



Maps in Children's Literature

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Bjørn Sortland & Trond Bredesen *Bergen-mysteriet* (2009)

Bruno Munari and his "lively" visual mapping of urban landscapes

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During his career as an artist and a designer, Bruno Munari achieved a special bond with the infant universe. He was one of the most pioneering and ingenious thinkers of the 20th century, who also explored the area of visual narration in children's literature with sublime results. My paper aims to provide an exploration of Munari's original approach in visualizing and mapping places in children's everyday life. Munari's witty picturebooks pay a lot of attention on young reader's capacity to organize and orientate his/her reading experience by means of what is visible and said in picturebooks. In this paper I will particularly examine the picturebook *Nella nebbia di Milano* (In the fog of Milan; English trans., *The Circus in the Mist*). This clever and beautifully illustrated picturebook, which was first published in 1968, drives the young reader in a journey through the milky opacity of Milan's fog. As a matter of fact, by actively entering the story through a series of pictures and prompts (created by using different types of pierced and perforated paper), the young reader is stimulated to go through an original and challenging discovery of the Milan landscape. It is an "active" reading and a "physical" experience at the same time: this "lively" urban landscape becomes a character that attracts the child's attention, tests his/her sensory receptiveness and helps him/her to connect visual narration to spatial orientation. The protagonist of this visual narration is a "travelling child" that travels through urban spaces to discover places, but above all to achieve new enriching life experiences. By scattering in the pages of this picturebook visual spatial information (the geographic name of the city, distinctive atmospheric conditions, urban architecture), verbal spatial information (using prepositions of place and prepositions of movement), visual travel instructions (traffic lights, road signs, arrows, etc.) and original details about the final destination, Bruno Munari not only amuses young readers but also educates them to orient themselves in the world of narration and in the real life.

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