



Photography in Children's Literature

Symposium 20-21 May 2021



Stockholm
University

The symposium "Photography in children's literature" is organised with support of Literature as a leading research area, Stockholm University and Department of Culture and Aesthetics, Stockholm University.

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Online symposium, Stockholm University, May 20-21 2021

Photographs have been used to illustrate a great variety of genres within children's literature. During the early 20th century, the photographic picturebook became a modern, educational and ideological medium, where the choice of technique is essential. While many photographic illustrations from the beginning of the 20th century show obviously staged scenes, or were part of the avantgarde experimentations within the media, during the 1930s and 1940s, the documentary ambitions became increasingly common.

Many photographers who were part of the modernist and avant-garde movements of the 1920s and 1930s created photobooks for children by combining photography with other artistic techniques, such as collage, photomontage, pencil drawings, and photograms. Inspired by ideas of a vanguard aesthetics that has been developed in various artistic movements such as Constructivism, Dadaism, New Realism, and Surrealism, the artists regarded photography as an aesthetic means to differentiate from the past in terms of form, style, and language. As a result, within children's literature, the choice of photography as a medium often expressed high aesthetic demands, but also the claim to introduce children to new technical developments and modern urban life. Thus, research concerning photography within children's literature is also closely connected to ideas and changes in the conceptions of childhood, which impact on the depiction of children in relation to cultural transformation and social change.

Moreover, photography has often been perceived in terms of objectivity and neutrality, and the idea of the camera as "objective" or giving people a new way of looking at the world and themselves is apparent in many children's photobooks. The medium has thus strong ideological implications and is used to express a reshaping of the society and to mediate a joint reality despite social class differences.

The word "objective" is also used in the polemical preface to Mary Steichen Martin's and Edward Steichen's ground-breaking *The First Picture Book. Everyday Things for Babies* (1930), where photographic images present familiar objects to small children. The book was primarily thought to stimulate the child's development of skills in spatial relations and in visual interpretation. Influenced by New Realism in photography, also called New Objectivity, the authors explain in the foreword the choice of the photographic illustrations as a method to present the objects and motifs "as

‘objectively’ as possible, so that no ‘effects’ should confuse the child” (p. 3). At the same time, various aesthetic strategies are applied in Steichen’s book, including different points of view, lighting, framing and various compositions.

In the 1940s many authors and artists experienced that the traditional narrative and aesthetic form of children’s literature had become inadequate in describing the modern world that the child was part of. In this respect, the application of photography in children’s literature signals an artistic and pedagogical turn, where visual strategies are applied to introduce not only new subjects but also new modes of vision and cognition.

After the Second World War, the photobook experienced a resurgence of interest due to its documentary character. Although photobooks about children’s everyday life already appeared in the 1930s and 1940s, the genre reached a peak in the 1950s and 1960s in many European countries and beyond. Apart from that, authors using photography in their books for children sought to follow the Avantgarde traditions of the interwar period while developing new contents and aesthetic forms that reflect contemporary political, social, and cultural issues.

The aim of this symposium is to investigate the historical development of the photobook for children (or about children) in different countries with a focus on the twentieth century. The papers address this issue from various academic perspectives, from in-depth presentations of a specific artist, movement, or theme to theoretical questions about photography as medium and, specifically, photography in children's literature.

Welcome to the symposium!

Elina Druker & Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer

Marnie Campagnaro

“A successful photograph is worth as much as a story” The influence of Photography on Bruno Munari’s picturebooks

During his long and multifaceted career, Bruno Munari experimented many different artistic possibilities: Painting, illustration, sculpture, design, graphics, teaching, poetry, writing, film and photography. Munari was particularly intrigued by photography. Right from the beginning of his professional life as an artist, photography played a relevant role in his artistic production and critical thinking. Since the 1930s, and for the following 40 years, this relatively new technology was tested by Munari in many fields. Graphic work for magazines and books got him involved in working on a wide range of different covers and illustrations, which really tested his photographic eclecticism (Maffei 2008). He explored the possibilities of photomontage. For instance, the distinctly Dada and surrealist nature of this technique often cropped up in his work as a magazine illustrator. He created pictures using the technique of creating photographic prints without using a camera (photograms). In his essay *Photo-reportage*, published by Domus Publishing Group in 1944, he even declared that “every photographer should try to express himself, [...] should think of the camera as nothing but a very quick paintbrush, a paint brush that if it had been in the hand of old Leonardo da Vinci, who knows what photo-reportages on the human anatomy, for example, he would have passed on to us. Remember that a successful photograph is worth as much as a story and sometimes even a piece of poetry” (Munari 1944/1997).

What happened when Munari used photographs instead of illustrations in his children’s books? Was he able to transform them into a fascinating visual story? This paper examines the playful use of photography in Munari’s work since the first half of the Twentieth century, its cultural and historical connections and its impact on some Munari’s later children’s books.

Monica Rùthers

The visual construction of an all-Soviet childhood in Soviet Photobooks

In the Soviet Union of the 1920s and 1930s, photobooks emerged as media that visually constructed the new reality following the rules of Socialist realism. By analyzing two illustrated books from 1936 and 1962, the paper investigates how the “Soviet Swarm of Children” resp. the “Children in the Land of the Soviets” were depicted and described and thus visually and socially constructed. The exploration of the 1936 edition regarding photographic styles, the retouching of the pictures, iconographic patterns, topoi and narratives reveals a distinct emphasis on ethnic diversity and the idea of Soviet integration through schooling and education. Institutions of childcare and education from the maternity ward to the classroom are represented as transformative spaces where children become Soviet children. The idea of an all-Soviet childhood as an imperial project takes shape. The colorful graphic design of the 1962 book clearly addressed children as well as an adult public. The comparative analysis identifies continuities in the patterns and narratives, but also changes and new features in the visual imagery and the promises inscribed into the pictures of the children. The imperial aspect is displaced by promises of consumption and personal happiness inside the family.

Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer and Jörg Meibauer

Portrait of the child as a socialist. An inquiry into photographic picturebooks of the GDR

Photographs showing children are either photographs in the context of the family (family photographs) or photographs being related to childhood in general (childhood photographs). Both kinds of photographs can be taken on a private or on an institutional (commercial) basis. Photographs of children in photographic picturebooks have a double function: On the one hand, they borrow properties from the tradition of the family photograph or the childhood photograph, on the other hand they are intended to complement or support the picturebook story. How photographic portraits are intended and interpreted, is dependent on a number of perceptive, social and cultural factors. Ideas about the naturalness, the innocence, or the cuteness of child faces underlie a complex dynamics of evaluative attitudes. Though photographs are often thought of as more objective and neutral as compared to drawings, several parameters contribute to the special aesthetics of child portraits. In our talk, we will focus on portraits of children in photographic picturebooks of the GDR. There is an important tradition of showing the young pioneer as an optimistic, strong, and intelligent child, an incarnation of the future “new man”. However, as photographs are strongly connected to the aesthetic avant-garde, there is also a tendency to show the child as sad, introvert, and skeptical. The latter tendency is also represented in some important photobooks addressed to a general audience (Rita Maahs and Karl-Eduard von Schnitzler, *Vom Glück des Menschen*, 1968). Three picturebooks from the GDR are analyzed in more detail. While *Bullermax* (1964) and *Matti im Wald* (1966) by Edith Rimkus (photographs) and Horst Beseler (text) show photographic portraits that underline the authors’ poetic intentions, thus transcending simple social realism, the photographic picturebook *Kleiner Bruder Staunemann* (1966) by Hans Hüttner uses quite similar modernist strategies of showing a curious, natural boy to engender children’s admiration for the duties of the Nationale Volksarmee (NVA), thus being a clear example of GDR propaganda.

Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer

Immigrants and Elves. The Everyday and the Fantastic in Danish Photographical Children's Books

The paper gives an overview of the Danish photographic picture book tradition which dates back to Fotografiske Børnegrupper (Photographs of groups of children) published in 1866, consisting of photographs by Harald Paetz and short poems by Hans Christian Andersen. It covers the documentary genre prevalent in the 1960s and 1970s which present the lives of children around the world sometimes carrying ideological statements. However the main focus is on books in which photography represents the imaginary such as the Fotografiske Børnegrupper. It is described how photography serves to enhance the imagination, and presents supernatural beings or humanize animals and objects in different ways.

Jane Wattenberg

Spellbound: Lona, Dare Wright's Haunting Photo-Fairytale

“She faced a thousand dangers.”—Lona, by Dare Wright

“Where’s your will to be weird?” —Jim Morrison

Like the young Narcissus, the photographer Dare Wright fell in love with her own image. Countless intimate self-portrait photographs show the lovely artist role-playing: gowned; naked; or artfully bedecked in seaweed, jewels, or fabrics. Her photographs are luminous, erotic, seductive, while she herself was private and virginal. Loneliness was Dare Wright’s motif. To ease long periods of time when her mother was away painting society portraits, Dare received a childlike Lenci doll she named Edith, her mother’s name. The miniature Edith physically mirrored the young Dare. Decades later, this doll became the central character in Wright’s early photobooks for children.

Although Wright is best known for her first book, *The Lonely Doll* (1957), and specifically remembered for the controversial spanking scene with Mr. Bear, her epic photo-fairytale, *Lona* (1963), is by far her tour de force. Demonstrating darkroom mastery and delivering page-turning suspense, Wright’s photographs radiate mystery and danger as good clashes with evil in this bracing and affecting tale. As in the *Lonely Doll* series, the emotional search for love and friendship is equally excruciating and palpable in *Lona*; the title alone speaks to disquiet desperation.

Later in life, mother Edith presented Wright with yet another Lenci doll. This “boudoir” doll became the Lona of the fairytale. But what a feat! Dare Wright, herself, bewitchingly appears in the role of the mature, empowered Lona; the transformed Lona; the woman whose grit, bravery and stamina saved kingdoms, broke the wizard’s spell and led her to find love. Frank Sinatra sang, “Fairytale can come true, it can happen to you.” Perhaps this was Dare Wright’s ardent wish.

Fairytales and folktales have been photographically illustrated for children’s books long before and well after Dare Wright’s *Lona*—from Zoltan Wegner to Cindy Sherman, from Paul Henning to Ata Kando and William Wegman. But it is the rare artist who becomes the main character of her story. This talk will give a nod to these prequels and sequels while opening a Pandora’s box in a close exploration of Dare Wright’s poignant photobooks for children.

Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna

From Halley's Comet to Scout Kwapiszon. On Photomontage in Polish Children's Fiction in the 20th Century

The paper is an attempt to bring about the outline of history of the use of photomontage techniques in children's book graphic design in Poland throughout the 20 century. Applying photo-based techniques, both photomontage and collage, has become quite popular in Polish graphic design of the inter-war period, furthermore as early as the 1920s (Mieczysław Szczuka, Teresa Zarnowerówna, Henryk Stazewski, Karol Hiller, Władysław Daszewski, Alfred Zmuda and others who significantly contributed to Polish avant-garde movements). This medium of a modern aesthetic language could have been found most of all on book and journal covers, as well as in illustrations accompanying books for adults. The popularity of the medium also affected children's and young adults literature. The paper's author focuses on the titles of fiction, leaving course books, popular science and documentaries aside.

The historical review starts with the earliest examples of avantgarde experimentations from the 1930s (Aleksander Krzywoblocki's design for *Halley's Comet* by Paulina Landau), and the 1940 design by Franciszka and Stefan Themerson (*The Table That Ran Away to the Woods*) which was published as a book as late as 1964. An interesting continuation can be traced in the period 1950s–1970s with various examples of innovatory graphic concepts in realisations by noted masters of Polish poster art, Henryk Tomaszewski and Stanisław Zamecznik, and prolific illustrators, Adam Kilian, Janusz Grabianski and Bohdan Butenko (author of the boy scout Kwapiszon's adventures from 1976-1981). The choice of examples aims at showing the variety of approaches to using photo materials – as elements equal to the parts of illustrations executed in other artistic techniques, both used within one composition; consequently, only as the backgrounds of illustrations; on their own, as complete illustrations.

Laurence Le Guen

From the ‘Children of all Lands Stories’ to the ‘Enfants du monde’ collection, providing a view of the Other in children’s literature

The photo-textual ‘portrait de pays’ is a real presence in juvenile literature across a wide variety of publications. These works often appeared in periods where children’s books were considered the driving force for a new pacifist humanism. Publications flourished in the United States and France after each World War, carrying the same message of hope and bearing the conviction that the world, in its diversity and complexity, is as one: our world, belonging to everybody. This paper examines the 1920s series ‘Children of all Lands Stories’, by the American photographer Madeline Brandeis, and the collection ‘Enfants du monde’ [Children of the World] illustrated by the photographs of Dominique Darbois, to show how text and photographs work together to provide the young reader with an alternative view of the Other and thus promote peace between peoples.

Elina Druker

In and out of focus. Anna Riwkin's photojournalism and photographic picturebooks

Anna Riwkin was a Russian-Swedish photographer who became one of the most prominent journalistic photographers in Sweden but who also contributed significantly to the growing use of photographs in children's picturebooks during the second half of the twentieth century. In this paper I will study the different photographic techniques and genres used in Riwkin's production, and will discuss how these techniques are related to her work for children. Applying previous research about women photographers from the era, I will discuss how interest in portrait photography on one hand, and photojournalism on the other hand, is expressed in the artist's work. During her early career Anna Riwkin specialised in dance photography and portraits and during the 1930s, she added journalistic work to her repertoire. In her picturebooks, she is aiming to convey the individual child's perspective, but the images are also used to express a need for social change and reformation. Simplicity and intensity are sought for in her work, with influence of New Objectivity. At the same time, traces from staged portrait photography are eminent in her picturebooks. Using Anna Riwkin's photographic picturebooks for children as a standing point, the paper will discuss photo narratives for children in relation to the reportage genre in general. Julia Hirsch has suggested that documentary photographic narratives about children's lives often use the text to accentuate the pathos of the images. But how is this interaction created in photobooks for children and how can the aim to express a child's perspective be understood in relation to the artist's aesthetic and socially engaged approach?

Marnie Campagnaro

Marnie Campagnaro (PhD) is Assistant Professor at the Department FISPPA, University of Padova and didactic coordinator of a postgraduate course in Children's Literature. Her main research fields include picturebooks, fairy-tales, architecture, Italian children's writers. In 2017, she hosted the 6th International European Network of Picturebook Research Conference and in 2020 the 1st International Conference Fostering Dialogue on teaching children's literature at university. Her most recent publications include *Stepping into the world of houses. Children's picturebooks on architecture* (in Goga, Iversen & Teigland (Eds.), 2021), *Materiality in Bruno Munari's Book Objects: The Case of Nella notte buia and I Prelibri* (Libri & Liberi, 2019), *Do touch! How Bruno Munari's Picturebooks work* (Rivista di Storia dell'educazione, 2019).

Monica Rùthers

Monica Rùthers is Professor of East European History at Hamburg University. She received degrees in History, German Literature and Linguistics from Basle University. She published several books and articles on East European Jewish Women in the 19th century and on Moscow as an imperial and a global city. In 2011, she co-edited the volume "Soviet Space Culture. Cosmic Enthusiasm in Socialist Societies" (Palgrave). Her last book investigated the "festivalization" of Jewish and Gipsy minorities in the cultural topographies of Europe. Her current research interests involve Soviet photoalbums and photobooks, consumer culture, Soviet nostalgia, food politics and cultural topographies of Soviet childhood. She participates in the *dekoder.org* project. Her next book „Unter dem Roten Stern geboren – Sowjetische Kinder im Bild“ will appear in 2020.

Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer

Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer is a Professor in the German Department at the University of Tübingen, Germany. She has written four monographs and edited 17 volumes, among them *Children's Literature and the Avant-Garde* (with E. Druker, 2015), *Canon Constitution and Canon Change in Children's Literature* (with A. Müller, 2017), and *The Routledge Companion to Picturebooks* (2018). She is a co-editor of the book series *Children's Literature, Culture and Cognition* (John Benjamins) and *Studies in European Children's Literature* (Winter).

Jörg Meibauer

Jörg Meibauer is Professor Emeritus of German Language and Linguistics at the University of Mainz, Germany. His current research projects comprise linguistics and children's literature as well as lying and deception. He is the author of *Lying at the semantics-pragmatics interface* (2014), co-editor of *Learning from picturebooks* (2015), and editor of *The Oxford Handbook of Lying* (2019).

Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer

Mette Kia Krabbe Meyer is Ph.d. from the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies specialised in photography and is working as a Senior Researcher at The Royal Danish Library. Her work is interdisciplinary, and combines the theory of photography and media studies, cultural history and the history of science as well as digital cultural heritage and digital humanities. At the moment she is investigating the visual culture of the former Danish West Indies as part of the project "The Art of Nordic Colonialism Writing Transcultural Art Histories". With Sarah Giersing she is also preparing the exhibition "The camera and us" which will open in the Royal Danish Library in 2021. Her last publication is "Contested paradise: exhibiting images from the former Danish West Indies" in *Curatorial Challenges : Interdisciplinary Perspectives on Contemporary Curating*, Anne Folke Henningsen, Malene Vest Hansen, Anne Gregersen (ed.), London: Routledge 2019.

Jane Wattenberg

Jane Wattenberg is an author/artist of photo-illustrated books for children including the photomontage, hip-hop retelling of *Henny-Penny* (2000), the Children's Choice Award winner, *Never Cry Woof!* (2005), the Baby Board Books, *Mrs. Mustard's Baby Faces* (2007) and *Mrs. Mustard's Beastly Babies* (2012) and the photo-illustrator of *The Duck and the Kangaroo* (2009) by Edward Lear. Jane contributed the chapter: *Picturebooks and Photography* in *The Routledge Companion to Picturebooks* (2018). A collector and historian of photo-illustrated books, a beekeeper and urban farmer, she lives in San Francisco, California, USA.

Anita Wincencjusz-Patyna

Art historian and critic, doctor in art sciences. Assistant professor and Head of the Art History and Philosophy Department at The Eugeniusz Geppert Academy of Art and Design in Wrocław, Poland. She collaborates with many cultural institutions home and abroad. Member of Polish Section of IBBY. Jury member of „Book of the Year” national contest, Warsaw (graphic section), and international Picture Book Quadriennial in Riga, Latvia. President of the jury of “Dobre Strony” and “Pióro Fredry” book competitions, Wrocław. Author of books and articles on history and theory of illustration, co-author of *Look! Polish Picturebook* (Gdansk, 2016), and editor-in-chief of *Captains of Illustration. 100 Years of Children’s Books from Poland* (Warsaw, 2019).

Laurence Le Guen

Dr Laurence Le Guen (Université de Rennes 2) researches French and American children’s books illustrated by photography. She runs the research log <https://miniphlit.hypotheses.org/> and curates the online exhibition ‘Ergy Landau à livres ouverts’. Her latest articles are devoted to the unfinished books of the photographer Robert Doisneau, to Jacques Prévert’s collaboration with the photographer Ylla and to the works of the couple Suzi Pilet-Alexis Peiry. A book based on her thesis will be published by MeMo in 2021.

Elina Druker

Elina Druker is Professor of Children’s Literature at Stockholm University. Her research area covers picturebooks, illustration history and intermedia studies. Druker has published and edited several publications dealing with children’s literature. She is author of *Images of Modernism* (2008) a biography of the picturebook artist Eva Billow (2014) and co-editor for *Children’s Literature and the Avant-Garde* (2015 with Bettina Kümmmerling-Meibauer). She co-edits the John Benjamin series “Children’s Literature, Culture and Cognition” (with Nina Christensen and Bettina Kümmmerling-Meibauer) and is jury member of The Astrid Lindgren Memorial Award.

Children's literature research at Stockholm university

Children's literature and young adult fiction is a prominent research area at the Department of Culture and Aesthetics at Stockholm University. Our research milieu consists of several employed lecturers, doctoral students and postdoctoral researchers. Sweden's only chair in comparative literature with focus on the subject is placed at the department.

Literature research is one of leading research areas at the Faculty of Humanities at Stockholm University and the department offers one of the broadest research environments in the field of literature research in Sweden.

Research in children's literature at the department is multifaceted and touches upon different aspects of the field. Central areas of research are 19th century children's literature, gender studies, modernism and literary urban studies, gothic studies, picturebook theory and human animal studies. The seminar for children's and youth literature at doctoral and postgraduate level at our department started about forty years ago.

In collaboration with the Swedish Institute for Children's Books, a group of scholars from the department is involved in writing a pioneering history of children's literature in Sweden from the 14th century onwards.

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