genuinely a family resemblance between mother's and daughter's illustrations. As will be seen, Bagnold borrows some of Laurian's devices for rendering time and emotional relationships. Each artist signs her illustrations; Laurian using her initials L.J. and Bagnold creating a rebus-like fusion of her initials E.B. As will be seen, the illustrations contribute substantially to making this an avant-garde book for children.

Throughout, visual and verbal modes of storytelling coincide and overlap, as they do in avant-garde collages and films. Breaking down barriers between artistic media and modes is a hallmark of avant-garde activity, so too is the mixing

3. Kümmerling-Meibauer (2013) discusses a series of earlier European exhibitions that feature both children's art and art for children.

4. Richard Schiff (1998) provides a detailed discussion of Fry's interest in writing about children's art.

5. Laurian went on to illustrate Bagnold's most successful book, *National Velvet* (1935).

of registers and the use of multiple perspectives. In *Alice and Thomas and Jane*, the mingling of visual, verbal, and stylistic modes is particularly cunning since it combines innocent and knowing perspectives and incorporates central and peripheral characters in ways that are simultaneously comically confused and destabilizing. Both words and images prioritize the children's perspective, but occasionally other centres of consciousness briefly intrude. When this happens it is done without the use of inquit tags or other overt cues to establish who is speaking or thinking. For example, at the end of an eventful day when the children are in their beds the text reads:

They each had their slates and their slate pencils and their slate sponges by their beds ready to draw in the morning while they were waiting to be wakened, and they each had a glass of water, and a handkerchief under their pillows. So they were done for the night... (Bagnold 1930: 60)

Until the final sentence, this could be the thoughts of the children: a kind of collective omniscient overview of their own sense of having been put to bed. But "So they were done for the night" establishes it as a moment of free indirect speech which allows a glimpse into their governess' mind; it is really *she* who is done for the night. Some passages are almost impossible to attribute. For example:

The sun was being murdered in his bed, and was sending up streams of blood like a squashed octopus all over the sky. The village was shining like a ruby, and all the cobbles were red. (Bagnold 1930: 45)

This is presented as third-person narration, but the imagery and vocabulary are childish, suggesting that Laurian (and her siblings?) may have contributed to the storytelling as well as to the pictures. The book's frame supports such a reading. It begins with a Preface in which the narrating persona seems to be closely identified with Bagnold, a view supported by the fact that the illustration that accompanies it is one by her rather than Laurian. The narrator explains that the book is based on stories told to her three children and that "during the time Alice and Thomas and Jane ran about the house and rushed about the village and did all the things my children would like to have done", her children for once "sat still" (n.pag.).

Pictures contribute both to the storytelling and characterization: images enter into characters' thoughts and feelings and often employ a kind of visual form of free indirect speech. For instance, when Jane gets into trouble with Cook after a midnight escapade and "Cook is absolutely Furious", the image does not show Jane's reaction to Cook's anger but her mother's. A diminutive, disempowered mother stands cowed and anxious before an enormous, angry Cook while the real culprit, Jane (nowhere to be seen) is unaffected by Cook's rage. The mother-cook image is another of Bagnold's drawings (her entwined initials are clearly visible in

the top right-hand corner) though as in the description of the sun as a squashed octopus, it is not clear whose point of view is being given. Readers are left wondering whether this insight into the relationship between Cook and her employer is meant to be Jane's, her mother's, or a joke between the narrator and a knowing reader.

The fact that her mother thinks it is more worrying that Cook is angry than that Jane was cooking over a fire unsupervised in the middle of the night, and that she is unaware that her youngest daughter has been secretly – and nakedly – towed behind a boat being managed by smugglers on whom the children are spying, typify the child's-eye view of events. Indeed, the three children are often confounded by and slightly contemptuous of their parents – and, indeed, all the other adults they encounter. In their eyes grown-ups tend to be tediously predictable, interested in the wrong things, and unaware of what is happening around them. When Alice has slipped out of the house early in the morning to stow away in an aircraft parked near by family's house and is eventually returned by two airmen to the bosom of her family (who have not realized that she is missing) she notes, "Father was in his Jaeger dressing gown, because it was only half past eight" (Bagnold 1930:21). When taken to the beach by a maid rather than their usual governess they know they can escape because, "The school-room maid always came on the beach with high heels" (27). On one of the many occasions when he has been troublesome, Thomas dives past the maid into bathroom and tunes out the sound of her scolding by turning the bath on "and then he could only see her lips moving" (46). As already seen in the incident with Cook, their mother too is well understood by the children. When they are in disgrace and know they ought to be having lunch upstairs in the nursery the text reports, "they had lunch downstairs [because] mother hated punishments that punished herself. And she liked lunch downstairs" (84).

As well as incorporating a child's drawings, *Alice and Thomas and Jane* experiments with combining words and images in ways that reference children's play. Arguably, all the children's adventures are simply collaborative games, stories, and fantasies used to pass time in their highly predictable lives where Monday is "baked-egg day" and the eggs are always "baked in little dishes with handles" followed by "a boiled suet pudding, with treacle separate" and "They always had some sort of home affair at eleven o'clock, like milk and biscuits. And they had early workmen's tea at four" (47). The secret world of the children's games, by contrast, does away with such monotony, and a wholly different hierarchy prevails from the one the adults believe they are managing. As the children see it, Thomas is truly in charge of the nursery and the children only appear biddable in order to deflect the adult gaze. Meanwhile, their play provides them with good opportunities for observing (and sometimes misinterpreting) the world around them, as when they

accept what they have obviously been told – that Father is poor – although all the evidence of the text shows that they live very comfortably. This perspective is, of course, a device used by an adult writer, often at the expense of rather than in collusion with child readers. Such use of double address is not, however, one of the avant-garde features of the book, but a well-established device in children's literature, used to particularly good effect in *fin de siècle* and early twentieth-century works such as those by Kenneth Grahame, Edith Nesbit, and the William stories of Richmal Crompton (Wall 1991:35).

Laurian's drawings constitute an original and less duplicitous way of injecting an authentic child's version of scenes and events into the narrative. It is also the illustrations that enable Bagnold to incorporate without labouring the point such avant-garde concerns as multiple perspectives and renderings of the subjective nature of time in a book for children. The picture of "Mummy having a baby" (Figure 1), for instance, looks in on a scene when several things are happening at once, and different characters are experiencing events in different ways: Thomas is being scolded at the same time that the nurse is bringing Mummy the baby and Alice is watching. The sense of simultaneous action is achieved through characteristically childish simplification in the drawing: although there is an attempt at perspective in the placement of a picture and fireplace on what is meant to be the back wall, in fact the figures are all on the same two-dimensional picture



Figure 1. Illustration by Laurian Jones from Enid Bagnold: *Alice and Thomas and Jane*. London: William Heinemann, 1930. Used by permission of Laurian d'Harcourt

plane, which makes every action equivalent and implies each is happening in the same moment. This effect is enhanced by labelling; such mingling of text and image is typical of both children's drawing and avant-garde artworks as in the way newspapers, tickets, and other print materials are incorporated in collages by Picasso and Braque. Bagnold borrows and adapts Laurian's visual storytelling techniques to experiment with rendering time so, for instance, on the morning when the airmen return stowaway Alice, Bagnold's drawing incorporates an image of Thomas on his way to the airplane *after* it has already taken off in a picture primarily about Alice hiding in the airplane and thinking lovely thoughts *before* it leaves the ground.

As these examples show, *Alice and Thomas and Jane* makes use of the naïve, unreasoned, spontaneous and exuberant attributes of childhood associated with the "infantilist aesthetic" that had become a defining feature of some key areas of the European avant-garde (Pankenier 2014). It does so, however, with a lightness of touch and dependence on humour that make it irreverent rather than iconoclastic, reforming rather than revolutionary. In its use of established genres such as the family and adventure story it also reaches a romantic modernist accommodation between tradition and innovation. The resulting mixture found favor with the British public in ways more abrasive manifestations of the avant-garde generally failed to do, whatever the age of the implied audience: *Alice and Thomas and Jane* went into a second edition in the year of publication and was reprinted five times between 1930 and 1966.

The Émigré effect: Adapting European techniques to British tastes

Although she was unique in Britain in collaborating with a child illustrator, Bagnold was not the only maker of books for children who incorporated avant-garde ideas about children's play and attributes of children's drawing in books for children. The Hungarian-born writer-illustrator known simply as "Klara" often imitates children's drawings in her picturebooks. Klara is one of a number of writers and illustrators who settled in Britain in the late 1930s as fascism and war spread across Europe. Most came from countries where the avant-garde was not moderated and re-inflected as it was in Britain, and where respect for children as artists was more embedded. As can be seen in the work of Klara and the better-known Polish duo Lewitt-Him, discussed below, these émigré makers of picturebooks adjusted to the requirements of romantic Modernism with wit and style. *7 Jolly Days* (1942) incorporates the letters, thoughts (conveyed through free indirect speech), drawings, and pronouncements of a schoolgirl – also called Klara – about how she spent one Easter vacation. Like *Alice and Thomas and*

Jane, the illustrations in *7 Jolly Days* incorporate labels and other features of children's art, though in more self-conscious ways since the author-illustrator Klara also inserts asides that directly address readers and so break the illusion of being in the world of the book. For example, before Klara comes to stay with her cousins her aunt asks her to write and say what time her train will arrive. When the aunt does not receive the required letter the narrator reports, "(Klara *did* write that letter, I can tell you that, for I saw her doing so)" (n.pag.). Other aspects of this picturebook also emphasize avant-garde themes and preoccupations such as speed, machines, and transport. Klara rushes here, dashes there, and speeds off in an impressive red automobile to catch the trains that will take her from the world of school to her cousins' large house in the country and back again (Figure 2).



Figure 2. Illustration by Klara: *7 Jolly Days*. London & Glasgow: William Collins, 1942

Like *Alice and Thomas and Jane*, *7 Jolly Days* is set in a large family home where, from the children's perspective, the things they do are all-important. Their games are absorbing and creative: they mount an exhibition, put on a circus show with clowns, "Red Indians" and magicians, and create a zoo from local animals and pets. To publicize their events they create elaborate posters and a newspaper complete with advertisements; all of these are reproduced in the book. These texts-within-a-text point to the importance of print and popular media to modern culture and modernist arts, but they also highlight the constructed nature of the "reality" of the book's storyworld. The inclusion of print matter within a printed book makes *7 Jolly Days* a kind of three-dimensional collage with moving parts (covers and pages) all based around children's play and artwork. Despite its clear avant-garde themes and stylistic features, the story exemplifies the hybrid (traditional and experimental) nature of the British avant-garde in the way it makes a middle-class home in the English countryside the place where children can be their most spontaneous and creative. Moreover, since the goal of the entertainments Klara and her cousins mount is to raise money for charity (they send five shillings and six pence to Dr Barnardo's Homes at the end of the vacation), it harks back to the Victorian "ministering children" tradition of British children's literature.

A similar adjustment to avant-garde elements characterizes the work of Jan Le Witt and George Him (the pair published under the name Lewitt-Him), who started working in London in 1937. For instance, at one level *The Football's Revolt* (1939) is a politically pointed, highly topical, parable about the responsibilities and abuses of power supported by illustrations that clearly draw on avant-garde movements from Cubism to the Absurd. At another level it is a rather traditional moral tale about the consequences of failing to treat others well that employs such familiar features as children who are wiser than adults and a victory for the weak over the strong, all in a pastoral setting.

The Football's Revolt tells the story of a football match from the ball's point of view – and this football is tired of being kicked around by 22 strong men just because "he was nothing but a football, who could not even talk English" (n.pag.). When it is kicked high into the air, the football finds a berth on a comfortable cloud and refuses to come down. He is joined by all the other objects the players throw at him to try to knock him down until the air is filled with a bizarre range of items. Eventually the grown-ups retire defeated, and the children invade the pitch and speak nicely to the football, who agrees to join in their game. Although it is a well told story that makes good use of carnivalesque reversal and anthropomorphism, what the story is about is much less experimental than how it is told, and in this the illustrations are central. Lewitt-Him's images and design make use of a wide range of avant-garde techniques including distorted figures and emphasis on both pattern and the two-dimensional nature of the painted surface. They also display

expressive use of color, experiments with rendering dynamic motion on the page, and incorporation of collage effects, unusual perspectives, and a delight in excess. Throughout, the book's images and design display a tendency towards abstraction that sets them apart from traditional British children's books; however, as in the other examples discussed, humor and familiar features from children's literature are used to make this another variation on the practice of romantic Modernism.

One area where mingling traditional and avant-garde elements occurs less frequently in children's books published in Britain in the 1930s and 1940s is those in which the illustrations take the form of photographs. Photographic pioneers Gilbert Cousland and Zoltan Wegner, for instance, produced books comprising photo-collages and dioramas made up of found objects from the nursery, garden, and beach. Using a mixture of lighting effects borrowed from the cinema and games with perspective facilitated by cameras, their images make even the most mundane objects seem strangely new and interesting. Their photographic illustrations constitute a response through the medium of the children's book to the challenge posed by leading Surrealist André Breton in 1925 to replace illustrations with photographs (Krauss 1999: 98).

The assemblages photographed by Wegner to illustrate stories such as Hans Christian Andersen's *The Emperor's New Clothes* and *The Little Mermaid* go further in the way they draw on avant-garde set designs and experiments with puppets. Wegner injects unsettling, multi-perspectival effects through the use of shadows, mirrors, and other reflecting surfaces and placement. As seen in the cover image for *The Emperor's New Clothes* (1945) (Figure 3), the reflections allow several views of figures to be seen simultaneously (back, front, and profile, above and below, real and reflection). The appearance is realistic, but it also plays with time and point of view in ways similar to Cubist art and, particularly, the experimental photographic images created by Alvin Langdon Coburn, an American associated with the British Vorticists. Coburn's portraits of influential figures use multiple exposures to create a single image composed of a succession of photographs. Although they are in fact static, the images create a sense of movement, including movement through time, which equates to the multiple times and vantage points featured in Cubist artworks. Superficially Wegner's compositions look simple, but as viewers take note of the interactions between the reflecting surfaces, the effect is similar to a Coburn or Cubist portrait.

Avant-garde echoes

The similarities between Wegner's and Coburn's photographs lie more in their effect than their appearance, and though as an experimental photographer



Figure 3. Cover with a photograph by Zoltan Wegener from Hans Christian Andersen: *The Emperor's New Clothes*. Glasgow: Collins, 1945

Wegner is likely to have been familiar with the more famous Coburn's work, it has not been possible to establish a direct connection. But that those who were creating books for children in Britain did deliberately evoke and allude to avant-garde novels and artworks is evident in two quite different works: *Fanny Penquite* (1932), a short novel for children by Edith Saunders, and *The Little Train* (1946), by Graham Greene and his then mistress, Dorothy Craigie (on the first edition only Craigie's name appeared on the cover). I have written at length about the Greene-Craigie collaboration elsewhere (Reynolds 2013), so it suffices briefly to show how Craigie's illustrations forge connections between what appears to be a traditional story about a little engine that runs away to see the world but discovers that there's no place like home, and T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland* (1922) and *Four Quartets* (1936–1941). For example, in a painting of the huge terminus where the Little Train is overwhelmed by the noise, movement, crowds, and pressures of the metropolis, Craigie inscribes the name "Thunder Clap" on the largest engine, bringing to mind the fifth section of *The Waste Land* V, "What the Thunder Said". Similarly, Craigie's images show a "city over the mountains" from the same section of the poem, while the train's terrified flight from the city seems to go through the same sinister mountain terrain Eliot describes. As will become clear, *Fanny Penquite* too references examples of high modernist writing and experimental painting in the romantic modern mode.

Fanny Penquite is the only children's book by Edith Saunders, a minor translator and historical novelist of the 1940s. Saunders's publishers, Oxford University Press, commissioned a cover for the volume from one of their established illustrators, Lynton Lamb (Figure 4). Lamb's use of woodcut is a fine example of the way British artists were reinterpreting traditional art forms and vernacular culture to wholly new effect. In this case stylized use of forms and shadows cut across traditional expectations of wood-engraved scenes of rural life to create a disturbing, menacing image largely derived from the square-shouldered rider and the powerful horse which bring to mind the work of the German-based group known as "Der Blaue Reiter" (The Blue Rider) and the Flemish artist Frans Masereel. The figure of the girl, whose back is to the viewer, prepares readers to experience events through her eyes. The seven much less accomplished internal illustrations were done by Saunders herself. Although rather crude in execution, they match the story well. In keeping with this tale about death and resurrection in a small village, Saunders's watercolor paintings take their cue from the work of her contemporary, Stanley Spencer. Spencer's *Resurrection, Cookham* (1926) was described by *The Times* in 1927 in terms that highlight the mingling of old and new approaches to art typical of romantic Modernism; it was, the reviewer said, the work of a Pre-Raphaelite shaking hands with a Cubist as well as "the most important picture painted by any

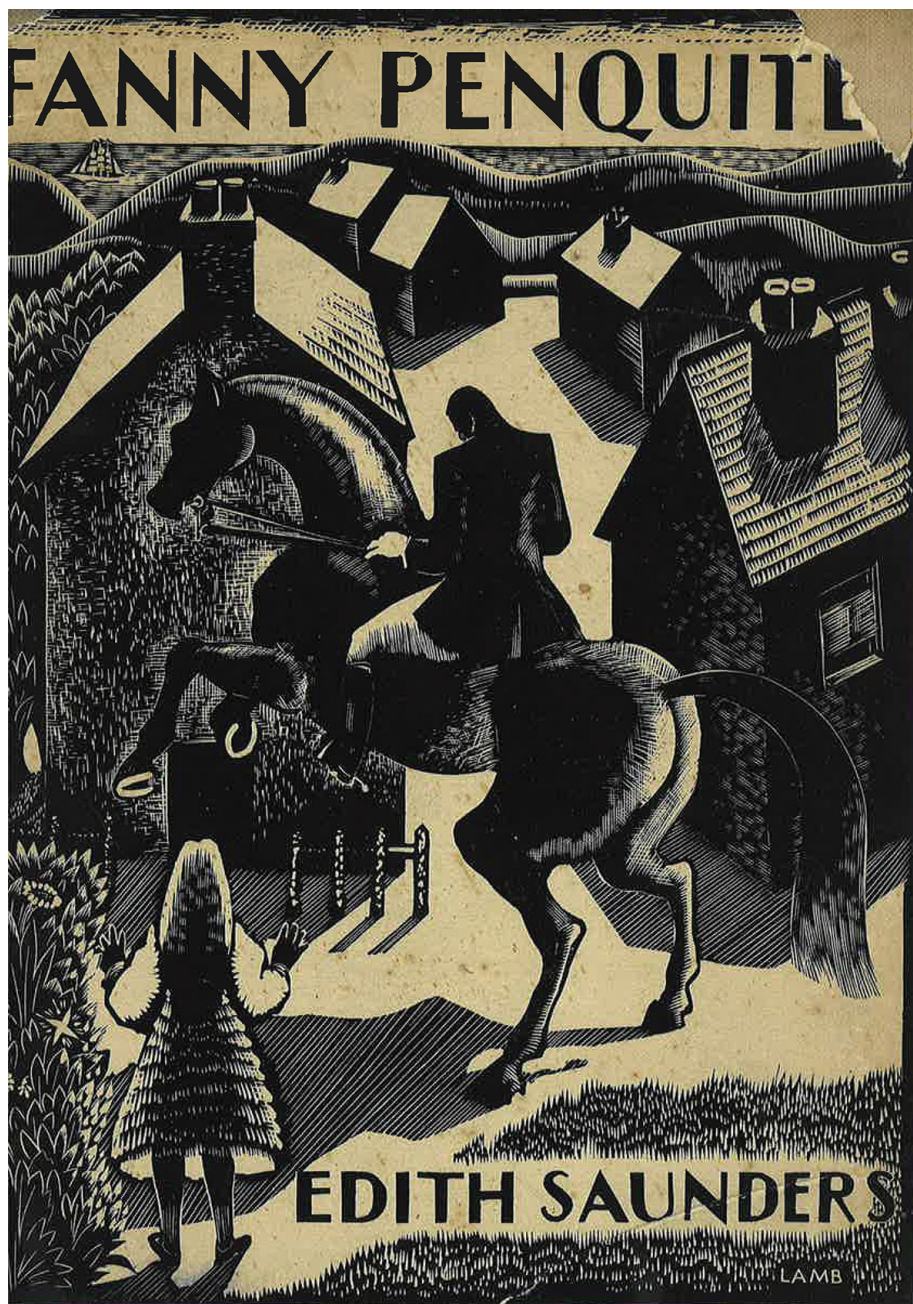


Figure 4. Cover from Edith Saunders: *Fanny Penquite*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932

English artist the present century” (in Chilvers 1999: n.pag.). Spencer’s painting, in common with all his images of Cookham, combines sex and religion, love and dirt, the heavenly and the ordinary (Hauser 2001). Like Spencer, Saunders shows figures rising joyfully from the local churchyard on the day of judgement, and though her images feature figures in pure white, especially in combination with her text, they are made of the same potent mixture (Figure 5).



Figure 5. Illustration from Edith Saunders: *Fanny Penquite*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1932. Used by permission of Oxford University Press

Fanny Penquite tells the story of the last minutes in an adolescent girl’s life (calculating the passage of time is complex as the text begins with a minute-by-minute account of Fanny’s walk through the village, traverses a century in a sentence, and then moves from human time to eternity). The book is largely focalised through

Fanny, who moves through her village in the manner of Leopold Blume walking around Dublin or Clarissa Dalloway moving through London. She sees and is seen. Her sensibilities are heightened; the language is saturated, and everything she sees and hears is shot through with an intensity of feeling. Even insentient objects such as the bridge that she crosses at the start of her walk are imbued with value: "The bridge was clear and static; each stone stood out with equal emphasis" (Saunders 1932: 3). As this sentence illustrates, meanings are not always exact (how can a bridge be clear and static?), but the sense is in the sounds and feelings more than any literal meaning.

In keeping with much modernist literature, focalization as it relates to Fanny is coenesthetic and somatic: she experiences her world largely through sensory impressions, and the body is regarded as the site of truthful emotion. When the text pulls away from Fanny's inner world it is to offer vignettes that add information about her and display that she is just one of many centres of consciousness into which the narrator can enter at any given time. So, when Fanny passes Mrs. Samuel's house, Mrs. Samuel sees her and thinks: "She [referring to Fanny] was fourteen years old, and tall and thin and active and had not dreamed of love; and Mrs. Samuel heated her teapot, her Sunday teapot adorned with a picture of the Good Prince Consort, and continued to think of Mrs. Tremeer" (4). At several points the text mentions that Fanny has not yet thought of love, but it protests too much. She is fascinated by a voluptuous figurehead and an attractive classmate who is not as good as she should be according to village thinking. Fanny's mother prophesies that, "That girl will come to a bad end, sure enough" and the thought gives Fanny's "strained thoughts" some relief (12). The strained thoughts are associated with an uncomfortable, unfamiliar tension in her body that clearly would have been transformed into erotic desire if it had had the chance: as she looks at William Tremeer's home, "Fanny's prosaic mind was suspended by an unfamiliar emotion that swept on to her, fixing her where she stood as though entranced" (18).

A somatic crisis is reached when Fanny becomes aware of her own heart beating to the sound of horses' hooves as the handsome local Squire amorously pursues the lovely Miss Anna de Lacey. The horse startles, tramples Fanny to death and "All the world looked on, but Fanny Penquite was no longer of it" (21). The memorial on her grave proclaims that she "leaves a whole village bereaved. UNTIL THE TRUMP SHALL SOUND", signalling an interlude under the ground where Fanny lies buried next to relatives and other figures from the village. Like the Sleeping Beauty she wakes after a hundred years, and with all the dead in the churchyard she is resurrected. Before she ascends to Paradise there is a form of pageant in which past, present, and future mingle as do figures great and small, old and young, human and mythic. Like Stanley Spencer's *Resurrection, Cookham*,

Saunders's short story offers a generous, democratic, and optimistic version of the end of time.

As Fanny observes those around her it seems that her interrupted pubescence is shaping her experience of Paradise: she watches as the still-handsome squire and the perpetually beautiful Miss de Lacey are united in a kiss of "subdued and sanctified joy" (40). A great deal of kissing goes on in Fanny's Paradise, and though it is erotically charged, it is repeatedly referred to as pure and sexless, making eternity rather dull for some of the more passionate figures who find themselves among the Good. The book ends with Fanny having a fleeting recollection of "an unfamiliar and intense emotion that had come and then passed away she could not remember how" before she is left to "long hours of eternity passed in unchanging pleasure" (43).

Edith Saunders's book is clearly a rebuttal of Puritan and Victorian stories of children who die young and in which to die young and sinless is regarded as a blessing; Fanny's is a life unfulfilled, and her heaven reeks of missed opportunities and sexual frustration. In style and references – but perhaps particularly in its acknowledgement of erotic desire in the young and its celebration of English tradition while it attacks the stultifying nature of provincial life – *Fanny Penquite* constitutes a fully modernist, fully British text for children. The final example of how children's literature interacted with aspects of the avant-garde offers a very different view of the English countryside, its traditions, and its relationship with childhood.

Experimental landscapes: Avant-garde arts meet the English landscape

Hermit in the Hills (1945) is the penultimate book in a series of five "camping and tramping" stories by David Severn (penname of David Unwin, son of the British publisher Sir Stanley Unwin). Previous books in the series, Severn's first attempts at writing for children, had acknowledged avant-garde interests through sporadic musings on the nature of time, memory, dreams, and the unconscious. At the start of the series Bill Robinson, the central adult character, is an aspiring young writer who makes friends with a group of children who are on holiday in the countryside. From his travels in a gypsy caravan and friendship with gypsies to being a hirsute writer who opts to live a simple life in the country, records and analyzes his dreams, and whose creativity seems to owe something to his interest in children, there is much of the bohemian in Bill – nicknamed Crusoe by the children. The links to bohemia and the avant-garde become stronger as the series develops and the group begins to travel with the Crosbys, a family of holiday walkers whose father is a painter. By *Hermit in the Hills*, painting, primitivism, abstraction, folk

culture, and the importance of spending time in nature to purifying perception are important themes. Where elsewhere avant-garde arts tended to focus on cities, electricity, speed, and machines, in British avant-garde arts the kind of retreat from urban, metropolitan life to the deep countryside featured in Severn's novels was equally common. This did not, however, mean rejecting the interests and perceptions associated with city life. Instead, they are reworked in rural contexts.

The opening scene *Hermit in the Hills*, for instance, shows the children climbing a high hill from which they get the kind of aerial view that at the time was associated with photographs and films shot from skyscrapers: from the hill "men were small and puny, insignificant as ants on a pathway" (Severn 1945: 141). Of course, this landscape is devoid of modern buildings, but similar perspectives are used in several of Joan Kiddell-Monroe's dynamic scraperboard illustrations, implicitly rejecting the suggestion that such vistas can only be achieved in cities. In keeping with romantic Modernism, Severn's text and its illustrations convey a sense of the organic and spiritual connection between the ancient stone buildings and the landscape. As he surveys the countryside Crusoe thinks the buildings are "stronger and more vigorously beautiful than anything he had seen before" (12). *Seeing* is the leitmotif of *Hermit in the Hills*; particularly with regard to the arts. Different members of the group are attempting to become better at writing, drawing, and painting. In one of the opening discussions of the subject Mr. Crosbie tells the children that "People don't use their eyes enough" and warns them about the difficulties faced by those who see things in new ways.

For the children, simply being in the countryside heightens their ability to look closely, and each begins to understand the difference between rendering things realistically and rendering them truthfully. The process is accelerated when they encounter the hermit of the title; a self-taught artist who has instinctively developed a form of primitive abstraction that Mr. Crosbie immediately recognizes is superior to his own attempts to break with realism. The hermit's vision is grounded in the landscape, as his visitors realize when they visit his "gallery" – a cave lit only by sunlight at sunrise. This collective moment of witnessing is the culmination of the transformations that have been taking place in each member of the group during their time in the countryside. Mr. Crosbie's paintings, for instance, become simplified and more vital while Pamela, one of the children who hopes to be a writer, has a spiritual epiphany that leads her to understand that this world is "only a shell and that another, altogether stranger, world encircled them" (134). As the holiday draws to a close they hike deeper into the hills where "they shed the last of their old ideas and expectations and, as moths emerge at twilight, spread wings in a dream-like world where they felt that anything might happen" (175). While "Compared with the hermit," who lives his whole life in the deepest parts of the hills, "they might be looking through dusty windows!" the children understand

that they have been changed in ways unavailable to “people, crowded together in the towns out and away beyond the hills” (203). As these sentiments illustrate, Severn’s version of the countryside mingles the nostalgia for past ways of living and working associated with the Arts and Crafts Movement with the aesthetic of transformation that developed as part of romantic Modernism. In their desire to break free from habitual ways of seeing and thinking, the ideas are as radical as those that underpinned European avant-garde movements, but the determination to avoid revolution and to stay connected with the ancient past as inscribed in the landscape by nature and earlier peoples is markedly different. Works such as those discussed here – and there are others – show children’s literature as one of the forces that shaped this very British avant-garde.

Acknowledgement

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PART 2

The impact of the Russian avant-garde

CHAPTER 5

The square as regal infant

The avant-garde infantile in early Soviet picturebooks

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This chapter focuses on geometric regions that serve as shared “picture primitives” in Russian avant-garde art and early Soviet picturebooks for children to highlight the interrelatedness between the infantile art of the avant-garde and avant-garde work that actually involves an infantile audience. Examining work with infantile aspects by Kazimir Malevich, El Lissitzky, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Vladimir Lebedev, Weld uses an interdisciplinary approach to juxtapose their work to children’s drawings, children’s perception, and children’s cognition to gain insight into their use of geometry and perspective and to raise new questions about the origin and impact of the avant-garde style.

Introduction

The Russian avant-garde artist Kazimir Malevich once called his infamous *Chernyi kvadrat* (Black Square, 1915) “a living regal infant” (Malevich 1995: 53), just as he termed an earlier version of it an “embryo of all possibilities” (Malevich 1976: 186).¹ In both cases Malevich uses the language of humankind’s earliest developmental forms to symbolize the new beginnings and unbounded potential represented by radical avant-garde art; with the Black Square, art both dies and is born again – in its most minimal and infantile form. In dialogue with the infantile primitivism burgeoning in avant-garde practice at this time, Malevich’s use of infancy here conflates the search for the most minimal components of art with the construction of the ‘infant/child’ as ideal primitive and originary subject for the avant-garde’s search for origins and a new beginning. The avant-garde’s radical notion of infancy provides the illusion of an absolute material minimum with maximal signifying

1. Unless otherwise noted, all translations from Russian are mine.

potential. In this sense, the infant subject's preverbal status corresponds to the boundless space before signification variously theorized by psychoanalysts, such as Jacques Lacan (1977) and Julia Kristeva (1980, 1984), or philosopher Giorgio Agamben, who argues in *Infancy and History* that the "Ur-limit in language" is "the very transcendental origin of language, nothing other than infancy" (Agamben 1993:51). Infancy thus serves as an originary site and new creative territory to be exploited by adult theorists, psychoanalysts, philosophers, and avant-garde artists, who engage in the suspect primitivist practice of speaking for or about the infant, infancy, or the infantile.²

I would argue that the celebration of the infantile, like other primitivisms Robert Goldwater analyzes in his study of *Primitivism in Modern Art* (Goldwater 1986:165),³ augurs a return to fundamentals, such as the square and other minimal geometric components that prove prevalent in the infantile primitivism of the avant-garde and early Soviet picturebooks. Thus, the avant-garde, which by its very nature occupies the forefront of experimentation, as is evoked by the originally militaristic term for the vanguard conventionally applied to a period of extreme experimentation in the arts in early twentieth century Russia, finds in the infantile a frontier that is both new and final and, as constructed by primitivism, first or original. Here, by focusing on geometric regions that serve as shared "picture primitives" (Willats 1997:98) in Russian avant-garde art and early Soviet picturebooks for children, I wish to highlight the interrelatedness between the infantile art of the avant-garde and avant-garde work that actually involves an infantile audience. I would argue that both share common features, often deriving from a starting point in infantile primitivism, or the imitation of children's own creative production, and developing similar aesthetic principles like a new attention to the child as addressee, a participatory ethos that involves the child reader in creative and constructive action, and an artistic attempt to more fully enter into the perception and cognition of the child. Examining work with infantile aspects by Kazimir Malevich, El Lissitzky, Vladimir Mayakovsky, and Vladimir Lebedev, I use an interdisciplinary approach to juxtapose their work to children's drawings, children's perception, and children's cognition to gain new insight into their use of geometry and perspective and to raise new questions about the origin and impact of the avant-garde style.

2. The idea of speaking for the other has come under critical scrutiny in the past few decades. See, for example, Alcoff (1991–1992) and Adams (2005).

3. In his study of primitivism, Goldwater writes about the search for "basic forms" in modern art, and "the themes of simplicity, fundamentality, and universality" in the theories of the abstract schools (Goldwater 1986:165).

Kazimir Malevich and the avant-garde infantile

Elsewhere I argue that the practice of infantile primitivism and the development of the infantalist aesthetic helped drive the Russian avant-garde's course to a profound minimalism and toward the achievements of non-objective art and trans-sense language (Pankenier 2006; Weld 2014). I conclude by comparing Malevich's own view of the famous "Black Square", which itself functions as an extreme endpoint and artistic manifesto, in the light of a deliberate and self-conscious infantilization of art. Indeed, when Malevich reflects on artistic evolution in *Ot kubizma i futurizma k suprematizmu* (From Cubism and Futurism to Suprematism, 1916; Malevich 1995), he calls the square "The face of the new art!" and terms it "The first step of pure creation in art" (Malevich 1995:53). For Malevich, what would appear to be reductivist minimalism and the eradication of form (zero-form) actually marks a new beginning and path forward – through basic geometry and new building blocks. The metaphor of the child's "first steps" recalls the earliest beginnings and basic actions that mark the start of a new artistic journey. He forcefully equates the square with the infancy of the new art when he declares, "The square is a living regal infant" (Malevich 1995:53). Having reduced art to this most basic component, a dark shape within the geometric frame, Malevich regards the square as the face of a newborn art now in its infancy. Malevich uses the word "regal", or more literally "imperial", to emphasize the vast power it will wield – as well as the imperialist aims of avant-garde art. Through an avant-garde reversal of emphasis and expectations, the black color becomes not death and destruction, but also alive and all-encompassing, just as a later study in white called "Suprematism" (1918) might be seen to represent the space before meaning. I would argue that it is the unlimited signifying potential of the semiotic evident here that attracts the avant-garde to infancy as an "ur-limit" in Agamben's words – of art as well as language.

Such challenges to interpretation represent what is most radical about the Russian avant-garde's non-objective art or trans-sense language, which investigate the limits of meaning. Indeed, contemporary audiences often dismissed modern art precisely because of its reductive and infantile features. As Jonathan Fineberg observes, "The idea that modern art looks like something a child could do is one of the oldest clichés around; it has been with us since the inception of the avant-garde" (Fineberg 1997: 2). If reactions to the infantile traits of modern art have been used to dismiss modern art, then Malevich's bold claims about his "Black Square" instead celebrate this idea, as typical of infantile primitivism, which involves a conscious revaluation of the childish within the context of a primitivist celebration of the 'primitive'. Malevich thus indicates that the "achievement" of modern art is the paring away of everything. When he speaks of the birth of a new art (which actually represents the rebirth of old art in the spirit of the avant-garde), he not

only hints at an archaic origin of art, but also at the birth of art on an individual level, such as in the child's artistic development. Typical of primitivism and infantile primitivism, this conflation relates to the overextended embryological notion that ontogeny recapitulates phylogeny, which was popular at this time.⁴ Indeed, when Malevich calls the Black Square "the embryo of all possibilities" (Kovtun 1981:235), he highlights its originary and as yet indeterminate potential, while using the language of embryology.⁵ His phrasing again emphasizes the interpretive fertility of what otherwise would have seemed to be the reduction of meaning. Malevich's own words thus signal that he too partakes in the widespread infantilism of the avant-garde.

Shape, geometry, and the infantile

It is Malevich's drive toward zero-form and the minimal components of art that delivers him to the productive potential of the infantile. Indeed, his Suprematist art is often defined by minimal geometric components, particularly the square. Regarding avant-garde art in the context of the infantile primitivism of the Russian avant-garde reveals the fact that children's own drawings also begin with basic regions as the picture primitives used to constitute the image. In his study of children's drawing development in *Art and Representation*, John Willats mentions that "young children derive their drawings from object-centered internal shape descriptions, and older children derive their drawings from viewer-centered descriptions" (Willats 1997:316). The geometric deconstruction of complex shapes underlying children's drawings can be explained from a variety of perspectives, including the aphorism based on Luquet's 1913 and 1927 studies that declares "The young child draws what he knows and the older child draws what he sees" (Willats 1997:150). Luquet also suggested that children seek to produce recognizable representations; so if we recognize things by shape, effective representation of shape is key. In *The Child's Conception of Space* (1956), Piaget and Inhelder include an ingenious study that found that younger children (under 7 or 8 years), when presented with "sticks" and "discs" in foreshortened positions, ie. a "stick" head-on and a "disk" edge-on, represented a stick as a line or long region and a disc as a round region, while older children used a dot or small round region to represent the stick presented head-on and a line to represent the disk presented edge-on (Willats 1997:299–300). They

4. For an intellectual history of the concept, see *Ontogeny and Phylogeny* (Gould 1977).

5. In a 1915 letter to Matiushin, Malevich comments on "Black Square" as it first emerged as the backdrop for *Pobeda nad solntsem* (Victory over the Sun, Kovtun 1981:234–241).

claim that the child's conception of space changes from a system of spatial relations based on topological geometry to one based on projective geometry (Willats 1997:300). They further argue that young children draw what they know because they are not aware of their own viewpoints (Piaget & Inhelder 1956: 178). Indeed, modern and primitivist art seem to strive, through conscious and artificial means, to eliminate the extraneous considerations – or viewpoints – that art, or the adult artist, has acquired through experience and training. A focus on geometry in particular makes this evident. Indeed, the “first representational stage to be derived from the image, which Marr called the *primal sketch*, consists of a description of the intensity changes and local geometry of the image” (Willats 1997:152).

In his own experiments, Willats also finds “a highly significant correlation between the sequence of drawing systems defined in terms of the rules of secondary geometry and the developmental sequence defined in terms of chronological age” (294). A telling artistic juxtaposition emerges when Willats notes that “a third class, corresponding to the 3D model stage, would contain Cubist paintings [...] and children's drawings belonging to the stage of intellectual realism such as the tadpole figures” (153). Willats later remarks that Analytical Cubism aspired to “represent objects as they really are, rather than as they seem,” which approaches Marr's terminology of the “object-centered description” (156). Such studies of visual representation from a cognitive perspective thus reinforce the similarity between geometric components and object-centered representations typical of both children's and Cubist art, which reject conventional perspective and flatten the third and fourth dimensions into two. Yet, we might also note the differences between the Cubist or Suprematist emphasis on angular geometric shapes and children's use of curves and circles in representing the human form, at least, if not for structures, which may approach the geometry of building blocks as an interactive material. In his own quest for the ur-limits of art, Willats cites Steven Pinker's *The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language* as he draws the conclusion that “If we can legitimately speak of a language instinct (Pinker 1994), it seems equally legitimate to speak of a ‘drawing instinct’” (Willats 1997:318).

Indeed, many artistic and scholarly approaches seek to establish the a priori presence of an artist in the infant. The abstract for a 1979 monograph on *Visual Shape Perception in Early Infancy*, for instance, concludes with the lines “It appears unlikely that infants must learn to perceive outline shapes. A simpler explanation for the findings reported here is that infants have an innate capacity to perceive shapes”, though the commentator ending the volume disputes this claim (Schwartz et al. 1979: 1–63). Despite the claims and attention of a variety of scholars in addition to Luquet, Piaget, or Willats, to name only a few, the search for conclusive evidence of a generative visual grammar continues (Rose 1988:1161–1176).

Ultimately, studies of children's own artistic production cannot conclusively indicate anything about underlying mental processes. On the basis of such evidence, one can only surmise what such a representation might indicate about the child's internal world.

Cognitive studies, on the other hand, have been able to offer some telling findings about the development of visual perception that prove interesting to juxtapose to avant-garde art and picturebooks. Research on cognitive development reveals, for instance, that the vision of a newborn is poor and includes only a limited ability to discriminate between colors, while patterns of maximal contrast can be perceived more readily (Bjorklund 2012:108). "Infants are also attracted to areas of high contrast, as reflected by the outline or contour, of an object" (109). A preference for vertical symmetry also develops in the first year, which shows the special status verticality has for early perceptual development (110). Bjorklund cites Bornstein et al. (1981) who remark "Whether innate, early maturing, or based on experience, the special quality of verticality generally may derive from the importance of the vertically symmetrical body and face (p. 85)" (qtd. in Bjorklund 2012:110). Other preferences include curvilinear and concentric visual stimuli (111), which relates to the infant bias for faces (113). As Bjorklund notes, "it makes sense from an evolutionary perspective for infants to be oriented to the most social of stimuli, the human face" (113). Indeed, some "evidence suggests that infants are born with some notion of 'faceness'" (114). Even newborns pay special attention to eyes (117), which I might add includes concentric circles and dramatic contrast and a sensitivity to the position of the pupil within the eye. In short, cognitive studies more convincingly reveal "What's Going On in There?" (Eliot 2000), as Lise Eliot puts it, and do show that the infant mind does seem to have innate visual preferences for symmetry and certain geometric shapes. I would argue that some of these same visual preferences, our earliest visual grammar, also predominate in the art of the Russian avant-garde, including in the geometric art and picturebooks of avant-garde artists and illustrators such as Malevich, El Lissitzky, Mayakovsky, and Lebedev.

These studies reveal different focal points for their various approaches to the infant mind, beginning with an attention to external manifestations and then seeking by scientific means to uncover the mysteries of the infant mind. Similarly, the activities of the avant-garde, both individually and collectively, encompass a range of approaches to the infantile. Infantile primitivism involves the attention, collection, exhibition, and imitation of children's artistic production, while what I call the infantilist aesthetic goes further in valorizing an infantile approach on a deeper level, seeking to understand infantile perception and perspective, and finally to venture into the unknown territory of the infantile mind. What I am addressing here encompasses a range from the infantile avant-garde to the

avant-garde infantile, from the infantile primitivism of prominent avant-garde figures like Malevich, El Lissitzky, and Mayakovsky to the increasingly infantilist aesthetic of someone like the illustrator Vladimir Lebedev. To varying degrees, their attention to the child encompasses the full range from avant-garde infantile to infantile avant-garde, moving between an abstract concept of the child and a real audience of children, imitation of children's art and attention to children's perception.

As his own artistic reflections show, Malevich makes the immense symbolic potential of the *Black Square* clear. We might also mention here another child square in Malevich's work depicted in *Mal'chik s riukzakom* (Boy with Knapsack, 1915), a work that shows how radically Malevich departs from objective art. Here the black square again is figured as a child, with a small red square representing his backpack. One might note that, despite its visual reductivism, the simple composition still retains great signifying potential due to its verbally expressive title, which retains significant narrative capacity as it puts the geometric components into a dynamic relationship. Malevich's early Cubist work, such as the illustration entitled *Krest'ianka* (Peasant Woman, 1913), collapses multiple dimensions into two and leaves us with geometric facets of the image he represents. This work, like Malevich's influential set designs for Velimir Khlebnikov's collaborative opera *Pobeda nad solntsem* (Victory Over the Sun, 1913; Khlebnikov 1999:212–228) which first introduced the use of a black square, brought Malevich into close contact with Cubo-Futurists like Khlebnikov and Aleksei Kruchenykh, who were practicing infantile primitivism in their own work, including in the book *Porosiata* (Piglets), where *Peasant Woman* appears (V. & Kruchenykh 1913). Here Kruchenykh collaborated with a young girl, thereby illustrating that the Russian avant-garde's interest in the infantile was both abstract and concrete, and included the closely interlinked verbal and visual arts, as well as theory and later manifestations of the avant-garde trajectory.

Indeed, many of these most infantile visual principles, such as dramatic contrasts between dark and light and a simplicity of composition based on basic geometry, abound in early Russian avant-garde art and picturebooks of the 1920s and 1930s. These visually defer to an undeveloped and arguably infantile visual ability. Other infantile features in avant-garde picturebooks include vertical symmetry, simple patterning, curvilinear lines, crisp outlines, and maximally contrasting fields of color. Some avant-garde compositions also mimic the infantile focus on a single geometric region like a face or eyes, such as the *Black Square*, which also was accompanied by less well-known works based on single circles, crosses, and diamonds in black, white, and red – the colors infants perceive the earliest. Indeed, as Deppner also observes in a Western context (Deppner 2011:64), such works resemble the maximally contrasting mobiles, flashcards, or books made

specifically for newborns today.⁶ For instance, the recent wordless board book *Art for Baby: High-Contrast Images by Eleven Contemporary Artists to Explore with Your Child* (Templar 2009) includes Kazimir Malevich's modernist *Black Cross* as an abstract and minimalist image for infants to gaze upon – in a logical outcome of modern art's experiments with infantile primitivism and involving its audience, even cognitively, in the political and aesthetic enterprise.

El Lissitzky and the avant-garde infantile

Simple geometric shapes, like the square, acquire quite dramatic signifying potential in the avant-garde artist El Lissitzky's revolutionary picturebook entitled *Pro 2 kvadrata: suprematicheskii skaz v 6i postroikakh* (*Of Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale in Six Constructions*, 1922), as well as in many other works and designs by El Lissitzky. Through its focus on red and black squares, it stages a revolutionary drama in a visually accessible manner (Figure 1). Although El Lissitzky illustrated many works for children, including a Yiddish translation of Kipling's *Elfandel* (*The Elephant's Child*, 1922a) and many Yiddish books such as *Ingl Tsingl Hvat* (*The Mischievous Boy*, 1918) by Mani Leib, *Had Gadya* (*One Goat*, 1919), and *4 Teyashim* (*Four Billy Goats*, 1922), the fact that *Of Two Squares* is addressed to an audience of children is frequently overlooked in art historical literature, despite its considerable attention to this particular text. Yet, at the outset, *Of Two Squares* declares itself to be written "To all/all/little children" (Figure 2). This diminutive phrasing infantilizes the audience of revolutionary and avant-garde art – all become as little children. The two dative case constructions "vsem" that independently signify "to all" are dwarfed by an enormous letter "P", which initiates and contains upon its curved portion the remainder of the word "rebiatkam" (little children), which also can be read independently to mean "to little children". The composition thus emphasizes little children as an audience and as a significant white presence in a field of blackness. Significantly, its preface uses the imperative

6. Martin Roman Deppner makes a similar point about modern art in a wider Western view, citing similarities between Chez Picthall's *Baby Sees Spots and Dots* (Bromley: Picthall & Gunzi, 2005) and concentric circles like Kenneth Nolan's "Lotus" and Jasper Johns's "Target" (Deppner 2011:64). He writes, "I would argue that abstract art, minimal art and conceptual art have much in common with picturebooks for small children that focus mainly on the representations of everyday objects in a more or less abstract manner. Abstraction and contrasts between forms and colors also occur in picturebooks designed for infants and toddlers" (64). Deppner also mentions Malevich and El Lissitzky briefly (63).



Figure 1. Cover design from El Lissitzky: *Pro 2 kvadrata: suprematicheskii skaz v 6i postroikakh* (Of Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale in Six Constructions). Berlin: Skify, 1922. Used by permission of Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library

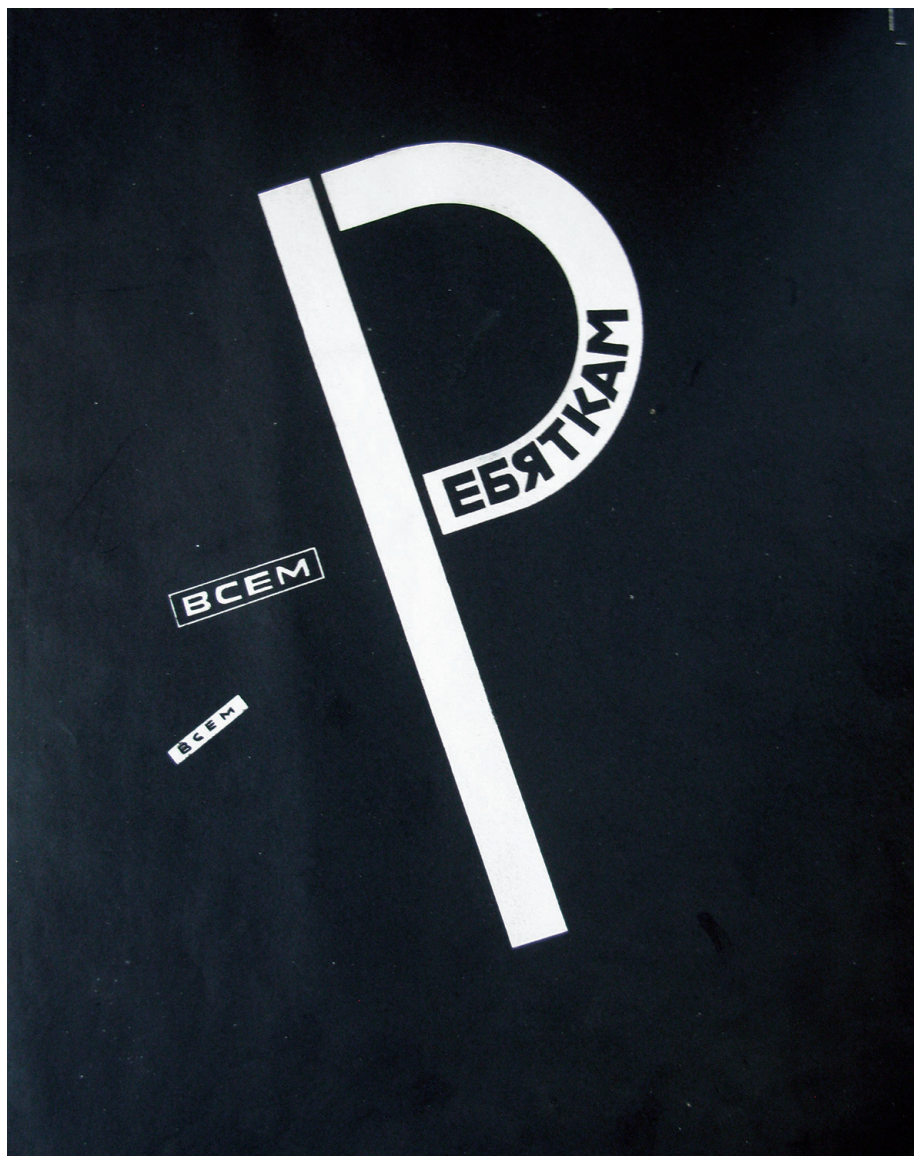


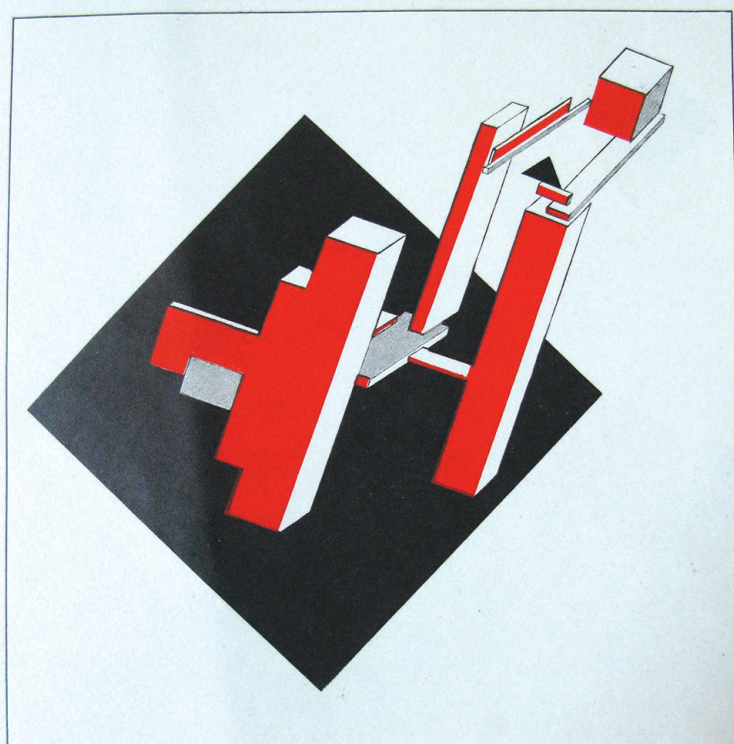
Figure 2. Dedication page from El Lissitzky: *Pro 2 kvadrata: suprematicheskii skaz v 6i postroikakh* (Of Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale in Six Constructions). Berlin: Skify, 1922. Used by permission of Cotsen Children's Library. Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. Princeton University Library

voice to invite the child to participate in the act of construction. It exhorts its audience: “don’t read // take up // scraps of paper/little posts/blocks of wood // stack/ paint/build”. It symbolically commands children to participate in the construction of a better future augured by the red square’s arrival. The prominent role of the child as addressee and participant in the construction of the future also finds an echo within the imagery of the book. On the final page, one reads “this is the end/onward” as, in the shadow and shelter of the victorious Red Square, a tiny red square is held up in an anthropomorphic moment – a ritual gesture that amounts to a symbolic acknowledgment and display of offspring. Indeed, like their rhetoric and art itself, avant-garde artists engaged themselves in the act of cultivating a youthful audience of actual children through children’s books in order to involve them in the process of constructing a new world and new artistic aesthetic. The initially two-dimensional and aperspectival depiction of the two squares has become, by the end of the book, a three-dimensional and perspectively rendered composition, as if the audience of children has heeded the commands at the outset and stacked geometric blocks in a grand construction project representing the revolutionary future (Figure 3).

Similar features occur in a less known book by El Lissitzky called *Chetyre deistviia* (4 Operations, 1928) that was not published at that time. It was also dedicated “to all all children”, as Khardzhiev observes (Khardzhiev 1968: 387) and includes a participatory note addressed to an infantile audience in its conclusion. It declares: “This is how to use letters to put together every kind of arithmetical method – try it yourself!” (Khardzhiev 1968: 387). El Lissitzky’s revolutionary picturebooks thus involve the child as addressee and participant in the action. If *Two Squares* uses geometric shapes, however, this book uses the signs and symbols of typography to create characters, while mathematical operations provide the action by dramatizing revolutionary principles. For example, worker, peasant, and Red Army soldier are added together to make 3 comrades⁷ or a variety of letters, representing different Soviet subject nations, all together equaling CCCP (USSR).⁸ In both cases, revolutionary principles are at once made more concrete, through a visual and allegorical story, but also made more abstract, since real people and revolutionary violence here become an abstraction. As typical of the Russian avant-garde, and appropriate to a child audience on the verge of literacy (as well as other illiterate audiences), El Lissitzky’s book designs comfortably violate the boundaries between image and text by creating images out of letters, symbols, signs, and ciphers.

7. Plate 155 in Lissitzky (1968).

8. Plate 156 in Lissitzky (1968).



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Figure 3. Penultimate page from El Lissitzky: *Pro 2 kvadrata: suprematicheskii skaz v 6i postroikakh* (Of Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale in Six Constructions). Berlin: Skify, 1922. Used by permission of Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library

Like *4 Operations*, Lissitzky's illustrations for Mayakovsky's collection *Dlia golosa* (For the Voice, 1923) also uses geometry and typography innovatively. El Lissitzky himself observes, "The book is created with the resources of the compositor's type-case alone".⁹ Such self-conscious play under creative limitations also resembles children's play and navigates the prelingual space of the child on the verge of acquiring literacy and thus supremely attentive to the form of letters. *For the Voice* makes its contents visually accessible and interactive in a tactile form through tabs that visually represent the poetic contents on each page. One of Mayakovsky's poems collected here, "Skazka o krasnoi shapochke" (The Tale of Little Red Riding Hood, 1923), presents a revolutionary revision of the traditional story. After a typical Russian fairy tale opening, "Once upon a time", it replaces the little girl with a cadet, while the red color of the cadet's cap takes on revolutionary significance. The pronounced sound repetition and word play has an infantile effect, from the opening line "Once upon a time there lived a cadet/In a red cap the cadet was dressed" to later formulations like "after the cadet [followed] a cadet/and the cadet's father and the grandfather of cadets". Sound predominates over meaning due to the exaggerated repetition, as typical of children's play with language, as Kornei Chukovsky observed in *Ot dvukh do piati* (From Two to Five, 2001). Aspects of child lore, such as a casual treatment of morbid themes, also appear, such as in the climax of the poem, which declares "Everyone knows what sort of diet wolves have:/they consumed the cadet down to the cuffs", including an insignificant detail about the cuffs. If the title, content, and style of this work was not enough to indicate its inclusion of an infantile aesthetic or that an infantile audience was welcomed, then a direct address to children assuming their participation certainly does: "When you are going to engage in politics, children,/don't forget the tale about this cadet". Indeed, Mayakovsky too, though this fact has largely been disregarded, also wrote a number of books for children, including *Chto takoe khorosho i chto takoe plokho?* (What is Good and What is Bad?, 1925), *Skazka o Pete, tolstom rebenke, i o Sime, kotoryi tonkii* (The Story about Pete, the Fat Child, and about Sima, Who is Thin, 1925), and *To ne stranitsa, – to slon, to l'vitsa* (Not a Page Without an Elephant, Without a Lioness, 1928), so these activities might also be juxtaposed to the infantile aspects of his avant-garde work more generally.

Considering this background of avant-garde activity and artistic, political, and pedagogical engagement in the child as addressee and active participant in aesthetic and political enterprises, then the burgeoning of avant-garde children's

9. From El Lissitzky "Typographical Facts". Reproduced beside plate 95 Lissitzky (1968).

books in the 1920s and 1930s should not be surprising. Tellingly, at the conclusion of his article on *Nasha kniga* (Our Book, 1926), El Lissitzky remarks, “in our country a stream of children’s picture-books has appeared, to swell the inundations of illustrated periodicals” (Lissitzky 1968: 363). Behind the new activity and engagement in children were the avant-garde attention to and revaluation of children’s minds and artistic potential: “By reading, our children are already acquiring a new plastic language; they are growing up with a different relationship to the world and to space, to shape and to colour; they will surely also create another book” (Lissitzky 1968: 363). This statement again betrays the avant-garde artist’s interest in the interiority of children’s minds and their interest in children’s potential to actively participate in the creation of a new aesthetic future.

Vladimir Lebedev and the avant-garde infantile

In some ways like El Lissitzky and Mayakovsky, Vladimir Lebedev came to children’s picturebooks along an artistic path typical of the times, from avant-garde art and Cubism to a new political orientation during revolutionary times expressed in propaganda posters and picturebooks. Here Lebedev found his calling and settled, serving as a significant editor in the world of children’s publishing for many years, though he later abandoned his avant-garde principles, it would seem, out of necessity. Like the other artists I have discussed, Lebedev’s work shows an interconnect-edness between his avant-garde practice for adults and his work for children, or the infantile avant-garde and the avant-garde infantile. As I focus on geometry and other infantile features of his art, I show moments in his artistic development from infantile primitivism to new, infantilist attempts to enter into the child’s perception, cognition, and construction of the object.¹⁰

If infantile primitivism, or the imitation of children’s art, is characteristic of Lebedev’s earliest works for children, then an infantilist attention to infantile visual perception, such as geometry, patterning, contrast, and symmetry, is characteristic of his most avant-garde work. Another characteristic of his work in an even later stage is an inverted perspective. The inverted perspective, which is typical of children’s drawings, folk art, and Orthodox iconography, for instance, as well as

10. In this regard too, he participates in avant-garde experiments with aesthetic sensibilities and the nature of perception inspired by the child, including the avant-garde artist Mikhail Larionov’s attempts to replicate rays of light on the retina in the Rayonist artistic movement (Larionov 1989). Vasily Kandinsky also took the perspective of the child in considering perception (Kandinsky 2001).

Cubist practice, can in theory be defined in terms of primary geometry (Willats 1997:65). But in practice, Willats remarks, it “seems most natural to define this system in terms of a rule of secondary geometry applied to an object-centered description: in most examples the front face is drawn as a true shape, and edges in the third dimension are represented by diverging lines” (69). Even comparatively late works by Vladimir Lebedev continue to employ an inverted perspective, even as other aspects of avant-garde aesthetics are discontinued for the sake of political expediency, as socialist realism increasingly becomes the officially proscribed form of art.

Key influences for Lebedev’s later work for children include his earlier Cubist phase and OKNA-ROSTA propaganda posters of 1920. Some of these same characters, such as the idealized worker or proletarian, adult or child, then reappear in his children’s books. Common aesthetic features include the simplification of representation in two dimensions and distinct geometric fields, illustrating how interrelated are the aesthetics of avant-garde art, propaganda, and picturebooks. In such propaganda posters, the necessities of lithography may predetermine the distinct geometric fields and simplification of imagery, while a goal of visibility at a distance and to visually engage an illiterate audience may lead to maximal contrast. These considerations parallel those of an infantile audience, indicating that the avant-garde infantile might be but one of many means to an end, an overall simplification of means.

Lebedev’s work also displays a distinct primitivist period, evident in a book like *Okhota* (The Hunt, 1925), which imitates the conventions of cave-paintings and other exoticized art of indigenous peoples. Similarly, *Medved’* (The Bear, 1923) and *Zolotoe iaichko* (The Golden Egg, 1923) employ a naive style, which appears unschooled and approaches infantile primitivism, such as through the choice of a material like a crayon and hand-lettered text. The most explicit example of infantile primitivism, however, is Lebedev’s earliest children’s book *Prikliucheniia Chuch-lo* (The Adventures of Scare-Crow, 1921), which I have discussed previously in “Avant-Garde Art as Child’s Play: The Origins of Vladimir Lebedev’s Picturebook Aesthetic” (Pankenier 2007). Alla Rosenfeld also remarks on the childish imitations of this book “with a text written by Lebedev himself as if it were told by a child. Imitating a child’s handwriting and manner of drawing” (Rosenfeld 1999:170–171). Here the imitation of children’s art is most evident, as in a drawing of a steamboat broken into geometric components or of a fallen Indian chief-tain (Figures 4 and 5). It displays how Lebedev’s primitivist practice and infantile primitivism helps point the way to the simplification of shape and form according to a geometric scheme.

Such a geometric simplification of shapes and flattening of perspective reaches a peak of influence in Lebedev’s designs for *Slonenok* (The Elephant’s Child, 1922), a



Figure 4. Illustration from Vladimir Lebedev: *Priklucheniia Chuch-lo* (The Adventures of Scare-Crow). Petrograd: Epokha, 1921. Used by permission of Cotsen Children's Library. Department of Rare Books and Special Collections. Princeton University Library

translation of Rudyard Kipling's story, which Evgeny Steiner rightly calls the "manifesto of a new approach to children's book graphics" (Steiner 1999:43) (Figures 6 and 7). Basic geometry and a two-dimensional and almost patterned composition then become a part of Lebedev's signature style, as evident in many of his most famous collaborations with Samuil Marshak, like *Tsirk* (Circus, 1925), *Vchera i segodnia* (Yesterday & Today, 1925), *Bagazh* (Baggage, 1926), and *Morozhenoe* (Ice Cream, 1925). Here squares and circles, often concentric, are particularly prevalent, such as in the components of the ice cream truck or fat man in *Ice Cream*. Geometry is also a distinctive feature in *Mnogotochie* (Omission Points), though this book was never published.

Speaking to children in a decidedly infantile vocabulary, for all of the reasons mentioned above – eg. maximal contrasts between light and dark, crisp and distinct outlines, distillation to a few salient features, and use of contrasting primary colors¹¹ – Lebedev attempts to enter an infantile cognitive space through his avant-garde picturebooks. Indeed, in *Khudozhniki detskoi knigi o sebe i svoem iskusstve* (Children's Book Illustrators about Themselves and Their

11. See also Werner (2011).

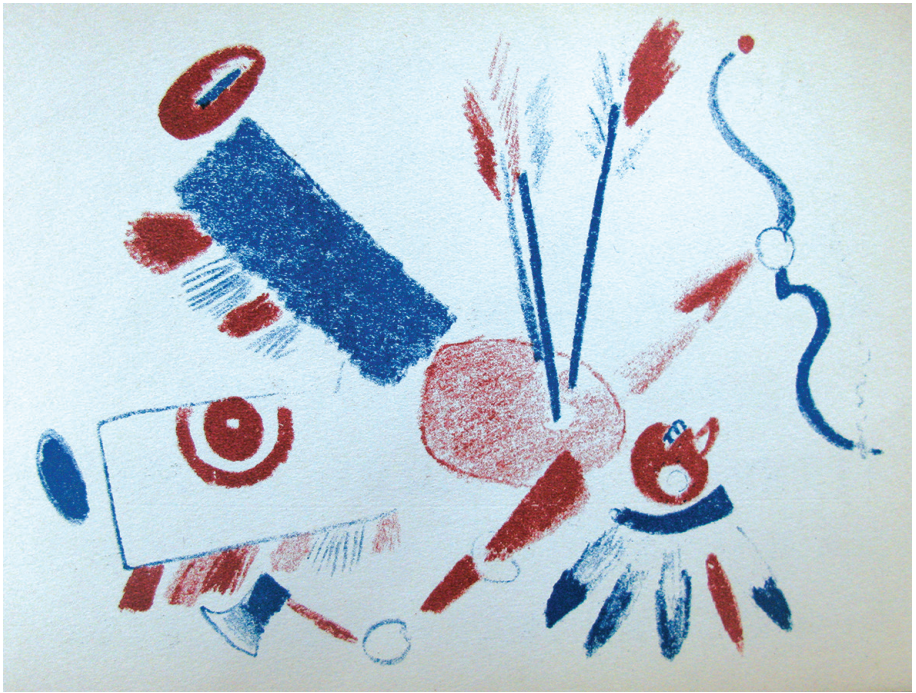


Figure 5. Illustration from Vladimir Lebedev: *Priklucheniia Chuch-lo* (The Adventures of Scare-Crow). Petrograd: Epokha, 1921. Used by permission of Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library

Art, Glotser 1987), Lebedev consistently grounds his theoretical statements about graphics for children in the consciousness and perspective of the child. He repeatedly writes about the need for the artist to return to his childish consciousness and to recollect and reexperience his childhood (Glotser 1987: 132–135). Lebedev takes on the child's eye view to justify techniques he considers appropriate for the child, such as when he cites memories from his own childhood to illustrate the child's lack of understanding for the conventions of perspective (134), thereby justifying his use of inverted perspective. Lebedev also demonstrates sensitivity to children's cognitive development when he compares the interpretive ability of the three year-old with that of the older child (134). He consciously seeks “to seize the attention of his viewer” (134) and then “attract the attention and interest of the child” (132) with intensive color and precise, concrete design (132).

In Lebedev's opinion, book graphics for very young children should gratify the child's interest in the object and be laconic and unornamented, as well as playful (134, 136). He declares, moreover, “Picture and text should be as intensive as possible” (136). Though based in the child's perceptual needs, these



Figure 6. Cover design by Vladimir Lebedev for Rudyard Kipling: *Slonenok* (The Elephant's Child). Petrograd: Epokha, 1922. Used by permission of Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library

principles – simplicity, intensity, and playfulness – also apply to avant-garde art. Still, Lebedev resists total abstraction and asserts that “an illustration for children must be an understandable illustration” (133), thereby marking a distinction between the comprehensibility of picturebooks and posters as opposed to



Figure 7. Illustration by Vladimir Lebedev for Rudyard Kipling: *Slonenok* (The Elephant's Child). Petrograd: Epokha, 1922. Used by permission of Cotsen Children's Library, Department of Rare Books and Special Collections, Princeton University Library

abstract art. He views children as “keen observers” (136) who always seek to comprehend the world around them and declares that the drawing must be made in such a way that the child can enter into the work of the artist – understand what the skeleton of the drawing was and how its construction took place (133). Here Lebedev emphasizes typically avant-garde and Formalist principles like self-conscious constructedness and the baring of devices as particularly appropriate for children. In short, through his consideration for how the child regards

and constructs the world, Lebedev justifies his avant-garde practice through its cognitive impact of the child. He thereby reveals how infantile is the avant-garde and how avant-garde the infantile.

Conclusion

In addition to observing many of the features of infantile perception and cognition, the deconstruction of complex shapes into simple geometrical components also engages the child audience on another, participatory level. Just as artists like El Lissitzky and Mayakovsky not only address the child through the work, but also invite the child into the process of manipulating materials, assembling things, or engaging in politics, so Lebedev's geometric compositions engage the child on an aesthetic and cognitive level, as well as in a kinesthetic one. His deconstruction of form into geometric shapes creates a participatory role for the child reader who must cognitively engage in the kinesthetic reconstitution of the image and construction of meaning, as if mentally manipulating geometric blocks. In this sense, Lebedev's picturebook aesthetic can be compared to the most esoteric modern art, since the radical challenge to interpretation it poses also involves the spectator actively in the constitution and interpretation of the work of art. Perhaps, through the imitation of children's art, vision, and cognition, avant-garde practitioners seek to restore to any audience an infantile state of perception and cognition. Thus the fact that the Russian avant-garde ended up finding its last bastion in children's literature is not merely a consequence of history and the vagaries of politics; rather, it is rooted in the infantile aesthetics they share. Indeed, as I argue here and elsewhere, the Russian avant-garde was infantile all along (see also Weld 2014).

In short, these artists and their artistic works and picturebooks, which were created for an audience of adults and children, and challenging the hierarchy governing their relations, display an aesthetic fixation on the infantile. In their activities, the infantile avant-garde and the avant-garde infantile range from infantile primitivism to an infantilist aesthetic that celebrates infantile perception and cognition. At its most evolved and extreme manifestations, the avant-garde infantile even seeks to enter into the child's consciousness in its search for a new aesthetic and the minimal components of art. The artificiality of this adult attempt to enter the infant mind should be duly noted, however. Even if the aesthetic choices of the avant-garde sought to replicate the infantile as it addressed and engaged an audience of children, the mere fact of this orientation does not guarantee success with the target audience, displaying the difference between the avant-garde abstraction of the child and concrete, actual children. Failures were telling; Steiner notes that children were horrified by the radical deconstruction of animals in Lebedev's

compositions for *The Elephant's Child* (Steiner 1999: 46). Willats, meanwhile, cites a number of studies that examined children's picture preferences and found that "children prefer drawings in which the representation of shape and space is more advanced than it is in the drawings they produce" (Willats 1997: 317). Indeed, children have a drive to develop and grow which is quite the reverse of the avant-garde's regressive infantilism. Such observations invert the perspective of the avant-garde and offer object-centered views orthogonal to their oblique projections – revealing children to be more conventional than avant-garde in their tastes. These moments of confrontation with real children expose the artificiality of the avant-garde's construction of the infantile.

Indeed, in the final count, the primitivist enterprise is quite predetermined at the outset; what the primitivist will find in the 'primitive' is a projection of what it sought there in the first place. Infancy, then, proves a useful construct for the Russian avant-garde and leads it down the path it itself was seeking and found in infantile perception – toward a deconstruction into minimal geometric components and inverted perspective and more. Even if the avant-garde's infantile primitivism eventually shades into an infantilist aesthetic that celebrates the child's cognition and consciousness, it still constructs the 'infant/child' as a primitive 'other' for its own purposes as it seeks to occupy its viewpoint and exploit it for its own purposes. As Johannes Fabian notes, echoing Levi-Strauss's critique of the equation of lunatic, primitive, and child, "Are we to overlook that adult-child relations are also, and sometimes primarily, fraught with barely disguised attitudes of power and practices of repression [...] Even worse, are we to forget that talk about the child-like nature of the primitive has never been just a neutral classificatory act, but a powerful rhetorical figure and motive" (Fabian 2002: 63). Indeed, in conclusion, it seems fitting to return to invert one's perspective on the preverbal state that so entices the avant-garde due its signifying potential; for the infant is the unspeaking subject who cannot protest. As Marianna Torgovnick observes, "The primitive does what we ask it to do. Voiceless, it lets us speak for it" (Torgovnick 1990: 9). Indeed, a better understanding of the avant-garde infantile often does less to illuminate the actual infantile, than to illuminate the avant-garde that exploits it.

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CHAPTER 6

The 1929 Amsterdam exhibition of early Soviet children's picturebooks

A reconstruction

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This chapter presents an evidence-based reconstruction of the exhibition of Soviet-illustrated children's books held in Amsterdam in April-May 1929. The children's books on show were identified using contemporary sources, leading to a qualitative analysis that lists the books and their titles, illustrators, and prices, which indicate the books' sizes. A quantitative statistical analysis of the books on show demonstrates an overrepresentation of the new Soviet picturebook, indicating that the importance of this special kind of children's book was acknowledged by its contemporaries, as indeed is shown in the reception of the exhibition at that time.

Historical background

The 1917 revolution changed the political and cultural landscape of the Russian empire. The result was a multicultural and multiethnic society. The new Soviet State set its sights on a rapid modernization of all the lands and peoples within its borders. The backward peoples were to become modern civilized Soviet citizens. To reach this goal, a pivotal role was given to education, and the struggle against illiteracy was a main objective of this period. From the start, the fledgling Soviet Union had to cope with internal and external enemies, and it was not until 1923 that a more or less regular development became possible. On December 30, 1922, the Soviet Union was officially established. Earlier in 1922, in the treaty of Rapallo, Germany was the first country to recognize the Soviet Union, followed in 1924 by the British Empire. The economic situation in the period following the revolution and the civil war was horrible: deprivation and hunger had become widespread. Lenin lifted the class war on commerce and allowed some freedom of enterprise

by introducing the New Economic Policy (NEP) (Hirsch 2003). This contributed to a first flourishing of Soviet children's book production.

In the very early Soviet period, children's books were rare, and for the greater part the same as or similar to pre-revolutionary illustrated books published by Knebel and Sytin (Lemmens & Stommels 2009: 73f.). After 1923, these picturebooks would become important weapons in the education of the Soviet citizen. From the viewpoint of Soviet Marxists, an apolitical school was neither desirable nor possible. Education was by definition an ideological matter. The Soviet school must train Soviet citizens freed from prejudices of religion and with an understanding of the class war, the legitimacy of the revolution, and the goals of the Soviet state. In the early 1920s, the teachers' most immediate problems were dealing with an unruly body of pupils while attempting to maintain their authority in the schools against competition from the organs of student self-government and the members of the Komsomol: the All-Union Leninist Young Communist League. Until 1927, there were no compulsory school programs in the USSR and local educational departments and individual schools were allowed considerable freedom (Fitzpatrick 1992: 38–48). Nor were there many restrictions on the production of children's picturebooks. During the New Economic Policy period, private publishing firms (estimated at more than 300 in Moscow alone) were printing books in considerable numbers and with considerable freedom.

Anxious to promote their value systems and ensure that their cultural heritage would take root among the next generation of Russians, these [Bolshevik] elites put forth their own versions or stories of children's literature in an attempt to create new culture. [...] In the early twentieth century, particularly after the 1917 October revolution, the field of children's literature became a battleground. Disoriented pedagogues, political figures, authors, and book illustrators entered into a public debate about what form a Soviet children's literature should assume (Olich 2009: 1)

In the second half of the 1920s, the Communist Party claimed children's books as an ideological medium and made it one of the most important issues on its agenda. The newly established Pioneer and Komsomol youth organizations together with the party's demand for a new educational system called for ideologically correct children's literature, yet presented in the engaging and innovative way established by the Russian avant-garde artists (Balina 2008: 9). It was the first serious attempt to prepare an entire generation of writers and readers for a proletarian world. This was in accordance with the *Proletkult*, the proletarian cultural and educational organization, a mass organization set up in 1917 to give substance to the dream of a cultural and educated proletariat. In the words of Aleksandr Bogdanov:

The proletariat has no culture of its own, for economic and political struggles have consumed all its energies; bourgeois culture is clearly unsuited to the task of organizing the psychology of the proletariat; therefore, the proletariat must and can develop its own culture. (Maguire 1987: 157)

The classic fairy tale had changed into a political one.

Publishing children's books in the early Soviet Union

The State Publishing House, known by its acronym GIZ or Gosizdat, played a dominant role in the Soviet publishing system. It was founded in May 1919 to bring to an end the chaotic situation that then existed on the publishing market. It produced its own books independently but also functioned as a regulatory body, overseeing the work of other publishing houses, and also exercising political censorship. With the onset of the New Economic Policy (NEP) in 1921, Gosizdat lost its regulatory functions and focused on the production of its own books as a universal publishing house, issuing works on a wide variety of subjects, including fiction, children's literature, scientific texts, propaganda, and works on Marxism and Leninism. It had branches in every major city of the Soviet Union, but the Leningrad and the Moscow branches were the most important ones for children's books. The change in policy had its effect on the children's books. Subjects such as construction, production, and physical fitness, needed for the success of the Five-Year-Plan, were prominently displayed in the new children's books.

Meanwhile, the Komsomol set up its own publishing house *Molodaia gvardiya* (Young Guard) in Moscow. Although established in 1918, the shortage of paper, ink, and printing equipment prevented large-scale publishing until October 1922. At the same time, the Komsomol was able to produce its own magazines and newspapers: the Leningrad *Iunii proletarii* (The Young Proletarian) and – some months later – the Moscow *Komsomolskaia pravda* (Komsomol Truth). These were to help establish censorship of all published material aimed at youth. The Komsomol also established libraries in workers' clubs all over the country to provide the members with suitable literature. By filling these libraries with proletarian literature, they aimed at changing the reading habits of the members, away from the cheap novels of the West towards the good and educative Soviet literature. This goal was supported by the enormous number of books published by *Molodaia gvardiya*. In the beginning of 1926, there were more than a thousand titles, adding up to more than 17 million copies (Gooderham 1982).

By 1927, *Molodaia gvardiya* had established a monopoly on youth literature in the Russian language and in terms of size it only came second to Gosizdat

(Maguire 1987:521). These ventures were supervised by *Glavlit: Glavnoe upravlenie po delam literatury i izdatelstv* (The Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs), whose officials were empowered as censors to approve a manuscript for publication or to turn it down. Their approval was delivered in the form of a number consisting of five digits and one letter of the alphabet. Anyone casting doubt on or ridiculing Soviet thinking did not receive a Glavlit number. No publications were issued that were totally banned, such as religious works or works with imperial contents (Fox 1992:1055). Part of Glavlit's work was also to register and evaluate the publishing houses. On the first of September 1923, there were 1,045 presses in the USSR, of which 232 were in private hands; 117 of these were located in Moscow. In 1926, many of these private firms had to close because of another change of policy. Many presses had to shut down because they were accused of 'speculation' or of producing 'low-quality' literature. However, the pretext of 'parallelism' proved even more efficient to curtail private presses. This policy made it possible to transfer functions and publications to state or party presses, with the justification that there was no need for private presses to repeat the publications of the state presses. The implementation of this policy involved the organization of the Soviet book-distribution apparatus and the libraries, with the result that private publishers were unable to distribute their publications. Thus, publishing activities for the remaining private presses in both Leningrad and Moscow dropped dramatically from 22.5% of all titles in 1925 to a mere 9.8% in 1926 (Fox 1992:1059f.).

In 1928, the New Economy Policy (NEP) was abruptly ended when Stalin announced his first Five-Year-Plan. The initial objective was to build up the heavy industry, but in 1929 Stalin edited the plan to include collectivization of the farming systems. The political atmosphere accordingly changed from a more privately directed economy into an entirely state-directed economy. In the early 1930s, the politically motivated changes in the attitude towards art and literature made the position of the avant-garde very difficult and therefore also that of the writers and artists of children's books, especially those of the Leningrad school. The famous children's book author Samuil Marshak had already realized that times were changing and had gradually distanced himself from the most compromising writers and artists. In 1932, the State Children's Publishing House, *Detizdat*, was established. Samuil Marshak was offered the position of director, but he declined and his production of children's books dwindled (Hellman 2008:232).

Early Soviet children's books

Before the revolution, one of the largest publishing houses in Russia was owned by Ivan Sytin. It was said that in no Russian home, school or peasant hut was there a

corner without a publication of some kind issued by Sytin. However, his fortune was built by the publication of the newspaper *Slovo* (Word). Soon after the Soviets had taken power, the newspapers, including *Slovo*, were shut down to prevent them from acting as mouthpieces for the bourgeois. Lenin personally directed the closing down of *Slovo*. In January 1918, his company was confiscated, but Sytin was still allowed to publish books and children's books for some time, albeit strictly on the State Publisher's terms (Ruud 1990: 177f.). The children's books printed by Sytin's confiscated firm were conventional and fully in compliance with the nineteenth century taste for harmonious and educational tales and illustrations.¹

In 1918, a new kind of book was published in Petrograd by the *artel khudozhnikov* (artist collective) *Segodnia* (Today). The collective was founded with the dual objectives of making art affordable and of matching the ideals of the revolutionary new society with new creative force. They focused on books for children because "the children of today are the grown-ups of tomorrow". During its short life span (1918–1919), the collective *Segodnia* published 13 booklets as well as three broadsides. The magazine *Knizhnyi ugol* (The Book Corner) no. 1 of 1919 contains a supposedly complete list of its publications: six books with poetry, five books for children, two books containing prose and three broadsides.² Around this time the situation in the country was deteriorating rapidly and people started to leave Russia in large numbers to flee from hunger and deprivation or, in the case of intellectuals, to escape prosecution because of their anti-revolutionary attitudes. Writers and artists of children's books were not exempted from the hardship of that time. Paper and ink became scarce, and the printing industry and its infrastructure were in shambles. The rising costs of goods and services rendered books almost unaffordable objects, and even Lunacharsky, the People's Commissar of Enlightenment (equivalent to the Minister of Education),³ was not able to allot money to print books for primary schools. Some books published by the State Publishing House were printed on such cheap paper and with so little ink that the illustrations were in places sometimes barely visible.⁴ By 1921, more than three-quarters of the pre-revolutionary journals were no longer published. Book production was down from 26,000 titles in 1913 to 4,500 between 1920 and 1921. The number of children's books published in 1921 plummeted to a mere 33 titles (Gankina 1963:61).

1. For an example, see Lemmens & Stommels (2009:79).

2. See *Knizhnyi ugol*, Petrograd 1919, no. 1: 23–24.

3. For the complete history of the Commissariat of Enlightenment, see Fitzpatrick (1970).

4. Pushkin's *Ruslan i Liudmila* with illustrations by the famous artist Boris Kustodiev, for example, was published by the newly constituted State Publishers in Petrograd in 1921. The book clearly shows the serious deficits in the printing materials.

At the end of 1922 and the beginning of 1923, the publishing firm *Raduga* (The Rainbow) was founded in Leningrad (as Petrograd was renamed in 1924, to honor the deceased Lenin) by the journalist Lev Kliachko, who called himself the 'Prince of Reporters'. He had approached the writers Kornei Chukovsky and Samuil Marshak to start a children's magazine under the name *Raduga*. While the magazine never appeared in print, *Raduga* started publishing children's picture-books with texts and illustrations that were to become famous. The books were an immediate success, and thus Kliachko was able to attract talented writers such as Samuil Marshak, Vitaly Bianki and Agnia Barto to write books, which he had illustrated by notable artists such as Mstislav Dobujinsky, Vladimir Konashevich, Vladimir Lebedev, and many others. In the second half of the 1920s, *Raduga* gradually lost its ability to contract its most able writers and illustrators, who began to work instead for the State Publishing House. Furthermore, *Raduga* had become subject to official criticism of its publications:

If throughout the early 1920s children's reading remained a free territory where new Soviet and pre-revolutionary books and periodicals intermingled, the drastic change came in 1924 with the decision of the party to claim children's literature as its own ideological property. A resolution of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of January 6, 1924, proclaimed the creation of children's literature as one of the most important issues on its agenda and called for taking steps towards it. At its 13th Congress in May 1924, the party declared its intention to develop children's literature according to the principles of class consciousness "internationalism and education through labour" thus stressing once again the demands placed on the new educational system in Lenin's speech.

(Balina 2008:9)

The more than 400 titles that *Raduga* published between 1923 and 1930 were produced in four formats, each having its own price class and print run. The smallest, printed in editions of 50,000 copies, measured 115 x 145 mm and were priced 10–12 kopecks. The format 180 x 145 mm was 23 kopecks and had print runs of 30,000 copies. The books measuring 220 x 185 mm had print runs of 20,000 copies and cost 35 kopecks. The largest books, sized 290 x 230 mm, cost one ruble. They were printed in editions of 5,000 to 7,000 copies (Immel 2002:347). Therefore, the price in kopecks given in the listing of the books presented at the Amsterdam exhibition is an indication of the size of the book. However, some titles were printed in various print runs and sometimes in various sizes. For example, *Moidodyr* (Wash'em Clean) was printed 12 times by *Raduga* between 1923 and 1928 in print runs of 4,000 copies for the second edition up to 10,000 copies for the seventh edition.

The famous publisher's logo, designed by Sergei Chekhonin, was generally placed on the back cover. It shows the biblical dove, sent by Noah to inspect the

world after the deluge, flying under the rainbow. The image is flanked by the vertically arranged words *Raduga* (Rainbow) on the right, and *Izdatelstvo* (publishing house) on the left. *Raduga* became the first publishing house in Petrograd to specialize in children's books. Its books marked the beginning of a decade that has been called the Golden Age of Soviet Russian children's books. In retrospect, *Raduga* had set the standard for the Russian children's book that was to enthrall the Western world around 1930, ironically the year that *Raduga* ceased to exist (Blinov 2005: 89; Tarasenkov 1966: 402). By then, the State Publishing House had fully taken over the market. It had succeeded in doing this from the second half of the 1920s onwards, by stealing the major authors, artists, and titles away from the private publishers and by imposing increasingly heavier taxes on private enterprises such as *Raduga*.

Illustrators of Soviet children's books

In 1918 the artists of the artist collective *Segodnia* printed their books in the studio of Vera Ermolaeva, who a year later was called to lead the art school in Vitebsk (Shatskikh 2008: 39f.). There she became part of the UNOVIS group around Kazimir Malevich, arguably the greatest artist of the Russian avant-garde. Involved in that group was El Lissitzky, one of the innovators of Yiddish children's books and the creator of the pinnacle of avant-garde children's book design, *Pro 2 kvadrata: suprematicheskii skaz v 6i postroikakh* (Of Two Squares: A Suprematist Tale in Six Constructions) in 1922 (Lemmens & Stommels 2009: 86, 364). Around the same time Vladimir Lebedev created abstract paintings and reliefs, and he was one of the main artists of the Petrograd branch of the Russian Telegraphic Agency (ROSTA). In this capacity he was among the main innovators of Soviet poster art. The stencil-like style he developed for his placards he also used in the now famous *Raduga* publications *Morozhenoe* (Ice Cream) and *Tsirk* (Circus) in 1925. During the second half of the 1920s many of the artists involved in children's book illustration were idealistic and young, and they were greatly influenced by, if not directly taught, the latest developments in art. It is fair to say that the early Soviet children's books were firmly rooted in the Russian avant-garde. Within the children's book this emblematic constructivist style merged with the more narrative style of the second and third generations of the *Miriskusniki* (artists from the World of Art group), with Vladimir Konashevich as its main exponent. Without the involvement of the younger generation of avant-garde artists the renewal of the pictorial language in children's books, and thus the development of Soviet children's books, would have been impossible.

Early exhibitions of Soviet children's books

Between 1917 and 1928, no mention can be found of special exhibitions of Soviet children's books. There were general exhibitions including graphics and sometimes children's books in the aftermath of the "relief efforts for hungry people in the Soviet Union" between 1924 and 1926. Which children's books were on display is never stated and catalogues were seldom printed. The picturebook exhibition in the Brooklyn Museum in 1926 contained a section of children's books that had been brought by "a traveller from that harassed land", as stated in the foreword to the catalogue (Brooklyn Museum 1926: 5). The children's books on show were purely pre-revolutionary and not a single Soviet book was included. The recently published book *Vystavochnye ansambli SSSR 1920–1930-e gody* (Exhibition Ensembles of the USSR in the 1920s and 1930s) (Tolstoi 2006) lists many exhibitions of Soviet goods and products (from clothes and woodcarvings to books), including those held in Western countries. For the year 1929, a total number of 61 exhibitions are listed. The Zurich, Amsterdam, and Paris exhibitions of children's books are mentioned, as well as some of the follow-up exhibitions in other cities (Tolstoi 2006: 139–141).

The stormy growth of the Soviet picturebook in the previous years had aroused great interest abroad and on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of GIZ, the USSR Society of Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries – VOKS – used these circumstances to organize a traveling exhibition of children's books. For the expertise on children's books, VOKS appealed to a group of Moscow pedagogues who had set up the Moscow Children's Book Museum in 1925, as recounted by one of the founders of the museum and author of the introduction to the Zurich and Amsterdam catalogues, Jacob Meksin (Meksin 1934: 360–368). In 1929, three exhibition catalogues in all were published that give indications of what kind of children's books were on display. Of these, only the Paris exhibition was solely dedicated to children's books, whereas in the other two (Zurich and Amsterdam) the children's book was exhibited as part of a more general graphic art exhibition.⁵

The organization of the 1929 Amsterdam exhibition

The 1917 October Revolution changed the attitude of the Dutch society towards Russia dramatically. While the Dutch public had been cautiously favorable towards

5. See the exhibition catalogues *Grafiek en boekkunst uit de Sovjet-Unie*, Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1929, *Exposition le livre d'enfant en U.R.S.S.*, Paris: Librairie Bonaparte, 1929, and *Russische Ausstellung. Buchgewerbe, Graphik, Theater, Photographie*, Zürich: Kunstgewerbemuseum, 1929. There also is a catalogue of another stage in the Swiss tour: *Russische Ausstellung*, Winterthur: Gewerbemuseum, 1929.

the Tsarist regime, they were strongly opposed to the Bolshevik regime. Like most Western countries, the Netherlands were fiercely anti-communistic, regarding the Soviet Union as their enemy. This attitude rendered the young Union quite isolated and Moscow was quite eager to improve the bad image the Soviet Union had in the West. An important role was attributed to the Friendship Societies that were founded in many foreign countries. These societies encouraged the, mostly young, people who were excited by the Bolshevik experiment. The economic situation in the West had become critical and the year 1929 saw the beginning of one of the most severe economic crises in Europe. While in the Netherlands job losses and unemployment were rising dramatically, the Soviet Union saw a remarkable stabilization of its economic situation. No wonder that the Dutch working classes were attracted to Moscow. Among these sympathizers were Adriaan (Apie) Prins, a journalist, and Henri Wiessing, former editor of the weekly magazine *De Nieuwe Amsterdammer* (The New Amsterdammer), who initiated the establishment of *Het Genootschap Nederland-Nieuw Rusland* (The Netherlands-New Russia Society). The society organized, among other things, travels to the Soviet Union and evenings for intellectual and cultural exchanges. Although the members of the society were very pro-Soviet Union, they distrusted the party discipline of the Dutch Communist Party. Therefore, the Dutch Party established their own *Vereniging Vrienden van de Sovjet Unie* (Association of Friends of the Soviet Union). As the Society never aimed to be a mass organization, and was a relatively small gathering of Dutch intellectuals, the Moscow VOKS tilted more towards the Association, which was more inclined to guide the proletarian masses to a more socialist future (Voerman 2001: 504ff.). In 1928, the liberal lawyer Benjamin Telders, who was not at all wholly favorable towards the Soviet Union, visited Moscow and became very enthusiastic on seeing the early Soviet picturebooks. His suggestion to organize an exhibition of these books with their wonderful illustrations, which “strike with their freshness of colors and their directness of line”, fell on fertile soil. Telders concluded by saying that he did not know of any Western-European children's book able to compete with the Russian picturebooks and that “they surpass everything we produce in this field” (Telders 1928: 15).

The reconstruction of the exhibition

To be able to understand and discuss what it was that made the viewers of the exhibitions in the Netherlands, Switzerland, and France so impressed, it is important to determine which books were on show. Equally important is to assess to what degree the books in the exhibitions were a fair representation of the book production in the Soviet Union. The intention to explore these questions was first triggered in 1997, when the introduction to the 1929 Paris catalogue was reproduced

in the dictionary of Russian illustrators of children's books (Cendrars 1997: IV–V). In 2010, an attempt was made in Malaga to reconstruct the Paris exhibition. However, as the French catalogue gives names of artists and publishers but no titles, an actual reconstruction of this particular exhibition turned out to be impossible (Michielsen 2010: 422). The Amsterdam catalogue (Figure 1), on the other hand, contains Dutch translations of the titles of the books in the exhibition, in combination with the name of the supposed artist and the price of the book. In spite of these facts, the identification of the books listed in the Amsterdam catalogue proved to be not as straightforward as it had seemed at the onset.

In the Amsterdam catalogue, the section on Russian children's books consists of 148 items. All but one list a title and a name, intended to be that of the artist, although occasionally the name of the author is given by mistake. One entry (cat. 63) gives only the name of the artist, but no title. The Dutch translations of the titles are sometimes literal and sometimes freer renderings. A first breakthrough in solving the identification problem was reached when the 1929 State Publishing House catalogue of children's books was found to be useful as a reference book (*Detskie knigi* 1929) (Figure 2).

This catalogue was published just months before the Amsterdam exhibition in the winter of 1928–1929, on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of the State Publishing House (GIZ). It lists some 1,560 children's books in print or soon to be printed by GIZ. Of the 148 books in the Amsterdam exhibition, 132 can be found in the GIZ catalogue. Not included in this count are the books that can be identified as older publications by the price printed in the Amsterdam catalogue. For example, it is possible to deduce from the price listed in the catalogue that *Snezhnaia kniga* ('The Snow Book, 1926) (cat. 111, 113, 115) is not the edition from the 1929 GIZ catalogue, but the edition dating from 1926.⁶ A more comprehensive source for Russian children's books proved to be the Bibliography of Children's Literature. This comprehensive bibliography lists almost every edition of any children's book published in the Soviet Union between 1918 and 1984.⁷ Drawing on these sources, we could successfully identify 144 of the 148 books, by which it has been demonstrated that it is possible to reconstruct the Amsterdam exhibition on the basis of its catalogue. The full list of the books with both the original information and the identified titles is given in the appendix to this article.

6. The price of the 1926 edition of this book was 50 kopecks, the price of the 1929 edition 15 kopecks. See Startsev (1933: Nos. 1011 and 1012) and *Detskie knigi* (1929: 196).

7. Between 1933 and 1989 eighteen volumes of this bibliography covering the period 1918–1984 were consecutively edited by I. I. Startsev, B.I. Shiperovich, and B. P. Zavialova. For this study the first volume was used.



Figure 1. Cover by Peter Alma of: *Grafiek en boekkunst uit de Sovjet-Unie*. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum, 1929



Figure 2. Cover of: *Detskie knigi*, Moscow: GIZ, 1929

The mere identification of the Russian titles does not contribute much to international scholarly research, however. We will therefore take it one step further and explore what these 148 books showed and represented, what they stood for. For this purpose, we can again turn to the 1929 GIZ catalogue and, by combining book history research with some basic statistics commonly used in exact sciences, it is quite possible to make a scientific analysis of the kind of books presented in the 1929 Amsterdam exhibition.

Representativeness

From the early days of the Soviet Union, children's books were aimed at different age groups. From the second half of the 1920s onward, it was very common to print the classification of the intended group in the book: for pre-school children, for younger children, for middle children, for older children. Of course, there were also books covering two adjacent groups. In the 1929 GIZ catalogue, all books are categorized in this way. Following this system, the Amsterdam books can also be catalogued in age groups. In Table 1, both the children's books published by GIZ and the books exhibited in Amsterdam are categorized by the age groups, making it possible to compare the relative numbers (percentages).

Table 1. Russian children's books divided by age groups given in absolute numbers and percentages both for the production of the State Publishing House (GIZ 1929) and for those presented at the Amsterdam exhibition

Age group		GIZ 1929		Amsterdam	
A	Pre-school	293	19%	56	38%
ab	Pre-school and younger	74	5%	13	9%
B	Younger	278	18%	33	22%
bc	Younger and middle	35	2%	3	2%
C	Middle	472	30%	23	16%
cd	Middle and oldest	16	1%	1	1%
D	Oldest	324	21%	12	8%
–	Unidentified	68	4%	7	5%
Total		1.560		148	

Table 1 makes clear that in the Amsterdam exhibition there was an over-representation of books for pre-school and younger children (the so-called picturebooks). These books add up to almost 70% of the books on show, whereas they only represent 42% of the books printed by GIZ at that time.

The classification of Russian children's books according to different theme groups has also been investigated. An extensive discussion of the value of thus classifying children's books can be found in the 1931 catalogue *100 Books for Your Child* (100 knig tvoemu rebenku, 1931). The underlying reason for this thematic classification is discussed by the unidentified author in the requirements for appropriate children's books. Children's books (1) should help children to understand their world, (2) should help children to become a social being, (3) should explain the progress of history and the achievements of modern times, (4) should be joyous and optimistic, and, finally, (5) should have high artistic content both in writing and illustration (Lemmens & Stommels 2009: 116). To help parents make the right choices when purchasing books for their children, nine categories are given. The GIZ catalogue gives an even greater number of theme groups, but many of these can easily be contained in the nine theme groups of the 1931 publication. It is for this reason that the latter categorization is used for a comparison of the theme groups of children's books represented in the GIZ catalogue to those present at the Amsterdam exhibition.



Figure 3. Doublespread by Mikhail Tsekhanovsky from Samuil Marshak: *Pochta*. Moscow-Leningrad: GIZ, 1928 (Cat. 131). This is a very well-known picturebook for pre-school children on science, technology, and production. Not only are the schematic drawings of figures and surroundings innovative, but also the subject matter, a postman at work, had rarely been addressed up till then

As was the case with the age groups, certain theme groups also appear to be overrepresented: natural history books, books on science, technology, and production (Figure 3), and picturebooks and play books. The latter group is obviously

linked to the age group choices. As to natural history, the largest group of books in the Amsterdam exhibition, comprising almost one-third as is shown in Table 2, the cause is less obvious.

Table 2. Russian children's books divided by theme groups given in absolute numbers and percentages both for the production of the State Publishing House (GIZ 1929) and for those presented at the Amsterdam exhibition

Theme group		GIZ 1929		Amsterdam	
1	Community-revolutionary books	113	7%	9	6%
2	Science, technology, and production	145	9%	23	16%
3	Life and revolutionary movements in other countries	124	8%	2	1%
4	New way of life and work	367	24%	20	14%
5	Fairy tales and puzzles	44	3%	8	5%
6	Natural history books	355	23%	47	32%
7	Merry books	21	1%	2	1%
8	Picture and Play books	61	4%	11	7%
8.1	<i>Playbooks</i>	26		3	
8.2	<i>Picture books</i>	35		8	
9	Other	330	21%	20	14%
9.1	<i>Street</i>	22		1	
9.2	<i>Biographies</i>	3		0	
9.3	<i>On the Soviet Union</i>	28		2	
9.4	<i>Travels and adventures</i>	106		3	
9.5	<i>Old way of life</i>	94		5	
9.6	<i>Poems, stories and songs</i>	32		9	
9.7	<i>Children's theatre</i>	40		0	
9.8	<i>Health protection</i>	5		0	
	Unidentified			6	4%
Total		1,560		148	

Considering that the exhibition was compiled in Moscow by VOKS, a certain amount of emphasis on propaganda (revolutionary books and books on a new way of life and work) was to be expected. Although books of this kind were naturally included – bearing in mind that the theme group of books on science, technology, and production not only showed the use of pocketknives but also factories and dam-building – the emphasis on natural history books may have been a surprise for many visitors (Figure 4).



Figure 4. Doublespread by Lev Bruni from Sergei Shervinsky: *Zoologicheskii sad*. Moscow & Leningrad: GIZ, 1927 (Cat. 127), an example of a natural history picturebook for pre-school children. Animals in a cage in a zoological garden were seldom depicted in picturebooks, as the depiction of a caged animal was often considered too brutal for the young child

The main artists in the exhibition were known at the time – as they still are today – as the main Russian children's book illustrators of their age. Topping the bill in numbers is Vladimir Konashevich, of whom 15 books are catalogued. The top five further consists of Konstantin Kuznetsov (12 books), Nikolai Tyrsa (9 books), Vladimir Lebedev (7 books), and Mikhail Tsekhanovsky (7 books).⁸ Together these five artists account for 50 books, a little over a third of the total number in the catalogue.

In Amsterdam the organizers of the exhibition showed a representative cross-section of book production and high quality book graphics – both technical and artistic – in the Soviet Union in the late 1920s. They emphasized the more colorful art (for younger age groups) and the more friendly themes (natural history theme), without shunning propaganda (science, technology, and production).

8. On the importance of Konashevich, Kuznetsov and Lebedev, see, among others, the separate chapters on these artists in Lemmens & Stommels (2009: 321–355).

The reception

The Amsterdam exhibition was visited by more than 5,000 people and GIZ sold more than 700 copies of its children's books (Michielsen 2010: 421). As a direct result of the Amsterdam exhibition, a series of eight picturebooks was published in a translated edition by *Servire – De Baanbreker*, using the same illustrations and typography as the Soviet originals (Lemmens & Stommels 2009: 256). It is interesting to note that the wrong attribution of author and artist in the catalogue of the Amsterdam exhibition can also be found on the title pages of some of these picturebooks; for example, *Dieren in den Winter* (Animals in Winter, 1929), published as part of the first series in November 1929, lists Kupreianov as the author and Afanasev as the illustrator. These picturebooks were published between November 1929 and 1931 in print runs ranging from 2,000 to 5,000. This was not as high as the Russian print runs, but was considerable for the Dutch market at the time. By the end of 1931 over 63,000 copies of the different titles had already been sold in the Netherlands and Flanders (*Catalogus* 1931: 8). What must be noted here is that not all of the books included in the series featured in the catalogue of the Amsterdam exhibition. In fact, *Morozhenoe* (Ice Cream), one of the major books by the duo Marshak–Lebedev, is depicted in the catalogue but does not feature in the catalogue listing! Nor is the original version of the most widely discussed book in the Dutch press, *De gouden blaren* (The Golden Leaves) (Figure 5).

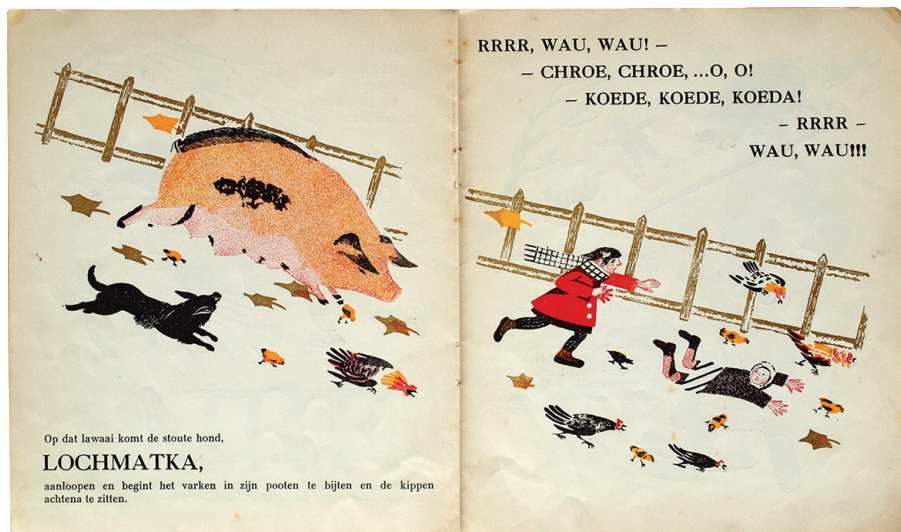


Figure 5. Doublespread by Sofia Vishnevetskaia and Elena Fradkina from Rashel Engel: *De gouden blaren*. The Hague: Servire – De Baanbreker, [1929]

The exhibition was mainly reviewed favourably, as far as the children's books were concerned, in many newspapers and several magazines.⁹ The other part of the exhibition, which in fact constituted the main part, got less attention and got hardly any favourable press. First and foremost, the children's books exhibition featured in the May-June issue of the Netherlands-New Russia Society magazine, in which Ina Elisa Prins Willekes-Macdonald discussed both textual contents and appearances. She refers to the fact that some of the books may well be propagandistic for Western viewers, but she stresses the pedagogical as well as the artistic qualities of all the books on view (Prins Willekes-Macdonald 1929a). Some months later, she published a revised version of the article in the women's magazine *De vrouw en haar huis* (The Wife and Her House) (Prins Willekes-Macdonald 1929b), in which she also refers to the other places the exhibition had traveled to during the summer: two venues in Rotterdam (16–31 May at the Rotterdamse Kring and 21–28 May at the Zuider Volkshuis) and one in Arnhem (15–23 June at the Groote Sociëteit).¹⁰ Plans for other cities were made, but it is unknown whether these materialized. Most of the authors stress the colourfulness of the pictures and the mise-en-page of text in combination with the pictures. Apart from the obvious notice of propagandistic features, the child-oriented themes, in combination with animals (natural history), were eye-openers to the public.

Conclusions

On the basis of the 1929 Amsterdam catalogue, with the GIZ publisher's catalogue of in-print books of the same year and the Bibliography of Russian Children's Books as reference books, it has been possible to make a substantiated reconstruction of the books on view at the exhibition at the Stedelijk Museum in Amsterdam in April-May 1929. However, on the basis of the publications of Russian picture-books in Dutch later that year and the picture of *Morozhenoe* (Ice Cream) in the catalogue, we must assume that the list in the catalogue is not complete.

A similar reconstruction of the French exhibition has been proven to be impossible (Michielsen 2010), because the information in the Paris 1929 catalogue is insufficient. The same is true for the Swiss catalogue of 1929.

9. A discussion of the newspaper clippings concerning the 1929 Amsterdam exhibition in the archive of the Stedelijk Museum is given by Teekman (2009).

10. See *Nieuw Rusland. Orgaan van het genootschap Nederland-Nieuw Rusland*, (1929a:40). Later that year, from October 7, the society showed the books again in Rotterdam for a few days only; see *Nieuw Rusland. Orgaan van het genootschap Nederland-Nieuw Rusland* (1929b:40).

Having identified the books on view in Amsterdam, we must conclude that the main focus of the presentation was on books for pre-school children and younger children and that the main theme on show was natural history. There was no emphasis on propaganda, but the propagandist nature of the exhibition was noted nonetheless. More importantly, the underlying pedagogical qualities of the books were noted. It was agreed by many that the picturebooks were more adjusted to children and more related to the younger child's ideas and interests.

Despite the emphasis on younger age groups and the theme of natural history, the exhibition did give a full overview of what was going on in Soviet children's book publishing at the end of the 1920s: no age groups or themes were excluded. The VOKS objective to create friendship and understanding was achieved. In the aftermath of the exhibition, eight Dutch translations were issued, six of which were also published for the Flemish market by the Brussels publisher De wilde roos (The Wild Rose) and two of which were published in French by the same publisher in Brussels. There was no immediate artistic response in Dutch children's book design. Influences only became apparent a decade later in the work of young Dutch illustrators such as Johanna Bottema (1918–1974) and Wim van Overbeek (1915–2012) (de Bodt 2014: 132).

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Appendix

In this table the Russian children's books presented in the catalogue of the Amsterdam exhibition in 1929 are listed. The first column represents the catalogue numbers 1–148. The following column offers further information from this catalogue: name (usually the name of the illustrator, but occasionally the name of the author), Dutch translation of the book title, and the Russian price of the book. In the third column the actual artist and book are given as identified from the two main sources used for identification (DK and S). The book titles are given in Russian orthography, the author's name and the year and place of publication are given in English. All books but one (no. 73) were published by the GIZ State Publishing House in Moscow (M), Leningrad (L), or both (M–L). The fourth column gives the Age Group Letter and the Theme Group Number. In the fifth and last column references to the main sources are given:

- DK, followed by a page number: *Children's Books. A Book-Catalogue* [Детские книги. Каталог книг], Moscow-Leningrad: GIZ State Publishing House, 1929.
- S, followed by book-number: I.I. Startsev, *Children's Literature. Bibliography 1918–1931* [Детская литература. Библиография 1918–1931], Moscow: OGIZ-Young Guard, 1933.

Amsterdam 1929 catalogue	Book	Groups	Sources
1 Name: Axelrod Title: De geruïte Price: 15 kopecks	Artist: M. Akselrod Book: L. Nejman, Клетчатый, M–L 1928	B 4	DK 63; S 6704
2 Name: Alakrinsky Title: Lees en reis naar Parijs, China Price: 60 kopecks	Artist: P. Aliakrinsky Book: V. Maiakovsky, Прочти и катай в Париж и Китай, M–L 1929	A 1	DK 14; S 6170
3 Name: Brimmer Title: Christofel Columbus Price: 15 kopecks	Artist: N. Brimmer Book: E. Bakhanovskaia, Христофор Колумб, M–L 1929	C 9.4	DK 144; S 769
4 Name: Bruni Title: Dikkertje Price: 20 kopecks	Artist: L. Bruni Book: P. Barto, Толстуха куца, M–L 1928	B 6	DK 181; S 731
5 Name: Bruin ¹¹ Title: Voorspan-paarden Price: 50 kopecks	Artist: L. Bruni Book: S. Fedorchenko, Ездовые, M–L 1928	A 6	DK 173; S 9721
6 Name: Borowskoj Title: Noorden Price: 65 kopecks	Artist: A. Borovskaia Book: O. Gurian, Север, M–L 1929	B 9.3	DK 114; S 2536
7 Name: Borowskoj Title: Feestdag Price: 60 kopecks	Artist: A. Borovskaia Book: O. Gurian, Праздник, M–L 1928	A 1	DK 14; S 2531

(Continued)

11. Misspelled in the catalogue.

Amsterdam 1929 catalogue	Book	Groups	Sources
8 Name: Bianky Title: Het hoepeltje – de muggendood Price: 70 kopecks ¹²	Artist: L. Fejnberg Book: V. Bianki, Росянка – комариная смерть, М–Л 1927	B 6	DK 182; S 1006
9 Name: Budogorsky Title: De Uil Price: 6 kopecks	Artist: E. Budogorsky Book: V. Bianki, Сова, М–Л 1929	B 6	DK 183; S 1017
10 Name: Bechtejew Title: Thee Price: 35 kopecks	Artist: V. Bekhteev Book: N. Dmitrieva, Чай, М 1926	B 2	S 2921 ¹³
11 Name: Borowskoj Title: De Speelbal Price: 35 kopecks	Artist: A. Borovskaia Book: V. Borisovsky, Мяч, М 1928	A 1	DK 13; S 1192
12 Name: Baransky Title: De roode bakkebaard Price: 25 kopecks	Artist: A. Baransky Book: S. Grigorev, Красный бакен, М–Л 1928	B 1	DK 20; S 2354
13 Name: Wladimirow Title: De Locomotief Price: 18 kopecks	Artist: V. Vladimirov Book: B. Zhitkov, Паравоз, Л 1927	C 2	DK 242; S 3260
14 Name: Wassiljew Title: De kleine Kostja Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: V. Vasilev Book: A. Zharov, Маленький Костя, М 1927	B 4	DK 58; S 3188
15 Name: Wassiljew Title: De Loopjongen Price: 9 kopecks	Artist: V. Vasilev Book: В мальчиках, М–Л 1927		S 1772
16 Name: Watagin Title: De Dierentuin Price: 50 kopecks	Artist: V. Vatagin Book: S. Fedorchenko, Зоологический сад, М–Л 1927	A 6	DK 174; S 9737
17 Name: Watagin Title: Maugli Price: 200 kopecks	Artist: V. Vatagin Book: R. Kipling, Маугли, М–Л 1926	D 6	DK 216; S 4340
18 Name: Wladimirow Title: Eigen werk Price: 12 kopecks	Artist: V. Vladimirov Book: B. Zhitkov, Самоделка, М 1927	D 2	DK 254; S 3284

(Continued)

12. The indicated price is that of the 1925 edition illustrated by Vladimir Konashevich; the price of the 1927 edition listed in the GIZ catalogue is 30 kopecks. The 1925 edition was out of print by 1929 and we may therefore assume the in-print edition of 1927 was the actual book in the exhibition.

13. A variant priced 50 kopecks is listed in the GIZ catalogue: DK 234 and S 2920.

	Amsterdam 1929 catalogue	Book	Groups	Sources
19	Name: Gerassimow Title: Kudelja Price: 15 kopecks	Artist: S. Gerasimov Book: P. Zamoisky, Куделя, М–L 1928	B 4	DK 58; S 3443
20	Name: Gorlow Title: Wolven Price: 20 kopecks	Artist: D. Gorlov Book: L. Zavadovsky, Волки, М–L 1928	C 6	DK 202; S 3345
21	Name: Gorlow Title: Wilde dieren Price: 50 kopecks	Artist: D. Gorlov Book: S. Fedorchenko, Звери хищные, шкуры пышные, М–L 1928	A 6	DK 174; S 9730
22	Name: Goljizin Title: De Yakoeten- jongen Oleska Price: 40 kopecks	Artist: V. Golytsin Book: J. Altausen, Якутенок Олеська, М 1927	C 9.3	DK 115; S 278
23	Name: Glebowa Title: Het Babbelkousje Price: 23 kopecks	Artist: T. Glebova Book: O. Kapitsa, Тараторка, М–L 1928	ab 9.6	DK 271; S 4069
24	Name: Genke Title: De Diertjes Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: M. Genke Book: N. Vengrov, Зверушки, М–L 1928	A 6	DK 168; S 1528
25	Name: Dorfman Title: De Kat zonder Baas Price: 10 kopecks	Artist: E. Dorfman Book: B. Zhitkov, Беспризорная кошка, М 1929	C 6	DK 201; S 3219
26	Name: Dejneka Title: De eerste Mei Price: 60 kopecks	Artist: A. Dejneka Book: A. Barto, Первое мая, М 1928	B 4	DK 54; S 694
27	Name: Etscheistow Title: Het Broertje Price: 60 kopecks	Artist: G. Echejstov Book: A. Barto, Братишки, М 1928	A 1	DK 13; S 664
28	Name: Etscheistow Title: De Kinder- Internationale Price: 75 kopecks	Artist: G. Echejstov Book: Iu. Gralitsa, Детский интернационал, М–L 1926	A 1	S 2300
29	Name: Akulschin (uitg.) Title: Over het Meisje Marischka Price: 35 kopecks	Artist: A. Goncharov, Z. Grigoreva, G. Echejstov, and M. Tarkhanov Book: R. Akulshin, О девочке Маришке, о новеньком пальтишке, о свинье ужасной, о звездочке красной, М 1927	B 4	DK 52; S 123
30	Name: Etscheistow Title: Over Meezen en andere vogels Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: G. Echejstov Book: P. Pastukhov, Про синиц да про всяких птиц, М–L 1928	A 6	DK 171; S 7245

(Continued)

Amsterdam 1929 catalogue	Book	Groups	Sources
31 Name: Efimow Title: Hoe dieren van machines schrokken Price: 40 kopecks	Artist: I. Efimov Book: S. Fedorchenko, Как машина зверей всполошила, М–Л 1927	A 6	DK 174; S 9745
32 Name: Efimow Title: Het haasje Price: 40 kopecks	Artist: I. Efimov Book: Ia. Meksin (ed.), Зайка, М–Л 1928	A 6	DK 170; S 3380
33 Name: Ermolajewa Title: De 10 kunstjes van de Duizendkunstenaar Price: 10 kopecks	Artist: V. Ermolaeva Book: M. Ilin, 10 фокусов Чудодеева, М–Л 1928	D 2	DK 254; S 3803
34 Name: Scheltkewitsch Title: De Vuilboom Price: 20 kopecks	Artist: L. Zholtkevich Book: L. Tolstoj, Черемуха, М 1928	B 6	DK 226; S 9416
35 Name: Iwanowa Title: Chokola Price: 18 kopecks	Artist: V. Ivanova Book: N. Zilov, Шоколад, М 1928	B 2	DK 236; S 3639
36 Name: Kulikow Title: De nieuwe jas van Petja Price: 18 kopecks	Artist: A. Kulikov Book: E. Beskov, Петуна новая куртка, М 1927	A 2	DK 229; S 906
37 Name: Kulikow Title: De haan heeft al gekraaid (2 exempl.) Price: 20 kopecks	Artist: A. Kulikov Book: Ia. Meksin, Петухи пропели. Русские народные песни Вып. 1, М–Л 1927	ab 9.6	DK 260; S 6213
38 Name: Kulikow Title: De kleine Hengelaars Price: 25 kopecks	Artist: A. Kulikov Book: Ia. Meksin (ed.), Рыболовнички. Народные песенки, М–Л 1928	ab 9.6	DK 260; S 6215
39 Name: Kulikow Title: Op de Vleugeltjes Price: 25 kopecks	Artist: A. Kulikov Book: S. Fedorchenko, На крылышках, М 1927	ab 6	DK 178; S 9761
40 Name: Rasulewitsch Title: Alle Honden Price: 45 kopecks	Artist: M. Razulevich Book: Lesnik, Все собаки, М–Л 1929	C 6	DK 203; S 5455
41 Name: Krimmer Title: Op de Duiventil Price: 15 kopecks	Artist: E. Krimmer Book: Lesnik, На голубятне, М–Л 1929	C 6	DK 204; S 5461
42 Name: Krawtschenko Title: Bloeiende Velden Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: A. Kravchenko Book: A. Morozov, Поля цветущие, М–Л 1926	C 6	S 6421

(Continued)

	Amsterdam 1929 catalogue	Book	Groups	Sources
43	Name: Krawtschenko Title: De Blinde en zijn Vriendin Price: 12 kopecks	Artist: A. Kravchenko Book: V. Korolenko, Слепой и его подруга, М–Л 1928	C 9.5	DK 101; S 4781
44	Name: Kustodiew Title: Het Dier Price: 20 kopecks	Artist: B. Kustodiev Book: N. Leskov, Зверь, М–Л 1928	D 9.5	DK 110; S 5437
45	Name: Krimmer Title: Hoe komt de Walvisch aan zijn Bek Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: E. Krimmer Book: R. Kipling, Откуда у кита такая глотка, М–Л 1926	C 5	S 4348
46	Name: Konaschewitsch Title: De Jager Price: 12 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: K. Chukovsky, Охотник. Русские народные песенки, М 1929	ab 9.6	DK 261; S 10341
47	Name: Konaschewitsch Title: De Insekten Price: 40 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: O. Gurian, Насекомые, М–Л 1927	B 6	DK 185; S 2523
48	Name: Konaschewitsch Title: Het Werkmanntje Price: 25 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: R. Engel, Работнички, М 1929	A 4	DK 49; S 10815
49	Name: Konaschewitsch Title: Volksliedje Price: 20 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: Ia. Meksin, Народные песенки. Русские народные песни Вып. 4, М–Л 1927	ab 9.6	DK 260
50	Name: Konaschewitsch Title: Wanja, de smid Price: 25 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: I. Mukoseev, Ваня кузнец, М–Л 1927	B 4	DK 62; S 6461
51	Name: Konaschewitsch Title: Toen Alla ziek was Price: 75 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: Ia. Meksin, Как Алла хворала, М 1926	A 4	DK 42; S 6195
52	Name: Kustodiew Title: Voor de Kinderen over Lenin Price: 75 kopecks ¹⁴	Artist: B. Kustodiev Book: A. Kravchenko (ed.), Детям о Ленине, М–Л 1927	B 1	DK 15; S 2791
53	Name: Konaschewitsch Title: De Sahara langs Price: 12 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: K. Chukovsky, Вдоль по сахару. Русские народные песенки, М 1929	ab 9.6	DK 260; S 10290

(Continued)

14. This is the actual price of the cover only; the price of the book without the cover was 1 ruble and 50 kopecks, and the price of the book with the cover was 2 rubles and 25 kopecks. NB: it was common practice in the USSR to pay separately for covers of books.

Amsterdam 1929 catalogue	Book	Groups	Sources
54 Name: Konaschewitsch Title: Nooit gehoord, maar goed gerijmd Price: 22 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: unidentified ¹⁵		
55 Name: Konaschewitsch Title: Kalender-zakboek Price: 22 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: A. Kovalensky, Книжка-календарь, М–Л 1928	A 6	DK 222; S 4485
56 Name: Konaschewitsch Title: De Meester en zijn kinderschaar Price: 50 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: Ia. Meksin and S. Shervinsky, Мастера и детвора, М–Л 1928	A 2	DK 231; S 6222
57 Name: Konaschewitsch Title: De Geitebok Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: I. Mukoseev, Козел, М–Л 1929	B 6	DK 189; S 6464
58 Name: Konaschewitsch Title: Borja in het Ambulatorium Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: S. Zak, Боря в амбулатории, М 1928	A 4	DK 40; S 3400
59 Name: Konaschewitsch Title: Onze Straat Price: 75 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: V. Mirovich, Наша улица, М–Л 1926	A 4	DK 43; S 6315
60 Name: Konaschewitsch Title: De Zoons van Alescha Price: 40 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: H. zur Mühlen, Сыновья Айши, М–Л 1927	D 5	DK 266
61 Name: Konaschewitsch Title: De Zoons van Alescha Price: 40 kopecks	Artist: V. Konashevich Book: H. zur Mühlen, Сыновья Айши, М–Л 1927	D 5	DK 266
62 Name: Kusnetzow Title: Het grijze Eendje Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: K. Kuznetsov Book: Ia. Meksin, Серая утушка. Русские народные песни Вып. 3, М–Л 1927	ab 9.6	DK 260; S 6217
63 Name: Kusnetzow Title: Price: kopecks	Artist: K. Kuznetsov Book: unidentified		
64 Name: Kusnetzow Title: De gekleurde Handschoenen Price: 35 kopecks	Artist: K. Kuznetsov Book: R. Akulshin, Пестрые ваежки, М–Л 1928	B 4	DK 53; S 136

(Continued)

15. This might possibly be: K. Chukovskii, Загадки и отгадки, М 1929, priced 12 kopecks (DK 267, S 10299). Unfortunately, neither pictures nor a copy of the book could be found to verify the contents as a possibility with regard to the Dutch translation of the title.

	Amsterdam 1929 catalogue	Book	Groups	Sources
65	Name: Kusnetzow Title: De Slak Price: 22 kopecks	Artist: K. Kuznetsov Book: S. Fedorchenko, Улитка, М 1928	A 6	DK 179; S 9795
66	Name: Kusnetzow Title: Het Kindereiland Price: 50 kopecks	Artist: K. Kuznetsov Book: S. Chernyj, Детский остров, М–Л 1928	ab 9.6	DK 259; S 10196
67	Name: Kusnetzow Title: Die waagt die wint Price: 15 kopecks	Artist: K. Kuznetsov Book: Ia. Meksin, Кто смел, тот и съел, М–Л 1928	A 4	DK 42; S 6206
68	Name: Kusnetzow Title: De brommige Kater Price: 40 kopecks	Artist: K. Kuznetsov Book: Ia. Meksin, Кот-воркот, М–Л 1928	A 6	DK 170; S 6204
69	Name: Kusnetzow Title: Het Wittertje Price: 50 kopecks	Artist: K. Kuznetsov Book: unidentified		
70	Name: Kusnetzow Title: Berko de Kantonist Price: 180 kopecks ¹⁶	Artist: K. Kuznetsov Book: S. Grigorev, Берко-кантист, М–Л 1929	D 9.5	DK 108; S 2345
71	Name: Kusnetzow Title: De Korhaan Price: 35 kopecks	Artist: K. Kuznetsov Book: A. Kovalensky, Тетерев-косач, М–Л 1926	B 6	DK 187; S 4509
72	Name: Kusnetzow Title: Bonte vleugels Price: 5 kopecks	Artist: K. Kuznetsov Book: unidentified		
73	Name: Kusnetzow Title: Hoe vader Tanja op zijn handen droeg Price: 95 kopecks	Artist: K. Kuznetsov Book: Ia. Meksin, Как папа Таня носил, М: ЗИФ, 1926		S 6196
74	Name: Kupriianow Title: Van het Geitje Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: N. Kupriianov Book: A. Kovalenskii, О козе-егозе, свинке-щетинке и о домашней скотинке, М–Л 1928	A 6	DK 169; S 4497
75	Name: Kupriianow Title: Van de Berk en van de Vorst Price: 35 kopecks	Artist: N. Kupriianov Book: A. Kovalenskii, О березе, о морозе, елках и иголках, М 1928	A 6	DK 222; S 4495
76	Name: Lapschin Title: Zwart op wit Price: 75 kopecks	Artist: N. Lapshin Book: M. Ilin, Черным по белому, М–Л 1928	D 2	DK 248; S 3827

(Continued)

16. The price of the book should read 160 kopecks (1 ruble and 60 kopecks); there is no possible edition of the book found in Startsev priced 180 kopecks (1 ruble and 80 kopecks).

Amsterdam 1929 catalogue	Book	Groups	Sources
77 Name: Lapschin Title: Van de Zon Price: 45 kopecks	Artist: N. Lapshin Book: M. Ilin, Солнце на столе, M-L 1928	D 2	DK 248; S 3821
78 Name: Lebedjew Title: Van het domme Muisje Price: 60 kopecks	Artist: V. Lebedev Book: S. Marshak, О глупом мышенке, M-L 1928	A 5	DK 263; S 6130
79 Name: Lebedjew Title: Vandaag en Gisteren Price: 70 kopecks	Artist: V. Lebedev Book: S. Marshak, Вчера и сегодня, M-L 1928	A 2	DK 230; S 6121
80 Name: Lebedjew Title: Bagage Price: 22 kopecks	Artist: V. Lebedev Book: S. Marshak, Багаж, M-L 1929	ab 7	DK 269; S 6117
81 Name: Lebedjew Title: Het Alfabet Price: 50 kopecks	Artist: V. Lebedev Book: V. Lebedev, Азбука, L 1925	A 8.2	S 5265
82 Name: Lebedjew Title: Te Paard Price: 45 kopecks	Artist: V. Lebedev Book: V. Lebedev, Верхом, M-L 1928	A 8.2	DK 5; S 5266
83 Name: Lebedjew Title: Het Olifantenjong Price: 40 kopecks	Artist: V. Lebedev Book: R. Kipling, Слононок, M-L 1929	A 5	DK 265; S 4368
84 Name: Lebedjew Title: Cirkus Price: 70 kopecks	Artist: V. Lebedev Book: S. Marshak, Цирк, M-L 1928	A 7	S 6138
85 Name: Motschalow Title: De opstandige vorst Price: 90 kopecks	Artist: S. Mochalov Book: S. Bogdanovich, Князь- бунтовщик, M-L 1928	B 1	DK 28; S 1115
86 Name: Oldina Title: Kinderen in een Kooi Price: 85 kopecks	Artist: C. Aldin Book: S. Marshak, Детки в клетки, M-L 1928	A 6	DK 170; S 6049
87 Name: Pawlinow Title: De Schildwacht Price: 20 kopecks	Artist: P. Pavlinov Book: N. Leskov, Человек на часах, M-L 1928	D 9.5	DK 110; S 5441
88 Name: Politschuk Title: Het diertje haalt onzin uit Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: F. Polishchuk Book: L. Nejman, Зверушкини шутки, M-L 1928	A 4	DK 45; S 6702
89 Name: Pokrowsky Title: Het vroolijke onweer Price: 50 kopecks	Artist: B. Pokrovskii Book: O. Gurian, Веселая гроза, M-L 1928	A 4	DK 39; S 2504

(Continued)

	Amsterdam 1929 catalogue	Book	Groups	Sources
90	Name: Prochorowa Title: Het Reuzenkorhaantje Price: 12 kopecks	Artist: N. Prokhorov Book: Lesnik, Тетеревенок-великан, М–L 1928	cd 6	DK 217; S 5470
91	Name: Pokrowsky Title: Het Reken- meesterje Price: 22 kopecks	Artist: B. Pokrovskii Book: A. Barto, Считаючка, М 1929	A 6	DK 167; S 714
92	Name: Pachomow Title: De Meester Price: 50 kopecks	Artist: A. Pakhomov Book: S. Marshak, Мастер, М–L 1927	A 2	DK 230; S 6070
93	Name: Pachomow Title: De Zomer Price: 45 kopecks	Artist: A. Pakhomov Book: A. Pakhomov, Лето, М–L 1927	A 8.2	DK 5; S 7253
94	Name: Pachomow Title: De Bijl Price: 22 kopecks	Artist: A. Pakhomov Book: G. Krugov, Топор, М–L 1928	B 2	DK 237; S 4938
95	Name: Popowa Title: Het vurige Paard Price: 35 kopecks	Artist: L. Popova Book: V. Maiakovskii, Конь-огонь, М–L 1928	A 2	DK 231; S 6165
96	Name: Popowa Title: Het Speelgoed Price: 20 kopecks	Artist: L. Popova Book: A. Olsufeva, Игрушки, М 1928	A 2	DK 232; S 6987
97	Name: Rerberg Title: Het Suikerriet Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: I. Rerberg Book: A. Kovalenskii, Сахарный тростник, М–L 1928	B 2	DK 237; S 4507
98	Name: Ssinjakowa Title: Hoe de Haas dient Price: 45 kopecks	Artist: M. Siniakova Book: N. Aseev, Про заячью службу и лисью дружбу, М–L 1927	B 6	DK 180; S 507
99	Name: Ssinjakowa Title: Arno Price: 12 kopecks	Artist: M. Siniakova Book: E. Seton-Thompson, Арно, М–L 1929	C 6	DK 212; S 8570
100	Name: Ssinjakowa Title: O zoo Price: 15 kopecks	Artist: M. Siniakova Book: unidentified		
101	Name: Staronossow Title: De Duivel op den grond Price: 65 kopecks	Artist: P. Staronosov Book: N. Bogdanov, Чердачный чорт, М–L 1928	C 4	DK 72; S 1113
102	Name: Staronossow Title: Chuschi Price: 70 kopecks	Artist: P. Staronosov Book: Ia. Kalnitskii, Хуши, М–L 1929	D 4	DK 90; S 4017

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Amsterdam 1929 catalogue	Book	Groups	Sources
103 Name: Staronossow Title: Onze Galja Price: 45 kopecks	Artist: P. Staronosov Book: L. Krasilnikova, Наша Галя, М–Л 1928	C 6	DK 203; S 4867
104 Name: Ssamochwalow Title: De Timmerman Price: 15 kopecks	Artist: A. Samokhvalov Book: B. Zhitkov, Плотник, М–Л 1928	B 2	DK 235; S 3265
105 Name: Ssamochwalow Title: Licht zonder Vuur Price: 15 kopecks	Artist: A. Samokhvalov Book: B. Zhitkov, Свет без огня, М–Л 1928	C 2	DK 242; S 3287
106 Name: Spandikov Title: Het Raadsel Price: 10 kopecks	Artist: E. Spandikov Book: O. Kapitsa, Народные загадки, М–Л 1928	A 5	DK 267
107 Name: Brimmer Title: Het Indianen- opperhoofd Price: 9 kopecks	Artist: N. Brimmer Book: O. Henri, Вождь краснокожих, М–Л 1927	C 3	DK 123; S 2072
108 Name: Efimow Title: De Trein Price: 35 kopecks	Artist: N. Simonovich-Efimova Book: L. Ostroumov, Поезд, М–Л 1928	A 2	DK 232; S 7107
109 Name: Tirssa Title: Boschhuisje Price: 60 kopecks	Artist: N. Tyrsa Book: V. Bianki, Лесные домишки, М 1927	B 6	DK 181; S 937
110 Name: Tirssa Title: De Kolonne Price: 10 kopecks	Artist: N. Tyrsa Book: S. Marshak, Отряд, М–Л 1928	C 4	DK 81; S 6077
111 Name: Tirssa Title: Het Sneeuwboek Price: 50 kopecks	Artist: N. Tyrsa Book: V. Bianki, Снежная книга, М–Л 1926	bc 6	S 1011 ¹⁷
112 Name: Tirssa Title: Verhalen van de Zee Price: 55 kopecks	Artist: N. Tyrsa Book: B. Zhitkov, Морские истории, М–Л 1928	C 9.4	DK 147; S 3255
113 Name: Tirssa Title: Het Sneeuwboek Price: 50 kopecks	Artist: N. Tyrsa Book: V. Bianki, Снежная книга, М–Л 1926	bc 6	S 1011 ¹⁸
114 Name: Tirssa Title: De Republiek Schkid Price: 200 kopecks	Artist: N. Tyrsa Book: G. Belykh and E. Pain, Республика Шкид, М–Л 1928	D 9.1	DK 96; S 825

(Continued)

17. The GIZ catalogue lists a later edition priced 15 kopecks: DK 196, S 1012.

18. Ibid.

Amsterdam 1929 catalogue	Book	Groups	Sources
115 Name: Tirssa Title: Het Sneeuwboek Price: 50 kopecks	Artist: N. Tyrsa Book: V. Bianki, Снежная книга, М–L 1926	bc 6	S 1011 ¹⁹
116 Name: Tirssa Title: Van de Olifant Price: 45 kopecks	Artist: N. Tyrsa Book: B. Zhitkov, Про слона, М–L 1929	B 6	DK 185; S 3277
117 Name: Uschakowa Title: De Poes en haar jongen Price: 25 kopecks	Artist: N. Ushakova Book: P. Petrovskii, Кисевна и котята, М–L 1928	A 6	DK 172; S 7422
118 Name: Uschakowa Title: Dat is me 'n Kat Price: 10 kopecks	Artist: N. Ushakova Book: S. Fedorchenko, Вот так киски!, М–L 1928	A 6	DK 173; S 9718
119 Name: Uschakowa Title: Broeders and Zusters Price: 20 kopecks	Artist: N. Ushakova Book: M. Soloveva, Братья да сестры кошечки нашей пестрой, М 1928	A 6	DK 172; S 8951
120 Name: Tschechonin Title: Sinaasappelschillen Price: 70 kopecks	Artist: S. Chekhonin Book: M. Moravskaja, Апельсиновые корки, М–L 1928	ab 9.6	DK 259; S 6404
121 Name: Tschitschagowa Title: De Kinderen van de Krant Price: 60 kopecks	Artist: G. and O. Chichagova Book: N. Smirnov, Детям о газете, М–L 1926	B 2	DK 239; S 8809
122 Name: Stern Title: Huisdieren Price: 22 kopecks	Artist: M. Shtern Book: M. Shtern, Домашние животные, М–L 1929	A 8.2	DK 8; S 10713
123 Name: Sternberg Title: Galu en Gatu Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: D. Shterenberg Book: O. Gurian, Галу и Мгату, М 1928	B 3	DK 120; S 2511
124 Name: Scherwinskaja Title: Bergen Price: 40 kopecks	Artist: M. Shervinskaia Book: A. Barto, Горки, М–L 1927	A 4	DK 36; S 669
125 Name: Schifrin Title: Loopen, mennен, arbeiten Price: 25 kopecks	Artist: N. Shifrin Book: N. Shifrin, Берут, везут, работают, М 1929	A 8.2	DK 8; S 10633
126 Name: Stern Title: Het Weitje Price: 65 kopecks	Artist: M. Shtern Book: M. Prishvin, Луговка, М–L 1928	ab 6	DK 178; S 7806

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Amsterdam 1929 catalogue	Book	Groups	Sources
127 Name: Bruni Title: De Dierentuin Price: 85 kopecks	Artist: L. Lev Bruni Book: S. Shervinskii, Зоологический сад, М–Л 1927	A 6	DK 176; S 10566
128 Name: Wedensky-Ewenbach Title: Op de Rivier Price: 22 kopecks	Artist: E. Evenbakh Book: A. Vvedenskii, На реке, М 1928	A 8.2	DK 3; S 1491
129 Name: Schitkow-Ewenbach Title: De Tafel Price: 40 kopecks	Artist: E. Evenbakh Book: B. Zhitkov, Стол, Л 1926	B 2	DK 235; S 3308
130 Name: Tirssa Title: Het Aapje Price: 20 kopecks	Artist: N. Tyrssa Book: B. Zhitkov, Про обезьянку, М–Л 1929	C 6	DK 201; S 3272
131 Name: Zechanowsky Title: De Post Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: M. Tsekhanovskii Book: S. Marshak, Почта, М–Л 1928	A 2	DK 231; S 6095
132 Name: Zechanowsky Title: Het Tien-kopekengeldstuk Price: 12 kopecks	Artist: M. Tsekhanovskii Book: B. Zhitkov, Привенник, М–Л 1928	C 2	DK 241; S 3229
133 Name: Zechanowsky Title: Over dit Boek Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: M. Tsekhanovskii Book: B. Zhitkov, Про эту книгу, М–Л 1928	C 2	DK 242; S 3281
134 Name: Zechanowsky Title: De Storm Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: M. Tsekhanovskii Book: B. Zhitkov, Ураган, М–Л 1928	C 9.4	DK 147; S 3300
135 Name: Fedortschenko Title: Apen Price: 22 kopecks	Artist: M. Tsekhanovskii Book: S. Fedorchenko, Обезьяны, М–Л 1928	ab 6	DK 178; S 9766
136 Name: Manuilow Title: Huis en tuin Price: 7 kopecks	Artist: A. Manuilov Book: N. Zilov, Двор да изба – народу гурьба, М 1927	A 5	DK 267; S 3595
137 Name: Iwanowa Title: De Jongen van Rubber Price: 9 kopecks	Artist: V. Ivanova Book: D. Grigorovich, Гуттаперчивый мальчик, М–Л 1928	C 9.5	DK 99; S 2327
138 Name: Roberts Title: Het Kleintje Price: 9 kopecks	Artist: unidentified Book: C. Roberts, Маленький ушан, М–Л 1928	B 6	DK 192; S 8113
139 Name: Nowikow Title: Schapen en Paarden Price: 30 kopecks	Artist: K. Kuznetsov Book: I. Novikov, Овцы-лошадки, детские загадки, М–Л 1926	A 5	DK 267; S 6853

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Amsterdam 1929 catalogue	Book	Groups	Sources
140 Name: Bontsch-Osmolowskaja Title: De Hoenderhof Price: 32 kopecks ²⁰	Artist: O. Bonch-Osmolovskaia Book: O. Bonch-Osmolovskaia, Птичий двор, М 1929	A 8.2	DK 3; S 1174
141 Name: Fedortschenko Title: Vogelklacht Price: 25 kopecks	Artist: V. Ivanova Book: S. Fedorchenko, Птичьи жалобы, М 1927	A 6	DK 175; S 9779
142 Name: Gurjan Title: Achmet en de Moestuin Price: 35 kopecks	Artist: A. Goncharov, Z. Grigoreva, G. Echejstov, and M. Tarkhanov Book: O. Gurian, Ахмет и огород, М 1927	B 4	DK 57; S 2501
143 Name: Bianki Title: De Boschkrant Price: 150 kopecks	Artist: L. Bruni, P. Sokolov, N. Tyrsa, M. Shishmareva, and E. Evenbakh Book: V. Bianki, Лесная газета на каждый год, М–Л 1928	C 6	DK 200; S 934
144 Name: Ermolajew Title: De Papoea's Price: 25 kopecks	Artist: V. Ermolaeva Book: V. Ermolaeva, Шесть масок, М–Л 1929	A 8.1	DK 12; S 3151
145 Name: Bontsch-Osmolowskaja Title: Veldbloemen Price: 22 kopecks	Artist: O. Bonch-Osmolovskaia Book: O. Bonch-Osmolovskaia, Полевые цветы, М 1929	A 8.2	DK 3; S 1173
146 Name: Wengrow Title: Oktoberliederen Price: 85 kopecks	Artist: L. Popova, A. Petrova, and G. Tuganova Book: N. Vengrov, Октябрьские песенки, М–Л 1927	A 1	DK 14; S 1531
147 Name: Zechanowsky Title: De Trein Price: 40 kopecks	Artist: M. Tsekhanovskii Book: M. Tsekhanovskii, Поезд, Л 1928	B 8.1	DK 12; S 10067
148 Name: Zechanowsky Title: Bim-Bam Price: 40 kopecks	Artist: M. Tsekhanovskii Book: M. Tsekhanovskii, Бим-Бом, Л 1928	B 8.1	DK 12; S 10065

20. The price of the identified edition should read 22 kopecks.

CHAPTER 7

Rupture. Ideological, aesthetic, and educational transformations in Danish picturebooks around 1933

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This chapter discusses the sources of influence on progressive Danish picturebooks from the 1930s and 1940s. The impact of Russian avant-garde books is described, followed by a discussion of the terms ‘Modernism’ and ‘avant-garde’. Four picturebooks are analyzed with a focus on new elements related to visual expression, ideological content, verbal expression, and the image of the child. The conclusion is that picturebook creators were inspired by a number of sources, leading to the beginning of a new era of picturebook creation in Scandinavia that is too complex to be summarized in one word.

In 1932 a notice in the Danish newspaper *Arbejder-Bladet* (The Worker’s Magazine) bore the headline “Exhibition of Russian Picturebooks and Posters in Copenhagen”. In the article, an anonymous writer recommends the exhibition, and describes some of the differences between contemporary Danish and Soviet picturebooks. The focus is on the ways in which Russian picturebooks present a new society, a new content, and a new mode of visual expression. The author describes how the main characters in Danish picturebooks are fairytale figures, such as witches and trolls, while

[...] the Russian picturebooks depict the fairy tale of everyday life, how the human being has subjugated nature. [...] Children are introduced to the wonderland of technology, naphtha and electricity, ships, and airplanes. (...) And all this is illustrated by the best artists in Russia, in lively colors and with childlike fantasy, in the best sense of the word. Plant and animal life, life on a farm, the Red Army, the revolution, the development of the socialistic society, the lives of pioneers, the whole fairy tale of the Soviet Union is presented, leading the child to nature; work

and life gain new meaning and fresh colors, work is not bondage, but the way to a new and better life. (Anonymous, *Arbejder-Bladet*, 24 May 1932)¹

The list in the second-to-last sentence gives the impression of an almost breathless enthusiasm and engagement, brought about by being confronted with this new way of addressing the child in the Soviet picturebooks.

The influence of Russian picturebooks and posters on Danish picturebooks has been discussed on various occasions (Christensen 2003; Weinreich 2006; Druker 2008). This chapter focuses on a more specific question related to considering 1933 as a turning point in Danish picturebook history: What is presented as 'the new' in Danish picturebooks for children around 1933? This article takes the reception of the exhibition of Russian picturebooks as its starting point, since this reception explicitly addresses the question of what is different and new in the Russian books. A further discussion of sources of inspiration for changes in Danish picturebooks follows, combined with reflections on terms such as 'Modernism' and 'avant-garde' in relation to picturebooks in a Danish context. Four books will be analyzed against this background with a focus on new elements related to visual expression, ideological content, verbal expression, and the image of the child. The four picturebooks are Hans Kirk's *Jørgens Hjul. En moderne Billedbog for Børn* (George's Wheel. A Modern Picturebook for Children, 1932),² illustrated by Arne Ungermann and Edvard Heiberg, Hans Scherfig's *Hvad lærer vi i Skolen?* (What Do We Learn at School?, 1933), Otto Gelsted's *Kai og Anne i den store By* (Kai and Anne in the Big City, 1933), illustrated by Karen Lis Jacobsen, and finally, Torben Gregersen's *Pers første Bog* (Per's First Book, 1943), also illustrated by Karen Lis Jacobsen. These books are chosen from a relatively small group of what one might call 'experimental' or 'innovative' picturebooks created by a fairly small group of Danish artists, writers, and educators, often with left-wing aspirations, during the 1930s.

A new society, a new child, a new picturebook

The previously mentioned exhibition of Soviet picturebooks was discussed in a number of publications. *Dagens Nyheder* (News of Today), a right-wing paper supported by the association of employees, explains that the exhibition was brought to Denmark after the manager of the book section at the Illums department store

1. All translations from Danish are mine.

2. On the cover of *Jørgens Hjul* the title is written in the lower case, showing inspiration from Bauhaus aesthetics. Heiberg taught at the Bauhaus school in Weimar for a short period in 1930 (Sørensen 2000: 132).

saw a similar exhibition in Paris, and learned that “the Russians are doing a great deal of work in order to renew all the literature aimed at children” (Anonymous, *Dagens Nyheder*, 12 May 1932). This writer mentions some of the same impressions of ‘the new’ in the Soviet picturebook: a high level of artistic quality in the illustrations, and the depiction of contemporary everyday life in a realistic manner. The writer states: “The Russians want to leave behind the old fairy tales about trolls and witches” and concludes:

[...] many of our artists and writers must find inspiration for a renewal of children’s books. This will not be considered imitation, when transformed and transported to a Danish context – of course, with the exclusion of everything that is connected to the red Revolution, which is also glorified in the Russian children’s literature. (Anonymous, *Dagens Nyheder*, 12 May 1932)

While the abovementioned notice in *Arbejder-Bladet* praised all the new elements in the Soviet picturebooks, this journalist focuses on the laudable in the visual expression, and the fact that children are introduced to how different things are produced, but evidently rejects the ideological content. Another generally positive approach is presented in an interview with the person who had brought these books to Denmark, Aage Jørgensen, who was employed by the Russian delegation in Copenhagen. In his opinion, the Soviet books must not be seen as a contrast to fairy tales – they are just a new version of this genre. He explains that they are “series of books that in an amusing and understandable way explain the fairy tale of technical life” (Anonymous, *Tidens Kvinder*, 7 June 1932). According to him, the books accessibly explain the history of the Revolution and the five-year plans, for instance, to children and their parents. As a former school teacher, Aage Jørgensen thinks it is natural to start with the children and reach the parents through them, when you want to change a society. Finally, he concludes: “I think (...) that everybody, whether looking upon the Soviet state with understanding and sympathy, or the contrary, must admit at least this when looking at these children’s books: that they represent a high level artistically, and in terms of entertainment and education” (Anonymous, *Tidens Kvinder*, 7 June 1932).

Terms used in relation to the Soviet books in these three articles are ‘renewal’, ‘new meaning’, and ‘modern in the very best sense of the word’, and they are used in relation to both form and content. In *Stories for Little Comrades* (1999), Evgeny Steiner describes some of the changes in the visual expression in Soviet picturebooks of the 1920s. He discusses how picturebooks by Vladimir Lebedev in the 1920s, for example, may be regarded as examples of a shift away from “the warm, biologizing, boastful, mystical and irrational *modern*”, with its curved lines and pastel shades, which are replaced with a mode of expression characterized by ‘solid flat planes’, diagonal lines, strong colors – especially black, red and white – and new ways of

presenting the motif through angles and cropping (Steiner 1999: 54). Steiner also discusses in detail the new content of Soviet picturebooks, and relates their development to the Russian avant-garde artists who were involved in picturebook production (see the chapters by Evgeny Steiner and Sara Pankenier Weld in this volume).

Neither 'avant-garde' nor 'Modernism' has been used as a general term to describe new tendencies in Danish picturebooks of the 1930s. In a literary context, the Danish term 'modernisme' refers primarily to literature from the 1960s. In the most recent history of Danish literature (Mortensen & Schack 2007: 62), a chapter on the 1960s is entitled 'Modernism Comes to Denmark'. In Danish art history, the term 'modernisme' is generally used to describe trends at the beginning of the twentieth century (Abildgaard 1994: 7). Therefore, it would not make sense to use 'Modernism' in a discussion of the new elements in Danish picturebooks from around 1933, even though the term 'modern' is also used in connection with picturebooks. The specific Danish use of the term 'Modernism' creates a complicated situation in relation to Swedish children's literature studies, where the term is important in relation to literature of the 1930s and 1940s. Thus, both Lena Kåreland and Elina Druker use the term when describing Swedish children's literature of the 1940s, in this different cultural and geographical setting (Kåreland 1999; Druker 2008).

The term 'avant-garde' does not present itself as a less complicated alternative. Once again, Danish literary history has primarily used the term 'avant-garde' when talking about the 1960s, including when this period is discussed in relation to different definitions and approaches to the term 'avant-garde' (Ørum 2009: 19). In descriptions of the history of Danish visual art, 'avant-garde' is not used to describe a more or less coherent movement, a group of artists, or a defined period of time. Danish artists traveled to Paris and to Germany in the 1920s and 1930s, and were influenced by avant-garde movements such as Surrealism, Cubism, and Expressionism. As mentioned above, Danish visual art of this period would generally be described under the overall heading of 'Modernism', combined with more specific terms in relation to specific artists.

For these reasons, I find it counterproductive to discuss Danish picturebooks of the 1930s using either the term 'modernist' or 'avant-garde'. The following analyses will show that Danish picturebooks published after the 1932 exhibition were significantly influenced by Soviet picturebooks of the 1920s. Therefore, in this context, the term 'avant-garde' will refer to the Russian avant-garde as it is described with regard to picturebooks (Steiner 1999; Rowell & Wye 2002).

The importance of progressive educational ideas is another argument against using a designation related to visual art or literature as the overarching term to describe the development of picturebooks in this period. Swedish picturebook scholar Kristin Hallberg has noted the existence of 'a pedagogic poetics' according to which the texts of picturebooks are adapted to knowledge of, for instance,

the linguistic development of the young child. Hallberg also demonstrates how, during this period, Scandinavian picturebooks for small children were highly influenced by contemporary progressive educational values and ideas (Hallberg 1996a, 1996b). Danish illustrators such as Egon Mathiesen and Ib Spang Olsen were closely connected to progressive educational institutions (Christensen 2003), and two of the most influential progressive educators, Torben Gregersen and Jens Sigsgaard, wrote picturebooks themselves, and promoted new educational ideas related to the use of picturebooks. They both represented the so-called ‘reform pedagogy movement’, according to which the child was to be considered a fellow human being in its own right, who should be given the opportunity to develop his or her own individual identity and creativity through a non-authoritarian upbringing (Winge 1979; Thau 1976).

Finally, the development of new modes of expression, new content, and new educational ideas in picturebooks must be understood in the context of radical changes in Danish society around 1930. In 1924, the Social Democrats formed a government for the first time, and in 1933 they passed the first of a number of reforms, the Social Reform. Other reforms related to children’s access to books and knowledge concerned the improvement of public schools and public libraries. Architects discussed how to create new, functional, affordable, democratic, and yet beautiful buildings and institutions for children, too (de Coninck-Smith 2011).

While the terms ‘avant-garde’ and ‘modernist’ are problematic in relation to Danish picturebooks, the denominations ‘new’ and ‘modern’ used in the reception of the 1933 exhibition are appropriate. Books published in Denmark shortly after the exhibition present variations on the characteristics of the Russian artistic avant-garde. One finds experiments with new visual and literary modes of expression, examples of explicit revolutionary content, and ideas of childhood related to progressive educational ideas. These elements will be discussed in the analyses that follow.

The new world presented in *Jørgens Hjul*

The cover of *Jørgens Hjul* is significant: In the lower left corner a boy is standing with his scooter in his hand. He is staring at a big black wheel with a scooter, and the title appears in poster-like letters, without any capital letters. This shows inspiration from the Bauhaus movement, within which the publisher Edvard Heiberg had worked (Sørensen 2000). Both the boy and the background are red, and the prominent use of this color is not coincidental. The text “A modern picturebook for children” explicitly advertises the intent to present a new way of addressing

children. The book was published by the newly established left-wing cooperative publishing house Monde. Apart from Arne Ungermann, the young progressive architect Edvard Heiberg is credited as the publisher, and the style of the photomontages indicates that Heiberg designed this part of the illustrations. Heiberg was a very influential figure in relation to promoting progressive ideas of functionalist architecture inspired by Le Corbusier and the Bauhaus movement (Sørensen 2000). The verses in the book were written by the acknowledged novelist Hans Kirk (Stybe 1983), who was also active in Monde, as well as in other left-wing activities.

Significantly, all doublespreads in *Jørgens Hjul* depict the “old” on the left page and the “new” or “modern” on the right. The old means of transportation are older versions of the bicycle, motorcycle, the horse-drawn carriage, the horse-drawn tram, rowboats, and sailboats (Figure 1). These means of transportation from the past are represented in the “old” style, in fine, naturalistic drawings by Arne Ungermann. On these pages, some of the characters have faces with individual features, and they are dressed in an outdated manner. These drawings contrast strongly – and intentionally – with the photomontages on the right side of each doublespread.

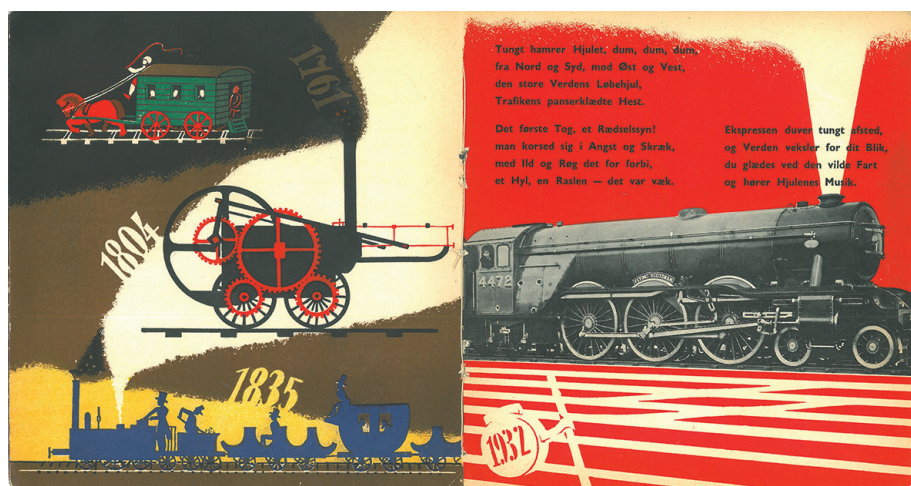


Figure 1. Doublespread from [Kirk, Hans]: *Jørgens Hjul. En moderne Billedbog for Børn*. Illustrations by Arne Ungermann and Edvard Heiberg. Copenhagen: Monde, 1932. Used by permission of Line Ungermann

Here photomontages combine black and white photos with figures and numbers. The typography of the numbers represents the ‘new’ through characters similar to those used by the architect Le Corbusier (Cohen 2008). The montages of the bicycle, the motorcycle, the race car, the train, the tram, the speedboat, the

airplane, and the Zeppelin all share the Russian avant-garde predilection for the use of one primary color combined with black and white, a composition based on diagonal lines, a lack of central perspective, an absence of depictions of complete human figures, and a consistent focus on depicting machines and engines from angles that present them as powerful and overwhelming. The machine, not the human being, is the center of attention.

Strangely enough, the text is written in a traditional form, with the use of an a-b-c-b rhyme scheme and iambic meter, which gives it an energetic tone. The content of the text is more innovative, and is a tribute to machines, speed, and progress. On each page, the first stanza presents the “old” means of transportation, while the next one or two describes the new and modern. The old train was a “sight of terror”, while the new trains are described in an almost loving manner:

The express pitches heavily on
the world changes as you pass
the high speed is a source of joy
as is the music of the wheels. (Kirk 1932: n. pag.)

Not only are the engines and means of transportation praised for their speed and functionality, the author also directs the reader’s attention to the aesthetic dimension of the vehicles: for instance, the electric tram is described as “a house of glass/ finely shaped, spacious and beautiful”.

Also new and noteworthy is the explicit encouragement of a feeling of solidarity and community. In relation to the description of a new airplane, Hans Kirk writes:

You should not speak of “my”, but “our”
community is what we seek
the world is open, strong, and free,
put on the great big wheel your hand! (Kirk 1932: n.pag.)

The text explicitly presents the old world not with nostalgia, but with a sense that human industry and effort have resulted in progress and development, and a change for the better. The present is exciting, and the future even more promising.

The visual expression in this book is innovative, original and involves an enlightening juxtaposition of traditional drawings and state-of-the-art photo-montages. Thereby it explicitly and deliberately exposes the child to an aesthetics inspired by contemporary art, design, and architecture. At the same time, the combination of text and images contains a clear political message, and addresses the child as a potential citizen in a state based on left-wing ideology.

The education of the socialist citizen

Another book, published in 1933, has a similarly explicit ideological message. *Hvad lærer vi i Skolen?* (What Do We Learn in School?, 1933) by Hans Scherfig, a novelist as well as a visual artist, includes a preface and 12 pages with text and black and white drawings. In the preface, Scherfig addresses the child reader directly:

The school you go to exists in order to make you good citizens in society. [...] It teaches you what society wants you to know. But we are among those who are not satisfied with society as it is. We see how a small class of people has all the goods, while the greater masses have only their own labor, which they must sell, in order to live. [...] We see that this social order – **the capitalistic society** – is stupid, and on a daily basis we experience all the misfortunes to which this crazed order leads: crisis, war, unemployment, and so forth. (Scherfig 1933: n. pag.)

According to Scherfig, this societal order must be replaced, and therefore the book tells the child readers what they do not learn in school, and what they ought to learn:

We hear about kings and heroes in history/– but not about the daily useful work./We learn about wars, and enthusiasm, and heroism, and patriotism/but learn nothing about the capital interests that cause wars./[...] /We learn that in Russia there is the most terrible confusion. That all the people are killing one another, or dying of starvation./– but we know that it is not true. In the Soviet Union the workers are creating a new world. /[...] Religion teaches us that we must be satisfied with the conditions of life here on earth ... if we have patience and behave, we will receive roast meat in heaven, after we are dead./But we know that we must fight if we want to improve our conditions of life.

(Scherfig 1933: n.pag.)

The very explicit political message in this book is accompanied by black ink drawings that echo avant-garde artists such as the critical and satirical German artist Georg Grosz, but also, in some cases, add a humoristic aspect to the serious text (see Figure 2).

The illustrations support the explicitly stated wish to form or educate the child for a specific society, and to be a specific, ideal citizen. The idea of character transformation by means of picturebooks is present, but the child is not addressed as an individual who should reflect on the matter and form his or her own opinion. The author states in the preface that his intent is to show children that they should not believe everything the school says, which shows his interest in an anti-authoritarian education. He also encourages the child to color the images and thus addresses the child as a creative individual.



— men vi véd, at vi selv maa kæmpe, hvis vi vil forbedre
vore kaar.

Figure 2. Illustration from *Hvad lærer vi i Skolen?* by Hans Scherfig. Copenhagen: Monde, 1933. Used by permission of Christine Scherfig. . The text on the sign says “Work” and “Bread”. The caption reads: “But we know that we must fight if we want to improve our conditions of life.”

Aesthetic appeal in text and image

A different, but related, way of addressing the child in words and images is presented in *Kai og Anne i den store By* (Kai and Anne in the Big City, 1933), with text by poet Otto Gelsted, and illustrations by the visual artist Karen Lis Jacobsen. Karen Lis Jacobsen (1905–1989) exhibited at curated exhibitions in the 1930s, and studied at different art schools in Denmark and Sweden. That 1933 was indeed a year of transition and change is illustrated by two very different modes of expression in two books she illustrated in this year. Edgar Rubin's text *Far fortæller* (Father Tells a Story, 1933) includes a number of small watercolor illustrations by Jacobsen (Figure 3).

They are naturalistic, and present various everyday scenes related to the text, which consists of anecdotes about childhood. The mother and child relationship is represented as close and important, for example, on an occasion when the child is lost and found, and in the final vignette of mother and child in a close embrace at bedtime. The contrast to some of the images in *Kai og Anne i den store By* is striking. This book represents the same visual division between old and new as *Jørgens Hjul*.

On the left page of each doublespread the reader is confronted with the text, and naturalistic line drawings, as in *Jørgens Hjul*. In this case too, the contrast with the images on the right page is stunning. Paper cutouts in bright colors, flat forms, the use of diagonals in the composition, and a lack of central perspective



Figure 3. Illustration by Karen Lis Jacobsen from Edgar Rubin: *Far fortæller*. Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1933

strongly evoke associations with picturebooks by Russian children's book illustrator Vladimir Lebedev. In the paper cutouts by Karen Lis Jacobsen, the individuals have no faces, and appear anonymous. The book includes eight images in color, and the motifs of five of them are consistent with the initial description of the Soviet picturebooks in the exhibition in 1932. They depict a train, a car placed in a setting with a modern building with windows and shapes characteristic of contemporary architecture (Figure 4), an airplane, a ship, and a factory. One element in these images contrasts with the Russian picturebooks: the Danish flag is present, not the



Figure 4. Illustration by Karen Lis Jacobsen from Otto Gelsted: *Kai og Anne i den store By*. Copenhagen: Levin & Munksgaard, 1933

red flag often to be seen in the Russian books. The other three images represent motifs which are not typical of avant-garde books: in one image, children are looking at a toy store, pointing out all the things they want; in another, people at a fruit stand are buying exotic fruit; finally, there is a scene from Tivoli, where the children are enjoying a pantomime. This book was published by a traditional publishing house, and while some of the themes of Russian avant-garde picturebooks are present, some elements of the images represent the idea of the child as a citizen in the national state. However, the contrast between the paper cutouts and the naturalistic drawings by Karen Lis Jacobsen clearly represent a time of change from a more decorative and naturalistic paradigm in picturebook illustration to an avant-garde inspired way of composing an image, using colors, and depicting human beings.

The choice of Otto Gelsted as the author is an indication that publishers had grasped the idea that highly esteemed authors of texts for adults could also write for children. Otto Gelsted was a well-respected poet who started his career as a relatively traditional writer of poems based on a vitalistic view of life and nature. In the 1920s, he wrote some of the relatively few Danish experimental texts for adults inspired by international avant-garde movements in literature. The most significant traits of his poems in *Kai and Anne i den store By* are the rhythm and the rhymes, which create a very beautiful sound image, and composition, for instance in the text about the airplane. In contrast to the iambic meter in *Jørgens Hjul*, which seems to imitate the rhythm of the train, in this case the meter is trochaic, and gives the impression of a soft, smooth, gliding movement. A translation can only give a slight impression of the musicality of the text:

Sailing under water,
 flying through the air!
 soon as fish,
 soon as bird
 soon on wings
 soon on wheels –
 ocean, air and country!

Up and down
 like a bird!

See the beauty:
 under us the green land,
 field and lake
 city, bay –
 landing smoothly, glidingly.

(Gelsted 1933: n.pag.)

The Danish original is written in rhyme and the poems must be regarded as evidence that the child audience is addressed as a set of individuals with an aesthetic sensibility. This appeal to a sense of textual beauty is combined with an integration of onomatopoeia and expression in the children's voices. In the verses about the factory, the whistle is imitated with a "Du-du-du" repeated at the beginning of each stanza. The text accompanying the image of the toy shop consists of repeated utterances by the children: "I want the bow /I want the arrow /I want the ball/I want the car", ending, after more repetitions, with "I want everything you have not mentioned". Gelsted's poems are fine examples of children's poetry, integrating children's own play with language as sound and music, as described by Joseph Thomas in another connection (Thomas 2007).

Kai og Anne i den store By represents a paradigm shift in terms of visual expression, and in relation to the themes of picturebooks. The setting of the images in the book is also characteristic, and indicates an interest in depicting the child in an urban setting, where modes of transportation, modern buildings, and production are presented as more relevant than the woods, rural settings, and fairytale landscapes. The implied child reader of this book paved the way for what was to become the dominant accepted view of childhood in progressive Danish picturebooks in the years to come: the child is not primarily a citizen and a future worker in a socialist or communist state, he or she is also a playful, inventive individual, interested in toys, play, and entertainment.

Toward a pedagogic poetics. Progressive educational ideals in Denmark around 1933

Debates concerning child education were intense in the 1930s. Inspired by international movements, some Danish educators experimented with new modes of teaching in schools and kindergartens. One of the goals of these educators was to "give the human being the best and richest opportunities in the modern industrial reality" (Thau 1976: 143). The ideal was a human being who was simultaneously an individual with individual needs and requirements, and a social being integrated in social contexts such as the family and society – a tolerant member of a democratic society. The activities of the individual child as well as the creative and 'free' expression of the child were seen as important elements in his or her education, but so was interaction and cooperation with others. From this perspective, the child was perceived as an individual with a 'natural' sense of beauty and a rich fantasy life. Ideas of creativity, education for a modern childhood, play, and artistic expression came together in some of the new picturebooks, for example, those by Egon Mathiesen and Jens Sigsgaard.

Pers første Bog (Per's First Book, 1943), by Torben Gregersen, and also illustrated by Karen Lis Jacobsen, illustrates the development of tendencies in education from the 1930s onwards. Torben Gregersen was an educator who had traveled in The Soviet Union, and who was also a member of the group of people linked to the previously mentioned left-wing publishing house Monde. *Pers første Bog* describes the life of a boy from morning to evening: how he gets up, eats his breakfast, posts a letter, plays with other children, comes home, eats dinner, and goes to bed. In some respects, one of the illustrations may be perceived as an extension of those in Russian avant-garde picturebooks: in the image in Figure 5 the setting is urban, means of transportation and communication are depicted, and, like the boy in *Jørgens Hjul*, the child has a scooter, so he is able to move about independently (Figure 5).

The use of paper cutouts and the stylized, flat depictions of people without facial expressions once again evoke the images of Lebedev, for instance. On the other hand, some elements and some details give the impression of a kind of 'softened' avant-garde, for instance through the decorative, small objects on the balcony, and the trees in the background. This image may also be read as a representation of elements in the growing Danish welfare state: the modern house with balconies, light and air, and what might be the cribs in a kindergarten, seen through one of the windows. The boy is depicted as the center of attention, but he is surrounded on all sides by fellow members of society.

Other images in the book represent a shift toward a more naturalistic and detailed mode of visual expression. Per has eyes and a mouth, and his room is filled with small objects and images. Per is depicted in his well-equipped home, where he has toys, clothes, food, care, and not the company of other children, but of his bear and his caring mother. Foremost, he is depicted as an independent child who is able to take care of himself: get up, get dressed, eat breakfast, and go out. He is the owner of quite a substantial collection of toys, some of them apparently Bauhaus-inspired blocks.

The text bears none of the poetic traits such as are found in Otto Gelsted's poems, for instance. It is straightforward prose in a matter-of-fact style: "His clothes are placed on the chair. He likes to dress himself. After all, he will soon turn 4. Per begins to put on his clothes. First trousers, then shirt, socks, and shoes. He will show Mom he can manage on his own". The depiction of all the objects mentioned gives the impression of a book intended to be used in language acquisition. In this respect, both text and images convey a strong didactic intention, but also an intent to provide the child with the ability to read the book on his or her own and thus acquire what we today would call 'agency' – the ability and possibility to act independently and have an influence on one's own situation (James & James 2008:9). The overall impression is of a book with an educational intent, aimed at the creation of an independent yet social individual in the welfare state.



Figure 5. Illustration by Karen Lis Jacobsen from Torben Gregersen: *Pers første Bog*. Copenhagen: Haase, 1943

The complexity of ‘The New’

This chapter presents some of the changes to be seen in the form and content of Danish picturebooks for children around 1933, and elements of this heritage in one later example. With regard to the images, the change is obvious primarily in relation to illustration techniques, mode of representation, setting, and motif.

Watercolors and drawings are replaced with illustrations using paper cutouts and photomontages. Naturalistic images are abandoned in favor of more abstract and stylized images. Bright colors, flat forms, and unusual cropping replace the pastel shades and central perspective of previous eras. Some written texts now present a very explicit, often left-wing ideology. Picturebooks seem to have become a regular battlefield in terms of ideas of the proper development or education of the child. Some of the examples promote a specific ideology, while others represent a new view of childhood, aesthetics, and education, but in a manner adapted to ideas related to the forthcoming welfare state. Gelsted's text is the only one that might be considered as experimental and artistically ambitious as the images. However, Gregersen's text is ambitious from an educational perspective, and in relation to the promotion of new educational ideas.

The foregoing examples share the idea that the child is an important figure in contemporary society, and therefore, the picturebook is an important medium. The child is by definition 'the new', and therefore becomes an important factor in relation to the creation of a new society. At the same time, the child is considered 'a small fellow citizen' (Winge 1979: 179), and a receptive individual with regard to modern forms of artistic expression. The examples described indicate that adult educators, artists, writers, and publishers certainly have more or less explicit educational, artistic, ideological, or societal agendas underlying the publication of picturebooks. Thus, not only is the picturebook transformed, but so are the ideals of childhood. The intention is to promote, create, or build a sense of a possible 'new life' and 'new forms of expression' for the child. For the reasons previously discussed, and because the analyses have shown that these books represent a variety of intentions, inspirations, and modes of expression in text and image, I refrain from referring to these books as the 'picturebook avant-garde'. They are indeed very much inspired by the Russian avant-garde, but also by a number of other sources, which together lead to the beginning of a new era of picturebook creation in a Danish and a Scandinavian context that is too complex to be summarized in one word.

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CHAPTER 8

Mirror images

On Soviet-Western reflections in children's books of the 1920s and 1930s

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This chapter compares the Soviet and the Western children's books of the 1920s–1930s. The creative output of the Soviet innovative artists and writers was in many respects isomorphic to the production of the modernist left artists and educators in the West. The various kinds of formal experiments in the sphere of visual representation are considered in detail. An important topic that is investigated is the “production book”, the genre of children's books about machines and about how things are made. It corresponds with the idea of “here and now” proclaimed by the American educator Lucy Sprague Mitchell. A special emphasis is placed on the demonstration of similarities in the concepts of the New Man (Soviet) and the New Generation (American).

It is usually taken for granted that the Russian avant-garde of the 1910s to the 1920s was one of the world's brightest artistic trends of that time. However, in the last few years, this movement has been increasingly reassessed in the context of the international history of art, and its exclusivity has rightly been diminished. In numerous publications, Russian and European artists have been scrutinized side by side, and similarities in style, movements, and cultural context have been highlighted. Regarding children's picturebooks and illustrated books, however, this work has barely begun. Therefore, I intend to investigate the mutual dependencies and confluences of artists who worked on children's books in Soviet Russia, Western Europe, and the USA; this includes European and American artists, as well as Russian émigrés. This chapter will demonstrate that, beneath official (or, shall we say, asserted ideological differences, there was a certain unifying *Zeitgeist* shared by most avant-garde and modernist artists and writers. Here, it is appropriate to clarify the distinction: to avoid a conflation of avant-garde and Modernism,

I identify “avant-garde” as a concrete expression of Modernism – a broad pan-European flow that began in the last third of the nineteenth century – that was most radical and innovatively charged and had its heyday in the 1910s and early 1920s.

Modernism, however, refers to the art from the mid-twenties and thirties, most often to Constructivist (in the USSR) and Art Deco (in Western Europe and the USA) stylistics. Moreover, it is also important to demarcate the notions ‘modernist’ and ‘left’. These two terms are often used interchangeably. However, some artists used many formal features of Modernism while possessing, at the same time, quite bourgeois and traditional tastes in their social life. In contrast, some left revolutionaries in politics could be traditional and even aesthetically archaic (take, for instance, the Association of Artists of Revolutionary Russia, also known as AKhRR in the Russian abbreviation, which chose to resurrect the worn-out clichés of Russian Realism of the 1860s-1880s).

If the Soviet experience was not unique, and Soviet and American illustrations and poems for children, for example, were somehow similar to each other, might there have been a similar ideology at work? If this was the case, why did America and Western European countries never experience what happened to art and society in Russia – which had practically ceased to exist as the Russia known before the revolution had mutated into the USSR? The short and blunt answer is that radical art in countries other than Russia did not receive state support and legitimization, and it remained a private experiment. The social background was different, and only in Russia was artistic and social radicalism ushered so hurriedly into the mainstream. Given this, the similarities in the development of a new aesthetics in the USSR and in the West are quite spectacular and deserve a detailed explanation. These correspondences were multifaceted and genetically and typologically alike.

Furthermore, before analyzing the most typical examples and turning points, the following three crucial aspects should be taken into consideration: Firstly, modernist tendencies determine Russian and Western artists and authors. Secondly, works by Russian Soviet artists exerted a direct influence on those by Western artists. This influence was, in most cases, channeled through exhibitions and bookstores. For example, there was a famous exhibition of Soviet children’s books in Paris in 1929, with an introductory article to the catalogue written by Blaise Cendrars.¹ The article was wildly enthusiastic. The exhibition was organized

1. *Exposition le Livre d'Enfant en U.R.S.S. 27 avril-22 mai*/Paris: Editions Bonaparte. 1929. By the way, in the opinion of Béatrice Michielsen, the French specialist in Soviet children’s books, Cendrars most probably did not see the exhibition and wrote his accolades as an expression of his *bolchévisant* persuasion (from an e-mail letter to the author from 22 March 2011).

in the bookstore “Editions Bonaparte”, on rue Bonaparte, 12. Across the street was another popular bookstore belonging to a publisher, Jacques (Yakov) Povolozky, who sold Soviet books alongside his own. He took part in the preparation of that exhibition too. Similar large exhibitions by the Soviet state publishing house Gosizdat (where the Children’s Department had been quite prominent since 1924) were held in the same year of 1929 in Berlin, Essen, Zurich, and Amsterdam.² (The whole series of exhibitions in America is detailed later on.)

Finally, Russian émigré artists played a seminal role in the Western artistic and publishing process. Thus, in France the impact of Russian artists on children’s books was clearly discernible. Young artists of Russian extraction, Nathalie Parain (née Natalia Chelpanova), Hélène (Elena) Guertik, Rojan (Feodor Rojankovsky), Nathan Altman, Chem (Alexandre Chemetov) and Yury Cherkesov, worked for the popular series of “Les Albums du Père Castor”, issued by the Flammarion publishing house. The mature avant-garde artist Alexandra Exter also collaborated there. In the USA, many Russian artists were involved in illustrating and designing children’s books too; these included Constantin Alajalov, Boris Artzybasheff, Vladimir Bobri (Bobrinsky), Vera Bok, Samuel Glanskoﬀ, Nadezhda Grishina, Ben Kucher, Nikolai Mordvinoff, Fedor Nadezhin, Feodor Rojankovsky, Esphyr Slobodkina, and others. These artists had varying degrees of talent and innovation, but three of the above mentioned were recipients of the prestigious Caldecott Medal for the best work of the year in children’s book illustration. As for Esphyr Slobodkina, she was a prominent abstract painter who served for many years as the chairperson of the board of the American Abstract Artists Association.

Let us be as children, or the cruel games of the avant-garde

“The avant-garde harps on the theme of the child” wrote, rather acerbically, Esther Averill in Paris in 1930 (Averill 1930:89). From their first manifestos, Futurists declared an affinity between avant-garde and youth. “Make room for youth, for violence, for daring!” wrote Umberto Boccioni et al. (Boccioni et al. 1910). In Russia, where the Union of Youth artistic association was organized in 1912, the interest in childhood amongst avant-garde artists and authors was all-embracing, from Natalia Goncharova and Mikhail Larionov to Alexei Kruchenykh.³ The child,

2. See the chapter by Albert Lemmens and Serge Aljosha Stommels on the Amsterdam exhibition in this volume.

3. The infantalist aesthetics of neo-primitivist artists and cubofuturist poets has been analyzed in Sara Pankenier’s dissertation (Pankenier 2006:91–159).

as imagined by avant-gardists, was perceived as an alluring image of the past that has slipped away – either their own childhood or the blessed folkloric childhood of the people. At the same time, the child was an image of the bright, mechanized future, which, thanks to technological progress, would be relieved of the burdens of the present. For adults, the looming advent of machines and mechanisms could not be void of anxiety, for the machines were radically changing their lives, and coping with this was both psychologically and intellectually challenging. The fear (even if only a reverential awe) experienced when standing in front of a machine might produce not only an urge to adjust oneself to it and serve it, but also a desire (albeit subconscious) to destroy it. But if the machine is indestructible – because the power and the future are on its side – there appears to be an urge to destroy everything else in order to make room for the machine and to collaborate with it. Unlike the frustrated grown-ups and the young not-quite adults, the child perceives technological innovations as the natural “configuration of nature”, as Walter Benjamin noted perspicaciously (Benjamin 1999: 390). Hence, the power and the future belong to the child; ergo, “Become as little children, for theirs is the kingdom of the Machine”.

The instability of the mechanized and dehumanized life of the twentieth century, felt so acutely by young artists entering the world, gave birth to one peculiar aspect of their creative self-reflection: a regression into childhood and attempts to rationalize and rid themselves of early phobias and complexes. Moreover, non-involvement in the wider world provoked a specific “poetics of recollection”: a call to early memories and attempts at artistic reconstruction of the world of childhood by means of introspection. As Vyacheslav V. Ivanov recently writes,

one of the features common to the science and culture of the modern epoch, especially in the last few decades, is the interest in reconstruction of the initial periods [...]. Recreation of childhood, especially childhood's traumas and complexes, became one of the characteristics of the century that began with the publishing of Freud's book on interpretations of dreams and continued in many fine pieces of literature that aimed to reconstruct the early complexes.

(Ivanov 2009: 332)

The b-attle of letters, or the triumph of typesetting: How the scarecrow was criss-crossed

The German artist Kurt Schwitters enjoyed, like many others, the absurd and machinery. During the First World War he worked as a draftsman in a factory and, as he confessed later, “found his love for the wheel and understood that a machine is an abstraction of the human spirit” (see Dietrich 1993: 86). One of Schwitters’

most interesting creations was made in the field of book design, more specifically, in several children's books. He worked practically in parallel with his friend El Lissitzky, sometimes following in Lissitzky's trail and sometimes blazing his own. Schwitters' book *Die Scheuche Märchen* (The Scarecrow Fairy Tale, 1925) was one of the most remarkable avant-garde improvisations with the typesetter's box. The text was written by Schwitters himself, while the design was a collaborative creation by Schwitters, Käte Steinitz and Theo van Doesburg. Actually, the idea belonged to van Doesburg, who, shortly before, had published the Dutch translation of El Lissitzky's *Suprematic Tale of Two Squares*, and who suggested producing a book even more radical than Lissitzky's by using only elements of the typesetter's box (Steinitz 1968: 41). One should mention the name of the typesetter – Paul Focht – because the typesetting is in fact the most important artistic element of this book.

The story in *The Scarecrow* is simple yet quite characteristic of the avant-garde mindset. A farmer makes a scarecrow and dresses it in old but quite decent clothes. The scarecrow puts on haughty airs and considers itself a boss. Then along came a rooster and a hen with chickens, who make fun of the scarecrow and peck at the grain and – to humble the scarecrow – its cane. Then along comes the farmer, who gets angry, beats the scarecrow and takes its cane. Then enters a boy, who beats up the farmer and takes the cane for himself. The meaning of this tale or parable I will discuss later but, for now, one should mention that all the figures are composed of large and small letters and other elements of the printer's set. Thus, the scarecrow consists of a fat letter X with the addition of a few lines, both straight and curvilinear. There is also a lace scarf executed with a number of decorative vignettes. The farmer is composed of a large letter B with shaky legs attached to it (see Figure 1). B, I believe, was chosen because it is suggestive of *Bauer* (farmer) and *Bauch* (belly).

Schwitters was not the first to play with the typesetter's box. It is clear that, besides Lissitzky, he gained inspiration from Dadaist typography, exercises by Marinetti and Soffici, Apollinaire's calligrams, etc. As for the subject, he was probably familiar with Vladimir Lebedev's *Chuch-lo* (Scarecrow, 1922). Scholars and critics who wrote about Schwitters' work emphasized its aesthetic qualities and class subtext. But there is one more interesting level of meaning. The combination of the letter X, with a thin vertical line inserted in the middle for the body, and the hat resembles the combination of two Greek letters: X and P (with the latter turned 90 degrees counterclockwise). In the scene where the farmer assaults the scarecrow, its hat, falling off its head, turns 90 degrees clockwise and looks like a perfect P. In other words, the body of the scarecrow is composed of the monogram XP, that is, *chrismon* Ⲡ, or the symbol of Christ. Thus, the scene depicting the attack on the scarecrow appears to be a scene depicting an attack on God. The theomachistic character of the story is also revealed in the text. Some consider it a

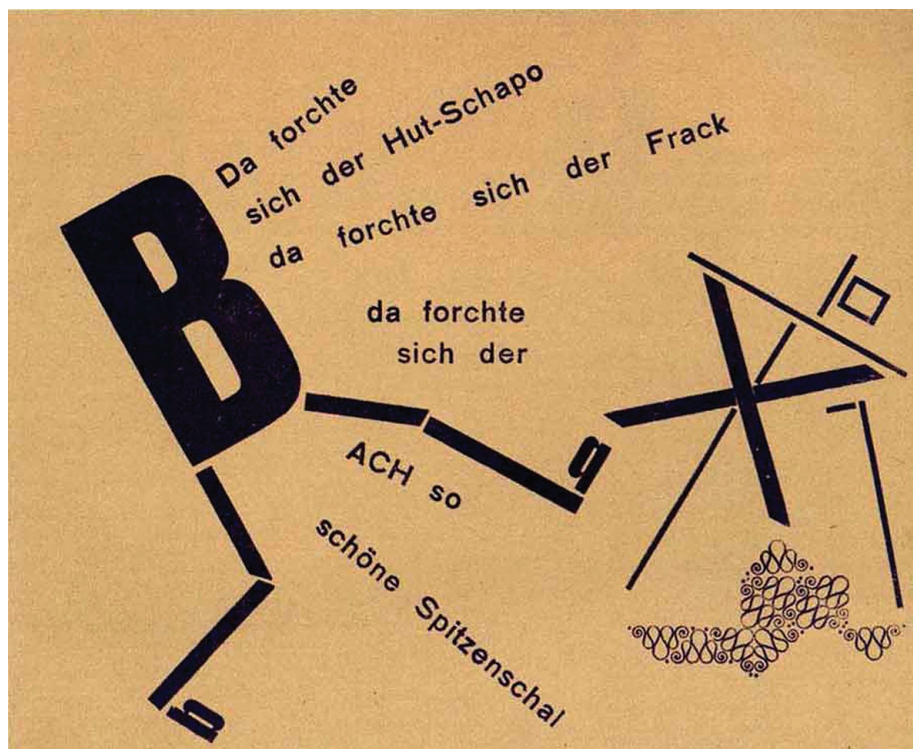


Figure 1. Illustration by Kurt Schwitters, Käthe Steinitz & Theo van Doesburg from *Die Scheuche Märchen*. Hannover: Aposch Verlag, 1925. Used by permission of the Kurt and Ernst Schwitters Stiftung

barely meaningful Dadaist collage, but it is quite comprehensible. The lines radiating from the farmer's figure read as follows:

Da forchte sich der Hut-Schapo

Da forchte sich der Frack

Da forchte sich der ACH so schöne Spitzenschal (Schwitters et al. 1925: n.pag.)

The word *forchte* is not common in modern German. *Da forchte sich...* was borrowed by Schwitters from the old editions of the Lutheran translation of the Bible: “Da forchte sich Saul...” (Samuel 1, 18:29) – “Saul became still more afraid of him”. Thus, these verses mean

The hat-chapeau became still more afraid

The frock coat became still more afraid

The, oh so beautiful lace scarf became still more afraid

This is the ironic attitude of a worker towards a dandy who, as a result of the turn of the wheel of history and the ensuing social marginalization, has become a scarecrow – not scary enough even to repel chickens.

After he has broken the scarecrow, the farmer takes away its cane or staff – a symbol of authority – but he does not keep it for long. Along comes the B-shaped boy (*Bursch*) who takes the stick away from the farmer, thus reflecting a revolution by youth against outdated elders and *grossbauers* (or peasant bourgeoisie). In other words, the farmer, representing the people, gets rid of the God-boss-dandy, but he in turn is overthrown by a boy, a young revolutionary force of the future. As Leslie Atzmon writes,

Die Scheuche had a radical, but practical, purpose: exposing children to a piece of collaborative De Stijl plus Dada art/design/poetry of the type Van Doesburg and Schwitters believed helped advance their ultimate goal of a brave new world.

(Atzmon 1996: 28)

Finally, one should mention that, three years later, Schwitters' comrade-in-arms El Lissitzky used the formal discoveries of Schwitters and van Doesburg and created an even more open and propagandistic version of a book on the class struggle and letter-men: *Chetyre Arifmeticheskikh Deistviya* (Four Arithmetic Operations, 1928). All the figures in this book are made of letters and represent different classes of society (see more in Steiner 1999: 33–36).

Africans, animals and dolls: The games of émigrés and surrealists

European modernists emphasized, in children's books, formal moments that go back to the revolutionary avant-garde and its second, 'left' wave. Thus, the images of Nathalie Parain, who before 1928 was known as Natalia Chelpanova, were barely distinguishable from Soviet constructivist images, well known to her, with their simple and generalized outlines, flat colors, and laconic compositions. Some of her works, such as *Ronds et Carrés* (Circles & Squares, 1932), paid homage to the founding fathers of Cubism of the beginning of the century.

Of the Surrealists who left their traces in children's books, one should first mention Joan Miró. In 1928, he illustrated a tale by Lise Deharme (née Anne-Marie Hirtz), *Il était une petite pie* (There Was a Little Magpie). This was the only book (out of about thirty) that Miró illustrated specifically for children. In it he presented a dense Surrealist style, not diluted *ad usum delphini*. Eight full-page illustrations are executed with a stencil technique and show bright gouache circles and ovals. Esther Averill wrote sarcastically that the Surrealists were all ecstatic about it, but parents tried to protect their children, viewing this book as though

it were a scarlatina virus (Averill 1930:90). It is interesting to compare this book with a Soviet picturebook, *Figury* (Figures, 1926), illustrated and designed by Maria Shatalova-Rakhmanova. It shows various geometric figures, amongst them numerous colored circles and rings in different sizes and combinations. Different strains of Modernism (Surrealism and Constructivism) and different social situations nevertheless resulted in similar visual representations.

In the same year of 1928, a Surrealist of a younger generation, Pierre Pinsard, illustrated a book with a text by Blaise Cendrars, *Petits contes nègres pour les enfants des blancs* (Little Black Stories for Little White Children) (Figure 2). The illustrations were executed in the woodblock technique and for the most part show silhouettes of exotic animals and “funny little” Africans. The figures are void of background and details, conveying a certain native and primitivist aura. These days, some of these compositions would probably not pass the filter of political correctness, and some PC zealots would label them “orientalist” or even “racist”. Historically speaking, these potential accusations appear rather ironic because, to a large degree, the popularity of African and South Pacific art amongst Surrealists was generated by the desire to counter-attack the colonial West by conquering it with non-European art. (This strategy appeared to be rather successful.) These subjects – African and Asian themes – were popular in Soviet children’s books too. They were part of the official discourse of proletarian internationalism. In quite a number of books published in the 1920s in the USSR, Africans and Asians were represented rather paternalistically, like children, with a figure of a Soviet boy teaching them class wisdom. As a typical and very prolific author, Lev Zilov, writes in the book *Mai i Oktyabrina* (Mai and Oktyabrina,⁴ 1924),

The children will help

The Negroes, Indians, Chinese.

(Zilov 1924: 40)

An interesting treatment of the African anticolonialist theme is given in the book *Malen’kii Chornyi Murzuk* (Little Black Murzuk, text by Nikolai Agnivitsev, illustrations by Samuil Adlivankin, 1926). There the Africans look like big children, and are sometimes grotesque, but are depicted with undeniable sympathy, which correlates with Pinsard’s images (Figure 3). The Soviet artist here treats the subject with a double-edged irony: he makes a joke of simple-minded “children of nature” who are jubilant because of free booze, beads and striped pants, and of the Western capitalists whose satirical depiction in high hats and striped pants was a *locus communis* in the revolutionary visual discourse of those days. These images fulfilled

4. These children’s names were new, politically motivated inventions: Mai refers to May (the 1st of) and Oktyabrina is a feminine form of October (October revolution).

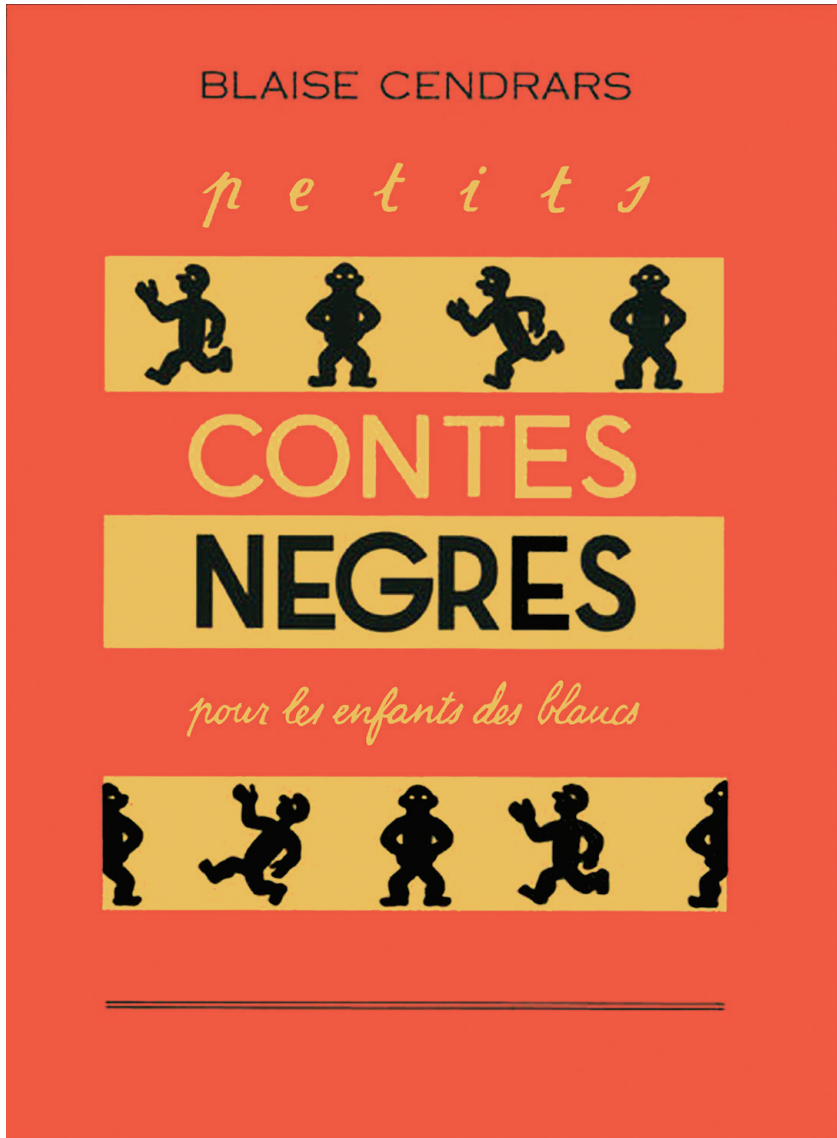


Figure 2. Book cover by Pierre Pinsard from Blaise Cendrars: *Petits contes nègres pour les enfants des blancs*. Paris: Les Éditions des Portiques, 1928

the purpose of attracting children by representing funny exotic characters, and the style of these images reinforced the comical effect by the usage of the type of mixed-up details so popular in classic children's rhymes: here this role is played by starched cuffs (a typically bourgeois accoutrement) put on Africans' legs.



Figure 3. Agnivitsev, Nikolai: *Malen'kii Chorny Murzuk* (Little Black Murzuk). Illus. Samuil Adlivankin. Moscow: Mol. Gvardiya, 1926. Used by permission of Tatyana Mikhailovna Kryukova, the heir of the artist

Sometimes the treatment of the international theme was not merely paternalistic but unmistakably cruel and rather ugly – as in the books of the prominent modernist artist Sergei Chekhonin such as *Detki-Raznotzvetki* (Kids of Many Colors, 1927) with a text by S. Poltavsky and those of the lesser-known and negligibly talented A. Kalinichenko such as *Vanya v Kitae* (Vanya in China, 1927) with a text by G. Shaposhnikov (See ill. in Steiner 1999: 101 and 108).

This non-reflective cruelty is another point that links children and modernists. The violence propagated by the manifestos was believed to be an unavoidable part of the innovative strategy because creation of the new cannot be accomplished without destruction of the old. A model of this Modernism was

found in the mind of the child. Children like to break toys, tear books or flowers, and rip legs off insects. This is usually explained as ingrained curiosity and innocent clumsiness. That is true, but alongside this, there may also be a certain primordial cruelty, not yet smoothed away by upbringing and the cultivation of the social being or suppressed by cultural frames. As Margaret Higonnet shrewdly notes, “The creative impact of children’s play on Modernism, I suggest, lies at least in part in the pleasure of taking things apart” (Higonnet 2009: 93). In a broader context, there is a parallel between children’s games and modernists’ preoccupation with the retreat into a (pseudo) childhood world, artistic games and play activities, into modeling the world for fun, for make-believe. These play activities and toys have been studied and some were exhibited recently at a large exhibition in the Museo Picasso in Malaga – of course, Picasso himself also made toys (see Stales & Pérez 2010). Quite naturally, artists did not merely play with toys themselves. As stated in the annotation to this exhibition, it “explores how artists have used childhood objects to project their own ideas onto young minds”.⁵

The left “here and now” for American and Soviet children

In the second half of the 1920s, i.e. during the *Sturm und Drang* of the Soviet innovations in children’s books, the pioneers of creation of the new children’s books in the United States devised the following slogan: “The cultural redemption of America is through children’s books”.⁶ This slogan now looks somewhat idealistic but it clearly shows the energetic neophyte fervor of young American Kulturträgers – publishers, authors, and artists. It coincided very neatly with the aspirations of their Soviet counterparts. The parallel development of the world of children’s literature in the USA and USSR is spectacular and sometimes simply amazing.

5. (http://www.bbc.co.uk/worldservice/arts/2010/10/101019_strand_toys_gallery.shtml) (23 November 2014).

6. This slogan was coined by May Massee, a renowned educator and editor. Her role in American publishing for children can be likened to the roles of both Samuil Marshak and Vladimir Lebedev in the Soviet Union. A supporter of new contemporary subjects, she was also very interested in innovative book design and the art of typography. See Wright (1928) and Hearn (1996: 28).

1918	The first Week of Children's Books takes place in New York. Organization of the Department of Children's Books at McMillan & Co. Publishing House (New York).	Organization of the book cooperative <i>Segodnya</i> (Today) in Petrograd, which published important avant-garde children's books.
1919		Organization of the Committee for Children's Books and Children's Reading at the Narkompros (Ministry of Enlightenment) (evolved in 1920 into the Institute for Children's Reading; in 1923, the name was changed to the Department of Children's Reading).
1922	Organization of the Department of Children's Books at Doubleday, Page and Co. (Garden City, NJ). The establishment of the John Newbery Medal for the best children's book.	The famous private publishing house <i>Raduga</i> (Rainbow) is founded in Petrograd, specializing in innovative children's books (about 400 titles were published before 1930).
1923	The first exhibition "Fifty Best Books of the Year," organized by the American Institute of Graphic Arts.	The monthly children's magazine <i>Vorobei</i> (Sparrow) is founded in Petrograd. <i>Novye Detskie Knigi</i> (New Children's Books), non-periodical collections of reviews, are published (5 issues before 1929).
1924	<i>Horn Book</i> , the first magazine devoted to children's books, founded in Boston.	The magazine <i>Novy Robinson</i> (The New Robinson [Crusoe]), an expanded version of <i>Vorobei</i> , is founded. Children's Department organized at the State Publishing House (Leningrad). The Museum of Children's Books and Drawings (existed until 1935) organized in Moscow.

As in the USSR, in the USA there were lively debates about the role of 'production' books, about the effectiveness of socialization of the child by means of book art, about the ideological impact of various kinds of stories, and about the acceptability of the depiction of animated machines and mechanisms.

Why did commentators talk about the "redemption" of America through children's books? This was a time when influential social psychologists and cultural anthropologists believed that human nature was endlessly flexible and malleable; therefore, if directed properly and at the proper time, a better generation could be formed, which would save civilization. The Marxist social historian Arthur Wallace Calhoun, in his well-known article "The Child Mind as a Social Product", claimed: "it is clear that the mind of childhood and youth is the pivot of successful social transformation" (quoted in Mickenberg (2010:112)). The article appeared in the book of collected essays *The New Generation* (Calverton & Schmalhausen 1930).

The term “new generation” meant something very close to the Soviet concept of New Man: The child born into a new social organization, properly educated to live in the new society, and accustomed to coexisting with sophisticated machinery that radically changes life.⁷ This similarity was not a coincidence: Many authors of this book discussed the Soviet experience – or, perhaps, declarations rather than experience – and considered it a positive and inspiring example. These parallels are well described by Julia Mickenberg (2010) in her article “The New Generation and the New Russia: Modern Childhood as Collective Fantasy”. In her closing remarks she writes:

The dream of wisely engineered machinery liberating people – “who know [the machine] as a splendid toy and not a hateful tyrant,” in the words of Greenwich Village radical Floyd Dell – had animated Americans since the beginning of the industrial era.
(Mickenberg 2010: 112)

One of the most typical genres of early Soviet modernist children’s books was the ‘production’ book. It was a genre of children’s books about how machines work and how things are made. As far as I know, the earliest usage of this term (1922) appears in the memoirs of Galina Chichagova, one of the Chichagov sisters, who were Constructivist artists and early proponents of this genre: “We begin. [We are] creating ‘production children’s books’” (Kalinin 1995: 39). In the middle of that decade the genre was actively debated: see Flerina (1926). In English it was introduced by the present author.⁸ I translate the Russian “*proizvodstvennaya kniga*” as “production book”; it can also be rendered as “industrial book”. American books on how things are made and how machines work run closely parallel to this type of book. They were called “factual books”. Perhaps the main propagandist of this genre in the United States was Lucy Sprague Mitchell, an educator and a driving force behind the Bank Street School movement, which she founded in 1916 as the Bureau of Educational Experiments. She professed a “here and now” methodology, which involved children learning about the world by studying the phenomena of the surrounding reality, especially modern technical things, and playing with real objects. Mitchell was a great admirer of Soviet Russia, having a high regard for its pedagogical experiments, and she enjoyed recognition in Russia as well. Her books about steam engines, skyscrapers and water plumbing were widely translated and published in the USSR with illustrations by Russian artists. One of the key figures in Russian children’s literature and publishing, Kornei Chukovsky, referred to her

7. See more on the concept of New Man in Steiner (2014: 98–100).

8. See Steiner (1999, Ch. Three): “The Production Book: Locomotives and All the Rest” (111–167).

in his works as the “American researcher of children’s psychology” (Chukovsky 1963:362). Rather ironically, Mitchell’s books were considered entirely suitable for the proletarian child: “To replace an old book, a new one is being born; it takes into consideration the psychological peculiarities of the age as well as the new way of life, new impressions and interests of a proletarian child – *Our Kindergarten*, [...] *Morning*, *Our Squirrel*, Mitchell’s books” (Sverdlova 1925:119).

The most frequently occurring and most typical character in the Soviet production book was a steam engine – in a way, a new lyrical hero in the literature of the victorious class. Engines were also very popular in American children’s books. Among the typical and highly influential books of that epoch one might mention Hildegard Hoyt Swift’s *Little Blacknose: The Story of a Pioneer* (1929), Watty Piper’s *The Little Engine That Could* (1930), Virginia Lee Burton’s *Choo Choo: The Story of a Little Engine Who Ran Away* (1935)⁹ and others. For the most part, the illustrations in these books were variations on modernist styles going back to Futurism, Expressionism, and Constructivism within the common paradigm of Art Deco: sharp contrasts of black and white, dynamic angles, unusual points of view and a predilection for diagonal lines. Artists such as Wilfred Jones, who wrote texts to his own pictures, or Lynd Ward were prominent in this respect. In Ward’s black and white engravings, one can clearly discern the influence of German expressionists (he studied in Germany) and of Frans Masereel. Ward himself admitted his relationship with European book artists. In the Boston magazine of children’s literature, *Horn Book*, he wrote in 1930 about his and his fellow artists’ work: “Inspired by the revolution that was already won in Europe, we slowly, cautiously, and discreetly revolted” (see Mahony & Whitney 1930:1).

What were the channels that enabled American artists to become familiar with new European and Russian trends? In addition to their voyages to Europe and long sojourns there (for example, Clement Hurd studied in Paris under Fernand Léger and collaborated with Gertrude Stein on the book *The World Is Round* (1939)), they knew trans-Atlantic Modernism quite well from the pre-war times. The foundations were laid by the Armory Show (1913). For instance, Marcel Duchamp’s painting *Nude Descending a Staircase, No. 2* (1912, now at the Philadelphia Art Museum) was possibly a source of inspiration for the book by John McMahon *In and Out, Up and Down: A Door Book* (1922). Duchamp and Francis Picabia moved to New York two years after the show (1915), exhibiting ready-mades (Duchamp) and artefacts of “machine aesthetics” (Picabia). In 1920, Duchamp and Katherine Dreier founded a gallery, *Société anonyme*, to exhibit

9. It featured his elder Russian brother *Parovoz-gulyaka* (The Gadabout Engine, 1925) by Nadezhda Pavlovich, a story about a runaway train.

works by European modernists. In 1924, an exhibition of contemporary Russian art was staged there, and another Russian exhibition took place in the same year in Grand Central Palace. A year before, the Brooklyn Museum had organized a big exhibition of Russian art.

All these, as well as Karel Capek's drama *R.U.R.* (1920) about the revolt of android machines which he called "robots" (staged in New York in 1922), must surely have influenced the young New York socialite, author, and illustrator Mary Liddell. Bertha Mahony, a key figure in American publishing for children, called her unique and ahead of her time (Mahony 1929: 131).

Mary Liddell wrote a book about a miraculous creature called Little Machinery.

Somewhere there is a Little Machinery, a magic creature. He grew up out of some pieces of a steam engine that was in a wreck, an old trolley car that couldn't run any more, and a broken automobile. This Little Machinery would rather work than anything in the world. He does things by steam like the steam engine. Or by electricity like the electric car whichever he chooses. And he rides merrily along on a little automobile wheel that goes by gasoline. // And the Little Machinery lives in a wood that grows beside a railroad track. And in the wood are a lot of animals that he plays with. He makes things for them by machinery. And they love him and follow him all about watching him work. (Liddell 1926: 2–5)

One leg of Little Machinery ends as a car wheel, the other as a drill. His left hand is furnished with a saw and the right one with a wrench. The body consists of enigmatic mechanical details and cogwheels. All this is crowned by an ideally round head with mischievous locks, big eyes, foretelling the advent of anime,¹⁰ and a broad smile (Figure 4). The visual image of Little Machinery might have been inspired by all the above mentioned examples of high European Modernism, but its closest, perhaps frightening, similarity is to the robot Topotun, created by Mikhail Tsekhanovsky in Leningrad in the same year of 1926 (Figure 5).

Since both robots appeared in the same year, we should exclude the possibility of direct borrowing. And this fact strikingly reflects the parallel visual thinking of the American artist (well-to-do socially – and liberal because of that) and of the Soviet Constructivist. However, there is a significant difference that relates not to the language of visual forms but to the content. American Little Machinery

10. About anime or, rather, animation: one more parallel with the visual image of Little Machinery and of sources of inspiration for Mary Liddell could be a film by Fernand Léger and his assistant Dudley Murphy, *Ballet Mécanique* (1924), with its rotating wheels and rolling details. In this film, the perfectly cubist figure of Charlot (Charlie Chaplin as a Little Tramp) with its movements of a marionette puppet opens the credits and also dances for the last minute.

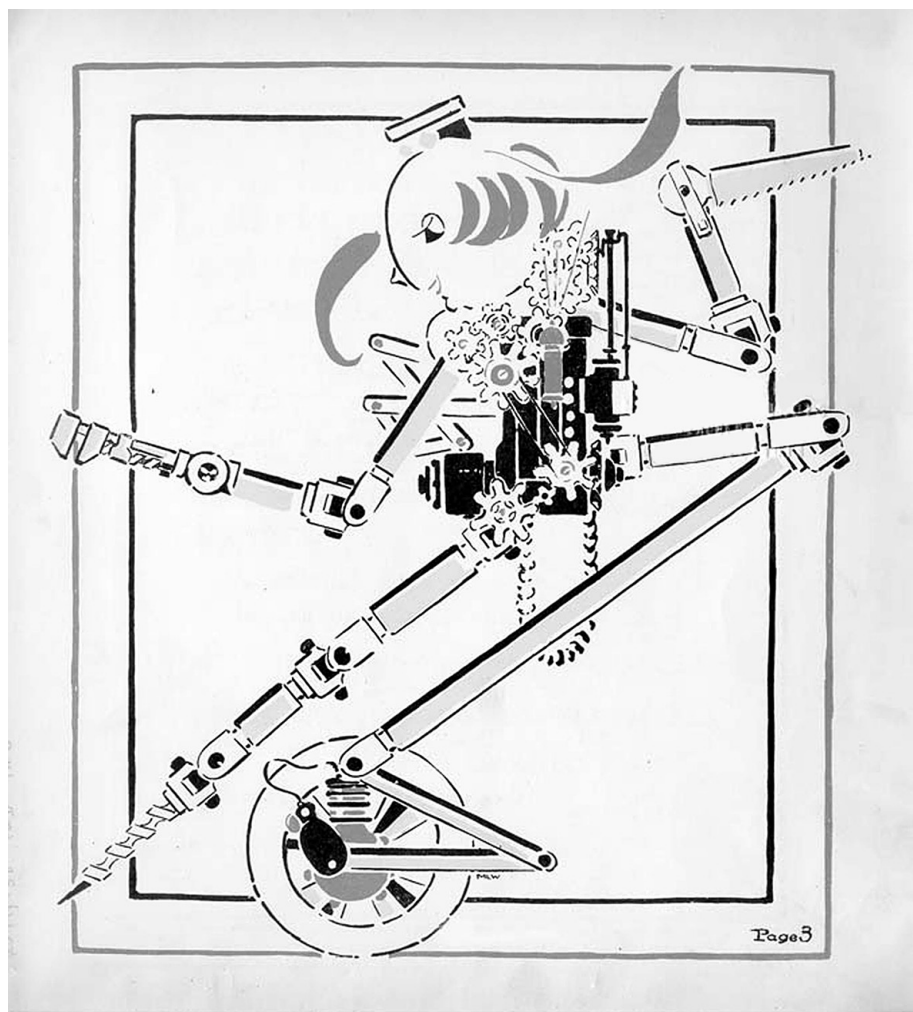


Figure 4. Illustration by Mary Liddell from *Little Machinery*. Garden Town (NJ): Doubleday, Page and Co., 1926. Used by permission of the family of Mary Liddell Wehle

always smiles and works (for free) for forest animals and birds, whereas the Soviet robot Topotun (his name literally means Stomper) merely sermonizes on how to behave and threatens those who disobey. The American one personifies a rather naïve idea that machines provide alleviation and improvement of life in nature – thus, *Little Machinery* makes birdhouses and feeding trays for hares, and sharpens the claws of eagles. Meanwhile, the Soviet robot represents the iron order and iron will, according to which communist idealists of the time tried to refashion nature

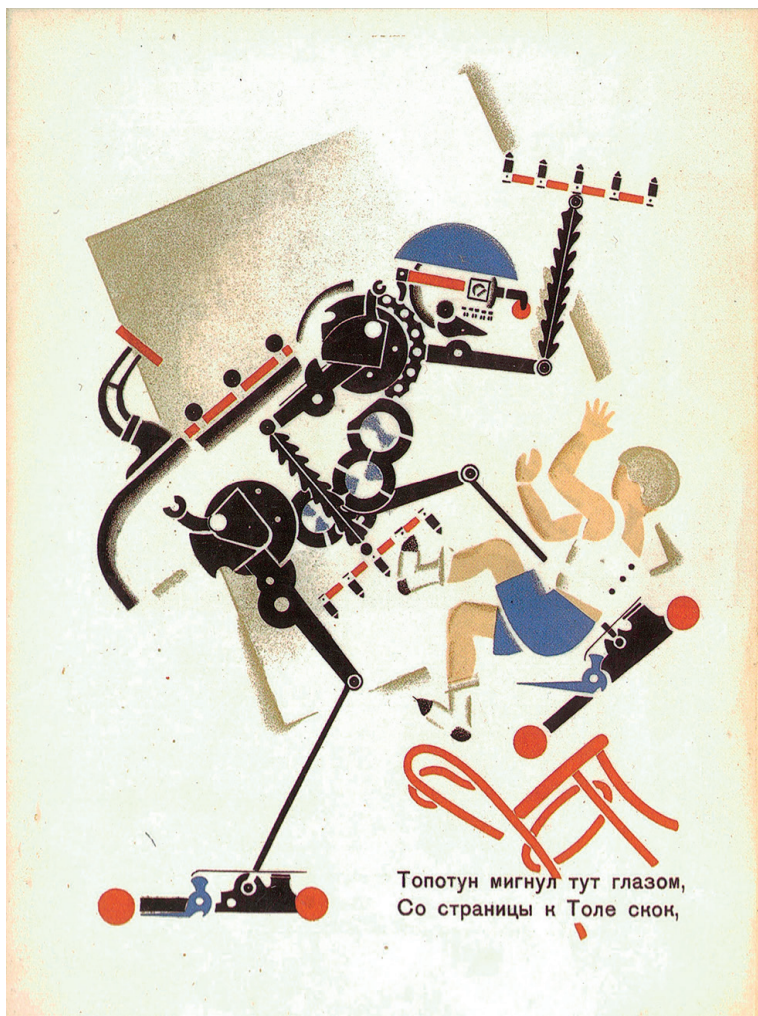


Figure 5. Illustration by Mikhail Tsekhanovsky from Ilya Ionov: *Topotun*. Leningrad: Raduga, 1926

and attempted, with an iron hand, to corral humankind into happiness.¹¹ However, the American robot also plays the role of a single active force vis-à-vis passive wild beasts that wait for his help and improvements – as children expect from adults. Thus, Little Machinery makes a wooden cot for a little bear and makes clay cups

11. This is the translation of a Soviet slogan that first appeared on an agitation poster in 1918.

for all the animals, enabling them to drink without dipping their muzzles in the water. The animals accept all this and start to become civilized little by little. They are active only in one thing: when they hinder his work by, for example, stealing his shiny cogwheels (see Liddell 1926: 12–13). So, in fact, the American and Soviet versions of robots are similar not only in their visual appearance but also in their role and goal: to teach and help injudicious and far-from-ideal biological creatures – capricious children and silly little animals. In such an attitude there was a reflection of, as Susan Buck-Morss puts it, “the utopian dream that industrial modernity could and would provide happiness for the masses” (Buck-Morss 2002: XIV). This quality, as well as the fact that Little Machinery does not need any food or rest, or anything personal, makes him an ideal worker on the one hand, and shows his supra-biological (and thus superhuman) nature on the other. He is stronger and more effective than those he helps, but he decides for himself what to do, how to do it and for whom he will work. The little animals accept this and obey. This essence – potentially totalitarian – was noted in an article by Nathalie op de Beeck:

In Little Machinery, the automaton benevolently rules over all living things. The tale establishes an implicit hierarchy in which the Little Machinery need not defer to anyone or anything, and this artificial imbalance exposes the Machinery’s totalitarian potential. The Machinery exercises unquestioned authority over his flesh-and-blood minions, which do not exhibit much personality beyond their avid curiosity and tendency to make mischief. (op de Beeck 2004: 53)

Concluding the discussion of Mary Liddell’s books, one should mention that, after *Little Machinery*, she continued the theme of an animated puppet by illustrating two books about a wooden boy: *Pinocchio in America* (1928) and *The Adventures of Pinocchio* (1930), both written by Angelo Patri.

Summing up this story of (nearly) identical twins, one American and one Soviet, I would like to use the words of Julia Mickenberg: “Many U.S. liberals ..., like the Bolsheviks, believed that technology and children, properly managed, were keys to a better future” (Mickenberg 2010: 107).

Other books told stories of friendship and cooperation between man and machine, such as Cornelia Meigs’ *The Wonderful Locomotive* (1928), or Virginia Lee Burton’s *Mike Mulligan and His Steam Shovel* (1939), and their various Soviet counterparts such as Aleksandr Vvedensky’s *Zheleznaya Doroga* (Railroad, 1929). In these books, the illustrations (by Bertha and Elmer Hader in *The Wonderful Locomotive* or Alisa Poret in *Railroad*) share a similar minimalist style peculiar to the Modernism of the 1920s.

I would like to stress once more the left-wing and occasionally explicitly proletarian or even communist sympathies of many active participants in the American cultural scene of those years – the radical art was connected to radical

social views. A number of illustrators, including Wanda Gag and Jan Matulka, collaborated with a Marxist magazine, *New Masses*. Besides the fellow travelers (many future classic American authors), there were openly left-wing authors such as Max Eastman, Joseph Freeman and Michael Gold. Jan Matulka belonged to the latter group. Authors and artists contributing to this magazine, which by 1929 had become utterly Stalinist and anti-Trotskyite, tried to create a radical all-people culture as an antidote to the existing popular culture, which was petit-bourgeois in their opinion. Michael Denning called this period a “Second American Renaissance” due to the fact that it significantly changed American Modernism (Denning 1996: XIX–XX).

Jan Matulka started working for *New Masses* in 1926; before that, from 1919, he divided his time between New York and Paris, where he had a studio, became a member of Gertrude Stein’s circle and was friendly with many modernists. In 1919 he illustrated Czechoslovak fairy tales (Fillmore 1919). Many of the compositions look like semi-abstract geometric vignettes built on sharp contrasts of black and white, with very active backgrounds consisting of dynamic zigzags and rings. In general, this is reminiscent of experimental Russian avant-garde artists of the 1910s; however, his style can also be traced back to East European folklore pictures as processed by the fragmented vision of the contemporary Cubism and Futurism.

Boris Artzybasheff worked in a similar manner during those years. He was born in the Russian Empire and came to New York in 1919 after fighting in the White Army. His early works were characterized by diagonal unstable elements, an absence of halftones and a preoccupation with macabre subjects. A good example is his illustrations for Dhan Gopal Mukerji’s *Gay-Neck* (1928), which won a John Newbery Medal as the best book of the year. Later, after the Second World War, Artzybasheff published a book, *As I See* (1954), featuring a large series of pictures called *Machinalia*. As a typical young man of the 1920s he writes in the introduction:

I am thrilled by machinery’s force, precision and willingness to work at any task, no matter how arduous or monotonous it may be. I would rather watch a thousand ton dredge dig a canal than see it done by a thousand spent slaves lashed into submission. I like machines. (Artzybasheff 1954: VII)

His anthropomorphized machines appear to be in the best traditions of Surrealism, but besides this modernist attitude with the animation of metal monsters, Artzybasheff was most probably influenced by his work with fairy tale subjects in children’s books.

The universal – from the Russian white émigré to American intellectuals – fascination with machines and the faith in social engineering through the operating of machines and children’s upbringing in the 1920s, just before the great

Depression, and even in the 1930s (notwithstanding the Great Depression and, in a way, thanks to it) demonstrates the impressive isomorphism of modernist cultural trends in the USA and the USSR. A good example of such isomorphism is the activity of the aforementioned Lucy Sprague Mitchell and her publishing house, Bank Street Books. According to her “here and now” principle of children’s education, the new subjects of books had to be found in the new technical marvels. This idea is very close to the Soviet teaching of pedagogy (or, rather, a Soviet brand of this American teaching), popular in the 1920s, which rejected fairy tales and urged their substitution with “the real things”. In the book *Tvoi Mashinnye Druz’ya* (Your Mechanical Friends, 1926) (see Figure 6), Nikolai Agnivitsev, a popular children’s author of the 1920s, addresses the classic characters of children’s books thus:

For hundreds of years/You could not be pulled away/From the pages of children’s books./Because of this,/Now it’s time for us, machines,/To play with children.

On the next page he continues:

Farewell, kittens,/Chickens,/Puppies,/Monkeys,/and Mice./Here –/in children’s books/Come/Mechanical,/Springy,/Oily/People!/Here we are!/Hello!

(Agnivitsev 1926: n.pag.)

One of the most prominent Soviet authors of children’s literature, Samuil Marshak, although not directly connected with pedagogists, wrote stories perfectly suited to the “here and now” trend: *Vchera i Segodnya* (Yesterday & Today, 1925), *Sem’ Chudes* (The Seven Wonders, 1927) and many others. His brother Michail Il’in also wrote many books about technical marvels and simple things in the immediate environment. Among them, one occasionally encountered rather bizarre subjects, such as *Karmanny Tovarishch* (Pocket Comrade, 1927) – about a penknife). Il’in also wrote a highly influential book, *Rasskaz o Velikom Plane* (The Story about the Great Plan, 1930), which was published in English in New York the following year under the title *New Russia’s Primer: The Story of the Five-Year Plan*. As Julia Mickenberg writes in the abovementioned article, progressive Americans were totally enamored with it and with the way in which revolutionary Russia educated its children. Interestingly, the Stalinist magazine *New Masses* played a significant role in promoting it in the American market. And, of course, it is important to bear in mind what Il’in himself said about his book: “I am unable not to write, and I cannot write in a calm and neutral way. [...] For I am not just telling about the [5-year] plan, I am recruiting people for this work” (Segal 1962: 277). His recruitment of left-wing American intellectuals was quite successful.

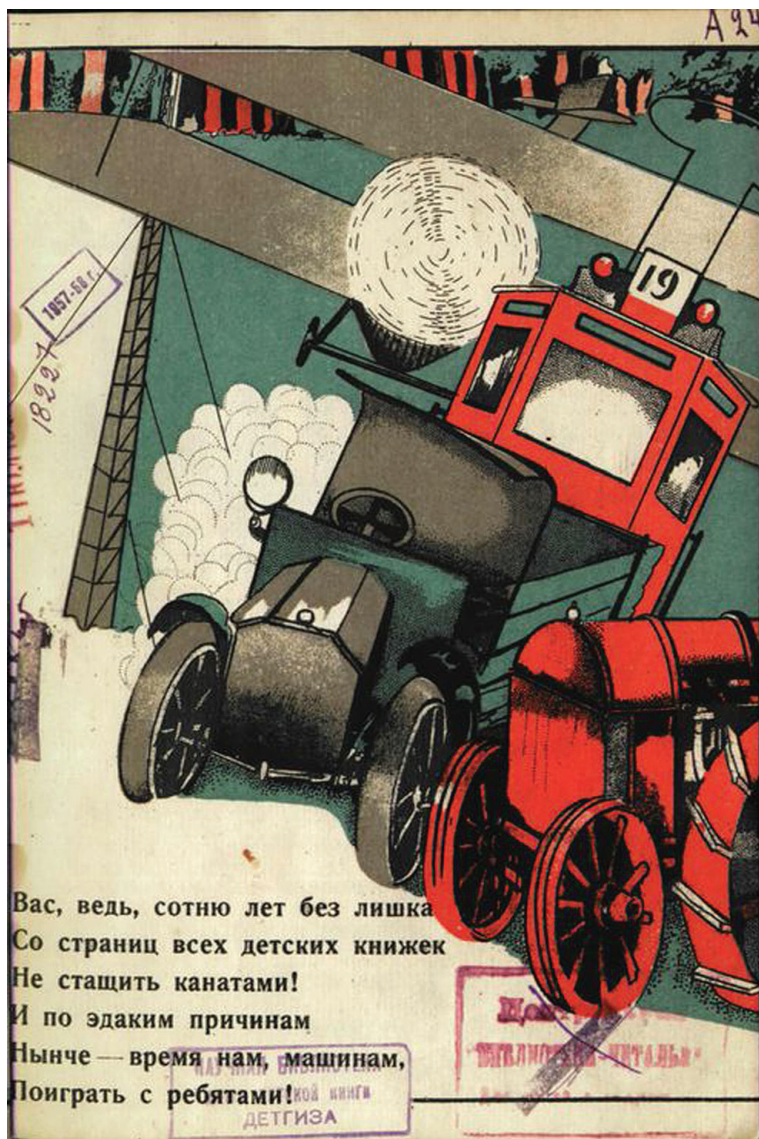


Figure 6. Illustration by Alexey Efimov from Nikolai Agniltsev: *Tvoi Mashinnye Druz'ya*. Moscow: Raduga, 1926

In the opposite direction, books by Mitchell were translated into Russian in many thousands of copies: *Pesenka Novogo Parovoza* (How the Engine Learned His Knowing Song, 1925), *Neboskreb* (Skyscraper, 1925), *Kak Borya Gulyal po Nyu*

Yorku (Boris Walks Every Way in New York, 1927), *Kak Voda Popala v Vannu* (How the Singing Water Got to the Tub, 1929), and even a large collection of stories under the title *Kniga Rasskazov pro Zdes' i Teper' dlya Detei ot 2 do 7 Let* (The Book of Stories about Here and Now for Children from 2 to 7, 1925).¹²

In a rather paradoxical way, this introduction to the real world was provided by young modernist artists. In the USSR it was initially done by Lebedev and his school, while in America it was accomplished by Esphyr Slobodkina and her friends, who worked for the publishing house William Scott & Co, which evolved from Bank Street Books. Slobodkina, who was born in Siberia and came to the USA via China at a young age, was a radical artist, a founder and for many years a chairperson of the American Abstract Artists Association. Like many early Soviet avant-garde artists, Slobodkina first started to write children's books in order to be able to pay her bills, but she remained in the field for decades. As she wrote in her late memoirs, she quickly understood that illustrations for children gave her a brilliant opportunity to combine her passion for abstract art with her natural penchant for telling stories. She showed her semi-abstract geometric collages to a young editor and author, Margaret Wise Brown of William Scott & Co. The book *The Little Fireman* (1938), with a text by Brown, was the first American children's book to be made with the technique of colored paper collage. It can also be considered a paragon of artistic simplicity, striking composition and integrity. These pictures could easily pass for Soviet productions executed eight or ten years earlier.

Conclusion

The stylistic and ideological context of Soviet and Western children's books of the 1920s and 1930s can be broadened to the common, interbellum, modernist Zeitgeist. I can only agree with Nathalie op de Beek, who writes:

The machine-centric picture books of the '30s and '40s appear in the context of a radically altered U.S. and international culture, where proletarian concerns and world tensions strongly inflect the domestic form of children's literature.

(op de Beek 2004: 55)

The social and modernist infantilism¹³ coupled with the left-wing political inclinations began to fade away from mainstream art in America and Europe from the

12. Originally it was published as *Here and Now Story Book. Two-to Seven-Year-olds*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Company Inc., 1921.

13. See Bates (1932) for early reflections on this problem.

second half of the 1930s. The new maturity of many, if not all, radicals was ushered in by the Great Depression, the political trials in the USSR and the increasingly evident degeneration of starry-eyed socialism into Stalinism, Fascism and Nazism. Experiments with radically modernist illustrations and designs and with machine-centered subjects diminished significantly. However, the publishing mainstream appropriated these experiments and used them in a diluted form.

The artistic and ideological processes that took place in countries with such different political systems as the USSR and the West were less antagonistic than it might appear. Modernist artists and writers, who were often at odds with officialdom in their countries, showed that the world was more united than politicians often claim.

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PART 3

Postbellum avant-garde children's books

CHAPTER 9

Manifestations of the avant-garde and its legacy in French children's literature

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The influence of the avant-garde manifested itself very early in French children's literature in pioneering works such as Édy Legrand's *Macao et Cosmage* (1919). In the 1930s, Constructivism and Surrealism inspired the children's books of Nathalie Parain, and Lise Deharme and Claude Cahun respectively. In the 1960s and 1970s, the avant-garde continued to play a significant role in the works of innovative publishers, such as Delpire, Harlin Quist, Le Sourire qui mort, and Ipomée, who were determined to revolutionize children's books. This chapter examines several landmark books of the avant-garde period and traces the lasting influence of the movement on French children's books into the twenty-first century, including the legacy of crossover picturebooks that appeal to both children and adults.

The avant-garde has played a particularly influential role in the artistic and cultural life of France. The French language provided the term for the artistic phenomenon that had its roots in the bohemian culture of turn-of-the-century Paris. Many important artists associated with the various avant-garde movements are French: Guillaume Apollinaire, André Breton, Jean Cocteau, Robert Desnos, Paul Éluard, Alfred Jarry, Fernand Léger, and Man Ray, to mention only a few whose names reappear later in this chapter. A large number of avant-garde artists and writers took a particular interest in children and children's culture, as they were trying to see the world through new eyes, as a child does. Some of these artists actually involved themselves directly in children's literature. As the present volume clearly demonstrates, children's literature was particularly open to the avant-garde in many countries. A number of critics have pointed to the movement's important influence in the field of children's books (see Perrot 1995: 219–233; Nel 2002; and Olson 2012). In France, the innovative spirit of the avant-garde began

very early to manifest itself in children's literature and would continue to push at the boundaries of the genre throughout the twentieth century and even into the twenty-first century. This chapter examines several landmark children's books of the avant-garde period, before tracing the movement's enduring influence in the world of French children's publishing in subsequent decades. It considers the works of particular artists within the context of innovative publishing houses determined to bring the transgressional spirit of the avant-garde to the sphere of children's books.

A pioneering avant-garde picturebook

The growing interest of painters, sculptors, photographers, and other artists in children's books in the early twentieth century led to the creation of some very innovative picturebooks. The painter and illustrator Édy Legrand brought a truly Modernist style to children's illustration in 1919 with his pioneering picturebook *Macao et Cosmage ou L'expérience du bonheur* (Macao and Cosmage or The Experience of Happiness). One of the great forerunners of the contemporary picturebook, *Macao et Cosmage* was a groundbreaking book in many ways. It was the first picturebook for children published by the Éditions de la Nouvelle Revue Française or NRF (the original name of the major French publishing house Gallimard) when they decided, in the aftermath of the first World War, to add children's books to their catalogue. An advertising band on the book actually bore the words: "the first illustrated book for children". Completed when the painter was only eighteen years of age, *Macao et Cosmage* is the most original and visually daring work of an artist who would go on to become one of the most important French illustrators of the twentieth century. The book was highly innovative in content, graphic design, and format. It marks a significant break from the romantic styles of well-known illustrators of the time, such as Arthur Rackham and Edmund Dulac. Like many European artists of the early twentieth century, Legrand sought to break down the traditional borders between non-visual art and visual art, but he did so in a book targeted at young readers. *Macao et Cosmage* is one of the first picturebooks to reverse the conventional text-image relationship and privilege the latter, revolutionizing the conception of the children's book.

Legrand's book contains fifty-four full-page engravings, vividly colored by hand in the *pochoir* process. The artist uses this stencil technique in a completely new manner. Framing and perspective play an important role in the striking graphic compositions. The large plates evoke reminiscences of various artistic

movements of the early years of the twentieth century.¹ In the foreword of the new edition, Michel Defourny notes in passing the influence of Japonism and Art Deco. While certain elements, particularly the sunburst, certainly announce Art Deco, the influence of Art Nouveau is much more pronounced in Legrand's elegant, decorative design. The organic floral forms, flowing lines, sinuous curves, combination of natural forms with more angular contours, page composition, and use of colour all evoke Art Nouveau (see Figure 1). The decorative, handwritten text, which becomes an element of the image itself, reflects avant-garde experiments with typography. The ukiyo-e style of Japanese wood-block prints, which was a source of inspiration for many impressionist painters in France before later influencing Art Nouveau and Cubism, can be seen in the lack of perspective and shadow, the flat areas of bold color, and the floral forms. Legrand's colors evoke certain woodcuts by the great master Katsushika Hokusai. The image of Macao and Cosmage's house on a lake uses a palette very similar to Hokusai's *View of the Lake*. There are reminiscences not only of Hokusai's famous landscapes, but also of his lesser known studies of birds and flowers, a genre called *kachô-e*. The birds over the lake in the same plate evoke Hokusai's graceful cranes in the ink drawing titled simply *Cranes*. When Legrand depicts the sea in the next illustration, the wave in the background recalls that of the celebrated print *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* or the lesser known *Wave*. The influence of Japonism is particularly evident in the illustrations that immediately precede the intrusion of the outside world. The "eternal spring" in which Macao and Cosmage live prior to the arrival of visitors is depicted as a tree covered in pink blossoms, an image that immediately calls to mind cherry blossom season in Japan, as it is portrayed in works such as Hokusai's *Mount Fuji seen through Cherry Blossom*. At the same time, the colors of some of Legrand's illustrations are reminiscent of Fernand Léger, the artist of the Machine Age, who celebrated the rise of twentieth-century technology. Paradoxically, Legrand uses those colors to denounce industrial and technological progress, a highly unusual attitude in the early years of the new century. The idyllic existence of the eponymous protagonists, a white man and a black woman, comes to an abrupt end when colonialization brings "civilization" and "progress" to their paradisiacal island.

1. The book left a lasting impression on the poet and essayist Michel Leiris, for whom it seems to have embodied the avant-garde that the poet himself embraced at the beginning of his literary career. Leiris mentions *Maçao et Cosmage* several times between 1924 and 1933 in his *Journal* (Leiris 1992: 62, 207, 219), as well as in a lengthy passage of *Frêle Bruit* (Leiris 2003: 853–855).



Figure 1. Illustration by Édy Legrand from *Macao et Cosmage ou L'expérience du bonheur*. La Nouvelle Revue Française, 1919

Legrand seems to have been influenced by the illustrations that Raoul Dufy created in 1911 for Guillaume Apollinaire's *Le bestiaire ou Cortège d'Orphée* (The Bestiary or The Parade of Orpheus), a project that Picasso had turned down. Although Dufy is best known as a Fauvist artist of colorful scenes depicting Parisian leisure society in the early twentieth century, he was also an important decorative artist. Early in his career, Dufy became interested in the woodcut and illustrated a number of books using that medium. The woodcuts for *Le Bestiaire* were his first published illustrations, but they are his finest. Today the book is considered a masterpiece of twentieth-century book production. It is not surprising that the bestiary, published only a few years earlier, should have inspired Legrand,

whose protagonists are surrounded by animals in their island paradise. The decorative style, floral images, and fluid lines of Dufy's woodcuts, so characteristic of Art Nouveau, announce those of *Macao et Cosmage*. Both illustrators offer lively, witty illustrations that are at once primitive and refined. Like Dufy, Legrand also adopts a square format, which was highly unusual at the time. The format constituted a significant element of Legrand's renewal of the picturebook. Due to its square format, the book is sometimes seen as a precursor of other avant-garde movements, such as Constructivism, Suprematism, the Bauhaus, and Cubism. In a rather general statement in the foreword to the new edition, Defourny sets *Macao et Cosmage* in the tradition of avant-garde movements, "from the Vienna Secession to Russian Constructivism, from the Bauhaus to the Stijl" (Defourny 2000).

Legrand was rethinking the children's book along the same lines as the artists of the Vienna Secession and the Wiener Werkstätte (Vienna Workshops). Like the Vienna Workshops, the French artist experimented with format, page layout, typography, and text-image relationship. He shares their desire to cheaply produce high quality, artistically designed publications, making beautiful books available to all economic backgrounds. This challenged standard publishing practices of the early twentieth century, which privileged carefully bound, costly books with elegant tipped-in plates on fine paper. *Maçao et Cosmage* was an inexpensive book with bold illustrations on coarse paper. The groundbreaking work played an instrumental role in establishing a new path for children's book illustration, a role that would have been even more pronounced if the author had not forbidden the republication of *Macao et Cosmage* in 1947. The book was not available again until 2000, when the innovative French children's publisher Circonflexe brought out a faithful reproduction. It nonetheless remains one of the most important books in the history of children's book illustration.

Surrealism and the children's book

Another little known landmark book is *Le cœur de pic* (The Heart of Spades), a book of short poems for children published in 1937 by the French writer Lise Deharme, one of the muses of Surrealism. The poems are accompanied by twenty black-and-white still life photographs by Claude Cahun, another prominent figure of the Parisian avant-garde. Their project intrigued important surrealists, such as André Breton, Man Ray, and Robert Desnos. *Le cœur de pic* has the distinction of being the only children's book ever issued by the prestigious French publishing house José Corti, whose founder, José Corticchiato, published the work of his surrealist friends, including André Breton and Paul Éluard. A poetic dialogue by Éluard constitutes a brief foreword to *Le cœur de pic*. It is a kind of *art poétique* in

which the “The Beautiful-Lady-Without-Reason” prevails over “The Gentleman-With-Reason”. The lady invented by Éluard describes the book in the airy terms of a “bouquet gathered in the fairies’ garden, stolen from bees and butterflies”, an apt description in light of the role flowers play in both the text and the images. Éluard clearly sees this “children’s book” as a crossover book, because the lady declares that this “livre d’images” (picturebook) is “the age that you want to be”. The pragmatic gentleman acknowledges the temptation of stories, but his unfinished sentence ends with a “but”, to which Éluard, through the voice of the lady, responds: “There is no but, read”. Éluard’s preliminary text anticipates the arguments of those who would question this surrealist project for children before even reading it.

The enigmatic nature of the book is announced in the title, which is a clever play on words. Spades in French is “pique”, while “pic” means “woodpecker” as well as “pick”, offering three possible translations: The heart of spades, The woodpecker’s heart, or The pick-axe heart. The illustration on the cover suggests the first translation, despite the fact that the cards spell out the homonym “pic”. Cahun’s strange and unsettling photographs complement perfectly Deharme’s “thirty-two poems for children”, which resemble nursery rhymes. An assortment of heterogeneous objects, both natural and man-made (flowers, leaves, branches, combs, bird’s feathers, feather pens, etc.) compose eye-catching, often startling, little tableaux. Some of the motifs are favorites with the surrealists, for example, cutlery and clocks. In this book for children, as elsewhere, Cahun uses photography to challenge the objectivity generally associated with that medium. The blend of fantasy, mystery, humor, and cruelty gives these tableaux a very evocative atmosphere. The photographer uses ordinary everyday objects to create a mysterious, strange world of the imagination. One photograph depicts three shoes on a wooden staircase that descends into darkness. A glass clog decorated with a white flower evokes reminiscences of Cinderella’s glass slipper despite its strangeness (see Figure 2). Deharme’s text is no less enigmatic than the images. The text that accompanies this photograph begins and ends with the haunting lines: “trois petits souliers/ma chemise me brûle/trois petits souliers/montent l’escalier” (three little shoes/my shirt burns me/three little shoes/climb up the stairs; 43). There are other reminiscences of fairy tales but they are always cast in a rather eerie light. Dark, shadowy figures are back lit in what appears to be Rapunzel’s tower; a veiled bed evokes echoes of Sleeping Beauty, but the canopy is somewhat shroud-like and the aura of death is heightened by the dried flowers. Cahun also uses images from the world of nursery rhymes in a disquieting manner: three smiling Humpty Dumptys sit below what looks like a pair of large, dried lips. The poet seems to set up a witty dialogue between some of the photographs: for example, a decorated egg in an egg cup evokes the earlier Humpty Dumptys. Other motifs of children’s culture are scattered throughout the images,



Figure 2. Photograph by Claude Cahun from Lise Deharme & Claude Cahun: *Le cœur de pic*. Paris: José Corti, 1937; reprinted by Éditions MeMo, 2004

but they become an element of the surrealists' exploration of the child's world. A miniature pyromaniac clown seems to promote playing with matches. The use of dismembered body parts, a common motif in surrealist paintings, is tied to children's culture in Cahun's dreamlike, sometimes nightmarish, photographs. A tiny doll's hand, severed from its body, appears in a number of the symbolic photographs and is multiplied in the image on the back cover. In another, a flower replaces the head of a doll apparently chained to a chair beside another masked doll. Like many avant-garde children's books of the early twentieth century, *Le cœur de pic* is largely unknown, despite the fact that it was republished in 2004 by Éditions MeMo in a collection devoted to important works of the past (Les grandes rééditions). The French publishing house was created in 1993 to make high quality books accessible to all and their catalogue indicates a predilection for poetry, play, and audacity. The publisher cites Éluard's phrase "L'âge que vous voulez avoir..." (the age that you want to be) on their website to explain their editorial policy: "we do not think that all books are either for adults or children, but the images still speak to us even when we have grown up. One can read books like *Le Cœur de Pic* ... as a child or an adult" (Morault).

Constructivism and the children's book

Russian artists made a significant contribution to the field of French children's books beginning in the 1920s, as A.L. de Saint-Rat points out in his essay on Russian émigré artists (Saint-Rat 1989:98). Among the Russian artists who brought new ideas and fresh talent to the French children's books scene of the 1930s was Nathalie Parain (Natalia Chelpanova), who was strongly influenced by the Constructivists. She began her career in 1930 by illustrating for the NRF the picturebook *Mon chat* (My Cat), an excellent example of the Constructivist aesthetic applied to a children's book.² In her search for a simplification of form and color, the artist uses the technique of paper cuts or solid, flat colors on a stark, white background that makes the figures stand out sharply. Thanks to the editor Paul Faucher, Parain illustrated the first picturebook in the beloved and influential Père Castor series in 1931. She went on to become one of the series' principal illustrators. Parain's geometrisation of forms, flat work, and play with cutouts and collages were a direct influence of the Russian avant-garde. Her most notable work in this respect is *Ronds et carrés* (Circles & Squares, 1932), in which geometrical

2. Parain is also the best-known illustrator of Marcel Aymé's timeless classic *Les contes du chat perché* (1934), which was translated into English as *The Wonderful Farm*.

forms (circles, squares, triangles, cylinders, etc.) are represented in stark simplicity (see Figure 3). The artist renews the use of space with a kind of simplified grammar of forms and colors. Her palette consists of only two colors, red and black, which are used on a white background. This picturebook also constitutes a game for children, an aspect that Père Castor highlights in his preface. Children are invited to take scissors and cut forms out of red and black paper to recreate proposed



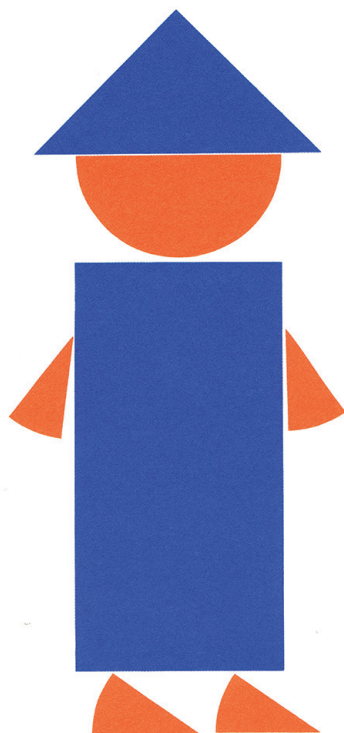
Figure 3. Cover of *Ronds et carrés* by Nathalie Parain. Paris: Flammarion, Père Castor, 1932; facsimile by Les Amis du Père Castor, 2001. Used by permission of François Faucher

subjects or to invent their own. This reminds us of El Lissitzky's instructions to the young readers of *About Two Squares*, which the Russian avant-garde artist and designer published in Berlin in 1922: "Take – Paper Fold, Columns Colour, Blocks Build." A homage to Kazimir Malevitch, Lissitzky's first Suprematist work is at once a picturebook and a manifesto, in which the artist offers a revolutionary rethinking of the children's book and the book in general, applying Suprematism to the graphic arts. In *Ronds et carrés*, Parain applies this "grammar" to books published for French children.

The influence of Parain's works, which have become French children's literature classics, is clearly demonstrated by the picturebook *Mercredi* (Wednesday), published by Anne Bertier in 2010. In 2011, Bertier acknowledged that the picturebook is indeed a "homage to Nathalie Parain, a nod to her work *Ronds et carrés*" (Bertier 2011). The protagonists of *Mercredi* are two geometric figures, Grand Carré (Big Square) et Petit Rond (Little Circle), whose words and actions remind us of children. They get together every Wednesday to play their favourite game, that of transformations. At the beginning of the story, the big form takes the lead and when the little one can no longer follow, he refuses to play. After a brief period of sulking in their respective corners, they combine forces to create new forms, which become increasingly complex (see Figure 4). The blue square and the orange circle are in constant motion, continually subdividing and recomposing themselves into new shapes in an infinite game. The title sets this adventure about a square and a circle in a temporal context, evoking all the carefree hours of the day of the week that is a school holiday for French children. The flat, solid shapes and geometric forms of *Mercredi* are directly inspired by Parain's *Ronds et carrés*, published almost eighty years earlier. Like Parain and Lissitzky, Bertier adapts the concepts of Constructivism to the picturebook.

The avant-garde legacy of Delpire and Quist

Throughout the second half of the twentieth-century, the avant-garde – specific movements and artists but especially the spirit of innovation, experimentation, and boundary-breaking – continued to play a highly influential role in the works published by ground-breaking publishers who revolutionized children's books. The visionary publisher Robert Delpire, who is known chiefly for his innovative work in photographic publishing, initiated a renewal of children's publishing in France from the mid-1950s to the end of the 1960s. Delpire sought to develop the status of the image in books in general. His intention was to support artists' projects by producing the highest quality books possible, whether they were photographic



Grand Carré chapeau, manteau...

Figure 4. Illustration from *Mercredi* by Anne Bertier. Nantes: Éditions MeMo, 2010. Copyright © 2010 Éditions MeMo. Used by permission of Éditions MeMo and Anne Bertier

books or children's books. The title "Dix sur Dix" (Ten Out of Ten) reflects the high aesthetic expectations he had for his children's series. Despite its short existence and limited catalogue, the series played an influential role in French children's publishing and several of the books were subsequently taken on by other children's publishers. The last book published in the series was Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), which Delpire brought out in France under the title *Max et les Maximonstres* in 1967. Delpire had a remarkable gift for recognizing talent and some of his illustrators were among the best of the twentieth-century, including André François and Alain Le Foll. André François illustrated the first children's book published by Delpire in 1955. Before becoming an internationally renowned painter and sculptor who would leave his mark on contemporary art, François illustrated the works of such avant-garde authors as Boris Vian (*L'Arrache-cœur*, 1980) and Alfred Jarry (*Ubu roi*, 1958). Jean L'Anselme, a poet friend of Delpire who had won the Guillaume Apollinaire Prize, was asked to write the text for

François's images. The result was *On vous l'a dit?* (We Told You?, 1955), a rather sophisticated and caustic text that seems to address adults more than children.

Delpire's signature book is another work by François, *Les larmes de crocodile* (Crocodile Tears), which was published in 1955 (it had actually appeared previously in a 1953 issue of Delpire's journal *Neuf*). Highly unconventional in both content and form, *Les larmes de crocodile* is a milestone in the history of French children's books. François offers a rather absurd explanation of the origin of the French expression "les larmes de crocodile" (crocodile tears) in a whimsical story that pays homage to Jean de Brunhoff's *Histoire de Babar* (1931). Contained in a box, the outsized book (the very elongated shape corresponds to that of the crocodile) was expensive to produce and difficult to shelve in libraries and bookstores. Perhaps Delpire felt the public was better prepared for *Les larmes de crocodile* when he reedited the book in 2004, thirty-five years after giving up children's publishing. Several Delpire titles published in 1963–64 prefigure the Pop Art influence in children's books. The most notable example is *C'est le bouquet!* (1964; English trans., *The Very Obliging Flowers*, 1968) by Claude Roy, with illustrations by Alain Le Foll. *C'est le bouquet!* is a Pop Art book in the manner of Harlin Quist, but predates the Quist books by several years. It tells the whimsical story of two children, Claudelun and Claudelune, who are bored with their life in apartment no. 192,768 on the 9th floor of building 1,822, block 203 in Paris, a modern apartment which has everything from a "vide-ordures" (empty-garbage) to a "vide-enfants" (empty-children). A talking bird gives the children a tiny "fraxilumèle" seed from Java, which grows into a very obliging flower nine stories tall. The two children and the sensational *fraxilumèle* change the lives of those living in "des cages-à-gens" (people cages) and solve even the most complicated problems of modern life, completely transforming the face of Paris and France in general. The nonsensical and humorous manner in which Roy presents serious issues is complemented by Le Foll's vividly colored illustrations, some of which announce Psychedelic Art.

Delpire's picturebooks brought the avant-garde into the field of children's publishing. They were ahead of their time and, although they garnered critical acclaim, they remained misunderstood by the general public. Delpire himself pronounced his first picturebook "completely anachronistic" and admitted that most often his books did not correspond to the market or the time (Vié 1984:43). Although he abandoned children's publishing in 1969, leaving a legacy of only a score of books, Delpire was responsible for a revolution in the conception of a children's picturebook. It was the discovery of Delpire's books, in the mid-1960s, that incited Henri Galeron to become a children's illustrator (Galeron). The first book he illustrated, *Le kidnapping de la cafetière* (English trans., *The Kidnapping of the Coffee Pot*), which would be published by Harlin Quist in 1974, announces Galeron's surrealist tendencies. His predilection for the fantastic and the strange is clearly manifest

in this story about the kidnapping of a coffee maker from the dump by a ragman, his rescue by friends – a lawn mower, an oil lamp, and an old pair of shoes, and the joyous celebration of the dump's inhabitants. Delpire left his mark on many illustrators of Galeron's generation and, although he has been largely neglected as a children's publisher until recently, he led the way for the daring innovations of Harlin Quist and François Ruy-Vidal.

In 1964, the author François Ruy-Vidal met the young American publisher Harlin Quist and two years later they founded a French publishing house with the intention of issuing books on both sides of the Atlantic. Between 1967 and 1972, Ruy-Vidal and Quist published very revolutionary and controversial picturebooks under the label "Un livre d'Harlin Quist".³ Their innovative picturebooks brought a distinctive, quirky look to children's book publishing that would leave an indelible mark on the industry. The editorial policy that Ruy-Vidal implemented at Éditions Harlin Quist reacted against the conventions and taboos that governed children's picturebooks at the time and opened new horizons for the genre. During his partnership with Quist, which terminated in 1972, Ruy-Vidal radically transformed the world of French children's books by publishing avant-garde writers and illustrators who were not specialized in children's books, including Eugène Ionesco, Nicole Claveloux, Patrick Couratin, Étienne Delessert, Henri Galeron, and Claude Lapointe. These controversial young artists, to whom Ruy-Vidal gave complete freedom, were engaged with the intention of ridding children's book illustration of the stereotypes that dogged it. They created powerful, daring, sometimes shocking images, tinged with Surrealism. Quist's books therefore featured some of Europe's most innovative young artists. The bestselling title *The Geranium on the Window-sill Just Died but Teacher You Went Right On* (1971), written by Albert Cullum, was illustrated by twenty-eight different illustrators, many of whom were among the most unconventional French illustrators of the twentieth century. Like those published by Delpire, the Quist books were too avant-garde, that is, too daring, disturbing, and unconventional, for the majority of the American public and were bought largely by collectors who appreciated their innovation and striking artwork and design.

Quist and Ruy-Vidal caught the attention of the children's book world in 1968 with the publication of Ionesco's *Conte n° 1* (English trans., *Story Number 1*), the first of four "Contes pour enfants de moins de trois ans" (Stories for Children Under the Age of Three). Ionesco's deceptively simple children's stories were, in fact, radically innovative. In these fantastic, nonsensical, playful works for young

3. Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer also discusses the Quist books in her essay devoted to Pop Art picturebooks in this volume.

readers, the Theatre of the Absurd playwright pursued his aesthetic experiments with language and the absurd. The original editions of the first two tales were illustrated by Étienne Delessert, who would later illustrate the other two tales as well. The talented Swiss artist had published his first children's book, *Sans fin la fête* (English trans., *The Endless Party*), a playful retelling of the story of Noah's Ark, with Harlin Quist in 1967. When Quist and Ruy-Vidal had asked Delessert in New York that year for the name of a writer with whom he could collaborate for his next book, he had offered two names: Samuel Beckett and Eugène Ionesco. Shortly thereafter, the latter agreed to give Delessert four brief stories which he had told his daughter Marie-France when she was young. In the afterword to *Contes 1, 2, 3, 4: Pour enfants de moins de 3 ans*, where Delessert discusses the genesis of these works, he makes it clear that Ionesco himself is the father and that Josette is the name the author gives Marie-France, whose childish remarks sometimes bordered on the absurd. Delessert describes the tales as a kind of "theatrical game invented by a father and his daughter", which he, as illustrator, would stage visually (Delessert 2009: 111). The unusual tales constitute a kind of theatre of the absurd for children. Like Ionesco, Delessert juxtaposes the familiar with the fantastic, the everyday with the unsettling. His illustrations for *Conte no. 1* contain very obvious allusions to Ionesco's best-known play, *Rhinocéros*, written in 1959, as well as a more subtle reference to one of Sendak's "wild things", which can be seen leaping amongst Delessert's cheerful, Bosch-like creatures.⁴ Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Jörg Meibauer describe "the distorted proportions and perspectives, the dreamlike landscapes with strange buildings and fantastic monster-like animals" of Delessert's watercolor illustrations for *Conte no. 1*, which they consider to be "the best-known Pop Art Picturebook" (2011: 106–107). This Pop Art influence can also be seen in the illustrations of the subsequent tales. The characteristic pastel colors of Delessert's unique palette are a perfect complement to the text of Ionesco's *Conte no. 2* (1970), in which Josette's mother has a predilection for pink and flowers. The maid's lengthy, repetitive description of the mother inspires a surrealistic image that integrates body parts into flowers that seem to issue directly from the speaker's mouth. The surrealistic flower imagery is continued in a depiction of Josette's mother being propelled over the urban skyline in a whimsical pink flower-vehicle, a doublespread that is reminiscent of *C'est le bouquet!* published

4. In his afterword to the four tales, the illustrator admits that in the fourth tale the father's thoughts fly, as he shaves, toward three of his theatrical works: *Les Chaises* (English trans., *The Chairs*), in which two elderly characters frantically prepare chairs for invisible guests; *Amédée ou comment s'en débarrasser* (English trans., *Amédée, or How to Get Rid of It*), in which a playwright and his wife discuss how to get rid of a corpse that is causing mushrooms to sprout all over the apartment and arousing the suspicions of neighbours; and *Rhinocéros*.

only a few years earlier (see Figure 5). Delessert's work profoundly renewed the graphic aesthetics of children's picturebooks well beyond France and the Franco-phone world. The Swiss illustrator is rightly considered a pioneer of the modern picturebook and his innovative works constitute reference points in the history of contemporary illustration.



Figure 5. Illustration by Étienne Delessert from Eugène Ionesco: *Contes 1, 2, 3, 4*. Paris: Gallimard, 2008. Copyright © 2008 Gallimard Jeunesse. Used by permission of Étienne Delessert

Ionesco's third tale, published by Harlin Quist in 1971, was the first book illustrated by Philippe Corentin, who would go on to become one of France's best-loved children's illustrators. Corentin's illustrations for Ionesco's text are at once playful and provocative, and decidedly more surrealistic than his later illustrations. When Josette's father threatens to kill the "mean" butcher if he kills any more calves, Corentin portrays a butcher's shop in which the bovine and human races have exchanged places. A bull butcher with a large knife stuck in his apron stares provocatively at the reader as he smokes a cigarette near a platter bearing a human head, while on the wall hangs a chart of the human body showing the best cuts of meat. Like Delessert, Corentin renders words visually in an illustration that blends Surrealism and Pop Art: during Josette and her father's conversation about eating only "bad fish" and not "nice fish," a chain of fish aggressively devouring one another issue from the speakers' mouths. Surrealist aesthetics have played a

particularly influential role in French children's picturebooks, although the predilection for Surrealism is widespread. Many contemporary illustrators, most notably perhaps Anthony Browne, have pointed to the fundamental relationship between Surrealism and childhood/children.⁵ Patrick Couratin's *Chut!* (English trans., *Shhh!*), published by Harlin Quist in 1974, is an excellent example of the surrealist influence found in so many of the Quist books. In this case there are very precise references to surrealist paintings, as *Chut!* is an absurd story inspired by the work of René Magritte. Many of the Quist books reflect the wit and visual playfulness of the surrealist movement, but also its darker side, which acknowledges the disquieting uncertainty of a world where the ground is constantly shifting.

The avant-garde legacy in children's books since the late 1960s

The collaboration between Harlin Quist and François Ruy-Vidal gave the Quist books a very European look that remains unique in American children's publishing. In France, the legacy of the Quist books was more marked and long lasting, in part because Ruy-Vidal went on to publish many children's books with other publishing houses, often working with the same authors and illustrators. Ruy-Vidal's groundbreaking children's books had caused quite a stir in France in the 1960s, and they continued to surprise and provoke in subsequent years. He is a leading figure of the revival of the French picturebook in the 1970s. Ruy-Vidal would continue to work with Nicole Claveloux, who is considered one of the most important French illustrators of her generation. Thanks to her contact with Ruy-Vidal and Quist in the late 1960s, Claveloux discovered the work of Push Pin Studios in New York, which would have a marked influence on her own art. In 1968, she illustrated Ruy-Vidal's "conte-fable surréaliste" (surrealist tale-fable) *Le voyage extravagant de Hugo Brise Fer* (English trans., *The Secret Journey of Hugo the Brat*, 1969), which was published by Harlin Quist. During his directorship of Grasset Jeunesse from 1973 to 1976, Ruy-Vidal published Claveloux's highly original graphic interpretation of *Les Aventures d'Alice au pays des merveilles* (Alice's Adventures in Wonderland, 1974), which is considered a landmark book in the history of illustration and a graphic art classic in France. In her visual rendition of Carroll's text, Claveloux alternates sepia images with vividly colored pictures, some of which are reminiscent of Andy Warhol and company. In 1976, Nicole Claveloux illustrated

5. Browne states: "All children are surrealists in a sense ... One of the things the surrealists were trying to do was to paint familiar things as if they were seeing them for the first time. Children are, of course actually seeing them for the first time" (Eccleshare 2000).

Ionesco's fourth tale for the new children's department Ruy-Vidal created with Jean-Pierre Delarge. Claveloux's provocative style is well-suited to Ionesco's, and highlights the underlying disquieting atmosphere that is created in the playful text by vague hints of domestic problems. The first image depicting the father's overindulgence of the night before blends Surrealism with a comics style. Josette's grandmother, with whom her mother may or may not be staying, is transformed, in a hallucinatory series of mirrors, into a bearded lady, an elephant, a devil, and a Mother-Goose-like bird carrying off the mother. Claveloux's unconventional and deliberately provocative illustrations depict Josette's father completely nude as he and his daughter pursue a strange game of hide and seek. Claveloux's unique and surprising work transgressed the boundaries of conventional children's books of the late 1960s and 1970s.

Critics have often reproached Ruy-Vidal for creating books for adults rather than children. In his view, however, "there is no art for children, there is Art. There are no graphics for children, there are graphics.... There is no literature for children, there is literature". His policy even after leaving Quist was to never work with children's illustrators. In 1974, Ruy-Vidal published the first picturebook illustrated by Alain Gauthier, *Zizou, artichaut, coquelicot, oiseau* (Zizou, Artichoke, Red Poppy, Bird, 1974) with text by Jean Chalon. Gauthier was a poster designer of world renown before he began illustrating children's books and his painterly, highly aesthetic work is considered by many to be too sophisticated for children. His unmistakable, surrealist style is characterized by ethereal, chalk figures in a mysterious, dreamlike atmosphere of soft, subtle colors. Gauthier claims his luminous colors, generally in soft pastel tones, are the colors of dreams, nostalgia, and melancholy (Gauthier 2006: 114). His recognizable female characters, which Ruy-Vidal called his "little chalk girls" are pale and ghost-like because, according to Gauthier, they embody the nostalgia of his youth. In 1978, Ruy-Vidal asked Gauthier to illustrate his unusual collection of nursery rhymes *Les papillons de Pimpanicaille: Comptines et formulettes d'ici, de là-bas et d'ailleurs* (Pimpanicaille's Butterflies: Nursery Rhymes and Children's catchwords from Here, There and Everywhere, 1981). Gauthier's surrealist illustrations for this book contain reminiscences of both René Magritte and Giorgio de Chirico. The artist's subsequent work continues to be characterized by a dream-like atmosphere and surreal images. Although there are few specific references to particular works of art, there are reminiscences of avant-garde artists, for example the Picasso-like wolf playing a Little Red Riding Hood cello in *Mon Chaperon Rouge* (1998) by Anne Ikhlef. When Ruy-Vidal returned to children's publishing in 2003, after a long absence, with the creation of Éditions Des Lires, he reedited several of his earlier landmark books, including *Au pied de la lettre* by Robert Constantin and Jérôme Peignot, first published in 1976. The surrealist cover image depicts literally "the foot of

the letter” in the French expression “au pied de la lettre”, which means “literally”. Although these books no longer had the same shock impact on audiences as in the 1960s and 1970s, their avant-garde character nonetheless remained striking.

Another important avant-garde publisher of the 1970s and 1980s was Éditions Ipomée, founded by Nicole Maymat and Dominique Beaufile in 1973. The unique publishing house established a reputation for highly aesthetic books that appealed to adults as well as children. In 1988, Alain Gauthier published a surrealist visual interpretation of *La Belle et la Bête* (Beauty and the Beast) with Ipomée. His approach to Madame Leprince de Beaumont’s tale is unique because he actually illustrates, with a combination of color plates and black-and-white illustrations, the scenario for Jean Cocteau’s famous 1946 film. Avenant’s disembodied hand, which holds out a mirror to Beauty, resembles curiously that of the protagonist of Michel Tournier’s *La fugue du Petit Poucet* (English trans., *Tom Thumb Runs Away*), as illustrated by Gauthier in 1979 and again in 1994. Gauthier’s work is the result of an instinctive, unconscious process, during which he allows images and motifs to flow freely from his subconscious. The artist expresses the same surrealist universe regardless of the subject of the book and his work is thus haunted by recurring motifs, such as mirrors, candles, masks, feline figures, the moon, birds, butterflies, flowers, and sphinxes (see Figure 6). The mysterious, enigmatic décor of Gauthier’s work lends itself well to Cocteau’s scenario. He makes striking use of geometrical shapes, curved and straight lines, and twentieth-century images popular with artists of the avant-garde, including metal structures, trains, and stations. In this stylized décor and oneiric atmosphere, dreamlike images portray instincts and repressed desires, as in the case of Beauty lying on the Beast’s head or Beauty in black boots taming the Beast with a whip.

Like François Ruy-Vidal, the author and publisher Christian Bruel wanted to renew children’s books and rid them of existing stereotypes and taboos. Between 1976 and 1996, Bruel directed the experimental publishing house Le Sourire qui mord (The Biting Smile), whose philosophy is hidden in the anagram of its unusual name: “Le risque ou dormir” (Risk or Sleep). Their innovative, visually sophisticated, and provocative picturebooks were often the subject of controversy. The unusual title of their first book, *Histoire de Julie qui avait une ombre de garçon* (Story of Julie Who Had a Boy’s Shadow, 1976), suggests the unconventional nature of the subject matter of these books. Bruel often collaborated with Nicole Claveloux, who became one of the principal illustrators of the pioneering publishing house. She illustrated his text for *Vaguement* (Vaguely, 1990), which plays with the French word for “wave” (vague) in a series of variations on the subject of waves inspired by Hokusai’s celebrated series. In the almost wordless picturebook *Dedans les gens* (Inside People, 1993), Claveloux stages the story of a baby/actor who advances in the Theatre of the World followed by all his past roles, a parade of



Figure 6. Illustration by Alain Gauthier from *La Belle et la Bête* by Jeanne-Marie Leprince de Beaumont, scénario de Jean Cocteau. Moulins: Éditions Ipomée, 1988. Copyright © 1988 Éditions Ipomée. Used by permission of Éditions Ipomée

bizarre, Bosch-like creatures (see Figure 7). Like Ruy-Vidal, Bruel has continued to play an important role in children's publishing in the twenty-first century. When *Le Sourire qui mord* was forced to close its doors in 1996, Bruel wasted no time in founding Éditions Être, where he continued to bring out challenging, avant-garde picturebooks.



Figure 7. Illustration from *Dedans les gens* by Nicole Claveloux. Paris: Le Sourire qui mord, 1993. Copyright © 1993 Le Sourire qui mord. Used by permission of Christian Bruel and Nicole Claveloux

Conclusion

The pioneering picturebooks of artists such as Édy-Legrand brought an avant-garde style to children's literature that left its mark on the future of the genre in France. French picturebooks have an international reputation for being daringly innovative and 'avant-garde'. With the exception of the Quist books, the picturebooks discussed in this chapter have rarely been translated into other languages. Their provocative and non-conformist content and graphics seem often to have been too 'avant-garde' for the tastes of other nations or at least for those of most foreign publishers. Although the radical nature of children's literature⁶ made it particularly receptive to the avant-garde in many European countries, nowhere does it seem to have had such a profound and lasting impact as in France. The innovative spirit of the early twentieth-century movement lives on in the books of young publishing houses such as Éditions Des Lires, Rouergue, MeMo, and Møtus.

6. The "radical" nature of many children's books has been demonstrated by a number of critics. See, for example, Dresang 1999; Reynolds 2007; and Beckett 2012.

The innovative formats and daring subject matter of contemporary French picturebooks may still limit their readership in many international markets. Often they challenge the generic expectations about picturebooks as children's literature only. Part of the legacy of the avant-garde, particularly in France, would seem to be crossover picturebooks. All the books examined in this chapter appeal to both children and adults. Today innovative French children's publishing houses continue to push at the borders of the genre, providing books that are stimulating for adults as well as children. The legacy of the early twentieth-century avant-garde has contributed significantly to making the picturebook the most exciting and forward-looking genre of the twenty-first century.

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Just what is it that makes Pop Art picturebooks so different, so appealing?

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In the 1960s and 1970s the Pop Art movement exerted a great influence on picturebook artists in different European countries (Finland, France, Germany, Poland, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom) and the USA. By referring to various avant-garde movements, such as Dadaism, Expressionism, and Surrealism, and by combining materials chosen from different media (advertisements, comics, film, newspapers, photography, and poster art), the author-illustrators introduced new ideas and concepts into picturebook art, thus crossing the boundaries between popular culture, children's literature, and modern art. Moreover, Pop Art picturebooks are characterized by an anti-pedagogical approach that encourages the child reader to critically reflect upon moral, political, and pedagogical issues and to revolt against authorities. Extended paratexts explain the artists' intentions and emphasize the presumption that children usually have more openness to new experiences than adults.

An iconic collage

The Kunsthalle Tübingen owns an artwork that is regarded as the first work of Pop Art to achieve iconic status (Dempsey 2002: 217). It is a small collage by the English artist Richard Hamilton called *Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?*, created in 1956 for the catalogue of the exhibition *This Is Tomorrow* at Whitechapel Gallery in London (Robbins 1990). This collage combines drawing, photography, and cutouts from newspapers, magazines, and comics. Art historians regard this collage as an extraordinary forerunner of the iconography of Pop Art, since it refers to twentieth century technology, popular culture, and systems of modern mass communication. In a nutshell, the title of this collage ingeniously grasps the potential of the Pop Art movement, whose differences to other contemporary trends in art and provocative political, societal, and artistic appeal challenged the status quo.

Nowadays, Pop Art paintings, sculptures, and furniture are showcased in art museums all over the world and regarded as masterpieces that represent a certain zeitgeist. Some Pop Art artworks, such as the serigraph printings by Andy Warhol and the comic-style paintings by Roy Lichtenstein, have entered popular culture and are reproduced on posters, disc labels, and advertisements. In this way, Pop Art is still omnipresent in diverse media and distributed through various channels, thus constituting an important part of the contemporary cultural memory.

In contrast, it is less known that a large number of picturebook artists created picturebooks in the tradition of Pop Art. Despite their success in the 1960s and 1970s, Pop Art picturebooks have been out of print since the 1980s and merely have the status of rare collectibles. This chapter, therefore, sets out to trace the history and specific features of Pop Art picturebooks by asking what distinguishes Pop Art picturebooks from other picturebooks of the same period and whether their unusual character might have hampered a more in-depth analysis to date.¹

What is Pop Art?

The term Pop Art, like most art historical labels, is a convenience for critics and historians, not for the artists themselves. As Livingstone explains:

Pop has come to be regarded as an art of external appearances, a resolutely post-War form of realism dedicated to the dispassionate deification of the common object and to the manipulation of images and sign systems extracted ready-made from the mass media. (Livingstone 2000: 15)

Although many Pop Art artists are defensive about having this label applied to their work, they remain conscious of the historical context in which they have created their own works. The sources of Pop Art and the reasons for its development are as varied and numerous as the works described by the label. The work of each artist has its own terms of reference. Only by allowing the story to unfold in detail, from the beginnings of Pop Art in the 1950s through to its conclusive arrival in the 1960s and subsequent influence in the 1970s and 1980s, can the thrust of its development as a continuing history be laid bare.

1. Bader's (1976) seminal study on American picturebooks does not mention Pop Art picturebooks at all. Some references can be found in the articles by Künnemann (1973) and Thiele (2004) that cursorily deal with the impact of pop culture on picturebooks, while the article by Kümmerling-Meibauer and Meibauer (2013) presents a detailed analysis of some Pop Art picturebooks, focusing on their relationship with the concept of "strangeness".

Seen from a contemporary angle, Pop Art emerged as an art movement that was a reaction to the predominance of Abstract Expressionism and Color Field painting that governed American and British art schools after the Second World War. In this regard, Pop Art was the first full-blown return since Dadaism and Surrealism to a depictive art after the emergence and triumph of abstraction.

Moreover, some of the recurring characteristics of Pop Art were anticipated in various European avant-garde movements, above all Cubism, Dadaism, and Surrealism. To begin with, Surrealism and Pop Art share an interest in psychoanalysis and the impact of dreams on the creative zeal. The incorporation of fragments of reality from everyday life into Cubist and Dadaist collages paved the way for the use of found imagery in Pop Art. In addition, the photograms and photographic images by the Bauhaus artist László Moholy-Nagy as well as some paintings by the Surrealist René Magritte also anticipated Pop Art in their distinction between object and image.

As far as Pop Art painting is concerned, this generally involves the use of existing imagery from mass culture, preferably borrowed from advertising, photography, comic strips, movies, automobile design, and other mass media sources (Alloway 1997: 170). Given that Pop Art as a whole represented a rebellion against a rigid set of artistic conventions, it was inevitable that its power as a movement and the main reason for its continuous influence on subsequent generations of artists have resided in a series of ideas and strategies which are open to constant redefinition. Key characteristics of Pop Art are the attempt to artistically convey innovative matters of perception, as for example the psychedelic sensual experiences evoked by the consumption of drugs, and the criticism of modern society, politics, and culture (Doris 2007). Other aspects connected with Pop Art are a preference for unmodulated and unmixed color bound by hard edges, a delving into areas of popular taste previously considered outside the limits of fine art, and the concentration on the contemporary subject-matter integral to the ready-made sources the respective artist uses.

Beginning at the end of the 1950s Pop Art was quickly disseminated throughout the world by means of countless reproductions. Together with increasingly easy travel from one country to another, the success of Pop Art artists in the USA and the United Kingdom soon encouraged the existence of numerous variations of Pop Art as far afield as Latin America and Japan. Pop Art paintings and sculpture cropped up in many European countries, such as France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Sweden, Spain, and Switzerland, but there was no immediate counterpart in the Soviet Union and most of the Eastern European countries. The iconic paintings created by David Hockney, Robert Indiana, Roy Lichtenstein, Claes Oldenburg, Andy Warhol, and Tom Wesselmann, which have been widely reproduced over the last fifty years and conspicuously influenced modern graphic design, have molded our image of Pop Art up to the present (Spies 2011).

Countless exhibitions, catalogues, and monographs have been devoted to the investigation of Pop Art, which encompasses diverse art forms, including graphic design, furniture, disc labels, and book design. However, it is not well known that famous artists, such as Heinz Edelmann, Peter Max, and Andy Warhol, created Pop Art picturebooks for children, and renowned authors, for instance Eugène Ionesco and Marguerite Duras, wrote the texts for these picturebooks. Some Pop Art picturebooks had high print runs, as for instance Eleonore Schmid and Étienne Delessert's *The Endless Party* (1967), which was translated into fourteen languages with more than four million copies sold worldwide. Guy Billout's wordless picturebook *Number 24* (1973) had three editions in 1973 and was one of the most successful publications of Harlin Quist, receiving much acclaim for its unusual design and narrative power.

The emergence of Pop Art picturebooks

Pop Art picturebooks had their heyday at the end of the 1960s until the end of the 1970s, with a peak at the beginning of the 1970s. They were prominent in different countries, such as Finland, France, Germany, Poland, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, and the USA. Some critics give credit for the emergence of Pop Art picturebooks to the American publisher Harlin Quist. Harlin Quist began as a theatrical producer before he turned to publishing in 1963. Beginning in 1966, he released over a hundred children's books from his publishing houses in New York and Paris, some of which were published simultaneously in English and French editions.² In cooperation with the artistic director François Ruy-Vidal, Quist was able to convince European and American artists to create innovative picturebooks that were mainly influenced by Pop Art styles. Ruy-Vidal's main inspiration source was the Push pin Studio, which was formed in New York in 1954 and played a leading role in graphic design in the 1950s and 1960s, with expositions in multiple European cities at the beginning of the 1970s. After Ruy-Vidal left the publishing house in 1972, Quist still produced French books until 1977 (*"Les livres d'Harlin Quist et François Ruy-Vidal"* 2013). Patrick Couratin, who published two books under the Quist imprint in the early 1970s (one of which, *Mister Bird* (1971), won several awards for its story and illustrations), became artistic director of Harlin Quist publications in 1974, and served in that capacity until 1982, when Quist returned to

2. See also the chapter by Sandra Beckett in this volume, which emphasizes the impact of the French branch of Harlin Quist on the emergence of post-war avant-garde picturebooks in France.

America to rekindle his career in the theater (Paley 1989). Quist and Couratin's collaborations were revived in 1997, when Quist again returned to Paris to renew his interests in children's book publication under the new imprint "Encore un livre d'Harlin Quist". However, this project lasted only three years, ending with Quist's death in 2000.

Labeled "for children of the future", the Quist imprint stressed the publisher's high artistic standard. The books that Harlin Quist published won praise for a variety of reasons. In the first place, they were admired (especially in the art and graphic arts communities) for their exceptional beauty. Elegant design, superb craftsmanship, and exquisite production were hallmarks of Quist books for children. Their impressive physical presence reflected Quist's unique concern with the children's book as an art object, not just as a medium for instruction or entertainment (Quist 1978). Not surprisingly, Quist books were repeatedly nominated for numerous national and international book awards and best-illustrated book lists. From 1967 to 1975, for example, seven Quist books were selected for "The New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Book List".

Until the appearance of the Quist publications, few books published for children had collectively raised such consistent discussion, applause, and criticism. They provoked a lively debate during the 1960s and 1970s regarding their suitability for children. Invariably, this debate reflected two opposing viewpoints: Quist books tended to be either highly acclaimed for their elegant design and exceptional craftsmanship, or unequivocally censured, which led to their removal from school libraries in the USA.

Besides Harlin Quist with his ardent rigor in publishing exceptional picturebooks and storybooks for children and encouraging prolific artists to engage in creating avant-garde artworks for the child audience, there were other publishers who followed in his footsteps, such as Gertraud Middelhaue Verlag (Germany), Sauerländer (Switzerland), and Gallimard (Paris). Most often, these publishers cooperated in publishing translated versions of the most successful Pop Art picturebooks, so that many Harlin Quist books appeared in German translation as well, while several German Pop Art picturebooks, for instance those illustrated by Heinz Edelmann, had the chance to come out in English and French translations.

The emergence of Pop Art picturebooks and their distribution over the course of at least ten years is tightly connected with a shift in political, pedagogical, and cultural matters. 1968 and its aftermath, inspired by student revolts and a protest against the rigid norms of authoritarian institutions, considerably influenced the pedagogical debate, thus leading to a reconsideration of child education (Fass & Grossberg 2012). Taboo topics, such as rebellion against authorities, critical screening of traditional conventions, depiction of war, and environmental disaster, appeared in children's books. In addition, in accordance with the claim

of contemporary pedagogues that children should be considered on a par with adults, authors and illustrators demanded that the child's right to be treated as an equal partner be respected. Moreover, picturebook artists required that contemporary picturebooks reflect modern developments in art, including mass media and popular culture. It is no wonder, then, that Pop Art left remarkable traces in contemporary picturebooks as well. A quick glance at these picturebooks reveals that they digress from mainstream children's literature in such an obvious manner that they provoked and still provoke judgmental attitudes. Despite their unusualness, Pop Art picturebooks continuously exert a strong impact on the audience because of their strange juxtaposition of text and images.

Characteristics of Pop Art picturebooks

When examining Pop Art picturebooks in great depth, their unusual topics, abundance of color schemes, mixture of diverse techniques, and peculiar image formats catch the eye. The references to psychedelic art, the repetition of the same items on the same page, and the overload of objects and figures in the images certainly contribute to the picturebooks' unsettling appearance, which often evoke the impression of "strangeness" (Kümmerling-Meibauer & Meibauer 2013). What exactly contributes to these picturebooks' exceptionality and strangeness? In general, four aspects influence the readers' engagement: the book titles, the narratives, the illustrations, and the paratexts.

While some Pop Art picturebooks have quite common titles, that is, proper names or titles rendering the essence of the story, other picturebooks stand out due to their unusual titles, which already draw attention to the provocative effect of Pop Art picturebooks. To enumerate stories with numbers without any allusion to their specific content, as in the picturebook sequence *Story Number 1*, *Story Number 2*, *Story Number 3*, and *Story Number 4* by Eugène Ionesco, certainly does not promote sales and demands an explanation. However, if one considers that some Pop Art artists likewise use this strategy of enumerating works of art in order to emphasize the artworks' prototypicality, the tight connection with Pop Art ideology becomes quite evident. Nevertheless, it is unclear whether the titles are to be taken seriously in that they refer to a frame story and characters that re-appear in the four books, or whether it is an ironic allusion to the Pop Art movement.

Some titles, however, consist of cumbersome names and abbreviations, such as *Andromedar SR1* (1970)³ by Martin Ripken and Hans Stempel, *Yok-Yok* (1979) by Anne van der Essen and Étienne Delessert, and *Herr Soundso aus Irgendwo*

3. Andromedar SR1 is the name of a rocket. The original name "Andromeda" has been changed after the rocket received a bump during transportation to a space station. The fusion

(Mr So-and-So from Anywhere, 1973) by Frantz Wittkamp, while other titles refer to the tomboy tradition, stressing the protagonists' bad behavior, like in *Timothy the Terror* (1972) by François Ruy-Vidal and Jean-Jacques Loup, and *Millicent the Monster* (1968) by Mary Lystad and Victoria Chess. In addition, the subtitle of the latter story indicates that this picturebook is intended for nice, lovely, polite, modest, and courteous children. However, Millicent's behavior in the story constantly transgresses the social and cultural norms, and although she finally decides to "change her program", she continues her stubbornness and bothersome conduct. Keeping this in mind, the subtitle apparently creates a false expectation. *Millicent the Monster* is not a picturebook in the "Shock-headed Peter"-tradition, but rather encourages the reader to critically reflect on the mandatory rules prescribed by adults.

Finally, there are rather extended titles, such as *You Think Just Because You're Big You're Right* (1976) by Albert Cullum, and *Roll Call. The Story of Noah's Ark & the World's First Losers* (1978) by Henry Goldthwaite and Henri Galeron. These titles stand out because of their length and they cannot be easily memorized. Moreover, such titles certainly contribute to the readers' confusion about the given picturebook's topic.

In addition to the titles, the narratives also play a role in the readers' bafflement. While several narratives do not have any plot at all, just consisting of enumerations of more or less silly facts and aspects, others deviate from the expected narrative schema of beginning, climax, and ending as they either do not result in a climax or have an open or ambivalent ending, enticing the reader to look for text markers that indicate the respective narrative's meaning. Yet other texts tell a rather confusing story whose complexity is additionally emphasized by metafictional devices and multi-perspectivity. Two linguistic principles that govern various Pop Art picturebooks are enumeration and repetition: the narratives show a preference for lists that enumerate actions and objects, as well as for repetitions of words, proper names, and even whole sentences. These principles are employed in a quite exaggerative manner, leading the plot to the point of absurdity. Other texts focus on topics that were explicitly regarded as unsuitable subjects for children by many pedagogues and critics, for instance, the invitation to resist authorities in general, whether parents, teachers, policemen, or politicians, and the appeal to actively take part in political, economic, and environmental matters.

A prototypical example is the Finnish picturebook *Elli-velli-karamelli* (Elli Gruel Caramel, 1973), with a text by Kaarina Helakisa and illustrations by Katriina Viljamaa-Rissanen. In this story, the self-confident girl Elli rebels against an egoistic factory owner whose factories are increasingly replacing natural landscapes

and play areas, thus contributing to the pollution of the environment. Supported by a magical tree and some birds, Elli succeeds in transforming the gray and joyless city into a setting that is covered with plants and flowers and attracts small animals, such as birds, bugs, and butterflies (see Figure 1). Encouraged by Elli's energy, the inhabitants chase the factory owner away and organize a joyous feast, where everybody wears flower crowns and colorful clothes.



Figure 1. Illustration by Katriina Viljamaa-Rissanen from Kaarina Helakisa: *Elli-velli-karamelli*. Helsinki: Oy Weilin + Göös, 1973. Used by permission of Katriina Viljamaa-Rissanen

The illustrations in Pop Art picturebooks surprise the beholder as well. Hard-edged painting, unusual scale, hybrid mixtures of materials and artistic

styles, shapes of figures and objects that often look quite bloated, and bright color schemes without color modulation create a dreamlike, sometimes even weird atmosphere. An exceptional example of the mixture of materials and artistic styles is the Polish picturebook *Gabrýs, nie kaprýs!* (Gabrys, No Caprice!, 1967) by Wiktor Woroszyński. The illustrations by Henry Toaszewski combine photography, raster print, watercolor paintings, and different typographic fonts, thus creating a collage form that alludes to advertisements, comics, popular films, posters, and newspapers.

Moreover, a number of illustrators obviously refer to previous avant-garde movements that prefigure Pop Art, especially Surrealism, Cubism, and Dadaism, thereby emphasizing the anti-authoritarian and critical attitude of their artworks. In addition, some illustrators incorporate distinct quotations from popular mass media (advertising, comics, and film) and interpictureorial allusions to famous artworks and artists, such as Salvador Dalí, René Magritte, Roy Lichtenstein, and Andy Warhol. Étienne Delessert's *How the Mouse Was Hit on the Head by a Stone and So Discovered the World* (1971) refers to surrealist paintings by Salvador Dalí and René Magritte. In another picturebook illustrated by Delessert, *La souris et les poisons* (The Mouse and the Poisons, 1975), with a text by Anne van der Essen, one image shows an allusion to Warhol's Campbell soup can, while Peter Max's source of inspiration for *The Land of Yellow* (1970) was Roy Lichtenstein's comic-like paintings (Kümmerling-Meibauer & Meibauer 2013).

Another artistic principle that occasionally occurs in Pop Art picturebooks is the serial arrangement of the same single object on the page, which goes back to Andy Warhol's widespread paintings that depict objects in repetition (like the Campbell soup can) or celebrities (such as Marilyn Monroe and Mao). The German author-illustrator Jürgen Spohn, for instance, uses this visual strategy in *Das Riesenross* (The Giant Horse, 1968) in order to convey the sameness of actions, which upon closer consideration actually differ slightly (see Figure 2). Those who are accustomed to Pop Art and its main aesthetic principles will recognize that the enumeration of items, both in text and pictures, is inspired by the so-called "aesthetics of boredom" (Alloway 1997: 170), which refers to the pictures' monotony, the repetition of the same objects, the lack of events, and the depiction of mundane motifs. These aesthetic strategies are regarded by many experts as a crucial property of Pop Art.

Finally, the paratexts play a significant role, since they guide the reader's understanding of the picturebook stories. A significant number of Pop Art picturebooks have prefaces, afterwords, blurbs, leaflets, and texts on the back cover that not only summarize the stories, but also give some advice on how to handle the books. These recommendations concern the mutual reading process as well as the invitation to discuss the picturebooks' content and illustrations with the

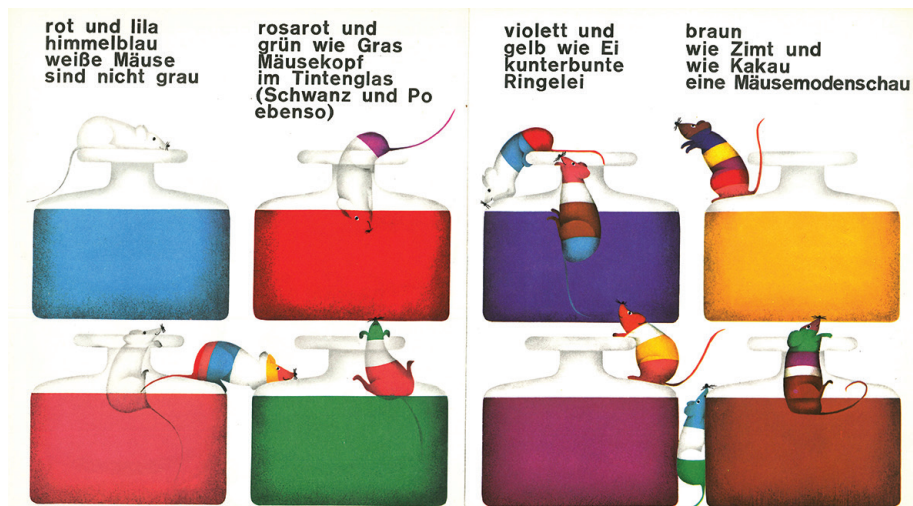


Figure 2. Doublespread from *Das Riesenross* by Jürgen Spohn. Gütersloh: Bertelsmann Jugendbuchverlag, 1968. Copyright © Barbara Spohn 1992. Used by permission of Barbara Spohn

child audience. Since some picturebooks have an open ending or do not end with a distinct moral, the paratexts reflect possible objections by parents and educators. The ironical remarks often contribute to the paratexts' ambiguity, thus emphasizing their tongue-in-cheek style. For instance, on the back cover of *Timothy the Terror* (1972) by François Ruy-Vidal and Jean-Jacques Loup the reader is warned: "Attention! Attention! Attention! Such books could set children thinking, they could pose questions!" This ironical remark entices parents and educationalists to accept that children are generally eager to learn about the world by posing questions and by interrogating adults. It was certainly one goal of the anti-authoritarian movement to invite parents to take children seriously and to treat them as equal conversational partners. What is striking concerning these paratexts is the fact that the artists and publishers have obviously acknowledged the progressive and innovative character of their picturebooks, which challenge the child and adult audiences alike (Kümmerling-Meibauer & Meibauer 2013).

Some typical Pop Art picturebooks

In order to show the scope of genres, artistic styles, and narrative strategies, I will analyze a number of prototypical Pop Art picturebooks from different countries, thus refining the aspects already outlined in the preceding paragraphs.

The most prominent Pop Art picturebook is certainly *Story Number 1* from Eugène Ionesco's collection "stories for children under three years of age", which appeared in two different illustrated versions with Harlin Quist. Swiss illustrator Étienne Delessert created the illustrations for the first edition, which came out in 1968, while US-American comic strip artist Joel Naprstek illustrated the second edition, published in 1978. Although there is a time span of ten years in between these versions, both books show the impact of Pop Art. Whereas Delessert's water-color illustrations are based on the European Pop Art tradition, Naprstek's acrylic paintings are mainly inspired by comic art and the US-American Pop Art style.

Like in its three followers, *Story Number 2* (1971a), *Story Number 3* (1971b), and *Story Number 4* (1973), the narration is arranged around the same frame story: in the morning, the little girl Josette knocks on the door of her parents' bedroom. Since her mother is very busy, taking a bath, still sleeping or already gone out shopping, her father has to look after Josette. However, he does this in quite an unusual manner, either telling a strange story or improvising a joyous game. The end of the story or game coincides with the housekeeper taking care of Josette or her mother's return. Although the dialogues between the family members in the frame stories already alert the readers that they should expect some strange occurrences in the inner stories, they might be overwhelmed by the absurd and nonsensical plays and narratives invented by the father and his daughter.

Story Number 1 captivates with the sophisticated use of language, leading to linguistic anarchy. In this book, Josette's father comes up with a funny story in which all people, animals, toys, and objects have the same name, Jacqueline, leading to an increasingly nonsensical enumeration in the manner of "The uncle and the aunt named Jacqueline had some friends named Mr. Jacqueline and Mrs. Jacqueline, who had a little girl named Jacqueline and a little boy named Jacqueline. The little girl had three dolls named Jacqueline, Jacqueline, and Jacqueline" (Ionesco 1968: n.pag.). Ionesco bases his story on wordplay and nonsensical sentences that stimulate the reader to reflect on the meaning of words and sentences. The absurd dialogues and the paradox combination of seemingly unrelated events show the impact of the theatre of the Absurd. Thus, the author draws the reader's attention to the arbitrary character of linguistic signs. If one turns the linguistic conventions topsy-turvy, for instance by re-naming objects and persons, the text might initially arouse amusement and even laughter, but in a next step it will stimulate the reader to consider linguistic norms and pragmatic conventions. Finally, the last image offers another interpretation of the story: it depicts the housekeeper, who is directly facing the viewer while putting her forefinger on her lips. The ring on her finger shows a portrait of the French philosopher Descartes, whose name is additionally printed underneath the portrait. Bearing in mind Descartes' famous philosophical statement "I think therefore I am", the whole story



Figure 3. Illustration by Étienne Delessert from Eugène Ionesco: *Story Number 1*. New York: Harlin Quist, 1968. Used by permission of Étienne Delessert

might be re-interpreted as a pictorial and textual reference to the seminal question of human identity and the human capacity to reflect on language and existence.

The illustrations by Étienne Delessert underscore the nonsensical structure of the story. For example, he depicts the enumeration of the items on the breakfast tray that the housekeeper announces to the sleepy parents (Figure 3):

Here is your morning newspaper, here are the postcards you have received, here is your coffee with cream and sugar, here is your fruit juice, here are your rolls, here is your toast, here is your butter, here is your orange marmalade, here is your strawberry jam, here are your fried eggs, here is your ham, and here is your little girl. (Ionesco 1968: n.pag.)

Besides the distorted proportions, the recurring patterns of clothes, and the accumulation of figures with the same haircut, hair color, and dresses, the more or less hidden inter pictorial references to other artworks, such as the recurrent motif of the rhinoceros as reminiscent of one of Ionesco's famous theater plays, and the delicate color scheme invite the reader to attentively look at the pictures and to consider the visual markers as further information in the comprehension process. In addition, written signs are incorporated into the images, which cast an eerie shadow on the story.

While Delessert's illustrations are dominated by light colors, the pictures created by Naprstek for the second edition are rather dark, thus evoking a nocturnal atmosphere. For instance, the illustration accompanying the text "Papa and mama fall asleep again because they are very tired. The night before, they went to a restaurant, to the theatre, again to a restaurant, to a nightclub, then again a restaurant" (Ionesco 1978: n.pag.) shows a nocturnal scene (Figure 4).

Josette's parents are placed in the upper center of the image, mostly covered by a unicolored dark gray bedcover. The headboard forms a barrier to the wall that merges into a grayish sky with individual clouds. The foreground shows a typical main street in an American middle-sized town with diners, restaurants, and a theater, indicated by huge illuminated advertisements. The street, which is drawn in central perspective, directly leads towards the sleeping parents and smoothly fuses into the gray bed cover. Clouds that criss-cross the street indicate the places that the parents visited the night before. Moreover, the cloudy path symbolizes the parents' mutual dream about their past enterprise.

An unusual picturebook is Marguerite Duras' *Ah! Ernesto!* (1971), with illustrations by Bernard Bonhomme. The story focuses on seven-year-old Ernesto, who announces after his first day at primary school that he refuses to go to school again. His parents are appalled by Ernesto's unexpected statement and call his class teacher, who cannot remember Ernesto's face and therefore invites Ernesto and his parents to meet him in his office. The subsequent text consists mainly of a dispute between the four protagonists. Ernesto stubbornly insists that he wants to learn only those things that he already knows. He claims that he is wasting his time at school, learning solely useless things which definitely would not increase his world



Figure 4. Illustration by Joel Naprstek from Eugène Ionesco: *Story Number 1*. New York: Harlin Quist, 1978

knowledge. While Ernesto's parents are rather perplexed and finally accept their son's stubbornness, the class teacher loses his temper. He screams at Ernesto, who coolly leaves the office by declaring that at school he had most of all had learned to say "No". The book closes with a photomontage depicting a Vietnamese child's face below an ominous mushroom cloud.

With its anti-authoritarian approach, its alignment with global protest movements and its critical attitude towards the enculturation of children in advanced societies to produce naïve consumers and obedient citizens, Duras' book is a compelling example of how the political and societal ideals of the Prague spring and the May 1968 protest in France reverberated in children's literature (Klimke et al. 2013).

In *Ah! Ernesto!*, the text's matter-of-fact style contrasts highly with the bright-colored illustrations by Bernard Bonhomme, which highlight the boy's imagination. While the adults just see plain objects, such as books, an atlas, and a globe, Ernesto uses them as vehicles to carry him off into a dream world which is dominated by surrealist elements. This is evident on the book cover, which shows a gigantic scale. The right scale pan is loaded with three plaques displaying the names of the author and illustrator, and the book title. A bust of Ernesto is enthroned above the plaques, showing a boy with glasses and curly black hair. The bust is flanked by two devil-like heads from whose snarling mouths flow blossoming roses. In contrast, the left scale pan, which is depicted on the back cover, is empty. Nevertheless, the scale is fully balanced, leaving the viewer free to find the meaning of this image. The inner illustrations focus on Ernesto's perspective, stressing the boy's uneasiness. One picture, for instance, shows Ernesto as a marionette whose strings are guided by his parents and the class teacher.

Another image depicts the class teacher's face, yelling at the boy (Figure 5). The dominance of the bilious green color which covers the teacher's skin, irises, and jacket, and the wide-open mouth with snarling teeth create a menacing atmosphere. Moreover, the viewer's gaze is immediately attracted by the image that fills the teacher's mouth: a hand holding a gun emerges from the collar of a shirt. While hand and gun are depicted in black and white, the background behind glows in red and yellow, thus indicating heat and danger. Although a white pigeon holding an olive branch leaves the teacher's ear, this symbol of peace is modified by the teacher's facial expression, which clearly indicates his unstoppable rage. However, the following illustration renders a different message: the doublespread depicts Ernesto, whose hands have turned into wings that enable him to fly up to the sky. Framed by a red rose and his glasses, which also have tiny wings, Ernesto's facial expression reveals the boy's happiness.

In any case, the juxtaposition of surrealist elements, such as the hybrid mixture of unexpected events and antagonistic aspects, and the means of expression derived from Pop Art, for instance the serial arrangement of single items and

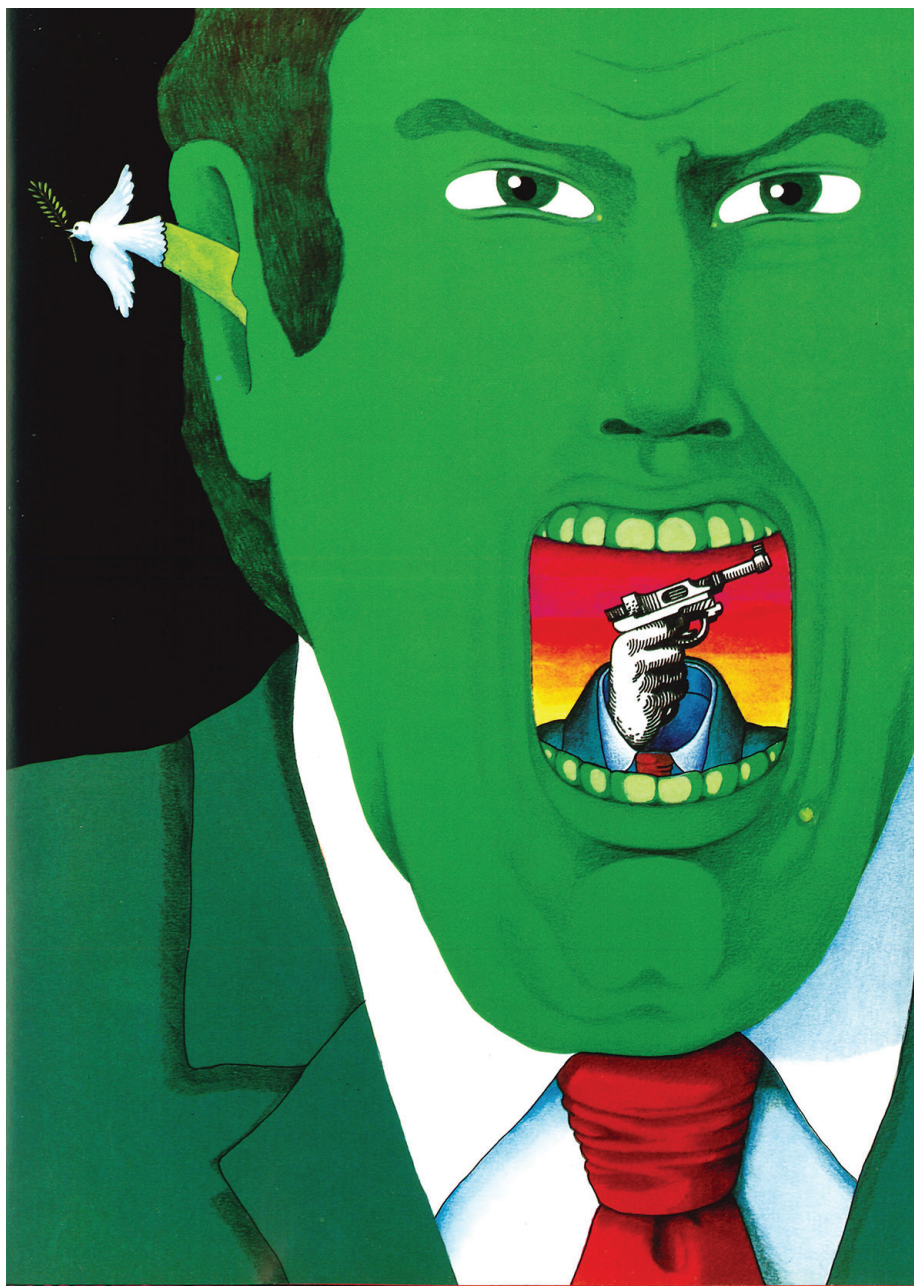


Figure 5. Illustration by Bernard Bonhomme from Marguerite Duras: *Ah! Ernesto!*
Paris: Ruy-Vidal-Quist, 1971

the combination of painting and photography, contribute to the cryptic impression that this picturebook conveys. The intertextual and inter pictorial allusions to Hieronymus Bosch's nightmarish paintings of hell, Andy Warhol's serial pictures, Albert Einstein's famous formula $E = MC^2$, educational books on biology, and ethnographic images of indigenous peoples additionally stress the strangeness of text and images in *Ah! Ernesto!* It is no wonder, then, that critics and pedagogues were rather skeptical about this picturebook's appeal to the child audience. Nevertheless, the picturebook has been translated into several languages, including English and German, and Marguerite Duras wrote a script for a film based on *Ah! Ernesto!* The film *Les enfants* (The Children), directed by Duras, Jean Mascolo and Jean-Marc Turine, was released in 1984 and praised by Serge Toubiana for its "tatiesque" humor in *Les Cahiers du Cinéma* in 1985 (Toubiana 1985). The success of the film encouraged Duras to transform the picturebook story into an adult novel *La pluie d'été* (Summer Rain, 1990), thus indicating the crossover appeal of the original picturebook.

The German picturebook *Maicki Astromaus* (1970), with a text by Fredric Brown and illustrations by Heinz Edelmann, stands out for several reasons. The title, which had been suggested by the Austrian poet H. C. Artmann, is a free translation of the original title of science fiction author Fredric Brown's short story *The Star Mouse* (1941). The first name also refers to Mickey Mouse, the famous comic character created by Walt Disney. Hence, the book title is a fusion of two intertextual references to American pop culture. The astounding book design goes back to Heinz Edelmann, the famous art director of the Beatles film *Yellow Submarine* (1967/68) and designer of a large number of disc and book covers that notably impacted upon contemporary graphic design in Europe and the USA. The few children's books designed by Edelmann captivate the reader with their innovative page layouts and cover designs, which clearly demonstrate the artist's attempt to merge essentials of Pop Art with contemporary modernist typography. Quite unusually, the book cover of *Maicki Astromaus* primarily consists of a text that introduces the main protagonists:

Hello! My name is Klarloth, I am 1 ½ centimeters tall (you can verify this here), black, and a professor. There is another professor in this book, Professor Oberburger, who lives on earth. But most of all this is the story of the mouse Maicki, who is supposed to fly to the stars. Every word in this book is true. Fredric Brown has written everything down as it happened then, Uwe Friesel has narrated the story for children, and Heinz Edelmann has created some drawings. This book has been published by Gertraud Middelhaue Verlag, and its title, of course, is Maicki Astromaus.

(my translation)

The book title is underlined with small lines in yellow, red, blue, and green. Between the first and second sentence, a small black figure is inserted that is a hybrid fusion of a sea lion and a human hand with an outstretched forefinger that covers the figure's rump.

The arrangement of text and illustrations clearly indicates Edelmann's experimental approach, which is distinguished by the use of four different typographies in various sizes. Each chapter begins with a number printed in bold typography, while each paragraph is indented with a black arrow. While the story is printed on the left pages throughout, the right pages on each doublespread show images whose artistic style conspicuously refers to Pop Art. In addition, a text is printed underneath each illustration that describes the content of the picture. This text is not part of Brown's original story, but was added by the German translator Uwe Friesel.

A typical image from this book displays Maicki, outfitted with oversized red pants, yellow gloves, and yellow shoes – a clear reference to Walt Disney's Mickey Mouse – posing before a huge poster that depicts a man with goggles (Figure 6). The lettering is palpably an advertisement for oil. This illustration perfectly matches with the story: Maicki has returned from outer space, provided with human intelligence and the ability to speak by highly developed aliens. He is homesick and therefore is hitchhiking at a service station. However, when he finally arrives home, welcomed by his mouse family and Professor Oberburger, who is eager to hear about Maicki's experiences, Maicki accidentally comes in contact with an electric cable and therefore loses the faculty of speech together with his memories of the space travel. This anticlimactic ending is typical of the attitude of many Pop Art picturebooks.

Edelmann merges the contemporary interest in modern technology, science fiction scenarios, and popular culture with the Pop Art aesthetics in order to create a picturebook that can be interpreted on different levels. The original story by Fredric Brown presents a satirical attack on the alleged omniscience of natural scientists and the human hubris which consists in the erroneous interpretation of mankind as masters of the universe. The humorous story about Maicki and his experiences in outer space is complemented by illustrations that underscore the critical message of the text. While media, advertisements, and consumption have a ubiquitous presence and dominate life on earth, the aliens that Maicki met on another planet present an advanced species that far outstrips the capacities of human people in different respects. Seen in this light, the close connection to the anti-authoritarian revolt in Germany at the end of the 1960s comes to the fore, since this picturebook stimulates the child reader to critically examine the requirements and rules dictated by society and adult authorities (Scott Brown 2013).



Maicki steht an einer Tankstelle und wartet auf ein Auto nach Hartford. Er meint, jetzt genauso auszusehen wie die Maus des Zeichners Disney. Doch das ist natürlich Unsinn, denn jeder weiß, daß die Maus des Zeichners Disney so groß ist wie eine Ente. Der Herr auf dem Plakat über Maicki ist ein Mensch. Er hat eine von diesen Autobrillen auf, die damals Mode waren.

Figure 6. Illustration by Heinz Edelmann from Fredric Brown: *Maicki Astromaus*. Köln: Gertraud Middelhaue, 1970. Used by permission of Julius Beltz GmbH & Co

The anti-pedagogical approach that distinguishes so many Pop Art picture-books is particularly evident in Albert Cullum's third book for Harlin Quist: *Blackboard, Blackboard on the Wall, Who Is the Fairest One of All?* (1978). Cullum was an elementary school teacher in New York, where he perfected his maverick teaching style, basing his lessons on his students' involvement with the world by combining drama, poetry, and imaginative play. In the late 1960s he became a professor at Boston University, where he spent the next 35 years lecturing and training new generations of teachers. The book consists of 28 illustrations, created by 14 artists, and accompanying short texts written in a poem-like style, which examine the world from a teacher's perspective. This picturebook is thus connected with the preceding picturebook *You Think Just Because You're Big You're Right* (1976), which focuses on the child's perspective towards adults. The dedication, "To those teachers who see children as more than a ticket to a summer vacation", makes clear that Cullum regarded his picturebook as suitable for a dual audience: children and adults. As the "publisher's note" states:

Here are Teachers loving 'their' children – except sometimes, when things get out of hand and they lose sight of love. Here are Teachers trying to share the excitement of learning with the young lives that drew them into teaching – all the while trying to hang on to lives of their own. Be sure the children see BLACKBOARD, BLACKBOARD ON THE WALL, WHO IS THE FAIREST ONE OF ALL? It's for them, so they can find out who Teacher is. Their Teacher is in these pages. Everyone's Teacher is. (Cullum 1978: n.pag.)

The sequence of illustrations created by British, French, and American artists is a kaleidoscope of multiple Pop Art styles, ranging from collage, cartoons, drawings, and watercolor illustrations to acrylic painting. Each accompanying text, consisting of four to six lines, describes the respective teacher's cognitive condition, which often reveals an emotional turmoil. This turmoil is evoked by the demand to satisfy the students' hunger for knowledge and attention on the one hand and the parents' and supervisors' requests on the other hand, as is clearly expressed in the following text: "How do I say, 'Your son is not stupid, but he's not very bright either.' How do I tell the parents that he's just an average kid – like them!" (Cullum 1978: 18).

The different perspectives shown in the images, and the distorted proportions and scale illustrate the teachers' inner conflicts, while the texts challenge the reader to delve into the spaces between the lines. While some doublespreads highlight the teachers' uncertainty about their role and behavior towards their students, other illustrations focus on the teachers' hidden dreams that revolve around freedom, creativity, and never-ending chances to change one's own conditions in life. The invitation in the text: "Let's paint a mural! Let's put on a play!



Figure 7. Illustration by France de Rancine from Albert Cullum: *Blackboard, Blackboard on the Wall, Who Is the Fairest One of All?* New York: Harlin Quist 1978

Dream with me, boys and girls! Dream big – and someday you may do big!” (Cullum 1978: 46) is accompanied by an illustration created by France de Rancine (Figure 7). The image depicts a child’s head whose contours are blurred. The framing surface shows a huge quantity of stars in yellow, orange, green, and blue against a gorgeous background that glows in rainbow colors. From below a blue triangular shape points to the child, who dreamingly gazes into the distance. The brilliant color scheme with even color surfaces and the consistent arrangement of the stars refer to the two famous Pop Art celebrities Roy Lichtenstein and Andy Warhol, thus implementing artistic allusions to two famous Pop Art stars. Throughout the book, the change between various individual styles and the depiction of different characters enthrall the reader, therefore encouraging them to closely consider the different emotional states addressed in image and text.

While Cullum’s book is a brilliant example of the overarching impact of anti-pedagogical issues on the design and configuration of Pop Art picturebooks, the increasing interest in the child’s psychological and cognitive development was the catalyst for an exceptional picturebook project carried out by Étienne Delessert in tight cooperation with the world-famous cognitive psychologist Jean Piaget. In the preface to *How the Mouse Was Hit on the Head by a Stone and So Discovered the World* (1971), Piaget emphasizes that the concept of the book resulted from

three sets of interviews undertaken with 23 children aged 5 to 6 years. In the first interview, children were encouraged to discuss selected pictures and texts from Eugène Ionesco and Étienne Delessert's *Story Number 1* and *Story Number 2*. In the second interview session, the children were asked how they judged texts and pictures prepared by Étienne Delessert and psychologist Odile Mosmann. In the third session, children were invited to draw images themselves.

While Piaget analyzed their responses from a psychological perspective, Delessert incorporated the children's suggestions when preparing the final version of the book. For instance, several children complained that some words were not easy to grasp. Other children pointed to mismatches between the story world and their own conception of reality. A photo attached to the preface shows Delessert together with a child that is drawing a mouse. As the artist's illustration alongside the child's drawing demonstrates, Delessert attempted to combine the child's naïve style with artistic devices. Another child's explanation of the sun's illuminating power inspired the artist to create an image that depicts the sun as a golden ball thrown into the air by one man in the morning and caught by another in the evening. The sun's luminosity is explained by the small image inserted in the lower left corner: the sun is shining because a long time ago it was lighted by a match. This experimental picturebook, which can be characterized as a meeting place of cognitive psychology and children's literature, is one of the rare examples of a collaboration where children's world knowledge, their apprehension of fictional texts, and their understanding of images have influenced the emergence of an artwork targeted at children.

The impact of Pop Art picturebooks

This overview of the most striking features of Pop Art picturebooks has demonstrated that these books are complex artworks which draw upon different sources of inspiration. Most of the artists created works for children and adults and they often addressed both audiences, thus their picturebooks can be regarded as prototypical examples of crossover picturebooks (Beckett 2012). Moreover, Pop Art picturebooks refer to different European avant-garde movements, such as Surrealism, Dadaism, Theatre of the Absurd, and Cubism. These references are found in the illustrations as well as the accompanying text. However, the impact of the avant-garde is not the only crucial property of Pop Art picturebooks. What particularly distinguishes them is the inclusion of contemporary trends in education, psychology, media discussion (for example, the impact of television on the child's development), and the conceptualization of childhood images, which contribute largely to the picturebooks' innovative and sometimes even provocative character.

One might even go a step further and consider these picturebooks as representatives of “radical children’s literature” (Reynolds 2007) as they attempt to break new ground by giving rise to multiple aspects that are influenced by recent artistic, pedagogical, psychological, and cultural discussions.

Nevertheless, this observation should not erroneously lead to the conclusion that Pop Art picturebooks are a sort of extravagance in the history of twentieth century picturebooks which did not leave any marks. Although – as seen from a contemporary perspective – Pop Art seems to be a historical art movement, the development of an entirely new perception of art and of picturebooks for children in the quarter century following the arrival of Pop Art and Pop Art picturebooks would have been unthinkable without their example. Clearly, Pop Art picturebooks challenged numerous long-standing conceptions of language, art, and images of childhood, and they prefigured post-modernist impulses in a later generation of picturebook artists, such as Anthony Browne, Charles Keeping, David McKee, and David Macaulay, to name just a few (Paley 1992; Sipe & Pantaleo 2008). Moreover, Pop Art lives on in picturebook art, if one takes into consideration, for instance, Peter Blake’s illustrations for a newly launched edition of Lewis Carroll’s *Alice through the Looking-Glass* that appeared in 2006, or Rachel Isadora’s homage to Pop Art in *1 2 3 Pop!* (2000) and *ABC Pop!* (2001). One might still continue to wonder just what it is exactly that makes Pop Art picturebooks so different, so appealing. These picturebooks show that today’s illustrators still demonstrate a deep interest in an avant-garde movement that adumbrated a new world view and embraced fresh insights into childhood and art for children.

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Surrealism for children

Paradoxes and possibilities

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This chapter addresses what an avant-garde for children might look like, and what it might do. It is called “Surrealism for Children: Paradoxes and Possibilities” because the very notion of an avant-garde for children strikes the author as both paradoxical and not, and as both possible and impossible. In making this claim, the author argues with – and revises – his own analysis in *The Avant-Garde and American Postmodernity: Small Incisive Shocks* (2002), which took for granted that an avant-garde for children was both possible and critically viable. What he once accepted as a certainty, he now thinks of as an intriguing question. The answer resides among the three main (and overlapping) areas around which the paradoxes and possibilities of a Surrealist children’s literature circulate: knowledge, experience, and audience.

Knowledge

An adult with some knowledge of René Magritte’s work can look at the picture-books of Anthony Browne, David Wiesner, Guy Billout, or Chris Van Allsburg, and see the legacy of the historical avant-garde. Browne often makes direct allusions to specific paintings, though he will also do what Wiesner, Billout, and Van Allsburg do: adopt specific visual devices from Magritte’s works. They might use the unexpected juxtaposition of two objects – a train emerging from a fireplace or a rhino in the living room. Or they might modify one key aspect of an object, such as withdrawing gravity from a rock or removing weight from a frog. Or offer change in scale, as when an apple fills a room, or giant vegetables land in the backyard. Or deliver a double image, such as a mountain

taking the form of a bird or a tree adopting the shape of a shouting mother's head.¹

Recognizing these *as* avant-garde tropes requires a cultural knowledge of Magritte, or other artists who use similar techniques – Giorgio de Chirico, Méret Oppenheim, Man Ray, John Heartfield. While some children may have had exposure to Surrealism and Dada, we cannot take that for granted. If you know Magritte's work, you will enjoy D.B. Johnson's many and playful allusions in *Magritte's Marvelous Hat* (2012) and Leo Timmers' *Meneer René* (2010, translated as *The Magical Life of Mr. Renny*, 2012). If you do not, then you may enjoy the art but not know its allusions. Children – having a lesser degree of cultural awareness than those adults who write about and create such picturebooks – may experience these works quite differently than adults do.

The second problem with assuming that these mysterious juxtapositions will create an avant-garde experience for children is that the literary and visual world of children is *already* more “surreal” than that of adults. Children may experience allegedly surreal works as more representational than grown-ups do. As Kimberley Reynolds writes in *Radical Children's Literature* (2010), “For children, the world often seems bewildering and its rules illogical. Children move more readily than adults between the modes of reality and fantasy, particularly when involved in play and story[tell]ing” (Reynolds 2010:60). Literature for children also takes for granted a flexibility between possible and impossible, realism and fantasy. In this sense, one might see the avant-garde tendency to blur those boundaries as reflecting children's experience. If so, then avant-garde strategies do not awaken young readers to the absurd rules of the adult world, but merely reflect a truth that they already know. Nonsense poetry – embraced by the English Surrealists in particular – may not so much *teach* beginning readers about the arbitrariness of linguistic systems as it does reaffirm something of which they are acutely aware. Works deploying avant-garde strategies may simply resonate with children, without fundamentally altering their perceptions.

However, an avant-garde that amplifies and reinforces a child's sense of the world's absurdities could be valuable. If other cultural influences encourage them to accept the strangeness of the adult world, then a book that nurtures an impulse to question can be actively subversive – even if its means of doing so is more

1. This anatomy of formal devices comes from Suzi Gablik's *Magritte*, p. 123. The specific works to which I am alluding in this paragraph are, in order, Magritte's *La durée poignardée* (1938), Van Allsburg's *Jumanji* (1981), Magritte's *Les château de Pyrénées* (1959), Wiesner's *Tuesday* (1991), Billout's *Something's Not Quite Right* (2002), Magritte's *La chambre d'écoute* (1952), Wiesner's *June 29, 1999* (1992), Magritte's *Le domaine d'Arnheim* (1944), and Browne's *Voices in the Park* (1998).

affirming than actually *changing* the child's awareness. To return to nonsense literature, in revealing the arbitrary of the alphabet, that building block of language, nonsense alphabet books like Mike Lester's *A Is for Salad* (2000) or Dr. Seuss's *On Beyond Zebra!* (1955) create the possibility for questioning other adult-enforced systems. "B is for Viking" is a joke for a literate child who recognizes that B is the first letter in the word "Beaver," even one wearing a Viking helmet (Figure 1). However, it also reminds us of the similar pronunciations of the letters "B" and "V," and that the distinctions we make between different sounds and shapes are learned, not natural. Likewise, and as I have argued previously, *On Beyond Zebra!* is the Seuss book that best embodies Wim Tigges' definition of literary nonsense as presenting "an unresolved tension [...] between presence and absence of meaning" (Tigges 1987: 51). Creating this tension by underscoring the constructedness of the alphabet itself, Seuss challenges the assumption of that written language is natural or normal: we could create a new one, he suggests, and we should. If language itself can be challenged, then so can just about everything else.



Figure 1. Illustration from *A Is for Salad* by Mike Lester. New York: Putnam & Grosset, 2000. Copyright © Mike Lester. Used by permission of Mike Lester

A second potential asset of merely reflecting a child's feeling that the world's rules are open to challenge is – in theory, at least – creating the possibility of challenging dominant ideologies. Seuss's book, Mike Lester's book, and other nonsense alphabets underscore the ways in which language is ideological, shaping the ways in which we understand the world. Echoing André Breton's comment that

“experience itself has been assigned limits,” Seuss’s narrator in *On Beyond Zebra* claims that the reason for his new alphabet is that “In the places I go there are things that I see/That I never could spell if I stopped with the Z” (Breton quoted in Nel (2002: 64)). If, as Foucault has argued, children become imbricated in systems of knowledge/power as they learn language, then books such as these may provide, at the very moment of language acquisition, an occasion to challenge knowledge/power. Potentially, nonsense can be a powerful strategy that – to quote Peter Bürger’s description of the historical avant-garde – works to “reintegrate art into the life process” in order to engender in the audience a “critical cognition of reality” (Bürger 1984: 50).

Experience

However, part of this belief in children’s ability to see through the deceptions of the adult world rests in the notion that children – as un-socialized or at least under-socialized adults – are less susceptible to, even less corrupted by the social world in which they live. So, to make these transformative claims about nonsense (as nonsense scholars do) or about the avant-garde (as both practitioners and theorists of the avant-garde do) is to risk falling into a Rousseauian trap: idealizing childhood innocence as a means for transcending or somehow overcoming the ideological systems in which we are always already enmeshed. Indeed, the flaws in my previous two claims about nonsense’s critical possibilities bring to mind the critique of Esther Averill – creator of *The Cat Club* (1944) and its many sequels. She accused the avant-garde of

creating a kind of religion for [the child’s] sensibilities and imaginative powers, in which it reads its own better moods. It believes that the dreamlike state of mind in which it specializes and which it interprets with primitive graphic signs, is part and parcel of the child’s daily routine. In creating for the child it has trusted in his being all prehistoric art plasma, and nothing of a bloodthirsty young savage.

(quoted in Reynolds (2010: 30))

When the Surrealists try to venerate childhood in the way that Averill describes, they ignore history. Comparably, when nonsense scholar Kevin Shortleeve (2011, in his *Oxford Handbook* essay) or I celebrate Seuss’s work as subversive, we veer toward the notion that nonsense or avant-garde approaches create an ideology-free zone. But they do not.

So, for example, I have argued that the conclusion of *The Cat in the Hat*, in which Seuss poses a question to the reader, is an avant-garde strategy and ultimately a liberating gesture. At that book’s conclusion, the narrator asks, “What

would you do if your mother asked you?" In *The Avant-Garde and American Post-modernity*, I wrote, "the question at the end of the book reinforces the Cat's questioning of the existing order" (Nel 2002: 57). And: "Like Magritte, Seuss withholds any answer in order to provoke his audience into solving the puzzle him- or herself" (55). The gender-inclusive language ("him- or herself") is polite, but it elides the fact that Seuss's work really isn't gender-inclusive. Nor, for that matter, is the avant-garde: barring a few notable exceptions (such as Meret Oppenheim), it, too, has been historically oriented towards the masculine. Though she does speak up in the book's sequel, Sally – the narrator's sister – says nothing in *The Cat in the Hat*. With a few notable exceptions, Seuss's works do *not* challenge patriarchal orders: male characters tend to be his protagonists. As Alison Lurie famously noted, Seuss's works suffer from an "almost total lack of female protagonists," and those female characters who do appear tend to be either silent or selfish (Lurie 1990: 51). Contrary to my earlier claims about the book, *The Cat in the Hat's* provocations challenge some elements of the existing order but they also reaffirm others.

So, such optimistic claims need to be theorized with a rigorous relativism. We need to be careful to acknowledge the ways in which such strategies may liberate and the ways in which they oppress. It is fair to argue that "Travers uses the Mary Poppins series (1934–1988) to urge readers to keep their minds open and flexible" (Reynolds 2010: 21), but the case is more persuasive if one also acknowledges the twice-revised "Bad Tuesday" chapter, which in its original features "the Eskimo with a spear, the Negro Lady with her husband's huge club, the Mandarin with a great curved sword, and the Red Indian with a tomahawk" (Travers 1962: 98) – ethnic stereotypes that seem not to encourage open-mindedness. The "Bad Tuesday" chapter refutes the oft-repeated claim that nonsense is inherently subversive or oppositional. Contrary to these claims, *Mary Poppins* both bears and attempts to challenge the ideologies of the culture in which it originates. Its results are mixed. Similarly, much Surrealist art – in its veneration of allegedly 'primitive' work as somehow more 'authentic' – reifies western notions of the primitive, rather than, say, exposes a false dichotomy between 'primitive' and 'civilized'.

The notion of children as 'less civilized' and thus better-equipped to resist cultural assumptions is both compelling and oversimplified. It is oversimplified because no child is *tabula rasa*. From the moment she or he is born, experience starts to accrue. While a child has less experience of the world than grown-ups do, she *does* have experience of that world and understands more than the adults acknowledge. Children are always being socialized. Some resist that socialization more, and others resist it less. The second reason is that this is an oversimplification is the underlying assumption that all socialization is somehow suspect, when it is not. Learning patience, language, and responsibility can all be helpful.

What is compelling, though, about the idea of children as ‘less civilized’ is that the world in which they live has had less *time* to impress upon them its value systems. It might be fair to argue that – in general – children’s characters are more pliable than those of their elders. Anthony Browne’s *Changes* (1997) does upset expectations. A child would not expect a football to turn into an egg, or a couch into a gorilla. In this limited sense, an avant-garde for children could nurture a child’s skepticism towards the rules of the allegedly civilized world they are being encouraged to join.

Depending on the child, of course. There are children who resist rules, and children who embrace rules. One of the pleasures of the not-avant-garde but definitely funny *Mr. and Mrs. Bunny – Detectives Extraordinaire* (Polly Horvath’s 2012 novel) is that, in response to her parents’ rejection of social rules, protagonist Madeleine is *more* “adult” than they are. This brings us to the question of audience.

Audience, Part I: The problem

The effects of an avant-garde depend upon its audience. Gauging the understanding of any audience is tricky, and that of children especially so. As is true of adults, children are heterogeneous, differing by race, class, ethnicity, nationality, gender, age, ability, moment in history, and so on. Further, it is even harder to assume how much or little children know. Since an avant-garde depends upon certain shared assumptions, an avant-garde for children is a particular conundrum. Here’s what we can say, though.

When everything is new, there can be no shock of the new. When everything is new, everything can be – on some level – shocking. For the earliest readers, *all* books are avant-garde. Novelist M.T. Anderson makes this point in an unpublished essay on experimental literature (Anderson 2008). Offering a reading of Kurt Schwitters’ “poem 25”, a poem that is purely patterns of numbers, Anderson explains, “this poem forces us as adults to have the same experience that many kids have when reading. *To read is to learn to read*. We have to work through context and deduction to find beauty in the patterns, to invest these marks on the paper with meaning”. In other words, for someone just starting to read, written language itself is a puzzle, an experiment, a challenge.

In contrast, for a literate adult to experience a work as avant-garde, the work has to reveal the arbitrariness of linguistic systems, which Schwitters does in his poem, and Mo Willems does in his 2011 annual sketchbook, *Beligerent Bunny in “Olive Hue Show Mutts”* – the title of which is “I love you so much”, pronounced with a drunken slur (Figure 2). Beligerent [*sic*] Bunny – the main character – goes on to say “Yore show spa shell”, “End pert tea”. And he asks, “Flower bout hay kitch?” “Just hay griddle kitch...” (Figure 3). But when he says “Police?” he is not

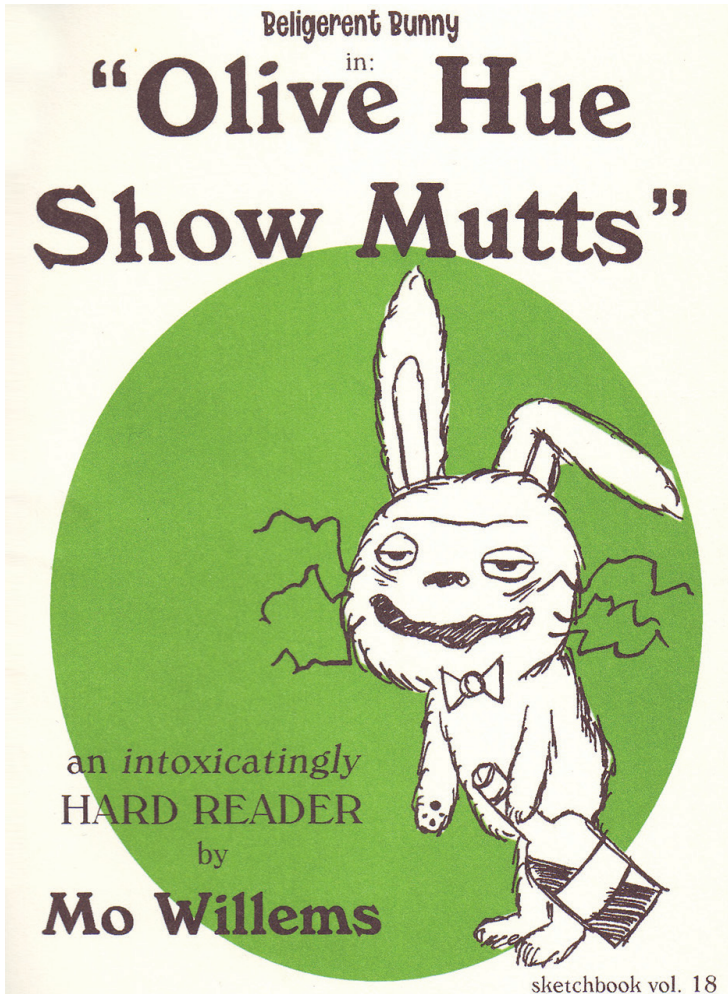


Figure 2. Cover from Mo Willems: *Beligerent Bunny in “Olive Hue Show Mutts”* (2011). Copyright © 2011 by Mo Willems. Reprinted by permission of Wernick & Pratt Agency, LLC. All rights reserved

seeking an officer of the law. He is trying to say “Please”, and, in his failure to verbally articulate important details, echoes the “Aggle flaggie klabble!” moment in Willems’ *Knuffle Bunny* (2004), when young Trixie can summon only those “words” to try to tell her daddy that she has left her beloved Knuffle Bunny at the laundromat. In a brief note at the end of this sketchbook (which, like, Armstrong and Darrow’s *A Child’s Guide to Freud* (1963) or Mansbach and Cortés’ *Go the Fuck to Sleep* (2011), is really a children’s book for adults), Willems explains *Belig-*



“Flower bout hay kitch?”



“Jest hay griddle kitch...”

Figure 3. Doublespread from Mo Willems: *Beligerent Bunny in “Olive Hue Show Mutts”*. (2011). Copyright © 2011 by Mo Willems. Reprinted by permission of Wernick & Pratt Agency, LLC. All rights reserved

erent Bunny in “Olive Hue Show Mutts” as “an attempt at recreating for adults the decoding process that children must go through when they first learn to read”. For a literate adult, being forced to sound out each word is a rare and disruptive experience that makes us conscious of the tenuous link between spelling and sound. Unless we’re reading tongue-twisters or *Krazy Kat*, we literate grown-ups do not usually experience this.

For that reason, children’s books like Dr. Seuss’s *Fox in Socks* (1965) and Ruth Krauss’s *Open House for Butterflies* (1960) are *less* disruptive to the beginning reader and *more* so to the advanced reader. One might think that giving a child a collection of tongue-twisters marked “Beginner Book” a cruel joke, but it is not. The prank is *not* on the beginning reader, but on the experienced one. A novice, sounding out each word, moves through the text slowly... which is the easiest way to read a tongue-twister. It is the adult, thinking that a children’s book will be easy reading, who will stumble over “Luke Luck likes lakes./Luke’s duck likes lakes./Luke Luck licks lakes./Luke’s Duck licks lakes./Duck takes licks/in lakes Luke Luck likes./Luke Luck takes licks/in lakes duck likes”. This can be read aloud slowly; reading it aloud quickly is the challenge. The joke is on the adults who, sure of their own competence, try to read the book aloud. A newer reader, reading more slowly, sounding out each word, actually has less difficulty than the more experienced one.

Open House for Butterflies – Ruth Krauss’s sequel to *A Hole Is to Dig*, also a collection of children’s definitions illustrated by Maurice Sendak – does what

its predecessor did. It estranges the familiar for *adult* readers. When a child in *Open House for Butterflies* reports “Nojuice is a good word to know in case you have a glass of no juice”, it offers adults a novel way of describing an empty glass. However, for the child saying it, this is a statement of fact. As Betty Miles wrote in her review of the book, these children’s statements Krauss has collected are “pure and sudden and illuminating. But it is adults who need illumination. To a young child the comment that ‘grownup means to go to nursery school’ is flatly logical. To an adult it has a poignancy no child could understand” (quoted in Nel (2012: 194)). That is the core problem of an avant-garde for children: as an audience, their expectations and experience can be very different from the adults who create children’s books.

Audience, Part II: Solutions (Some successful, some not)

A handful of children’s books on or inspired by the avant-garde do attempt to consider their younger audience’s knowledge and experience. The most adept of these address questions of the avant-garde’s political efficacy, provide some history, and encourage readers to embrace the movement’s subversive spirit. The least successful reduce the avant-garde to a series of aesthetic practices. Queensland Art Gallery’s *Surrealism for Kids* (2011) – produced in conjunction with an exhibit that year – teaches readers Surrealist techniques, but makes sure to sanitize them. For a book that promises the avant-garde, it is oddly insistent about regulating children’s experience. In teaching children to create a “Surrealist collage”, it advises them to photocopy the specially designed material from the book rather than to gather their own materials. It is hard to exploit the possibilities of chance combinations if you are using pre-selected artwork. Similarly, in its advice on how “To make a dadaist poem”, the book tidies up Tristan Tzara’s instructions. Tzara’s “1. Take a newspaper” (Tzara 1992:39) becomes “1. Take a newspaper (you can photocopy the newspaper article on page 56)” (23) – again reducing any element of chance. Tzara ends his with “And there you are – an infinitely original author of charming sensibility, even though unappreciated by the vulgar herd”. Perhaps fearing for its young readers’ sensitivities, *Surrealism for Kids* omits “even though unappreciated by the vulgar herd”. Its depoliticization of the avant-garde continues in the factual bits about particular artists. We learn, for example, that “Salvador Dalí often included loaves of bread in his art works. He liked to paint baguettes, a type of bread from France”. Of André Breton, the book reports: “It’s very rare to find a photo of André smiling. André was the leader of the Surrealists and was very serious. Between the 1920s and 1950s, he set the rules for the Surrealists. If someone didn’t agree with his ideas, he would kick them out of the group. He was quite bossy!” That’s not

factually inaccurate, but much more could be said about an authoritarian leader of an anti-authoritarian group. The book, however, doesn't dwell on such intriguing contradictions. It just tells us that he "was quite bossy!" and rarely smiled.

Joyce Raimondo's *Imagine That!: Activities and Adventures in Surrealism* (2004) acknowledges the avant-garde's political history, and encourages imaginative engagement with Surrealist and Dadaist artistic techniques. In treating the subject and her audience with respect, Raimondo's book gets right what *Surrealism for Kids* gets wrong. Unfortunately, its busy layout and messy design impede *Imagine That!*'s aims. The author understands the avant-garde, but her designer seems to think that Surrealism means "anything goes", and "let's try to cram as much stuff on each page as we can!" The 1960s "Ad Lib" typeface – used for headers and captions – is hard to read. In contrast, the book's use of the Futura typeface (invented by German typographer Paul Renner in the 1920s) has a modernist feel and fits nicely with the period of the early-twentieth-century avant-garde. However, the designer mars this otherwise sound choice by using a **bold font** for each **key term**, making each page something of a **challenge** to read.

In contrast, Marc Aaronson's *Art Attack: A Short Cultural History of the Avant-Garde* (1998) offers a clearly written, well-researched history for older readers. It asks the key questions posed by avant-garde aesthetics, such as "Can art be radical in its politics as well as in its form?" (12). Beyond providing a more complete history of the avant-garde, he also addresses continuing influence – in figures such as Laurie Anderson, Yoko Ono, Christo, and Jean-Michel Basquiat. (He is not stuck in the 1920s and 1930s.) Though *not* a history, Shelley Jackson's *Mimi's Dada Catifesto* (2010) is an affectionate, well-designed, and even – at times – avant-garde book about the avant-garde. Though it does nod to Dadaism's historical origins ("They parodied things that other people took very seriously, such as political speeches, money, and war"), the book's primary emphasis is Dadaism's playful, oppositional spirit, embodied by the human artist Mr. Dada and Mimi, the cat who sees him as a kindred spirit. If the book *mostly* emphasizes play rather than shock, it doesn't avoid the avant-garde's provocations entirely. This play is *not* scripted by the book: children are encouraged to go out and use found objects as art. The artwork's labeling of Laszlo the pigeon's excrement as "A painting by Laszlo" does challenge notions of art – much in the way that Fluxus artist Piero Manzoni's "Artist's Shit" (1961) did (Figure 4). (In the latter case, the artwork is a can of Manzoni's shit.) It also adapts Tzara's poem exercise, and, while it does not include the line "even though unappreciated by the vulgar herd" either, it makes quite clear that many people will not get it. Audiences throw eggs and tomatoes at Mr. Dada, and shoes at Mimi. As Mr. Dada says, "I like to be yelled at. It means I have gotten on someone's nerves, and that's just what an artist should do". It is a great introduction to Dadaism for younger readers.

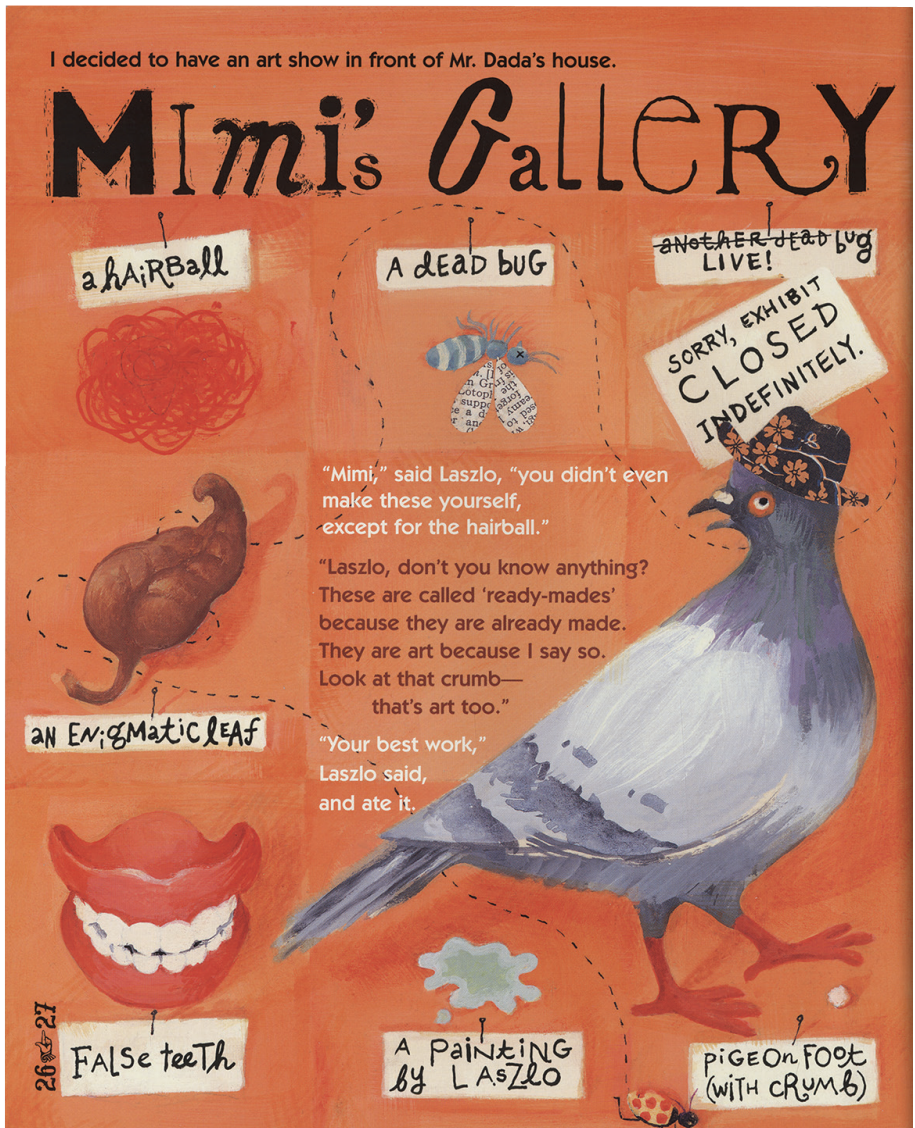


Figure 4. Illustration from Shelley Jackson: *Mimi's Dada Catifesto*. New York: Clarion Books, 2010. Used by permission of Shelley Jackson and BookStop Literary Agency. All rights reserved

Two case studies: Crockett Johnson and Hervé Tullet

With the exception of Aaronson, the shared emphasis of these books – whether successful or less so – is the notion of Dada as play. The final section of this essay examines two playful books as ‘case studies’ of what an avant-garde for children

might be, and offers a provisional answer to the question of whether an avant-garde for children is indeed possible. For each, I will address the issues of knowledge, experience, and audience that I have raised. The books are Crockett Johnson's *Harold and the Purple Crayon* (1955) and Hervé Tullet's *Un Livre* (published in English as *Press Here*, 2010).

In November 1955, just a few months after the publication of *Harold and the Purple Crayon* was published, the book's author sent his editor a review provided by his clipping service. Titled "Draws Anything" and written "By Dave Marion Age 4", it reads, in full: "Harold can draw whatever he wants with his purple crayon, and then it really is". Johnson's accompanying note to his editor says, "Just in case you missed this – It's a very good review" (quoted in Nel (2012: 153)). He is joking, amused by the 4-year-old's brevity. But part of the joke is that this 15-word review gets at what's so startling about the book: Harold draws "with his purple crayon, *and then it really is*" (emphasis mine). I hear in this young reader's words some of the awe that may have drawn other contemporary children to the work: its succinct expression of how what we imagine can become real, its blurring of the boundary between art and life.

An interest of Johnson's since at least a March 1949 narrative in his comic strip *Barnaby*, during which a museum's paintings and sculptures come to life, his blurring the line between representation and the world is an avant-garde technique. Crockett Johnson knew this, alluding to Magritte's *The Human Condition 1* (1933) on the title page to the second-to-last book in the Harold series, *A Picture for Harold's Room* (1960). Though one doubts that Dave Marion Age 4 caught that allusion, a child does not *need* to be versed in a history of the avant-garde in order to feel empowered by Harold's crayon. While Anthony Browne's works assume an audience that has some familiarity with Surrealism, Johnson requires no such knowledge of his readers. There are levels of understanding that might evade a four-year-old – such as the puns, in "made land" or "drew up the covers". But the core idea that art remakes the world does not depend upon this knowledge.

This revolutionary idea inspired some of the book's initial readers to become artists. Some contemporary child readers viewed the book's many blank white spaces as an invitation to draw in its pages – an act of creativity viewed by librarians as an act of vandalism. In this sense, these children embody Tzara's contention that avant-garde artists should offend. For other contemporary children, the book launched an artistic career. Chris Van Allsburg, six when Harold was published, calls it his most memorable childhood book because of both its "theme, which has to do with ... the ability to create things with your imagination," and is succinct presentation of "a fairly elusive idea" (quoted in Nel (2012: 152)). The book so inspired him that, in his speech upon winning the Caldecott Medal for *Jumanji* (1981), Van Allsburg thanked "Harold, and his purple crayon". Future U.S. Poet Laureate Rita

Dove, three years old at the time of the book's publication, says Harold was her first favorite book because "it showed me the possibilities of traveling along the line of one's imagination", an idea that made a "powerful impression" on her (Dove 1999a: 70) – so powerful that it appears in her poem "Maple Valley Branch Library, 1967". In it, she writes of being able to "take/the path of Harold's purple crayon through/the bedroom window and onto a lavender/spill of stars" (Dove 1999b: 32).

One reason that Harold inspired readers is that, to borrow Scott McCloud's thesis on iconic images, the more iconic an image is, the more universal it seems. Lacking specific features, the reader projects him- or her-self onto the character, filling in the details, identifying with this crayon-wielding child. McCloud calls this principle "amplification through simplification" (McCloud 1994: 30). Harold is also something of a cipher, a mere conduit for the purple crayon. Though his name is male, his behavior does little to "gender" him as a character: he exhibits traits that are stereotypically male (such as his adventurous spirit) and stereotypically female (such as his thoughtfulness). Though I have always read him as a "white" child, Dove (an African-American poet) was able to see herself in him, and Chris Ware (a white cartoonist) read Harold as "black", his "tawny skin (the only tint in entire series)" (Ware 2013: 7). People of many backgrounds can identify with Harold – one reason his story has been translated into fourteen languages – because images propel his story. Dove actually remembers the book as having "no words." She recalls only the pictures, "in black and white and purple". Ware found the book so absorbing that, as he writes, "you almost felt (rather than saw) your way through his story, and Harold's tinted skin seemed as much a shell to be inhabited by the reader as Harold himself inhabited his purple creations" (7).

Though it is debatable whether works that ignite the imagination are truly transformative, the historical avant-grade believed that they could be. In child readers' initial responses, its long-term influence, and its ability to inspire people of many backgrounds, *Harold and the Purple Crayon* suggests that an avant-garde for children is possible. Affirming a child's creative impulses, Johnson's book suggests that art can change the world.

Moving to a contemporary work, Hervé Tullet's *Un livre* (2010), published in English as *Press Here* (2011) and a *New York Times* bestseller, would seem at first to invite the type of creative response that *Harold and the Purple Crayon* does. In his *Horn Book* review, Leonard Marcus praised Tullet's "knowing grasp of the real relationship between interactivity and imagination". Writing in Canada's *National Post*, Nathalie Atkinson called the book "subversive", and said readers would have their "imagination tickled". These claims of the book's ability to stimulate the imagination, combined with its challenge to conventional ideas of what a book is, might inspire us to view it as *more* avant-garde than its predecessor. It challenges our assumptions about what a book is or should be. It is a book that pretends to

be an app. It invites the reader to press its dots, and then to turn the page to see the result. Below a yellow dot, the words “PRESS HERE AND TURN THE PAGE”. Then, when you press (or do not) and turn the page, the book presents a second yellow dot next to the original one. Follow these instructions – “GREAT! NOW PRESS THE YELLOW DOT AGAIN” – and turn the page to find a third yellow dot. And so on. The book literally insists on interactivity.

However, despite its insistence on reader participation and its apparent playfulness (a book pretending to be an app), it is not especially avant-garde. First, rather than ask the reader to imagine, it asks him to obey, and then rewards compliance with minor changes to the art. This is a clever joke, and likely to amuse initially. However, as the novelty wears off, so too may the book’s appeal. As an app does, *Press Here* constrains play rather than opening possibilities for imagining: it asks that we follow instructions, and promises a reward for our compliance. Second, it aims itself at the reader who is familiar with apps: conceiving an iPad user as its ideal audience, *Press Here* invites that reader to pretend that the page is a touch-screen. While someone without access to the technology would experience *something* of the book’s novelty, *Press Here* is really for the reader who will get the joke of a book pretending to be an app.

Indeed, *Press Here*’s mimicry of the app underscores why apps and enhanced eBooks are inventions of dubious merit. Turning reading into a video game does not make reading more “interactive”. Reading is already interactive: the app constrains play because there is a set of expected outcomes. Indeed, as Elise Seip Tønnessen (2013) notes, children become more impatient with an app when nothing’s happening than they do when facing a picturebook. This response indicates that the experience of the app is more passive: either it “performs” as the child expects it to, or she grows impatient with it. In contrast, a child is more willing to work with a slower-moving picturebook, allowing the imagination to engage and make it more interesting.

This is not to say that the avant-garde is dead in contemporary children’s books. There are those contemporary books that act in that spirit, notably Shaun Tan’s *The Lost Thing* (2000) and *The Arrival* (2006), both of which use an aesthetics of estrangement to encourage readers to think critically and actively about the world. One could also make a case for Bernardo Carvalho’s *Trocoscópio* (2010) as avant-garde. Without textual or visual explanation, it dismantles the shapes that represent a factory (on the left page), gradually rearranging them into a jungle scene (on the right page) – in so doing, it suggests that artists can transform the world.

In concluding with these two books, I hope to show one successful and one failed iteration of avant-garde sensibilities. Exploring the ways in which avant-garde children’s literature is both theoretically dubious and a politically

empowering praxis, how its initially radical methods both succeed and fail at fostering a critically engaged readership, I have attempted to sketch a few productive ways of considering what an avant-garde for children might look like, and what it might not. We cannot simply take for granted that a child reader will respond to an avant-garde picture-book in the same way as picturebook scholars do, and, for that matter, nor can we assume that all children will respond in the same way. We need to theorize rigorously the relationship between allegedly avant-garde works and their potential readers or viewers because, to a greater degree than most artistic forms, the avant-garde *depends* upon its audience to perceive it as such. The avant-garde is more than a stylistic repertoire rooted in early-twentieth-century Modernism; it is a challenge, a provocation, an invitation to think.

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