

## Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer

University of Tübingen

bettina.kuemmerling-meibauer@uni-tuebingen.de

## Childhood and Modernist Art

*Izvorni znanstveni rad / original research paper*

*Primljeno / received 05. 06. 2013.*

**L**  
ibri  
&  
iberi

*This paper focuses on exhibitions of children's books held in Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands from the turn of the 20th century. These exhibitions displayed children's books, toys, and mural posters created by renowned artists who were inspired by modernist art movements. It is argued that these exhibitions and the accompanying discussions had a great effect in changing attitudes towards children's literature and children's culture. Many artists and pedagogues, belonging to the British Arts & Craft Movement, the German and Austrian "Kunsterziehungsbewegung", and the Dutch "Kunst aan het Volk", emphasized the importance of early art education on the child's developing sense of aesthetic perception. These efforts undoubtedly paved the way for the emergence of Avant-garde children's books in the 1920s and 1930s.*

**Keywords:** *Avant-garde, children's culture, children's drawing, exhibition, modernism*

## Introduction

Nowadays it is common practice to exhibit children's books and picturebooks in libraries and museums, not to mention the increasing interest in the foundations of special museums devoted to the collection, exhibition, and archiving of historical and modern children's literature. Prominent examples are the International Youth Library in Munich, the picturebook museum "Burg Wissem" in Troisdorf, Germany, the Eric Carle Museum of Picture Book Art in Amherst, USA, and the Picturebook Museum in Iwaki City, Japan. Besides these museums, libraries, book conventions, and academic institutions consecrate themselves to the exposition of children's books in different contexts. Considering this accretive interest, one has to bear in

mind that the idea to publicly showcase children's books in exhibitions is relatively modern and actually emerged at the turn of the twentieth century. Surprisingly, there is scant research on this topic as of yet, although it is definitely connected with an essential change of the conception of childhood. In any case, the analysis of children's book exhibitions in the first decades of the twentieth century might certainly give an insight into the development of children's culture during this time period that was characterized by a seminal shift in the acknowledgment of childhood and art for children in several respects. Hence, this article looks into the reasons for the increasing interest in exhibitions of children's books on the one hand, and the conception and variable receptions of some of these exhibitions on the other hand. However, the idea to exhibit children's books did not come out of left field, but was strongly connected with a changing attitude towards children's upbringing, education at school, and estimation of children's literature at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century.

In this regard, the year 1900 presents a benchmark for European children's literature and the changing attitudes towards the public representations of children's books. To begin with, that year (i.e. 1900) saw the publication of Ellen Key's seminal monograph *Barnets århundrade (The Century of the Child)* which first appeared in English in 1909. Translated into several European languages, Key's manifesto foresees a new world order which allows children all over the world to live in peace together and which fosters children's abilities and interests. Driven by an optimistic perspective and the prospect to revise traditional educational concepts, Key propagated a new image of childhood that goes back to the pedagogical ideas of Heinrich Pestalozzi and Friedrich Froebel. In addition, similar to the claims of educational reform movements in Germany, the Netherlands, Switzerland, and the United Kingdom, Key demanded the publication of aesthetically demanding children's books. Thus, Key became the mouthpiece of an increasing number of educationalists, artists and authors who advocated a new era which could be characterized by tolerance, peace, and mutual understanding. To achieve this, reform pedagogues requested the reflection of novel topics in children's literature that should present an opposing model to the patriotic and nationalist overtones that characterized a vast group of books for children. Key's ideals particularly influenced the German reform movement "Jugendschriftenbewegung", founded by Heinrich Wolgast in the 1890s, and the British Fabian Society, among whose members was the renowned children's book author Edith Nesbit. Key was also a founding member of the so-called "Stockholm circle" that assembled leading Swedish authors, literary critics, and educationalists. Among them were Laura Fitinghoff and Selma Lagerlöf, who were stimulated by the lively debate on the significance of children's books for the child's mental and aesthetic maturation

to write children's books themselves (Kåreland 1977). Fitinghoff's *Barnen ifrån Frostmoffället* [The Children of the Frostmoor] (1907) and Lagerlöf's *Nils Holgerssons underbara resa genom Sverige* [The Wonderful Adventures of Nils Holgersson] (1906/07) motivated a renewal in Swedish literature for children and are now regarded as international children's classics (Kümmerling-Meibauer 1999: 350-354; 591-594).

The ideals of reform pedagogy turned into a highly topical issue in Scandinavia as well as in Germany and other West European countries. The promulgated framework of the child's natural development finally led to the concept "vom Kinde aus", that is, focusing on the child's perspective and interest. This prominent aspect found its way into contemporary picturebooks as well. In this respect, the German picturebook *Fitzebutze* (1900), with poems by the couple Paula and Richard Dehmel, and illustrations by Swiss artist Ernst Kreidolf, played an important role. Published the same year as Key's book, *Fitzebutze* achieved wide acclaim as the first German children's book which was evidently influenced by modernist art on the one hand, and by reform pedagogy on the other hand. Although some conservative critics complained about the colloquial speech adapted in the poems and the awkward proportions and unusual colour scheme in the illustrations, other influential coevals recognized the innovative traits of poems and pictures.<sup>1</sup> The overarching concept of this picturebook consisted in rendering an authentic image of children's world views and imaginative plays. In order to achieve this goal, Paula and Richard Dehmel strove to reproduce the typical language of very young children, including their mispronunciation and restricted grammar. This is already evident in the eponymous poem, which focuses on the relationship between a little girl called Detta and her favourite doll Fitzebutze. Since she is not able to correctly pronounce the proper name "Vitzliputzli" (name of an Aztec god), she changes it to Fitzebutze. While the poem consists of the girl's unidirectional address towards her doll, the illustrations do not show her at all, but focus on the strange-looking doll, which is distinguished by an ugly face, a beard, an oblong body with dangling arms and legs, a huge black hat, and a yellow dress (**Fig. 1**).

Ernst Kreidolf's lavishly coloured watercolour illustrations apparently show the artist's withdrawal from the decorative and Biedermeier-like style of children's book illustration that was predominant until the end of the nineteenth century. The illustrator's commitment to a reduced stylization of figures and objects and the omission of detailed settings in favour of a negative space are obviously borrowed from modernist paintings. Other German book illustrators, such as Karl Ferdinand Edmund von Freyhold, Josua Leander Gampp, and Karl Hofer, eagerly took up

<sup>1</sup> The best overview of the controversy among critics and educationalists on the stylistic, linguistic, and artistic value of this picturebook is given in Stark (2000: 93ff.).

## Wie Fitzebutze einen neuen Hut kriegen soll.

Lieber, schöner Hampelmann!  
 sing nun Detta wieder an;  
 sieh doch endlich manchmal her!  
 freust du dich denn dar nicht sehr?  
 du?

Du! mein kleiner lieber Dott!  
 mucke doch nicht immer so!  
 henkst du mir denn teinen Tusch,  
 wenn man so viel beten muß?  
 nein? —

Nein, der böse Ditzlibock  
 saß so steif wie'n Fliegenstock,  
 sah nur immer starr und stumm  
 nach dem alten Hut sich um;  
 oh.

Oh, sprach Detta, sei doch dul!  
 willst du einen neuen Hut?  
 Klinglingling: wer b'ingt das Band?  
 Ebnigin aus Mohnenland!  
 tnick's!



**Fig. 1** *Illustration by Ernst Kreidolf, published in Paula and Richard Dehmel: Fitzebutze. (1900).\**

**Sl. 1.** *Ilustracija Ernsta Kreidolfa, objavljena u slikovnici Paule i Richarda Dehmela: Fitzebutze. (1900).\**

\* All the images in this paper come from books that were published before 1923, so that they are not affected by copyright laws. The images can be seen in colour in the electronic version of this issue. To view all the images in full resolution please visit <[www.librietliberi.org](http://www.librietliberi.org)>.

Kreidolf's major achievements, thus enticing the first modern wave in German children's book illustration that had its peak in the first decade of the twentieth century.

Yet Ernst Kreidolf was not the only artist that had a huge impact on picturebook illustration at the turn of the century. Surprisingly, the American artist William Nicholson received a gold medal for a series of woodcuts that he created for the picturebook *The Square Book of Animals* (1899), at the world exposition in Paris in 1900. It is the first time that picturebook illustrations were awarded at a world exhibition, and this achievement evidently proved the increasing estimation of children's book illustration in the art world (Olson 2012). Another important case in point is the eighth exhibition of the Viennese "Secession" in 1900, where a selection of picturebooks created by Walter Crane and Maurice Boutet de Monvel were on show.<sup>2</sup> While Crane was mainly inspired by the British Art & Craft Movement, Boutet de Monvel's artistic achievements showed the influence of French Art Deco. In any case, Crane's and Boutet de Monvel's picturebooks were enthusiastically received by Austrian modernist artists and stimulated the creation of aesthetically demanding picturebooks by Austrian illustrators who constituted the so-called "Wiener Schule" [Viennese School] (Heller 2008: 15).

At the same time, many modernist artists like Marc Chagall, Juan Gris, Wassily Kandinsky, Joan Miró, and Pablo Picasso affirmed a debt to child art in the form of extensive personal reference collections and in their own artistic work. Paul Klee, for instance, collected the drawings of his little son and openly admitted that these drawings were the inspiration sources for his famous paintings. It is no wonder that this increasing interest merged with a shift in the appreciation of children's drawings which were regarded as a reflection of the child's internal state rather than a kind of technical activation and skill. Publications, such as drawing guides for children and monographs dealing with the investigation of children's drawings, and the establishment of drawing classes for talented children at art schools and academies, shaped this accretive interest in different ways (Kelly 2004; Menefee 2012). In this respect, the Austrian art teacher Franz Cizek played a significant part. He was a pioneer in art education and had started to teach drawing to children aged 5 to 10 years in 1897. In his book *Das freie Zeichnen* [Free Drawing] (1925), he propagated that children should learn to draw freely, thus stimulating their imagination. Because of his increasing popularity, Cizek was appointed professor in the Vienna School of Art, and his lessons were granted official status by the Austrian government in 1906 (Bisanz 1985; Laben 2006). Cizek's main goal

---

<sup>2</sup> Walter Crane's artwork and picturebooks had already been shown in a travelling exhibition in Germany in 1894 (Ries 1996: 93).

consisted in stimulating the child's creative power. One of his methods to awaken children's latent and spontaneous artistry consisted in playing background music while the pupils were engaged in their work. The works created in these art classes were frequently shown in exhibitions in Vienna. A selection of the best artworks, drawings, book illustrations, cards, and mural posters travelled through Europe and the USA from 1920 to 1928, attesting the increasing interest in child's art (Heller 2008).

In addition, young children's scribbles and mark-making were now regarded as prominent forerunners of more distinguished and elaborated pictures, thus these early attempts were considered evidence of the young child's power of imagination. In this regard, the concept of the child's "innocent eye" was a seminal metaphor that cropped up in brochures and articles focusing on the impact of children's drawings on the child's singular world view (Fineberg 1997). Thus, artists, psychologists and educationalists believed that children were able to render an authentic and naïve image of nature in their drawings.

Moreover, modern art found its access to the child facilitated by new educational theories. Otherwise, educational theory considered artistic innovations as an aesthetic language that children should learn, since one of the prominent ideas among the educational reformers was the prospect that an appreciation of art and beauty should be fostered in children. These new ideas had been developed by Maria Montessori who suggested that children should encounter beautiful things in their surroundings, stressing the impact of colour, brightness, and simple forms on the young child's developing aesthetic sense of beauty and harmony. Montessori's educational concepts exerted a great impact on artists who tried to approach the world of the child from scientific and artistic viewpoints. A seminal step in this direction was the "Kunsterziehungsbewegung" [Art Education Movement], founded by Alfred Lichtwark. Lichtwark had been the director of the Kunsthalle at Hamburg since 1886 and aimed at introducing the child to the evaluation of art in a general sense. Influenced by the British Arts & Craft movement and the influential writings by art historian Robert Anning Bells, Lichtwark advocated museum lessons for children, thus promoting their creative, emotional and cognitive development. As Lichtwark conveys in *Übungen in der Betrachtung von Kunstwerken* [Exercises in the Examination of Works of Art] (1900), the child's surroundings, encompassing architecture, furniture, school material, and children's books, should be distinguished by the capacity to foster the child's developing perception of "beauty" and "harmony".

At the same time, Heinrich Wolgast claimed that children's early encounter with picturebooks and illustrated books potentially influenced their appreciation

of literature and art. Wolgast stressed the importance of aesthetically suitable picturebooks and suggested establishing a personal union of teachers, publishers, and artists in order to achieve this goal. Wolgast expressed his thoughts in a small book, *Über Bilderbuch und Illustration* [About Picturebook (!) and Illustration] (1894), which was hardly noticed by scholars working in the realm of children's literature, since they solely focused on Wolgast's notorious and controversially discussed pamphlet *Das Elend unserer Jugendliteratur* [The Calamity of Our Literature for Youth] (1899).

All in all, these diverse efforts led to the request to produce aesthetically demanding artwork for children, including picturebooks, illustrated story books, mural posters, and toys. The notion of "neue Buchkunst für Kinder" (new book art for children) became prominent among ambitious publishers and illustrators, giving rise to the foundation of specific journals, such as the German *Kind und Kunst* [Child and Art] (1904-1906) and the Dutch *Het Kind* [The Child] (1900-1955). These journals were dedicated to the propagation of children's art and the investigation of the impact of art on the child's developing sense of beauty and harmony. Although they were often ephemeral, these journals witness the essential task to take art for and art by children seriously.

### **Three Seminal Exhibitions on Children's Art and Art for Children**

The advent of the new century evidently inspired many artists, authors, publishers, and pedagogues to vigorously demand a novel approach towards children, who were regarded as representatives of the future generation. Since children's literature was considered an important means to support children's aesthetic and mental education, reform pedagogues, teachers, and book authors searched for innovative methods to spread their ideals. While some educationalists and teachers advocated the establishment of libraries devoted to children and their books, others suggested appealing to a broader audience by showcasing children's books accompanied by toys for children in public spaces, such as libraries and museums.

In the following, I will focus on three exhibitions that displayed children's art in combination with art for children, that is, books, mural posters, and toys. These exhibitions were shown in Austria, Germany, and the Netherlands from the turn of the century until the end of the 1910s. Since these exhibitions have not been thoroughly investigated by art historians and children's literature researchers as of yet, and the source material is often poorly accessible, it cannot be established

with certainty how many exhibitions exactly were presented in the first decade of the twentieth century. Just a few were complemented by catalogues that listed the items on show and explained the underlying concepts of the expositions. Despite the deficient availability of relevant sources, the reviews published in journals and magazines and the exhibition catalogues demonstrate that these exhibitions were highly significant, since they presented an array of children's books and toys which were influenced by modernist and Avant-garde movements.

The first exhibition devoted to children's art and art for children was shown in 1901 in Berlin and circulated in other German and Austrian cities during the course of two years (Brünn 1901, Magdeburg 1901, Leipzig 1902, Wien 1902).<sup>3</sup> As the title of the exhibition and the accompanying catalogue *Die Kunst im Leben des Kindes* [The Art in the Life of Children] already indicates, the focus was on those artworks that were considered relevant for the child. In other words, children's books, mural posters, and toys were on show, but also a selection of children's drawings, created by children aged from 2½ up to 8 years of age. Numerous articles and reviews appeared in newspapers and journals that praised the concept of the exhibition and the chance to get an insight into modern children's book publishing and the toy industry.

This successful exhibition had immediate successors in Germany, but also in the Netherlands, as well as in Austria. In 1906 the society "Kunst aan het Volk" [Art for the Folk]<sup>4</sup> initiated the seminal exhibition "Kind en Kunst" [Art and Child] (1906) that was shown in the Stedelijk museum in Amsterdam (**Fig. 2**). Under the auspices of furniture designer Willem Penaat and architect H.P. Berlage, this exhibition showcased illustrations, mural posters, toys, furniture, original illustrations, and children's books, both from the Netherlands and from abroad.<sup>5</sup> Special focus was given to picturebooks from the UK, especially those influenced by the Arts & Craft Movement. This exhibition travelled to The Hague the same year and was obviously presented in other Dutch cities as well. Another exhibition, "Kind und Kunst" (1908) was presented at the Herzog Rainer Museum für Kunst

<sup>3</sup> An exhibition of mural posters for schools was also presented at the famous cabinet for copperplate engravings in Dresden in 1901.

<sup>4</sup> This society was founded in 1904 and requested that art should be practical and appeal to the folk. Driven by a socialist impetus, Kunst aan het Volk established a library for children in Amsterdam in November 1906 where children from the laboring classes could borrow children's books which were usually not affordable because of the high book prices (de Bodt 2003).

<sup>5</sup> The array of diverse works of art for children, including furniture and toys, evidently illustrates the organizers' exhibition concept, that is, to show that children are aesthetically affected by all things in their surroundings. Consequently, Penaat and Berlage conclude that children should be exposed to beautiful objects from the early years on.





**Fig. 2** Cover of the Dutch exhibition catalogue *Kind en Kunst*. (1906).

**Sl. 2.** *Prednja stranica korica nizozemskoga kataloga izložbe Kind en Kunst*. (1906).

und Gewerbe in Vienna. In the same year, the *Kunst-Schau* (Art Show) in Vienna convincingly presented art for children and art by children. This exhibition, which was organized by an artist group under the auspices of Gustav Klimt, showed the best and most innovative Austrian artwork of that time. Several rooms were dedicated to toys, children's drawings, graphic reproductions, and illustrated books for children, among them Oskar Kokoschka's much-debated *Die träumenden Knaben* [The Dreaming Boys] (1908).

The jubilee exhibition of the "Nederlandse Vereeniging 'Schoonheid in Opvoeding en Onderwijs'" [Dutch Society "Beauty in Education and Teaching"] was presented in The Hague in 1914 with the title "Schoonheid in het leven van het volkskind" [Beauty in the Life of the Folk Child], accompanied by a small catalogue that lists the books, including prices.

In addition, from 1905 art schools and schools of advanced arts in Vienna and other Austrian and German cities started to showcase toys and picturebook illustrations in their annual winter exhibitions in order to convince publishers and customers of the exceptional quality of the artworks. While the picturebooks and drawings in these exhibitions were usually individual copies, the manufactured toys were produced in small numbers. Some of these objects crossed the channel in subsequent years, when they were shown in the UK in travelling exhibitions (Heller 2008). Most of these items are now in private collections or museums; however, some objects from these exhibitions might have been lost forever.

The exhibitions in Berlin (1901), Amsterdam (1906), and The Hague (1914) were documented in catalogues. In contrast to the Berlin and Amsterdam catalogues which included extensive articles written by the organizers and some experts in the realm of children's drawings and art education, the The Hague catalogue did not include comprehensive essays at all. Although these catalogues just consisted of written texts and lists of exhibited books, posters, and toys, it is possible to get an impression of the number and variety of artworks and objects on display. With the notable exception of one children's drawing, printed in the Berlin catalogue, these catalogues do not have illustrations. Interestingly, the drawing in question was created by Prince Friedrich Wilhelm, the later German Emperor Friedrich Wilhelm, as the caption under the illustration stated. However, neither the age of the artist nor the topic of the picture is given. In the picture, which is separated into three sections, two soldiers on horseback and a hunter with a gun and a dog are depicted (**Fig. 3**).

As the foreword by Max Osborn in the Berlin catalogue and the introduction by Ben Wierink<sup>6</sup> in the Amsterdam catalogue make evident, the items on show were subjected to a restrictive selection process. Only those books, posters, and toys were exhibited that met the rigorous criteria established by the organization committee. These criteria not only referred to the printing and material quality of the objects, but also to their aesthetic value, thus serving the purpose to train the senses and the imagination as a counterpoint to the strict training of the mind at school (*Die Kunst im Leben des Kindes*, 1901: 8). In order to reach this goal, Osborn and Wierink demanded a reform of drawing lessons at school. Instead of mechanical drawing instructions both authors favoured the stimulation of the child's artistic and imaginative creativity by choosing adequate child-like topics and by enticing the students to follow their own ideas and inspirations.

---

<sup>6</sup> Ben Wierink was a renowned illustrator and toymaker who illustrated several children's books. Two of his books for children were shown at the exhibition. See de Bodt & Heij (2009).



Kinderzeichnung des Prinzen Friedrich Wilhelm  
späteren Kaiser Friedrich.

81

6

**Fig. 3** *Child drawing by Prince Friedrich Wilhelm printed in the exhibition catalogue Die Kunst im Leben des Kindes (1901: 81).*

**Sl. 3.** *Dječji crtež Princa Friedricha Wilhelma otisnut u izložbenom katalogu Die Kunst im Leben des Kindes (1901: 81).*

This claim was additionally emphasized in the German catalogue that contains an article about the child as artist, written by Otto Feld. Initially, the author regrets the scarce appraisal of children's drawing. As compensation he recommends fostering the child's power of observation in order to instil a sense of form and colour (85). Feld stresses that increasing drawing skills improve the child's capacity to mentally store images of objects and actions. In this respect he suggests that children should be encouraged to meticulously observe their surroundings in order to draw authentic pictures. Therefore, Feld believes that observation, imagination, and memory are closely connected with each other and that this combination enables children to increase their world knowledge and aesthetic sensation in the long run.

In any case, the main aim of the German exhibition was not only to show what already exists, but also what is missing (*Kind und Kunst*, 1901: 16f). The exposition of commendable picturebooks from other countries mostly served the purpose to present models for the national children's book market. In this regard, the catalogue had the further purpose to highlight the essential issues of "good" artwork for children. In order to understand the premises of the assertive notion "good" with respect to children's books, art historian Wilhelm Spohr contributed an article on "Künstlerische Bilderbücher" [Artistic Picturebooks] and listed some properties that should be considered when evaluating illustrated books for children. To achieve a convincing argumentation, Spohr connected aspects that accord with results from child psychology, art theory, and art criticism. When reading his argumentation, it becomes quite clear that Konrad Lange's study *Die künstlerische Erziehung der deutschen Jugend* [The Artistic Education of German Youth] (1893) was Spohr's model. Like Lange, Spohr emphasized that "good" picturebooks should be "*kindgemäß*" (suitable for children). Only those picturebooks that observe the young child's mental, emotional, and aesthetic capacities fall into this category. Therefore, Spohr claimed that the child's preferences for bright colours and strong contours should find their way into contemporary children's book illustration. In addition, he requested that these picturebooks should be childlike, but not childish, and that they should address adults, who function as mediators, as well. What is compelling is that Spohr attempted to describe the vague notion of "beauty" in relation to picturebooks. In this regard, he argued that picturebooks for children should follow certain rules the regularities of which refer to the child's fondness of clear colours, shapes, and contours, which should not be disturbed by purely decorative elements, subtle hues and complex perspectives (see also Lange 1893: 44). Interestingly, Spohr did not use the adjective "beautiful" when describing the effects of such picturebooks, but he applied – in accordance with Lange – the notion "*charakteristisch*" (characteristic) (51). Characteristic are those picturebooks that meet the young child's interests, that is, preferences for simple shapes, primary colours without shades, black contours, flat presentation of surfaces and settings, and the reduction of forms. Regarding these aspects, Spohr comes to the surprising conclusion that these criteria are only fulfilled by contemporary art, thus drawing a direct line from modernist art movements to true picturebook art (53). This assertion is striking, since it apparently shows that the amalgam of contemporary art and modern picturebook illustrations was recognized by artists as well as art historians and many other people working in the realm of publishing for children, education, and academic research.

Interestingly, the Dutch catalogue (1906) emphasizes more or less the same

aspects that emerge in the German catalogue. Ben Wierink (1906: 12) points out that the major intention of the exhibition consists in inculcating a sense of beauty and a longing for harmonious and balanced design. The underlying principles are clearly stated: toys and children's books should be distinguished by a simple and clear design and bright colours with a preference for primary colours, since according to the psychology of perception young children are not able to distinguish subtle nuances of shade. In addition, the organizers claim that toys should meet the demands of children, that is, they should be characterized by purity and constructional simplicity in order to entice the child's imagination and to contribute to the child's pleasure. However, what makes this exhibition exceptional in comparison to the German and Austrian exhibitions, is the organizing principle to directly contrast "good" and "bad" picturebooks in the same room in order to show the public quite plainly the differences between both corpuses. Interestingly, the examples of "bad" picturebooks are not listed in the catalogue that only recommends "good" picturebooks. By checking reviews and newspaper articles, it is possible to get an impression which types of picturebook have been considered "bad". To this group belong those works that are either distinguished by a didactic overtone or by poor printing quality and iniquitous book design. As for the latter aspect, the organizers especially envisaged picturebooks influenced by Biedermeier and the typical style of the Wilhelminian period artists whose illustrations are often overburdened with decorative frames, detailed depictions of settings and an unsatisfying arrangement of pictures and text on the page. In this respect, the organizers showed a preference for picturebooks about nature, animals, and children's play on the one hand, and minimalist and modernist illustrations on the other hand.

Also in this exhibition, the underlying principle consisted in teaching the audience to recognize "artistically valuable" artworks and books, thus maintaining the development of the child's "good" taste. Although the idea that children and adults would perceive the difference between bad and beautiful books simply by seeing the exhibited copies seems to be quite naïve from a distanced perspective, this concept clearly reveals an optimistic worldview.

When comparing the catalogues of the German and Dutch exhibitions and the reviews about the other exhibitions mentioned above, two further aspects come to the fore, namely, a preference for typical genres, such as fairy tales, fables, and poems, and the occurrence of specific illustrators in all exhibitions, for example, Elsa Beskow, Maurice Boutet de Monvel, Rie Cramer, Walter Crane, Kate Greenaway, Ernst Kreidolf, William Nicholson, Sybille von Olfers, and Benjamin Rabier, to name just a few. Moreover, the two Dutch catalogues enumerate illustrators from the Netherlands, such as Nelly Bodenheimer, Theo van Hoytema, Jan Rinke, and

Henriette Willebeek le Mair, whereas the Berlin catalogue mentions German artists like Ernst Kreidolf<sup>7</sup> and Lothar Meggendorfer. For most of the Dutch and German illustrators included, it was the beginning of their career as picturebook artists. These illustrators were and are still held in high esteem among critics, collectors, and researchers, and their major works are nowadays regarded as children's classics. The role of these exhibitions for the initial canonization of picturebooks in general and specific illustrators in particular has not been considered until now, although a thorough analysis of the picturebook selection and the underlying criteria would certainly give an impressive insight into the canon processes within the field of children's literature.<sup>8</sup>

Moreover, the success of these exhibitions also lies in the fact that picturebooks influenced by modernist style became accepted among the general public. Without the efforts of these travelling exhibitions and the close cooperation of engaged publishers, artists, and educationalists, the heyday of Avant-garde children's literature in the 1920s and 1930s would not have taken place. The endeavour of contemporary picturebook authors and illustrators to cross the border between applied picturebook art and highly esteemed autonomous art targeted at an adult audience was fruitful in different respects. Firstly, renowned artists started then to consider picturebook illustration as a profitable and intellectually demanding task and thus created exceptional picturebooks the artistic appeal of which did not fade over the course of time. Secondly, modernist traits, such as minimalist design, clear outline of shapes, reduction of the colour scheme, and distinct typography, cropped up in picturebooks for children and paved the way for the acceptance of Avant-garde techniques and experiments in the realm of children's literature in the 1920s and 1930s. Thirdly, the request of publishers and librarians to create children's books that should be both artistically demanding and reasonably priced led to a broader distribution of these modernist books in libraries, bookshops and domestic homes. In either case, the exhibitions and the attendant circumstances apparently contributed to the establishment of an early picturebook canon which endures until today.

Additionally, when considering these exhibitions, one has to keep in mind that the political and societal climate changed during the first decade of the twentieth century, finally leading to the outbreak of World War I. Unfortunately, children were not excluded from the national and patriotic atmosphere that governed European policy and discharged itself in blunt ideology. Although these changing attitudes

<sup>7</sup> Two titles by Kreidolf are included: *Fitzebutze* (1900) and his debut *Blumenmärchen* (Flower Fairy Tales, 1898).

<sup>8</sup> For historical studies on canon processes in children's literature, see Clark (2003) and Kümmerling-Meibauer (2003).

also touched upon the educational institutions and educational circles focusing on children's literature and culture, there still existed a certain resistance among educationalists, critics, publishers, authors and illustrators, who appealed to the audience to cling to the ideals of reform pedagogy and the thoughts propagated in Ellen Key's seminal work about the century of the child. Considering this, the exhibitions on contemporary children's books from different countries disregarded these patriotic overtones. They not only advocated that just the best artworks are good enough for children, but also pressed for the crossing of national borders and to appreciate the artistic and educational efforts in other countries. The organizers of the German, Austrian, and Dutch exhibitions took it for granted that they would display illustrated children's books and picturebooks from different European and non-European countries in order to demonstrate the increasing artistic quality of picturebooks from France, Italy, the Netherlands, the UK, and even Japan and the USA.<sup>9</sup> Therefore, these exhibitions might be regarded as forerunners of the ambitious projects of international institutions, such as UNESCO, to foster mutual understanding by means of children's books after 1945.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusion

Although the outbreak of the First World War presents a noticeable disruption of these promising endeavours, the intersection of children's culture and modernism did not stop with the war. A reconsideration of the primordial educational ideals of the turn of the century in combination with a flourishing children's book industry started at the beginning of the 1920s.

Artists, belonging to diverse Avant-garde movements, such as Dadaism, Expressionism, Surrealism, and Cubism, turned towards children's literature and culture, and created fascinating works for children, whether picturebooks, toys, clothes or furniture.<sup>11</sup> Especially the Bauhaus that was founded in 1919 at Weimar

---

<sup>9</sup> The catalogue from the exhibition in The Hague includes 83 Dutch and 46 foreign picturebooks and illustrated books.

<sup>10</sup> UNESCO promoted children's book exhibitions in libraries, but also book series for children that focus on the depiction of children's everyday life in different European and Non-European countries. The photo book series by Anna Riwkin-Brick (with texts by Astrid Lindgren), Dominique Darbois and Tim Gidal (with texts by Sonia Gidal) were eminently successful with high print runs and translations into several world languages. Cf. Ehriander (2011) on Anna Riwkin-Brick's photo books.

<sup>11</sup> The relationship between children's literature and Avant-garde movements is not well understood. Studies focusing on the history of Avant-garde movements usually do not mention the impact on children's literature; see, for instance, Klinger (2004). A concise overview is given in Perez (1998); the connection between Avant-garde and children's culture at the turn of the century is at the fore of Olson's comprehensive study *Children's Culture and the Avant-garde* (2012). An edited volume on this topic is in preparation; see Druker & Kümmerling-Meibauer (forthcoming).

is characterized by an overarching interest in children's culture and arts which was reflected in the arts classes guided by renowned Bauhaus artists, such as Lionel Feininger, Paul Klee, Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, and Oskar Schlemmer. In order to promote artworks for children, Bauhaus artists arranged various exhibitions in Weimar, and later in Dessau, and even showcased selected products at art fairs. Last but not least, the idea to spread innovative children's books by means of exhibitions was continued as well. For instance, several exhibitions focusing on Soviet Avant-garde children's books were shown in various European capitals and cities, such as Amsterdam (1929),<sup>12</sup> Paris (1929),<sup>13</sup> Zurich (1930), and Copenhagen (1932), during and soon after the 1920s.

The concept of these exhibitions clearly indicates that they might be considered as followers of those early exhibitions that disseminated modernist picturebooks and illustrated books at the turn of the twentieth century. In a nutshell, an in-depth investigation of these and other exhibitions of children's literature since the turn of the twentieth century would certainly give interesting insights into the mutual influence of modernism, Avant-garde movements, children's culture and literature, and childhood images, thus connecting the scholarly investigation of children's literature with other academic fields, primarily childhood studies, art history, and museology.

## References

### Primary Sources

*Catalogus van de tentoonstelling 'Kind en kunst', in ennegezet door de commissie voor schilderkunst en die voor architectuur en nijversheidskunst gedurende do maand januari 1906 in het Stedelijk Museum, Amsterdam.* 1906. Exhibition catalogue. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum.

Dehmel, Paula and Richard Dehmel. 1900. *Fitzebutze*. Illustrated by Ernst Kreidolf. Leipzig: Insel Verlag.

*Die Kunst im Leben des Kindes.* 1901. Ausstellung im Hause der Berliner Seession. Preface by Max Osborn. Leipzig: Seemann.

*Die Kunst im Leben des Kindes.* 1902. III. Ausstellung des Künstlerbundes Hagen und des Deutschen Buch-Gewerbe-Vereins in Leipzig. Leipzig: Seemann.

*Schoonheid in het leven van het volkskind.* 1914. Amsterdam: NVSO.

### Secondary Sources

Bisanz, Hans et al., eds. 1985. *Franz Cizek. Pionier der Kunsterziehung (1865-1946). Historisches Museum der Stadt Wien, 20. Juni bis 3. November 1985.* Wien: Museen der Stadt Wien.

<sup>12</sup> In order to commemorate the tenth anniversary of the State Publishing House GIZ, the Soviet Society for Cultural Relations with Foreign Countries (VOKS) exhibited a selection of picturebooks. All books on display were published between 1926 and 1929 in Moscow and Leningrad by the State Publisher. The Amsterdam exhibition was visited by more than 5.000 people and more than 700 copies of the Russian books were sold. In addition, a series of eight picturebooks had been selected for translation into Dutch (Lemmens and Stommels, 2009).

<sup>13</sup> The exhibition in Paris was reconstructed by Michielsen (2010).



- Bodt, Saskia de. 2003. *Prentenboeken, ideologie en illustratie, 1890-1950*. Amsterdam: Ludion.
- Bodt, Saskia de & Jan Jaap Heij, red. 2009. *Bernard Willem Wierink 1856-1939*. Assen: Drents Museum.
- Cizek, Franz. 1925. *Das freie Zeichnen*. Wien: Schroll.
- Clark, Beverly Lyon. 2003. *Kiddie Lit. The Cultural Construction of Children's Literature in America*. Baltimore: The John Hopkins UP.
- Druker, Elina & Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer, eds. Forthcoming. *Children's Literature and European Avant-garde*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ehriander, Helene. 2011. "Everyday and Exotic: Astrid Lindgren's Co-operation with Anna Riwkin-Brick." In *Beyond Pippi Longstocking. Intermedial and International Aspects of Astrid Lindgren's Works*, edited by Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer & Astrid Surmatz, 155-172. New York: Routledge.
- Feld, Otto. 1901. "Das Kind als Künstler". In *Die Kunst im Leben des Kindes*, 79-93. Leipzig: Seemann.
- Fineberg, Jonathan. 1997. *The Innocent Eye: Children's Art and the Modern Artist*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP.
- Heller, Friedrich C. 2008. *Die bunte Welt. Handbuch zum künstlerisch illustrierten Kinderbuch in Wien 1890-1938*. Wien: Christian Brandstätter Verlag.
- Kåreland, Lena. 1977. *Gurli Linders barnbokskritik*. Stockholm: Rabén & Sjögren.
- Key, Ellen. 1909. *The Century of the Child*. New York: Putnam.
- Kelly, Donna Darling. 2004. *Uncovering the History of Children's Drawing and Art*. Westport, CT: Praeger.
- Klinger, Cornelia. 2004. *Das Jahrhundert der Avantgarden*. München: Fink.
- Kümmerling-Meibauer, Bettina. 1999. *Klassiker der Kinder- und Jugendliteratur. Ein internationales Lexikon*. 2 vols. Stuttgart and Weimar: Metzler.
- Kümmerling-Meibauer, Bettina. 2003. *Kinderliteratur, Kanonbildung und literarische Wertung*. Stuttgart & Weimar: Metzler.
- Laben, Rolf. 2006. *Franz Cizek und die Wiener Jugendkunst*. Wien: Schlebrügge.
- Lange, Konrad. 1893. *Die künstlerische Erziehung der deutschen Jugend*. Darmstadt: Bergstraeßer.
- Lemmens, Albert, and Serge Stommels. 2009. *Russian artists and the children's book 1890-1992*. Nijmegen: LS.
- Lichtwark, Alfred. 1900. *Übungen in der Betrachtung von Kunstwerken*. Dresden: Kühnmann.
- Menefee, Joan. 2012. "Art and Data: Children's Mark-Making and Modernity". *The Lion and the Unicorn* 36: 225-244.
- Michielsen, Béatrice. 2010. *Promessas de Futuro. Blaise Cendrars y el libro para niños en la URSS / 1926-1929*. Malaga: Museo Picasso.
- Olson, Marilyn. 2012. *Children's Culture and the Avant-Garde*. London: Routledge.
- Perez, Carlos, red. 1998. *Infancia y arte moderno*. Ivam Centre Julio González. Valencia: IVAM Institute Valencià d'Art Moderne.
- Ries, Hans. 1996. "Deutsche Bilderbuchkritik zwischen Wolgast und dem 'Dritten Reich'". In *Theorien der Jugendlektüre. Beiträge zur Kinder- und Jugendliteraturkritik seit Heinrich Wolgast*, edited by Bernd Dolle-Weinkauff & Hans-Heino Ewers, 77-104. Weinheim and Munich: Juventa.
- Spohr, Wilhelm. 1901. "Künstlerische Bilderbücher". In *Die Kunst im Leben des Kindes*, 49-59. Leipzig: Seemann.

- Stark, Roland, ed. 2000. *Fitzebutze. 100 Jahre modernes Kinderbuch*. Marbach: Deutsche Schillergesellschaft.
- Wierink, Ben. 1906. "Inleiding". In *Catalogus van de tentoonstelling 'Kind en kunst'*. 12-14. Amsterdam: Stedelijk Museum.
- Wolgast, Heinrich. 1894. *Über Bilderbuch und Illustration*. Hamburg: Selbstverlag (Kommission Conrad Kloss).

## Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer

Sveučilište Eberhard Karl u Tübingenu  
Eberhard Karls Universität Tübingen

### Djetinjstvo i umjetnost moderne

*U članku se autorica bavi izložbama dječjih knjiga s početka dvadesetoga stoljeća u Njemačkoj, Austriji i Nizozemskoj. Ondje izložene knjige, igračke i zidne plakate izradili su znameniti umjetnici koji su inspiraciju za svoj rad pronalazili u modernističkim umjetničkim strujanjima. Te su izložbe, kao i rasprave koje su one potaknule, znatno pridonijele sve većemu uvažavanju dječje književnosti i dječje kulture. U tome su kontekstu umjetnici i pedagozi bliski britanskome pokretu Art & Craft Movement, njemačkome i austrijskome pokretu Kunsterziehungsbewegung, kao i nizozemskome pokretu Kunst aan het Volk, isticali značaj ranoga umjetničkoga odgoja u smislu razvijanja estetskoga zamjećivanja koje je kod djece tek u začetku. U članku se, povrh toga, napominje da su ta nastojanja također utrla put prodoru avangardističke dječje književnosti dvadesetih i tridesetih godina dvadesetoga stoljeća.*

**Ključne riječi:** izložba, avangarda, dječja književnost, dječji crtež, modernizam

### Kindheit und die Kunst der Moderne

*Dieser Beitrag befasst sich mit einigen bedeutenden Kinderbuchausstellungen, die seit der Jahrhundertwende in Deutschland, Österreich und den Niederlanden gezeigt wurden. Die ausgestellten Bücher, Spielsachen und Wandbilder entstammen dem Schaffen namhafter Künstler, die sich von modernistischen Kunstströmungen inspirieren ließen. Die Ausstellungen und die durch sie ausgelösten Diskussionen übten einen großen Einfluss auf die zunehmend hohe Wertschätzung von Kinderliteratur und Kinderkultur aus. In diesem Kontext betonten jene Künstler und Pädagogen, die dem britischen „Arts & Craft Movement“, der deutschen und österreichischen „Kunsterziehungsbewegung“ oder der niederländischen „Kunst aan het Volk“-Bewegung nahestanden, die Bedeutung der frühen Kunsterziehung für die sich noch entwickelnde ästhetische Wahrnehmung des Kindes. Darüber hinaus wird in diesem Artikel veranschaulicht, dass diese Bestrebungen den Weg für den Durchbruch der Kinderliteratur der Avantgarde in den 1920er und 1930er Jahren bereiteten.*

**Schlüsselwörter:** Ausstellung, Avantgarde, Kinderkultur, Kinderzeichnung, Modernismus