

This book offers an original and needed contribution to the emergent literacy field. It clearly explains various aspects of emergent literacy in relation to picturebooks, and it offers a valuable overview of picturebooks for very young children. It seems likely that this book will become a fundamental reference for all future research in the above-mentioned fields.

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Picturebooks for Children and Adults Alike

Beckett, Sandra L. 2012. *Crossover Picturebooks: A Genre for All Ages*. New York and London: Routledge. xvi+398 pp. ISBN 978-0-415-87230-0

What a delight to be able to review such a wonderful book. Sandra Beckett's enthusiasm for picturebooks oozes through her competent analysis of visual narratives from around the world. This enables her to put forward a case for "Picturebooks as a crossover genre" – the title of her first chapter.

Crossover Picturebooks, a follow-up to Beckett's earlier publication *Crossover Fiction* (Routledge 2009), seeks to address what Beckett feels is "the neglect of a genre that deserves special attention within the widespread and ever expanding global trend of crossover literature" (1). She suggests that because picturebooks offer a unique opportunity for collaborative reading between children and adults, they empower the two audiences more equally than any other narrative form. She is, however, very much aware that picturebooks have been considered the prerogative of young children and is sure that it will take much persuasion to destroy this image – possibly more rapidly in some countries than others. She cites contemporary picturebooks globally, especially those from countries like Norway where picturebooks are considered 'all-age literature'. Alongside this she looks at earlier authors who have been thinking along the same lines for some time. Maurice Sendak, for example; who believes that we have created an arbitrary division between adult and children's books; Lewis Carroll who didn't set out to write for children; or François Ruy-Vidal who was often reproached for writing books for adults rather than children and is renowned for saying that "there is no literature for children, there is literature" (5). Where Beckett is at her best, however, is when she delights in talking about French writers, illustrators and publishers. Her knowledge in this area is second to none and she is able not only to quote and discuss relevant picturebooks, but also give insights into the histories of many authors, as well as the publishing houses. She tells us, for example, that the French author and publisher, Christian Bruel felt that to make books for children is an error; it is more appropriate to make books that can be put into children's hands. She also mentions several other European publishers who support her argument and a number in Latin America, Canada and the United States, too.

In Chapter Two, Beckett suggests that some of the most innovative crossover picturebooks have been called 'artists' books', and she challenges not only the boundaries

between adult books and children's books but also the boundaries of the book itself. She does this by looking at early experimentations such as the illuminated printing of William Blake's British poetry in the 18th century; Viennese lithography, woodcuts and stencils in the 19th; engravings of the French illustrator Edy Legrand and, amongst others, the revolutionary typography of Russian avant-garde illustrators early in the 20th. From here she looks at breaking new ground with book objects, such as those of the Italian, Bruno Munari whose picturebooks out of tin were revolutionary at the time, as were the innovative narrative creations of many artists including Warja Lavater whose folding stories were created in Switzerland. Book games became the natural development from here, Beckett suggests, and she cites relevant material from a number of countries, including three dimensional books created by Katsumi Komagata from Japan. She then discusses the development of more contemporary works through analysis of wordless picturebooks, material books, cut-out books, book-sculptures, accordion-books, mural books and object books. The examples given ably support Beckett's belief that artists' books appeal to "young and old alike" (77) thus transcending arbitrary boundaries that put readers into different categories.

"A wordless picturebook offers a different kind of experience from one with text..." (81). This quote from David Wiesner, American author/illustrator, is the thread that runs through Beckett's fascinating third chapter. Here she details a plethora of wordless picture book styles, covering pictorial narratives in the tradition of Japanese scroll painting, mural-style wordless picturebooks, those by avant-garde publishers and cinematic visual journeys. She then looks at the move from wordless picture books to film, the creation of wordless picturebook series, and the use of paratext in this genre; together with 'almost' wordless picturebooks. All these are superbly supported by reference to contemporary illustrators from around the globe, as well as relevant theorists who, in turn, demonstrate that reading wordless picturebooks can be very challenging for readers of all ages. As Beckett moves towards her conclusion, through wordless dream sequences and an explanation of the progression from picturebooks with text to wordless picturebooks, she invites us to think about the ways in which we read these wordless picturebooks. She discusses a number of pointers in the illustrations which help us to understand these visual narratives. Colour, for example, can play an important part in the development of character, setting and storyline. She exemplifies this with reference to the colour red which constitutes "a marker in a surprising number of works" (142) – a red line often being a metaphor for "narrative progression" (143). Although this analysis is excellent, Beckett could well have also mentioned the importance of other visual codes such as position, size, perspective, frame, shape, etc. that facilitate readings of these visual 'texts'.

In discussing "Picturebooks with allusions to the fine arts", Beckett's fourth chapter, she suggests that this is a facet of contemporary picturebooks that has "particular appeal with a crossover audience" (147). It is for this reason that she details art fantasy and directly alludes to specific works of art. She also makes reference to parodic play with framed paintings, as well as multi-level parodies. Her section on artists' studios and museums gives numerous examples of how contemporary illustrators, such as the UK's Anthony Browne, allude to

fine art. Browne's illustrations are full of references to Magritte, De Chirico, Botticelli, Seurat, Da Vinci, Hopper, Van Eyck, Munch, Magritte, Goya, Millet, Michelangelo ... and even Frida Kahlo/Diego Rivera. These art references, Beckett suggests, are used to shift from 'reality' into a dream world. But is this dream world for adults or children? With support from international theorists, Beckett points out that the question of audience is inevitably raised in discussions of picturebooks containing artistic allusions. She suggests that allusions to the visual arts in picturebooks address the adults who mediate children's books, including parents, librarians and educators. She goes on to say that, although most of the picturebooks in this chapter can be appreciated on one level by young children, many more subtle references may even go over the heads of some adult readers.

"Picturebooks with cross-generational themes" is possibly the most sensitively written chapter because it covers a wide range of sometimes difficult or taboo themes. In it, Beckett really conveys a sense of what these stories mean in terms of crossover literature as she draws on a myriad of visual examples from around the world. She opens her argument with examples of nursery rhymes and fairy-tales with 'dark' themes such as those of the Brothers Grimm. According to Sendak, these appeal to all ages because they are "about the pure essence of life – incest, murder, insane mothers, love, sex" (211). So Beckett's first section, focusing on the stages of life and family relationships, covers work of avant-garde publishers in the 1960s and 70s who recognized human development as a continuum; with titles such as *What Is a Baby?* or *What Is a Grownup?* Over the years, these were superseded, she suggests, by the idea of the seeds of the grown up already being present in the child, as in the French picturebook *Tout-petits déjà* in 1994, and in 2007 *La famille foulque* which shows the pending birth of a baby coot. When she discusses family relationships, the books take on a more sombre tone, often involving dysfunctional families, for example, *You Think Just Because You're Big You're Right* or *The Geranium on the Window Just Died but Teacher You Just Went Right On*, by the American author Albert Cullum. She then looks at how a variety of love stories are portrayed in picture books and chooses many French titles to exemplify this, including *Un amour de triangle* (2001). This book was eventually published in both French and Occitan, the language of medieval troubadours. The author had to wait several years before it was accepted for publication, however, because the amorous tone of the content was not thought suitable for children. The Dutch illustrator, Max Velthuis had similar problems with his picturebook *Frog in Love* because his original publisher thought that the book was not suitable for a young audience.

In developing her ideas on nudity, violence and death, in this same chapter, Beckett suggests that nudity and sexuality do not have the same taboo status in many European countries that they do in the English speaking markets, and cites many examples that can be found in recent publications. They range from numerous tales where inquisitive children want to learn about their sexual organs like *A quoi sers le zizi des garçons?* to 'erotised' picturebooks such as *Pierrot ou les secrets de la nuit*. When she discusses violence, Beckett points out that often animal protagonists and humour are used in contemporary picturebooks, although she reminds us of the horror represented in *Der Struwwelpeter* and

how this book has been appreciated by both adults and children over the years. She even mentions that very few picturebooks have also been written about self-harm and cites the Dutch picturebook *Juul* where the main character attempts to remove parts of his body because he is being bullied at school. She also mentions that a number of books tackle the difficult subject of domestic violence, and again peppers the text with relevant examples. Her section on death – the ultimate challenge – is the longest in this chapter. Here Beckett discusses a plethora of visual interpretations of death, including characters that gradually diminish in size until they no longer exist, as in *Jojo la Mache*, where parts of an aged cow slowly disappear until the children can see these parts integrated within the countryside. She also touches on perhaps the saddest thing of all – the death of a child; mentioning Michael Rosen's emotional story about the loss of his son, Eddie, who many readers may well have met in Rosen's amusing poetry before his son's death. Suicide and euthanasia are also touched upon and illustrate the diversity of material that is available which may, in some way, help both adults and children to come to terms with the loss of a loved one.

Beckett's final chapter on celebrity picturebooks is probably the least interesting part of the book. It is not really about picturebooks themselves but about the celebrities who created them. It is, nevertheless, very detailed and informative and points out that often the books written by celebrities sell better simply because the authors are known to parents, not because they are well written and illustrated narratives. Beckett tells us about Madonna's adventures with her books; also those of Jamie Lee Curtis, Jimmy Carter, Lenny Henry, Prince Charles and many others. She presents us with the facts but, perhaps necessarily, does not feel it important to discuss the books in detail. This is in stark contrast to what has gone before and, maybe, highlights the excellence of the picturebooks discussed in earlier chapters. After all, her goal has been to present us with picturebooks that crossover from one generation to another and that can be read by multiple audiences. As it is adults who generally buy books for their children, Beckett is probably right to mention celebrity books here, particularly as the financial success of a picturebook will depend on the adults who buy them.

In her Epilogue, Beckett looks towards the future - to picturebooks as the ultimate crossover genre. She speculates on the kinds of books children might continue to read in an electronic age and suggests it is already becoming evident that sophisticated picture books which appeal to both adults and children, i.e. crossover picturebooks and other graphic literatures, will ensure the survival of the book in the face of the threatening forces of new technologies. The picturebook, according to Beckett, is a 'supergenre' that seems to know no boundaries. Her work challenges current definitions of the picturebook and has the potential to defy generic expectations. *Crossover Picturebooks* is not only an academic text which competently makes a very convincing case for a crossover picturebook genre, it is also well written, well researched and is a very good read – a must for anyone who enjoys or works with picturebooks.

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