
Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer (Ed.)

The Routledge Companion to Picturebooks

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Handbooks and companions sit happily between the dictionary and the encyclopedia, they target the academic library market (most evident in their high price range) and are of use to academics, researchers and postgraduate students. They are described as ‘concise and accessible guides to emerging research fields in core humanities subjects [aiming] to map the parameters of a discipline or sub-discipline and present the “state of the art” in terms of research’ (Bloomsbury website). Having a handbook or a companion associated with a particular field denotes recognition of relevance to an academic community and for picturebook scholarship, a field which emerged in the 1970s, this is an important milestone. Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, has brought together what the back-cover blurb describes as ‘the ultimate guide to picturebooks’ and ‘the first to focus solely on picturebook research’. Taking an interdisciplinary approach, the 48 chapters in just over 500 pages provide readers with a very clear survey of the history and development of this very specific field. The depth and extent of the volume is impossible to do justice to in this short review, but I shall attempt to provide an overview with comments on the relevance of some chapters in particular for English language education and its associated contexts.

Kümmerling-Meibauer’s short but clear introduction sets the scene. She presents the picturebook, its spelling and peculiarities, emphasizing the complex relationship between the text and images which make cognitive, linguistic and aesthetic demands on a reader. She cleverly makes her point by analysing the apparently simple cover image – taken from an avant-garde German picturebook of 1923 – leading us to recognize the ‘artistic, historical, political, inter pictorial and cultural references that open up new ways of looking at the history and theory of the picturebook’ (p. 3). She presents picturebook research as an

international and interdisciplinary field, discussing the range of perspectives and tendencies which have led picturebook research to becoming a distinct field within children's literature. For anyone not familiar with the world of picturebooks, this is an invaluable introduction.

The remaining chapters of the companion are brought together in five parts.

Part I looks at the major 'Concepts and topics' of research discussed thus far in relation to how picturebooks work – 14 chapters in all. One thing that surprised me, in a positive way, about some of these chapters was the unexpected content in relation to the titles. An example being Kerry Mallan's opening chapter, 'Author-illustrator' – she considers the complexity of authorship following notions of 'author God' by Barthes and 'author-function' by Foucault, and relating this to author-illustrator promotions and branding – a stance I had not expected, but fascinating none-the-less. This first part then includes chapters on the material aspects of the picturebook, i.e. paratext, layout, montage and collage as well as the theoretical concept itself, on topics such as hybridity, interpicturebook, metafiction, and seriality. This latter chapter, by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, outlines an apparently new research area and leaves many questions unanswered, opening doors for future research directions. Chapters related to gender issues, emotions, canon processes and ideology were also in this part. A truly enlightening beginning, with opportunities to move back and forth and make connections. I found myself reading Erica Hateley's suggestions that Maurice Sendak be 'the canonical picturebook creator' (p. 133) and returning to cross-check Beatriz H. Cabo and colleagues' Figure in their chapter on 'Interpicturebook in picturebooks' of how Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* is a model for other picturebooks and movie characters (p. 91). I did this many a time as I read through the chapters, discovering what Kümmerling-Meibauer describes as 'implicit dialogues between the chapters even though the contributors do not address each other explicitly' (p. 5).

Part II presents 'Picturebook categories', covering a variety of the possibilities the picturebook form accommodates – I use 'form' rather than genre after Lewis (2001, p. 65). Here we are introduced to early-concept and concept books, *Wimmelbooks*, ABC books, pop-up and moveable books, as well as wordless, informational and digital picturebooks, and poetry in picturebooks. This section is fascinating, and I particularly enjoyed the chapter on 'Wordless picturebooks' by Emma Bosch, who has written widely in this area of

picturebook research. She still managed to surprise me with her proposal that wordless picturebooks are a ‘multitude of genres’ (p. 197) following a categorization which distinguishes between the dual functions of showing and telling. Additionally, there are chapters on postmodern picturebooks, crossover picturebooks and picturebooks for adults. The former two chapters outlining a fairly developed area within picturebook research, but the latter, by Åse Marie Ommundsen, presents a picturebook category which is new to the market (p. 229) and brings together the scarce literature, mostly in languages other than English, on the topic. Finally, this section also includes a chapter on ‘Multilingual picturebooks’ by Nancy Hadaway and Terrel Young, which will be of particular interest to the readers of the *Children’s Literature in English Language Education*. The section on the potential of multilingual picturebooks is very useful, as is the summary of the different formats that these picturebooks take.

Part III covers ‘Interfaces’, a section with five chapters that considers the research on picturebooks and their related forms, i.e. illustrated books, artists books, photography, comics and film (referred to as movies). All these chapters provide an insight into how the picturebook has evolved and been inspired by these earlier traditions. I would like to mention ‘Picturebooks and illustrated books’ by Elisabeth Bird and Junko Yokota, which provides a very detailed account of what the illustrated book is, purporting that ‘the picturebook is a subset within the broader category of illustrated books’ (p. 281). Bird and Yokota expound, after Salisbury and Styles, that a picturebook is defined by ‘its particular use of sequential imagery, usually in tandem with a small number of words, to convey meaning’ (2012, p. 5). ‘Picturebooks and movies’ by Tobias Kurwinkel, presents a fascinating description of intermediality and in particular ‘filmic writing’, when picturebook authors and illustrators ‘evoke or imitate cinematic techniques by relying on their own means of expression’ (p. 327).

Part IV, ‘Domains’, contains 13 chapters that report research into the various theoretical frameworks and disciplines of picturebook research, i.e. the education of picturebook-makers, representations of childhood, literary studies, developmental psychology, cognitive studies, linguistics, narratology, media studies, and translation. In addition, there is a chapter on multimodal analysis by Clare Painter, whose research into

using a systemic functional framework is fairly well known (see Painter, Martin and Unsworth, 2013) and chapters on art history and picture theory complete this section. All chapters provide relevant information for any researcher or scholar wanting to complement their understanding in these fields. Of particular interest for ELT is the chapter on 'Picturebooks and literary studies', by Evelyn Arizpe, Jennifer Farrar and Julie McAdam, who take a broad view of literacy and refer to emergent, visual, digital, media and critical literacies. They describe the mutual benefits between literacy studies and picturebook studies and highlight that knowing how picturebooks work, and how these books create meaning will lead to 'confident educators, mediators and other professionals who can critically select texts that develop "literacies" required for the twenty-first-century life' (p. 377).

Part V, the final part of the companion, is a section on 'Adaptations and remediation'. Here four chapters focus on adaptations of fairy tales, adaptations of world literature, film versions and merchandising and franchising. In the chapter on fairy tales, Vanessa Joosen, describes picturebooks as being either 'duplicates' – reinforcing the traditional versions of a fairy tale – or 'rewritings', where the 'authors and illustrators play intertextual games with [...] plots and generic conventions' (p. 476). Perhaps, there is not enough attention paid to this distinction and its affordances in ELT and as such, readers may be prompted to reconsider certain picturebook categories and how they are used in language education.

I began this review with a definition of what a handbook or companion actually is, and when I first received this book, I used it very much like an encyclopedia, as a place to go if I needed a reference to support something I was writing about. My initial perusals took me to 'Paratexts in picturebooks' by Sylvia Pantaleo, where I confirmed what I already knew, but added a reference to my repertoire. Then 'Wordless picturebooks' by Emma Bosch, where I learned quite a bit more about this category of picturebook. Certain other chapters I have read to go deeper into something I knew little about, such as 'Art history and the picturebook' by Marilyn Olson, or to read about something quite new to me, like 'Picturebooks and narratology' by Smiljana Narančić Kovač. There are chapters I still need to return to and reread more closely and others whose significance I will only realize later in my career as a picturebook researcher. This is the magic of such a wide, far-reaching collection of chapters.

Kümmerling-Meibauer suggests that ‘picturebooks have become an indispensable part of our modern society’ (p. 7), and as such picturebook research is a fast-growing discipline with many directions in which to go, but one thing is clear, this compendium contributes to clearly mapping this fascinating field. There is just one path I would have suggested Kümmerling-Meibauer include a chapter on: global and multicultural picturebooks, that is ‘picturebooks set in a global context outside of a reader’s own location’ (Short, Day, & Schroeder, 2016, p. 5). This, in my view, would include picturebooks about marginalized and underrepresented groups, and in particular refugee migrant narratives. For another edition, maybe?

This *Routledge Companion to Picturebooks* may be somewhat expensive to purchase for our personal shelves but is more than worthy of a recommendation to your institutional librarian; it will become an important starting point for any research into picturebooks undertaken by post-graduates and scholars alike.

References

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