UNIVERSITÀ DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO

Scuola di Dottorato *Humanae Litterae*

Dipartimento di Lingue, Letterature e Culture Straniere

Dottorato di Ricerca in Anglistica
XXVI Ciclo

GROTESQUE AND GOTHIC CHILDREN'S LITERATURE: FROM NINETEENTH-CENTURY PICTUREBOOKS UP TO TIM BURTON

L-Lin/10 – Letteratura Inglese

Tesi di Dottorato di:
Angela Anna Iuliucci

Tutor:
Prof.ssa Francesca Orestano

Co-tutor:
Prof.ssa Lidia Anna De Michelis

Coordinatore del Dottorato:
Prof. Alessandro Costazza

Anno Accademico

2012-2013

Table of Contents

List of Illustrations

Introduction

The aim of the present dissertation is to show that Tim Burton's imaginative universe can be considered as a remediation of a past tradition of grotesque and Gothic children's book illustrations which I have identified with the picturebooks realised by some illustrators who lived between the nineteenth and the twenty-first century. The first two chapters are meant to provide a historical and theoretical background to the development of the works specifically discussed in the last two chapters.

At the beginning of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the young protagonist asks what is the use of a book without pictures or conversations. Turning Alice's question upside down, in the first chapter I investigate what is the function of picturebooks, and I trace a brief history of this genre showing that it is strongly connected with the changes and improvements undergone by children's literature and by book illustrations. I have then focused on the interaction between words and images, this being the distinctive feature of picturebooks. Text-picture interaction is what makes picturebooks original and unique, and what explains their usefulness in the development of both verbal and visual literacy and, especially, of what Rosemary Ross Johnston defines the literacy of the imagination.

The second chapter deals with the grotesque and the Gothic. Despite the fact that they are examined separately, I do not conceive the grotesque and the Gothic as two distinct entities and in this chapter I show that they share formal and visual elements so that they may be considered as complementary. In the beginning both the terms "grotesque" and "Gothic" were used in the artistic field, and only later they would be

applied to literature. As far as the grotesque is concerned, I have traced its presence and development over the centuries, in order to identify its main features. The same procedure is also applied to the analysis of the Gothic. This preliminary survey opens the way to further remarks about the grotesque and the Gothic in children's literature, and about the exploration of grotesque and Gothic elements in picturebooks realised between the nineteenth and the twenty-first century.

As a hinge between the two areas I investigate – past tradition and the art of Tim Burton – in the third chapter I take into consideration the following illustrators, who lived between the nineteenth and the twenty-first century: Alfred Crowquill, Heinrich Hoffmann, Edward Lear, Richard Dadd, John Tenniel, Wilhelm Busch, Arthur Burdett Frost, Charles Addams, Ronald Searle, Edward Gorey. These artists are examined in chronological order, according to their date of birth. For each of them I provide some biographical information and I have analysed their most significant work. Illustrators and their picturebooks have been chosen according to the following criteria:

- Their style is strongly characterised by the presence of grotesque and Gothic elements
- Their imaginative universe may have influenced the style of Tim Burton

Tim Burton is the protagonist of the fourth and last chapter, where I examine his vocation as "visual storyteller", in order to show that his whole artistic production can be considered as a remediation of the picturebooks analysed in the previous chapter. Beside illustrations, Tim Burton is also influenced by children's literature in general. Taking into consideration his drawings and sketches, his movies and his picturebooks, the first being the basis of his creative process, I identify the main features of the so-called "Burtonesque", providing evidence of its being at the same time an appropriation and a remediation. This is the reason why Burton's imaginative universe succeeds in exploring the limitless possibilities of grotesque and Gothic picturebooks, respecting their essential character, and thus fostering the imaginative activity and the development of the literacy of imagination.

Chapter 1
An Introduction to Picturebooks

Alice was beginning to get very tired of sitting by her

sister on the bank, and of having nothing to do: once

or twice she had peeped into the book her sister was

reading, but it had no pictures or conversations in it,

"and what is the use of a book," thought Alice,

"without pictures or conversations?"[1]

At the beginning of *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* the young protagonist asks what is the use of a book without pictures or conversations. It would be interesting to turn her question upside down, asking ourselves what the use of a book with pictures is. This is my starting point, and it will be central to this investigation.

Analysing picturebooks is a difficult task because they are particularly complex. As stated by the editors of *The Norton Anthology of Children's Literature*

Picture books are probably the most innovative, experimental, and exciting area of children's literature — but also one of the most difficult to understand. We can

---

[1] Carroll, Lewis, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland and Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There - Edited with an Introduction and Notes by Hugh Haughton*, London, Penguin Books, 1998, p. 9.

define them as books in which pictures dominate the verbal text, or which have no

verbal text, or which interact with verbal text in a fundamental way.[2]

Also Perry Nodelman stresses the peculiarity of picturebooks when, at the beginning of

his *Words About Pictures*, he writes

Picture books – books intended for young children which communicate information

or tell stories through a series of many pictures combined with relatively slight texts

or no texts at all – are unlike any other form of verbal or visual art. Both the pictures

and the texts in these books are different from and communicate differently from

pictures and texts in other circumstances.[3]

Even at a basic linguistic level, there is something to say about the notion

conveyed by the word: "How should you spell 'picturebook', for example?"[4], asks David

Lewis. "It is a compound word (picturebook), a hyphenated word (picture-book), or two

distinct words (picture book)?"[5] William Moebius answers the question by saying that by

using the word 'picturebook' we want to point out that "pictures and words together are

treated as semi-autonomous and mutually attractive chains of meaning, rather than as

fixed images serving as a supplement to meanings fixed in words."[6] On the contrary,

when using the word 'picture-book', we keep the words separated to show the importance

of the written word, and "to foster images in the margins, at the incipits of verses, and

intermingled with text."[7]

Maybe the only certainty about picturebooks is the concept behind the thing.

According to the editors of the *NACL*, "understanding pictures comes before

understanding words"[8] because

---

[2] Avery, Gillian, Hunt, Peter, Paul, Lissa, Vallone, Lynn, Zipes, Jack, eds., *The Norton Anthology of Children's Literature: The Traditions in English*, New York, W.W. Norton & Company, 2005, p. 1051. Hereafter referred to as 'NACL'.

[3] Nodelman, Perry, *Words about Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books*, Athens (Georgia), The University of Georgia Press, 1988, p. vii.

[4] Lewis, David, *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks: Picturing Text*, London, Routledge, 2001, p. xiv.

[5] *Ibid.*

[6] Moebius, William, "Picture Book", in Nel, Philip, Paul, Lissa, eds., *Keywords for Children's Literature*, New York, New York University Press, 2011, pp. 169-173, pp. 169-170.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Avery, G., Hunt, P., Paul, L., Vallone, L., Zipes, J., eds., *NACL*, cit, p. 1051.

> Seeing comes before words. The child looks and recognizes before it can speak. But there is also another sense in which seeing comes before words. It is seeing which establishes our place in the surrounding world; [...][9]

It is my aim to take into account the history of this evident relation between image and word in picturebooks, so as to take eventually into consideration the works of Tim Burton, as author and illustrator of his own stories. However, before going into the analysis of the structure and usefulness of picturebooks, it is necessary to trace a brief history of them.

1.1 A Brief History of Picturebooks

The history of picturebooks is tightly connected and interwoven with the history of children's literature and of book illustrations. The changes, the developments and the improvements which picturebooks have gone through follow the evolution of children's literature and of the printing techniques, which will be briefly described in this paragraph.

The earliest paintings on the cave walls, dated back to 30,000 or even 60,000 years ago, show that pictorial storytelling has always played an important role in our life since its very beginning and that pictures have constantly been a very precious and powerful means of communication.[10] In Roger Fry's words, the strength of primitive art is an "immediate expressiveness" which is not subjected to the constraints usually imposed by aesthetic theories and conventions.[11] Even after the inception of writing, pictures continue to convey significant messages, especially to the illiterate.[12] Medieval stained glasses, or murals, or the so-called *Biblia pauperum*, explained a lot to those who could not read the Scriptures. In *From Primer to Pleasure in Reading* Mary F. Thwaite states that "oral

---

[9] Berger, John, Blomberg, John, Fox, Chris, Dibb, Michael, Hollis, Richard, *Ways of Seeing*, London, British Broadcasting Corporation and Penguin Books, 1972, p. 7.

[10] Salisbury, Martin, Styles, Morag, *Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling*, London, Laurence King Publishing, 2012, p. 10.

[11] Fry, Roger, "Children's Drawings", in Reed, Christopher, ed., *A Roger Fry Reader*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1996, pp. 266-270, p. 267.

[12] Whalley, Joyce Irene, Chester, Tessa Rose, *A History of Children's Book Illustration*, London, John Murray with the Victoria & Albert Museum, 1988, p. 11.

literature belonged to the people and their children for centuries before the written or printed word."[13] It is only during the Middle Ages, in fact, that we have the development of a written literary tradition, thanks to the invention of the movable type printing by Johannes Gutenberg in the 1430s, introduced in England around 1480 by William Caxton. The growth of this technique is revolutionary because it allows the production of multiple copies of a book, with a remarkable reduction of time and money.

According to Whalley and Chester, as far as the illustrations are concerned, movable type printing leads to the introduction of two mechanical methods of producing illustrations: the woodcut and the copper-plate engraving. The woodcut is a relief process in which "the design is drawn or traced onto the planed side or plank surface of a soft wood, with the area surrounding each line being cut away with knives or chisels. The line thus lies above the surface and prints black on a white background, with the image in reverse."[14] Since type is also in relief, when using this method illustrations and text could be printed at the same time. In the copper-plate engraving, instead, the picture is incised on a copper-plate using a burin. Then the plate is inked all over and wiped clear so that the ink remains only in the incised lines. Putting the copper-plate through a press the image is printed in reverse.[15] Being an intaglio process and not a relief process, copper-plate engraving does not allow to print the text and the image at the same time: the pictures have to be printed separately and then bound in. For this reason, the technique is not so used for page illustration, but for the printing of pictures inserted in the book.

It is important to point out that in the Middle Ages we cannot speak of children's literature yet. The printing process is still too expensive to make the book an object for the masses, or to produce books specifically written for children.[16] The great paradox of this period is that children are among the readers of books but they do not have their own books; they share literature with their parents, with the adults, as underlined by Alessandra Petrina in her essay "Prima della letteratura per l'infanzia: il tardo medioevo e la prima età moderna". Here Petrina states that critics use to identify the birth of

---

[13] Thwaite, Mary F., *From Primer to Pleasure in Reading: An Introduction to the History of Children's Books in England from the Invention of Printing to 1914 with an Outline of Some Developments in Other Countries*, Boston, The Horn Book, 1963, p. 1.

[14] Whalley, Joyce Irene, Chester, Tessa Rose, A *History of Children's Book Illustration*, cit., p. 245.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 13 and p. 246.

[16] Avery, G., Hunt, P., Paul, L., Vallone, L., Zipes, J., eds., *NACL*, cit., p. xxvii-xviii.

children's literature with the publication of Newbery's *A Little Pretty Pocket-Book* in 1744. As I shall point out later on, this is partly true, especially as far as a commercial point of view is concerned. However, as argued by Petrina, when taking into consideration a non-commercial context, it is possible to see that children's literature has always existed.[17] With regard to this topic, she makes a distinction between texts addressed to adults and enjoyed also by children, and texts specifically written for children. Among the former, which she defines as mixed literature, Petrina identifies works such as *The Canterbury Tales* (suitably abridged and purged for the younger readers), Aesop's fables, romances[18] and ballads.[19] Among the texts specifically thought for children, instead, she takes into consideration mainly lullabies[20] and educational books, such as "babees books",[21] catechisms,[22] primers,[23] hornbooks, battledores,[24] and ABCs.[25] All these instructional

---

[17] Petrina, Alessandra, "Prima della letteratura per l'infanzia: il tardo Medioevo e la prima età moderna", in Tosi, Laura, Petrina, Alessandra, a cura di, *Dall'ABC a Harry Potter: Storia della letteratura inglese per l'infanzia e la gioventù*, Bologna, Bononia University Press, 2011, pp. 33-54, p. 33.

[18] According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, a romance is a medieval narrative (originally in verse, later also in prose) relating the legendary or extraordinary adventures of some heroes of chivalry. In extended use, the word also refers to narratives about important religious figures. "romance, n. and adj.1". OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.pros.lib.unimi.it/view/Entry/167065?rskey=0hikNL&result=1&isAdvanced=false. (accessed February 28, 2014).

[19] Petrina, Alessandra, "Prima della letteratura per l'infanzia: il tardo Medioevo e la prima età moderna", in Tosi, L., Petrina, A., a cura di, *Dall'ABC a Harry Potter*, cit., pp. 35-40.

[20] A lullaby is a soothing refrain used to please or pacify infants. "lullaby, int. and n." OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.pros.lib.unimi.it/view/Entry/111037?rskey=YkZvJZ&result=2&isAdvanced=false. (accessed February 28, 2014).

[21] Also known as courtesy books or books of table manners, "babees books" develop in Europe during the thirteenth century. In England the oldest ones are dated back to the fifteenth century. Babees books were practical manuals of manners especially addressed to the children of the nobility. Their aim was to describe to their young readers the suitable behaviour for each moment of the day, by using a very simple language and syntax. Petrina, Alessandra, "Prima della letteratura per l'infanzia: il tardo Medioevo e la prima età moderna", in Tosi, L., Petrina, A., a cura di, *Dall'ABC a Harry Potter*, cit., pp. 43-48.

[22] Originally the catechism is an elementary treatise for instruction in the principles of Christian religion, in the form of question and answer. Later this term is used to refer to any book of instruction in other subjects always in form of question and answer. "catechism, n.". OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.pros.lib.unimi.it/view/Entry/28846?redirectedFrom=catechism. (accessed February 28, 2014).

[23] The term primer is introduced in England in the fourteenth century to indicate what was known in Latin as The Book of Hours of the Blessed Virgin Mary. Therefore, the word primers would come from *Prime*, the first of the Hours. However, according to some critics, the name is due to the fact that this text was considered the *liber primarius* in the house, even because it was useful in learning to read especially in Latin. The primer is a religious handbook "intended specially for the laity, to guide the devout layman in his private daily devotions or to help him bear his part in the services of the Church." As a consequence, in primers we can find a lot of material drawn from the Scriptures, such as the Psalms and the most known passages from the Old and New Testament. When conceived to be used by children, primers do not undergo significant changes, but they generally begin with an alphabet and a sillabary. Originally primers were written in Latin. In England the first primer written in English language, *A Prymer in Englyshe, with Certeyn prayers [et] godly meditations, very necessary for all people that understonde not the Latyn tongue, Cum*

texts were used at home or in Songs and Grammar Schools and in Private Monastic Schools, which were the most important educational establishments of the eleventh century. Songs and Grammar Schools were run by priests or deacons and were connected with the cathedrals. Private Monastic Schools, instead, were affiliated to specific religious orders. These schools were attended by the sons of the nobility and the instruction given in them was focused on Latin, grammar, rhetoric, logic, geometry and music.[26]

The fact that children in this period do not have their own books is not only due to economical causes, but also to social reasons. As argued by Philippe Ariès in his ground-breaking *Centuries of Childhood*, and subsequently by Bette P. Goldstone in *Lessons to Be Learned*, "before the seventeenth century the child was seen as a miniature adult, not as an individual within a special stage of development."[27] Ariès states that "there was no place for childhood in the medieval world."[28]

---

priulegio Regali (also known as the *Marshall Primer*), appeared in 1534. Butterworth, Charles C., *The English Primers (1529-1545): Their Publication and Their Connection with the English Bible and the Reformation in England*, New York, Octagon Books, 1971, pp. 1-3 and pp. 50-52.

[24] Hornbooks and battledores can be considered as the ancestors of the modern alphabet books. As observed by Mary F. Thwaite the hornbook "was not really a book at all. It consisted of a piece of board, usually of oak, about nine by five inches in size, with a handle at its base. On one side there was stuck a sheet of paper, setting out the alphabet, the nine digits, the Lord's Prayer, and sometimes a sillabary. For protection the paper was covered with a sheet of horn, enclosed with a narrow rim of brass. On the other side might be engraved some splendid figure. [...] The hornbook was also called the 'Criss-Cross-Row'. [...] The term was derived from the cross which usually preceded the alphabet, or perhaps it dates from the older nine letter alphabet strung on wire in the form of a cross, known before the hornbook." The hornbook is used in schools from the end of the sixteenth century to the middle of the eighteenth century, when it is replaced by the battledore, that is to say "a thin varnished sheet of cardboard folded twice to make a booklet of two pages." The alphabet was still the pre-eminent feature but it included also prayers, verses, lists of vowels and consonants, and wood-engravings. Thwaite, Mary F., *From Primer to Pleasure in Reading*, cit., pp. 4-5; Avery, G., Hunt, P., Paul, L., Vallone, L., Zipes, J., eds., *NACL*, cit., p. 2; Demers, Patricia, Moyles, Gordon, eds., *From Instruction to Delight: An Anthology of Children's Literature to 1850*, Toronto, Oxford University Press, 1982, p. 3.

[25] ABCs develop as an extension of hornbooks and battledores during the Tudor age. The aim is the same of hornbooks and battledores, that is to say to teach the child to read and thereby to pray, but the structure and the contents are quite different. As noticed by Antonella Cagnolati, also the ABC "began with alphabets and syllables. The ABC contains the text of the Apostle's Creed, Lord's Prayer and Hail Mary; sometimes adds the Ten Commandments; and then attaches a variety of table graces and other devotions. However, these books rarely include explanations of any of their materials." Cagnolati, Antonella, "Hornbooks and Prayers: Textbooks for Children in Reformation England (XVITH Century), in *History of Education & Children's Literature*, III, 2, 2008, pp. 59-66, p. 63.

[26] Demers, P., Moyles, G., eds., *From Instruction to Delight*, cit., pp. 1-2.

[27] Goldstone, Bette P., *Lessons to Be Learned: A Study of Eighteenth Century Didactic Children's Literature*, New York, Peter Lang, 1984, p. 74.

[28] Ariès, Philippe, *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life*, London, Jonathan Cape, 1962 (*L'enfant et la vie familiale sous l'ancien régime*, Paris, Librairie Plon, 1960), p. 33.

In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist; this is not to suggest that children were neglected, forsaken or despised. The idea of childhood is not to be confused with affection for children: it corresponds to an awareness to the particular nature of childhood, that particular nature which distinguishes the child from the adult, even the young adult. In medieval society this awareness was lacking. That is why, as soon as the child could live without the constant solicitude of his mother, his nanny or his cradle-rocker, he belonged to adult society.[29]

As a consequence, children "simply 'did not count'"[30] until the age of six or seven, when they made their entrance into adult society. From the seventeenth century onwards, however, things gradually change. The temporal limits of childhood are extended to include the years of the adolescence. A small nuclear family takes the place of the larger extended family typical of the medieval era, and thus the relationship between parents and children tightens and parents start enjoying their children and caring for their moral developments and welfare.[31] Always according to Ariès, in fact, also the concept of family did not exist during the Middle Ages because at that time "the family fulfilled a function; it ensured the transmission of life, property and names; but it did not penetrate very far into human sensibility."[32]

The family was a moral and social, rather than a sentimental, reality. In the case of very poor families, it corresponded to nothing more than the material installation of the couple in the midst of a bigger environment – the village, the farm, the 'courtyard' or the 'house' of the lord and master where these poor people spent more time than in their own homes (and sometimes they did not even have a home of their own but rather led a vagabond life); among the prosperous, the family was identified with the prosperity of the estate, the honour of the name.[33]

---

[29] Ariès, Philippe, *Centuries of Childhood*, cit., p. 128.
[30] *Ibid.*
[31] Goldstone, Bette P., *Lessons to Be Learned*, cit., pp. 75-76.
[32] Ariès, Philippe, *Centuries of Childhood*, cit., p. 411.
[33] *Ibid.*, pp. 368-369.

As already pointed put, things begin to change during the seventeenth century, when the child gets a central place in the family and parents develop a real and profound concern about their children's education.

In England, always during the seventeenth century, Puritanism starts to gain ground and it is just with the Puritans that the first books written specifically for children are produced. The Puritans believe that the child is born in sin, and is naturally evil. As a consequence he has to be educated, by providing the means to reach eternal salvation. This can only be done through the reading of the Bible, so the most important thing is to teach children to read because the earlier they learn to read, the sooner they can approach the word of God. Young Puritans have at their disposal abridged and easier versions of the Bible, of the Old and the New Testament, catechisms and also ABCs, primers and readers in which instruction and religion are inseparable.[34] These books are quite lavishly illustrated because pictures help "to imprint the stories on the child's mind."[35] However, despite the presence of the illustrations, these texts do not offer entertainment to children because the idea of reading for pleasure is seen as "an abhorrence – a prostitution of the God-given ability to read."[36]

As far as the production of the first children's books is concerned, it is interesting to take into consideration the statement made by Francelia Butler in the first volume of *Masterworks of Children's Literature*:

> The seventeenth century saw the beginnings of a literature for children only. Therefore one can say that much literature enjoyed by adults and children together – children's literature in the best sense – died in the seventeenth century, and segregated literature was born during that period.[37]

According to our chosen definition of children's literature, we can therefore affirm that it is either born, or it dies in the seventeenth century. If we consider it as a genre including

---

[34] Goldstone, Bette P., *Lessons to Be Learned*, cit., p. 76.

[35] Whalley, Joyce Irene, Chester, Tessa Rose, *A History of Children's Book Illustration*, cit., p. 14.

[36] *Ibid.*

[37] Butler, Francelia, volume ed., Cott, John, general ed., *Masterworks of Children's Literature. Volume One: The Early Years, c. 1550 - c. 1739*, New York, The Stonehill Publishing Company in association with Chelsea House Publishers, 1983, p. xxxiii.

only books written specifically for children, it is undoubtedly true that it develops in this period; on the contrary, if we consider children's literature as the literature shared by children and their parents, then we have to say that it dies in the seventeenth century.[38]

Another significant event of the period is the publication of *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* by John Locke (1693). Locke affirms that the child's mind is a *tabula rasa*, a white slate on which instruction is etched or written. He also stresses the necessity to use play and pleasant didactic methods in order to develop the child's curiosity and interest toward learning.[39] The Czech theologian, teacher and educationalist Johann Amos Comenius had already applied these theories some years before with his *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* (1658), a book usually considered the first children's picturebook. It is a sort of children's pictorial encyclopaedia written in Latin and German in which each word or sentence is illustrated by an image.[40] According to Comenius, in fact, children remember things best not only if they read about them, but also if they see them. Comenius's work represents one of the first examples of instruction through play, as it proposes a method of learning and gives great importance to pictures, thus contributing to the development of children's picturebooks.

The first to really put into practice Locke's theories is the bookseller and publisher John Newbery, who publishes *A Little Pretty-Pocket Book* in 1744. As we can see from the whole title of the book, *A Little Pretty-Pocket-Book, Intended for the Instruction and Amusement of little Master Tommy and pretty Miss Polly, with an agreeable Letter to Read from Jack the Giant Killer, as also a Ball and a Pincushion, the Use of which will Infallibly make Tommy a Good Boy and Polly a Good Girl*, Newbery's aim is to use the principle of instruction-with-delight, but also to develop the children's books market. *A Little Pretty-Pocket Book*, in fact, is sold with a ball for the boys and a pincushion for the girls and these objects are a sort of forerunners of the modern gadgets which often accompany children's books.[41] Newbery, in fact, is the first to realise that to sell books they must be made attractive to the child as

---

[38] Butler, F., volume ed., Cott, J., general ed., *Masterworks of Children's Literature. Volume One: The Early Years, c. 1550 - c. 1739*, cit., p. xxi.

[39] Goldstone, Bette P., *Lessons to Be Learned*, cit., pp. 77-78.

[40] The English schoolmaster Charles Hoole translates *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* into English in 1659 with the title *The Visible World*. Avery, G., Hunt, P., Paul, L., Vallone, L., Zipes, J., eds., *NACL*, cit., pp. 2-3.

[41] *Ibid.*, cit., p. xxvii.

well as to their parents.[42] As previously pointed out, it is often said that children's literature is born in 1744 with the publication of *A Little Pretty-Pocket Book*. This is not absolutely correct because there are books written specifically for children even before Newbery, but this date undoubtedly represents a turning point in the history of children's literature. From now on, the religious indoctrination typical of the previous period is replaced by the will to entertain children and to give them instruction-with-delight. Children's literature starts to have a publishing market of its own.

Once again, this change also depends on political, social and economical causes. The eighteenth century sees a considerable population growth and the spread of the Industrial Revolution which leads to the development of the middle and the working classes. As observed by Mariangela Mosca Bonsignore in *Puer Œconomicus*, the new social and economic context changed considerably children's life. The increase in children's survival rate, due to the progress in medicine and a better quality of life, incited parents to make an investment in their children, especially in their education.[43] Both the members of middle and working classes, in fact, considered instruction as a means to improve their social position and for this reason they wanted to give the best possible instruction to their children.[44] According to Bonsignore, Newbery took advantage of this new parental attitude towards children. Through his advertisements he convinced parents that books were worth buying because they could provide that instruction which they considered fundamental for their children. In this way Newbery succeeded to reach a very wide public of buyers and readers.[45]

In the eighteenth century, books are cheaper than in the past. This is due to the progress made in printing technology; they are also made available thanks to libraries and

---

[42] Whalley, Joyce Irene, Chester, Tessa Rose, *A History of Children's Book Illustration*, cit., p. 23.

[43] Mosca Bonsignore, Mariangela, *Puer Œconomicus: consumo, denaro e lavoro nella narrativa per l'infanzia. Inghilterra, 1740-1820*, Torino, Trauben, 2009, p. 11.

[44] Also the children of the working class and of the poor can have access to instruction thanks to schools ruled by volunteers or religious groups, such as the Sunday Schools. Originally the Sunday schools were schools for the general instruction of children held on a Sunday, usually set up and controlled by a parish. Later on, the term is used to denote a school or class held on a Sunday, organized by the church or other religious organizations, to provide a religious instruction. In the United Kingdom, Sunday schools are generally regarded as originating from the one formed in 1783 by Robert Raikes (1735–1811) in Gloucester. They aimed to provide a basic education for children from the lower social classes, who were in full-time employment for the rest of the week. "Sunday school, n. and adj." OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.pros.lib.unimi.it/view/Entry/194069?redirectedFrom=sunday+school . (accessed February 28, 2014).

[45] Mosca Bonsignore, Mariangela, *Puer Œconomicus*, cit., p. 25.

circulating libraries, with a consequent increase of literacy. Among the low-price readings available to the working class, chapbooks hold the record of popularity in this age. The word 'chapbook' comes from the Anglo-Saxon verb 'cēapian' which means to buy and sell. Chapbooks appear around the middle of the sixteenth century, when pedlars, or 'chapmen', sell them from door to door, "together with latest ballads, laces, ribbons, thread, news, and gossip – and all the other stock-in-trade of the wandering salesman."[46] From the very beginning they are illustrated, even if with very cheap and simple pictures that can be used to adorn different stories and situations, and they become "the repository of traditional folk and fairy tales, of rhyming ballads, as well as of collections of jests and riddles."[47] Chapbooks reach the height of their popularity between the eighteenth and the nineteenth century, when they are also standardized in their form. In fact, as described by Whalley and Chester, chapbooks

> were usually printed on one side of sheet only, which was then folded to form a booklet of twelve or twenty-four pages, roughly 6 x 4 inches in size and illustrated with one or more crude woodcuts, the whole printed on coarse grey paper. [...] Towards the end of the century the chapbook became smaller, measuring 4½ x 2½ inches – sometimes even less than that. The standard number of pages became sixteen, though there were some books which had more or less, and they were now printed on both sides of the sheet.[48]

The change in size at the end of the eighteenth century is also due to the fact that chapbooks, which are usually addressed to unsophisticated adult readers, became very popular among children, because their contents had been made suitable for the young readers.[49]

      As far as the illustrations are concerned, the second half of the eighteenth century sees the birth of a very competent school of English engravers who cater for the increasing demand for illustrations. As a matter of fact, in this period "there was a growing perception that every publication, from botanical magazine to religious tracts and working

---

[46] Whalley, Joyce Irene, Chester, Tessa Rose, *A History of Children's Book Illustration*, cit., p. 93.
[47] *Ibid.*
[48] *Ibid.*, pp. 93-94.
[49] Avery, G., Hunt, P., Paul, L., Vallone, L., Zipes, J., eds., *NACL*, cit., p. 33.

class literature, should be illustrated."[50] The engraver Thomas Bewick introduces the wood engraving, a relief process also known as 'white-line' engraving because the design is cut with engraving tools using the end-grain of a hard wood. When the surface is inked, the picture reveals white lines on a black background. Then the area surrounding the lines is cut away so that the image in relief is printed black (in reverse) on a white background. Unlike the woodcut, this method allows to realize more accurate and detailed illustrations, also reproducing different texture and tonal effects.[51] This new technique of reproducing pictures will be applied in book illustration throughout all the following century.

The concept of childhood and the production of children's books are significantly influenced by the spread of Romanticism and by the publication of Rousseau's *Émile, ou de l'éducation* (1762). The Romantics consider childhood as a sacred period in life as they stress the importance of spontaneous imagination. As far as Rousseau is concerned, he denies both Locke's idea of *tabula rasa* and the Puritan's view of the child as innately sinful. Rousseau considers the child as good by nature and born with certain capabilities that should be nurtured. Since bad habits and vices are learned from exposure to adult society, the child has to live in touch with nature as long as possible and his education has to follow his interests and the laws of nature. Books have to be avoided; Rousseau only recommends Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* and the Bible.[52] Rousseau's ideas influence a group of British women writers, such as Sarah Trimmer, Anna Laetitia Barbauld, Catherine Macaulay, Hannah More, Mary Wollstonecraft and Maria Edgeworth, all authors regrouped by Bette P. Goldstone into what she calls "the didactic school". Although very different from each other, in fact, all these writers share a strong didactic aim. They write books addressed specifically to children and based on the principle of instruction-with-delight but, unlike the Romantics, they are against the use of fantasy and imagination. Children have to read realistic books through which they can learn moral values.[53] As observed by Francesca Orestano, making a careful selection of what children

---

[50] Houfe, Simon, *The Dictionary of 19th Century British Book Illustrators and Caricaturists*, London, Antique Collectors' Club, 1978, p. 16.

[51] Whalley, Joyce Irene, Chester, Tessa Rose, *A History of Children's Book Illustration*, cit., p. 245.

[52] Goldstone, Bette P., *Lessons to Be Learned*, cit., pp. 83-84.

[53] *Ibid.*, pp. 1-3 and Orestano, Francesca, "Una compagine di irresistibili scribacchine: il Settecento", in Tosi, L., Petrina, A., a cura di, *Dall'ABC a Harry Potter*, cit., pp. 87-106, pp. 87-88.

should and should not read was fundamental. Fairy tales and all the other children's books based on fantasy have to be banished from children's readings.[54] Catherine Macaulay, for example, in *Letters on Education* (1790) defines as trash all contemporary children's literature and blames the use of pictures because they distract children from their reading exercises. In *Practical Education* (1798) Maria Edgeworth explains her didactic theories and she states that education has to be based on experience. Sentimental novels for girls or adventure books for boys are not suitable readings; children need stories fitted for them and focused on their everyday life.[55]

As already observed, from 1740s onwards, secular and deliberately cheerful children's books start to be published, but this does not mean that the didactic aim is completely forgotten. Whalley and Chester notice that

> If one should choose to make a generalised statement about the 18th century, it could be said that the implied objective of children's reading passed from religious education in the early decades to social education in later ones. By the early 19th century the objective had changed again, to that of social advancement through practical knowledge. Throughout the whole period of the 19th century the emphasis on religious and moral education certainly continued to be an important factor in children's education. [...] Nevertheless most parents were anxious that their children should also be able from an early age to participate in all the wonders of the world which were opening up around them, and the didactic element was never allowed to be far away in children's reading."[56]

If children begin to build their background knowledge by means of reading, the need for more detailed illustrations is felt. They are realised by wood engravings and by means of the previously-neglected technique of copper-plate engraving. Two other methods of

---

[54] The debate concerning the suitability of fairy tales continues during the Victorian Age too. The Victorians think that fairy tales are useless because they cannot be used to introduce children to Christian principles. Moreover they are untrue and so they "make young readers insensitive to the difference between what was true and what was not." Woff, Robert Lee, volume ed., Cott, John, general ed., *Masterworks of Children's Literature. Volume Five: The Victorian Age, 1837 - 1900. Part One*, New York, The Stonehill Publishing Company in association with Chelsea House Publishers, 1985, p. xvi.

[55] Orestano, Francesca, "Una compagine di irresistibili scribacchine: il Settecento", in Tosi, L., Petrina, A., a cura di, *Dall'ABC a Harry Potter*, cit., pp. 87-106, pp. 92-93 and pp. 96-99.

[56] Whalley, Joyce Irene, Chester, Tessa Rose, *A History of Children's Book Illustration*, cit., pp. 36-37.

image reproduction are developed in this period, lithography and etching. Lithography is a planographic process[57] invented around 1788 by Alois Senefender based on the interaction between grease and water.

> The artist draws on a limestone slab with a wax crayon or pencil, over which water is spread with a damp roller. This separates the non-print areas from the image. When the ink is applied to the stone, it is repelled by the water and only adheres to the greasy parts, and an impression can be taken.[58]

Etching is an intaglio process very similar to metal engraving.

> In this process the plate was covered with wax on which the engraver scratched the drawing down to the original surface. Immersed in an acid bath, only the exposed metal lines would be bitten away. […] When the wax was removed and the plate inked and then cleaned, only the etched lines, which held the ink, would print off.[59]

Illustrations undergo further developments during the Victorian Age, thanks to the rise of popular journalism and the foundation of many illustrated periodicals, such as *Punch* (1841) and *The Illustrated London News* (1842). As a consequence, we also notice the inception of a full-time profession, that of book illustrator. Pictures stop being anonymous as in the past. Both in books for adults and children, illustrations are influenced by the different artistic movements which develop in this period. For this reason the figure of the engraver becomes more and more important, since he has the duty to reproduce in the most precise, accurate and faithful way the original illustrator's ideas.[60] From the 1850s onwards we also notice the first examples of colour printing,

---

[57] Of, relating to, or produced by a process in which printing is done from a plane surface. "planographic, adj.". OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.proxlib.unimi.it/view/Entry/145143?redirectedFrom=planographic. (accessed February 28, 2014).

[58] Whalley, Joyce Irene, Chester, Tessa Rose, A *History of Children's Book Illustration*, cit., pp. 246.

[59] *Ibid.*, pp. 41-42.

[60] *Ibid.*, pp. 53-55.

especially thanks to the development of toy books.[61] Despite their name, they have nothing to do with toys. The term is used by publishers

> to describe contemporary picture books which relied for their impact on the use of colour, either hand-applied or printed. Toy books were printed on one side of the sheet only, with a minimum of text or captions, and then folded to form an almost square booklet of six to eight pages, with decorative paper covers. They were essentially a publishers' invention, and the main purveyors of toy books, the firm of Dean & Son, followed in turn by Routledge and then Warne, each had their own series, often with fanciful names.[62]

The most common method of colour reproduction is hand-colouring which is used until the middle of the century, when other techniques are introduced. For example, around 1835 George Baxter patents the colour printing from wood blocks. Colours are superimposed on an engraved metal plate in a fairly neutral colour through wood blocks (a wood block for each colour). This technique is used also by the well-known engraver Edmund Evans.[63] Chromolithography, which is an improvement of Senefender's technique, starts being used as well.

In 1870 the Elementary Education Act (also known as Forster's Education Act) introduces compulsory elementary education and the demand for reading material becomes higher than before. Moreover, we are at the apex of British Imperialism and children's literature becomes a powerful means to spread the language and culture of the colonists through the different parts of the Empire.[64] Thus late Victorian Age also sees the birth of photomechanical reproduction which implies the "use of the camera to

---

[61] Gift-books, that is to say books published in an attractive form to be suitable for a present, develop in this period along with toy books. Also Dickens makes reference to gift-books in the short story *A Christmas Tree*. Among the gifts found under the Christmas tree by the young protagonist, in fact, there are the ABC known as "A was an archer", *Little Red Riding-Hood* and *The Arabian Nights*, all "thin books, in themselves, at first, but many of them, and with deliciously smooth covers of bright red or green." "gift, n.1". OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.pros.lib.unimi.it/view/Entry/78177?redirectedFrom=gift+book. (accessed February 28, 2014), and Dickens, Charles, *Some Short Christmas Stories*, http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext98/cdscs10pf.pdf, pp. 68.

[62] Whalley, Joyce Irene, Chester, Tessa Rose, *A History of Children's Book Illustration*, cit., p. 100.

[63] *Ibid.*, pp. 100-101.

[64] Avery, G., Hunt, P., Paul, L., Vallone, L., Zipes, J., eds., *NACL*, cit., p. xxviii.

photograph a drawing and develop it straight onto the block or plate."[65] Artists no longer have to draw in reverse or depend on the engraver's interpretation of their works. Consequently, the figure of the engraver gradually loses importance. Among these new techniques there is the half-tone engraving, consisting in representing tone by using a screen or grid which breaks the image down into a minute of pattern of dots of different sizes. Dots are so small that it is necessary to use a smooth surface to reproduce them accurately. Because of this, half-tone plates are printed separately on glossy paper.[66]

The outbreak of the First World War obviously makes a difficult time in children's books industry. The industry recovers during the between-the-wars years, even thanks to the birth of the film industry. In 1937, in fact, Walt Disney realizes his first full-length film, *Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs*, putting the basis for the tight connection between children's literature and the new mass media which will characterize the twenty-first century. The Second World War causes another halt for the children's books market but this time the recovery is slower than after the First World War. A complete re-establishment occurs only in 1960s, the decade which sees the spread of photolithography. This is an offset lithography technique in which "the inked image (text and illustration) is passed from a flexible metal plate curved round a cylinder to a rubber-covered roller, and in turn to paper. This makes it possible to print on a variety of surfaces, and the use of the rubber helps wear and tear on the plates."[67] Photolithography allows a complete integration of text and illustration and picturebooks start to be shaped and designed as a whole, trying to perfectly balance the verbal and the visual elements. This is why critics tend to state that the picturebook as we conceive it today is born in this period.[68]

Contemporary children's literature is characterized by a non-stop evolution. The development of new technologies and media can be seen as a threat for its survival because children now have the possibility to approach culture and literacy also through television, computers, e-books and so on. The children's book market is getting wider and wider, while children's literature and the new media often undergo a process of

---

[65] Whalley, Joyce Irene, Chester, Tessa Rose, *A History of Children's Book Illustration*, cit., p 247.
[66] *Ibid.*
[67] *Ibid.*
[68] *Ibid.*, p. 216.

hybridization. The same happens for picturebooks, which belong to children's literature, and face the challenge to help children knowing what is often defined as "an increasingly visual, image-based, culture."[69]

1.2 Picturebooks under the Magnifying Glass: Definitions and Structure

Picturebooks studies include a number of seminal, critical and reference works. As far as this investigation is concerned, a selection has been made; therefore, in this paragraph I shall make reference to the texts that I have found particularly relevant for my research. Perry Nodelman's *Words About Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books* (1988) and Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott's *How Picturebooks Work* (2006) have represented a really significant and valuable critical resource, and I consider these two books respectively as a sort of starting and ending point in picturebooks studies. As a matter of fact, Nodelman's *Words about Pictures* is still considered a ground-breaking work because it was one of the first attempts to analyse and theorise picturebooks. On the other hand, *How Picturebooks Work* is a recent study which tries to sum up all the previous critical debate to lead the research about picturebooks to a further level. It is also necessary to say that all the texts here discussed will be taken into consideration, sometimes in a more detailed and accurate way, also with regard to the study of the works of Tim Burton and of the illustrators analysed in the following chapters.

1.2.1 Definitions: The Uniqueness and the Complexity of Picturebooks

As already noticed, the word 'picturebook' can be spelled in different ways, according to the notion we want to convey. In this investigation I shall use the compound word, because I consider the picturebook as a whole in which words and images are not two distinct elements, but two parts which mingle and interact each other.[70] We have also pointed out that the complexity of picturebooks make them a difficult topic to study. In

---

[69] Salisbury, Martin, Styles, Morag, *Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling*, cit., p. 7.
[70] When making reference to critical works about picturebooks, the spelling will be the one chosen by the different authors.

order to identify the causes of this complexity, it could be useful to make some considerations about the different definitions of picturebooks given by critics.

In her essay "The Verbal and the Visual: The Picturebook as a Medium" (2001), Maria Nikolajeva states that the great part of picturebooks studies tends to provide only a basic distinction between illustrated books and picturebooks. According to Nikolajeva, this distinction is not satisfactory. It does not take into account the complexity of picturebooks, also because critics have differing opinions on the issue. In the first chapter of *A History of Children's Book Illustration*, Whalley and Chester explain that their work is

> about picture in children's books, but it is not about picture books – or at least only accidentally. 'Pictures' are independent works – they can stand by themselves, or they can be put into books in which they may not be relevant. Book illustration is something quite different and cannot properly exist outside its text – artist who forget this do so at their peril. Good book illustration should continue or enhance the narrative or verse that it accompanies. It should not overwhelm it, or contradict it, for the eyes of the child are sharp. Unlike the picture, which often makes its own point, illustration usually forms part of a sequence of events.[71]

While Whalley and Chester see the illustrated books as characterized by a strong connection between words and images, the great part of critics thinks exactly the opposite. For example, Martin Salisbury and Morag Styles say that

> Today's picturebook is defined by its particular use of sequential imagery, usually in tandem with a small number of words, to convey meaning. In contrast to the illustrated book, where pictures enhance, decorate and amplify, in the picturebook the visual text will often carry much of the narrative responsibility. In most cases, the meaning emerges through the interplay of word and image, neither of which would make sense when experienced independently of the other.[72]

---

[71] Whalley, Joyce Irene, Chester, Tessa Rose, *A History of Children's Book Illustration*, cit., p. 11.
[72] Salisbury, Martin, Styles, Morag, *Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling*, cit., p. 9.

Again, Maria Nikolajeva defines illustrated books as works "where the words carry the primary narrative and the pictures are supportive or decorative"[73] and picturebooks as "books in which the visual and the verbal aspects are both essential for full communication."[74]

In their definitions both Salisbury and Styles and Nikolajeva stress the importance of the interaction between words and images. This is not a coincidence because the text-picture relationship is the characterising feature of picturebooks which, consequently, are based "on the combination of two levels of communication, the visual and the verbal."[75] In picturebooks the overall meaning of the book is delivered by text and images working in unison and, as noticed by Nodelman, "it is the unique rhythm of pictures and words working together that distinguishes picture books from all other forms of both visual and verbal art."[76]

The uniqueness of picturebooks, that is to say the coexistence of text and images, of a verbal and a visual element, is also the source of their complexity, because it implies a duality which often makes their analysis though and confusing. As stated by David Lewis, in fact,

> there is still a good deal of disagreement over how we might best understand the picturebook. There has long been a broad consensus about the basic characteristics of the form, its combining of two distinct modes of representation – pictures and words – into a composite text, but it is precisely this doubleness, this two-sided quality, which has led to much confusion and disagreement.[77]

---

[73] Nikolajeva, Maria, "The Verbal and the Visual: The Picturebook as a Medium", in Sell, Roger D., ed., *Children's Literature as Communication: The ChiLPA project*, Amsterdam/Philadelphia, John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2001, pp. 84-108, p. 88.

[74] *Ibid.*

[75] Nikolajeva, Maria, Scott, Carole, *How Picturebooks Work*, New York, Routledge, 2006, p. 1.

[76] Nodelman, Perry, *Words about Pictures*, cit., p. 276.

[77] Lewis, David, *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks: Picturing Text*, cit., p. xiii.

1.2.2 Structure: The Interaction between Words and Images

The text-picture interaction is a distinguishing feature of picturebooks, primarily as it creates a specific tension between the verbal and the visual pole which is impossible to find in any other kind of books. Barbara Bader defines this tension "the drama of the turning of the page."[78]

When we read a story told only in words, we are eager to know its ending and this incites us to go on reading. However, things change when in a book there are also pictures. Images, in fact, require our attention, 'force' us to stop reading to look at them, but, at the same time, words make the opposite demand. As explained by Nodelman,

> Even after we do know what happens next – even after we have read a story once – our pleasure in it will be in its unity, in the way it makes one moment lead naturally and inevitably into the next. Our pleasure in that integration is interrupted by our pleasure in the pictures, and our pleasure in those pictures is interrupted by our need to go on and complete the story. The frustration, then, is in the opposition of these two demands, demands that are inherent in the basic differences between these two different means of communication.[79]

Nodelman compares the pictures in picturebooks to the descriptive passages in novels. According to him, they have the same function, that is to say to give us information we need to know at exactly that precise moment. Like descriptive passages, pictures interrupt the flow of time of the story, thus creating a sort of double timing:

> [...] the time in which picture books communicate a story is different from the time of their events. First we spend time absorbing information from a fixed image that depicts the characters in stopped time, then events take place in the words of the

---

[78] Bader, Barbara, *American Picture Books from Noah's Ark to the Beast Within*, New York, Macmillan, 1976, p. 1.

[79] Nodelman, Perry, *Words about Pictures*, cit., pp. 245-246.

story, and then we continue to move through time as readers and viewers as we absorb the information about the characters in stopped time in the next picture.[80]

This double timing can be frustrating, but it is also exciting and we must remember that pictures are always an integral part of a picturebook, even if they stop the action, because we could not perceive the story as a whole without them. In "How Picture Books Work: A Semiotically Framed Theory of Text-Picture Relationships", Lawrence R. Sipe analyses the consequences of the tension between words and images:

> This tension results in the impulse to be recursive and reflexive in our reading of a picture book: to go backward and forward in order to relate an illustration to the one before or after it, and to relate the text on one page to an illustration on previous or successive page; or to understand new ways in which the combination of the text and picture on one page relate to preceding or succeeding pages.[81]

For this reason, according to Sipe, picturebooks require a continuous rereading to "perceive all the possible meanings of the text, all the possible meanings of the pictures, or all the possible meanings of the text-picture relationships."[82] It could be noteworthy to remark that the developments undergone by picturebooks, and discussed in the previous paragraph, have strongly influenced the presence of this tension because they have allowed a lot of creative freedom. Consequently the birth of modern picturebooks could be seen as fostered by those technical improvements. With regard to this issue, David Lewis makes reference to the metaphor of weaving. He says that a text is

> something woven together, a cohesive patterning of inter-related strands that adds up to more than a mere accumulation of individual parts. For this interweaving to proceed, however, we need to have the images and the words displayed before us in fairly close proximity to each other. It is not much use if the two strands – the weft and the warp, so to speak – are on different pages or are so far apart that they

---

[80] Nodelman, Perry, *Words about Pictures*, cit., p. 247.
[81] Sipe, Lawrence R., "How Picture Books Work: A Semiotically Framed Theory of Text-Picture Relationships", in *Children's Literature in Education*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 1998, pp. 97-108, p.101.
[82] *Ibid.*

cannot be brought together in the act of reading. If the words are on one set of pages and the pictures elsewhere in the book, as it frequently the case in longer texts and illustrated novels, then it becomes difficult for the two forms of representation to enter into the construction of the story together.[83]

While Sipe uses the term synergy[84] to describe the text-picture relationship in a picturebook, David Lewis employs the word "interanimation" and suggests to study this interaction by applying to picturebooks the concept of ecology. Actually ecology is "the branch of biology that deals with the relationships between living organisms and their environment".[85] Nevertheless ecological studies are sometimes applied metaphorically within the area of other disciplines. Lewis thinks that, when comparing picturebooks to a miniature ecosystem, it is easier to understand the interanimation between words and images assuming they embody the flexibility and the complexity which characterise ecosystems. As far as the interanimation is concerned, we can say that "the words come to life in the context, the environment, of the pictures and vice versa."[86] As in the natural world the relationship between an organism and its environment is not fixed but changes continuously according to the circumstances, so does the word-picture interaction in a picturebook which, consequently, has a very flexible structure. Moreover, considering the picturebook as an ecosystem implies the total recognition of its complexity because systems are by definition multiple and organised.[87] It could be added that as ecosystems picturebooks affect rather than simply inspire. As observed by Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, in fact,

> Affect arises in the midst of *in-between-ness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon.
> Affect is an impingement or extrusion of a momentary or sometimes more sustained

---

[83] Lewis, David, *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks: Picturing Text*, cit., p. 33.

[84] Sipe adopts the definition of synergy of the *Shorter English Dictionary*: "the production of two or more agents, substances, etc., of a combined effect greater than the sum of their separate effects." Sipe, Lawrence R., "How Picture Books Work: A Semiotically Framed Theory of Text-Picture Relationships", in *Children's Literature in Education*, cit., p. 98.

[85] "ecology, n.". OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.proslib.unimi.it/view/Entry/59380?redirectedFrom=ecology. (accessed February 28, 2014).

[86] Lewis, David, *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks: Picturing Text*, cit., p. 48.

[87] *Ibid.*, pp. 48-54.

state of relation as well as the passage (and the duration of passage) of forces or intensities.[88]

Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott examine the word-image relationship from a semiotic point of view. Combining the visual and the verbal level of communication, picturebooks convey messages through iconic and conventional signs. "Iconic, or representational, signs are those in which the signifier and the signified are related by common qualities; that is where the sign is a direct representation of its signified."[89] By contrast, conventional signs do not have a direct relationship with the object signified because they

> are based on an agreement among the bearers of a particular language, both the
> spoken language and communications, such as gestures, dress code, or emblems. For
> anyone outside the given community, conventional signs do not carry any meaning,
> or, at best, the meaning is ambivalent.[90]

In picturebooks, pictures are iconic signs and their function is to describe or represent, while words are conventional signs whose function is primarily to narrate. The unlimited possibilities of interaction between words and images depend on the tension between these two functions. At the extremes of the spectrum of the word-picture dynamic we find a text without pictures and a wordless picturebook. In between it is possible to identify several ways in which picturebooks can communicate with readers.

> In *symmetrical* interaction, for instance, words and pictures basically tell the same
> story, repeating what is essentially the same information in two different forms of
> communication. By contrast, when words and pictures fill each other's gaps and thus
> compensate for each other's insufficiencies, the dynamic becomes *complementary*. In
> *enhancing* interaction, pictures substantially amplify the meaning of the words, or
> occasionally the words expand the picture, so that different information in the two

---

[88] Seigworth, Gregory J., Gregg, Melissa, (eds.), *The Affect Theory Reader*, Durham, Duke University Press, 2010, p. 1.
[89] Nikolajeva, Maria, Scott, Carole, *How Picturebooks Work*, cit, p. 1.
[90] *Ibid.*

modes of communication produces a more complex dynamic. Depending on the degree of different information presented a *counterpointing* dynamic [91] can also develop, where words and images collaborate to communicate meanings beyond the scope of either mode alone. An extreme form of counterpoint, finally, is apparently *contradictory* interaction, where words and pictures create an interesting but often ambiguous imbalance in meaning,[92] so challenging readers to mediate between the words and pictures in order to establish a full understanding of what is being presented.[93]

Coming to a conclusion, we can say that "picture books are 'written' with pictures as much as they are written with words"[94] and their role is particularly relevant, especially in a society in which visual culture "is not just a part of your everyday life, it *is* your everyday life".[95] Having identified and analysed the characterising feature of picturebooks, I shall try to answer our opening question, "what is the use of a picturebook?"

1.3 What Is the Use of Picturebooks?: Literacy, Visual Literacy and "the Literacy of the Imagination"[96]

According to the editors of the *NACL*, the uniqueness of picturebooks makes them not only complex, but also paradoxical, because

> They seem to be immediately accessible to – and suitable for – young, inexperienced, and preliterate readers, yet understanding a picture requires a very extensive set of decoding, and interpretive skills. Picture have a "visual vocabulary"

---

[91] For a detailed description of the all the varieties of counterpoint identified by Nikolajeva and Scott see Nikolajeva, Maria, Scott, Carole, *How Picturebooks Work*, cit, pp. 24-26.

[92] Nodelman expresses a similar concept when he speaks about ironic relationship, in which "the words tell us what the pictures do no show, and the pictures show us what the words do not tell." Nodelman, Perry, *Words about Pictures*, cit., p. 222.

[93] Nikolajeva, Maria, "The Verbal and the Visual: The Picturebook as a Medium", in Sell, Roger D., ed., *Children's Literature as Communication*, cit., p. 88.

[94] Shulevitz, Uri, *Writing with Pictures: How to Write and Illustrate Children's Books*, New York, Watson-Guptill Publications, 1985, p. 16.

[95] Mirzoeff, Nicholas, ed., *The Visual Culture Reader*, London, Routledge, 1998, p. 3.

[96] This expression is taken from Ross Johnston, Rosemary, "The Literacy of the Imagination", in *Bookbird*, Vol. 38, Iss. 1, 2000, pp. 25-30.

and a grammar every bit as complex as that governing the use of words, and we have
to learn the implications of space, perspective, size, positioning, relationships, and
lighting, as well as conventions of action line, speech bubbles, and so on.[97]

Why inserting pictures in a book, then? One of the most obvious answers is
that parents and educators generally believe that children, especially very young children,
respond more readily to images than to words. Actually, there is no psychological or
pedagogical evidence at the basis of this opinion. Some pedagogists and psychologists
have even shown that pictures can be pedagogically counterproductive because they
interfere with the acquisition of reading responses.[98] In effect, even if it would be possible
for children to enjoy listening to and reading books without illustrations, this rarely
happens. Since Comenius's *Orbis Sensualium Pictus* onwards, pictures have always been
considered necessary to children's learning and to their acquisition of reading skills.
Comenius can be somewhat seen as the forerunner of the idea that pictures are useful to
develop literacy, especially visual literacy. To better explain this concept it may be useful
to make some remarks about the importance of reading and the notion of literacy.

In 1987 the U.S. Department of Education published the second edition of the
report *What Works: Research about Teaching and Learning*. The report was part of a research
carried in the 1980s by the U.S. government in order to verify and demonstrate what the
great majority of teachers and parents had already suspected, that is to say the importance
of reading to children. The results of the research proved that "reading to a child will
inspire a child to read."[99] As a consequence, we can say that children's literature is a
powerful form of communication because

Children, like adults, relate to books that give both meaning to their lives and
understanding to their daily predicaments. Children eagerly seek out what helps
them understand their world, and a good book can do just that. [...] A good book

---

[97] Avery, G., Hunt, P., Paul, L., Vallone, L., Zipes, J., eds., *NACL*, cit, p. 1051.
[98] See for example Samuels S. Jay, "Attentional Process in Reading: The Effect of Pictures on the Acquisition of Reading Responses", in *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 58.6, 1967, pp. 337-342.
[99] Nuba, Hanna, Lovitky Sheiman, Deborah, Searson, Michael, eds., *Children's Literature: Developing Good Readers*, New York & London, Garland Publishing, 1999, p. 3.

provides a child the opportunity to relate to a situation, express what they think and
feel, and open a new window to the world in which they live.[100]

The sooner children get in touch with the spoken word, written language, books and stories, the better they acquire those skills that will lead them to early reading and consequently to literacy.

In the *Oxford English Dictionary* literacy is defined as "the quality, condition, or state of being literate; the ability to read and write."[101] The word comes from the Latin *littera*, a term which indicated the letter "L" of the alphabet. This is not a coincidence because in the past learning to read began with the alphabet. In the late nineteenth century the word denoted the achievement and possession of general and necessary skills. In the mid-twentieth century there was a change in the concept of literacy, which aimed at stressing primarily the importance of the process of learning to read.[102] Nowadays the traditional concept of literacy has so widened that it is more appropriate to speak of multiple literacies. The development of new technologies and new media, in fact, has led to the birth of new literacies which involve different skills and new ways of reading the world. If we agree the idea that we live in a visual age, and that our world is increasingly visual,[103] then it is easy to see that among the new literacies, visual literacy plays an important role. James Elkins affirms that visual literacy is based on the notion that pictures have syntax and grammar as well as words. He defines visual literacy as "the capacity to identify images and to parse them according to the ways they refer to the world."[104] Maria Nikolajeva notices that visual literacy is often neglected: while verbal literacy is usually trained, visual literacy is generally considered as coming natural to the child. Actually this is not true because visual literacy implies the acquisition of a number of elementary skills. Among them the understanding of the connection between signifier and signified and the notion of the difference between two-dimensional and three-

---

[100] Nuba, Hanna, Lovitky Sheiman, Deborah, Searson, Michael, eds., *Children's Literature: Developing Good Readers*, cit., pp. 8-9.

[101] "literacy, n.". OED Online. September 2013. Oxford University Press. http://www.oed.com.proslib.unimi.it/view/Entry/109054?redirectedFrom=literacy. (accessed February 28, 2014).

[102] Paul, Lissa, "Literacy", in Nel, P., Paul, L., eds., *Keywords for Children's Literature*, cit., pp. 141-145.

[103] Salisbury, Martin, Styles, Morag, *Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling*, cit, p. 77.

[104] Elkins, James, *Visual Studies: A Skeptical Introduction*, New York & London, Routledge, 2003, p. 137.

dimensional world, required to approach images.[105] With regard to this topic, Martin Salisbury and Morag Styles state:

> Our view is that in this increasingly visual world it is essential that children learn the skills of looking, appreciating and interpreting visual material, including its design. This is something most children do quite naturally at an early age as they are drawn to pictures, colour and form, but this instinct can be enhanced by enlightened teaching and by learning how to analyse visual texts insightfully. [...] Picturebooks seamlessly provide lessons in looking at, and evaluating, visual texts.[106]

As a consequence, picturebooks are useful because they guide children in the discovery, exploration and understanding of the world they live in. They also allow children to develop what Rosemary Ross Johnston calls "the literacy of the imagination" which is central to the process and practice of literacy, in all its forms. Johnston states that "the essence of the imagination is the ability to visualize, to make pictures in the mind." Picturebooks help the development of the literacy of the imagination because, when reading them, children have to fill in the gaps.[107] In picturebooks, in fact, "the verbal text has its gaps, and the visual text has its own gaps. Words and images can fill each other's gaps, wholly or partially. But they can also leave gaps for the reader/viewer to fill."[108] Therefore, when reading a picturebook, the reader not only fills the gap in the verbal text with the information from the illustration and vice versa, but also has the opportunity to create new meanings and new worlds. Picturebooks, like literature in general, are therefore characterised by an imaginative activity because, even if they present ready-made images, these images are discontinuous and enable a number of possible meanings and interpretations. It is in the nature of picturebooks, characterised by an interaction

---

[105] Nikolajeva, Maria, "Interpretative Codes and Implied Readers of Children's Picturebooks", in Colomer, Teresa, Kümmerling-Meibauer, Bettina, Silva-Díaz, Cecilia, *New Directions in Picturebook Research*, New York & London, Routledge, 2010, pp. 27-40, pp. 27-28.

[106] Salisbury, Martin, Styles, Morag, *Children's Picturebooks: The Art of Visual Storytelling*, cit, p. 77.

[107] The concept of textual gaps belongs to the theory of the aesthetic response which analyses the act of reading in terms of reader-text relationship. The reader is seen as a co-creator of the work because he takes part in the production of the textual meaning. Each text, in fact, has some gaps or blanks in which the meaning is not written but only implied. The reader fills in these gaps. For more information about the theory of the aesthetic response see also Iser, Wolfgang, *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Baltimore, The John Hopkins University Press, 1978.

[108] Nikolajeva, Maria, Scott, Carole, *How Picturebooks Work*, cit., p. 2.

between text and images to stimulate and activate imagination. Actually the editors of the *NACL* state, on the contrary, that picturebooks limit the imagination of the reader because "rather than having to produce an image for themselves, readers are often given images, which they may or may not understand, or which may or (more probably) may not match the images."[109] Rosemary Ross Johnston, instead, is convinced that only new media such as television, video games and the Internet are characterised by imaginative passivity because they do not nurture the imagination. They do not allow the "picturing to oneself" attitude because they provide children with ready-made images. The only kind of interaction between children and the new media is when they pretend that the given images are real.[110]

Tracing the history of picturebooks, it seems evident that, despite the development of new media and technologies, the children's book market is expanding and children's literature and the new media seem to undergo a process of hybridization. The new media take books into new areas and vice versa. As observed by Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin, this is due to the fact that no medium works in isolation from other media. "What is new about new media comes from the particular ways in which they refashion older media and the ways in which older media refashion themselves to answer the challenges of new media."[111] Bolter and Grusin define this process as remediation.

In this investigation I shall analyse the works of Tim Burton both as an illustrator and as a film director. I shall take into consideration the picturebooks he has written and illustrated, and the adaptations of some classics of children's literature he has realised for the big screen. My aim is to show that Burton's work could be considered a remediation of traditional grotesque and gothic illustrations and that his movies face the fundamental challenge of endowing with a lively active imaginative substance an activity — that of the movie/film viewer — traditionally described as passive or unimaginative.

---

[109] Avery, G., Hunt, P., Paul, L., Vallone, L., Zipes, J., eds., *NACL*, cit, p. 1051.

[110] Ross Johnston, Rosemary, "The Literacy of the Imagination", in *Bookbird*, cit., pp. 26-27.

[111] Bolter, Jay David, Grusin, Richard, *Remediation: Understanding New Media*, Cambridge (MA) & London, The MIT Press, 2000, p. 15.