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Telling Dreams: Shifting Child Images in Three Swedish Iconotexts

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Abstract

The aim of the article is to reflect on transformations of the motif of a child's dream fantasy in three Swedish iconotexts: I Skymningslandet [In the Land of Twilight] by Astrid Lindgren and Eva Billow (1949), Vilda bebin får en hund [The Wild Baby Gets a Puppy] by Barbro Lindgren and Eva Eriksson (1985), and Kivi & monsterhund [Kivi & Monsterdog] by Jesper Lundqvist and Bettina Johansson (2012). I focus on the functions and constructions of the protagonists' fantasies to trace the representations of childhood as they were changing over the course of about 60 years. The three discussed iconotexts employ a similar narrative tool: an interplay of primary and secondary worlds based on the concept of a dream that may concurrently be interpreted as a real story, reflecting the shifting societal paradigms and aesthetics.

Key words

dream, iconotext, empowerment, gender neutrality, Sweden

Introduction

All texts and iconotexts[2] are deeply embedded in their cultural contexts, and the child images they contain are stamped by the prevailing societal norms, as

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[2] I understand iconotext as an interplay of words and images in and beyond picturebooks, as defined by Kristin Hallberg in her revised approach to the concept (2022). Hallberg coined this popular term in 1982 in close association with picturebooks. Forty years later, she extended its meaning to include all kinds of word-image relations.

observed by John Stephens: "All aspects of textual discourse, from story outcomes to the expressive forms of language and pictorial representation, are informed and shaped by ideology" (1992, p. 137). In this study, I want to focus on the correlation between literary representations of the child and contemporaneous child images. I will explore three children's books – one illustrated short story and two picturebooks – which were created in the same country, Sweden, approximately 60 years apart: *I Skymningslandet* [*In the Land of Twilight*] by Astrid Lindgren and Eva Billow from 1949, *Vilda bebin får en hund* [*The Wild Baby Gets a Puppy*] by Barbro Lindgren and Eva Eriksson from 1985, and *Kivi & monsterhund* [*Kivi & Monsterdog*] by Jesper Lundqvist and Bettina Johansson from 2012. This selection was determined by the narrative similarity of the texts as all of them revolve around the same motif: a child's fantastic adventure which is ambiguously framed as a real experience (presumably with novice readers in mind) and at the same time as a dream (accessible mainly to a more experienced readership). Despite their discernible intertextual resemblance, the books differ in many respects, offering a glimpse at shifting paradigms and aesthetics, inherently interwoven with the ideological fabric of their times. In the subsequent sections, I will discuss child images in the selected iconotexts to conclude by pointing out their common features and differences.

In the Land of Twilight: A sick child's dream

Boel Westin relates that after the Second World War there was a breakthrough in children's literature in Sweden, which opened to experimentation (1999, p. 23). Pippi Longstocking, a red-haired rebel created by Astrid Lindgren, was the most representative character of those decades and revolutionized the children's book. Pippi is acknowledged to be 'one of the most convincing examples of unconditional child empowerment in children's literature' (Nikolajeva, 2010, p. 49). She is a principal member of a large group of powerful girl protagonists invented by Lindgren, and a big literary experiment of her times. By contrast, Lindgren's boy characters seem rather fragile and vulnerable. This dichotomy can be interpreted as an explicit challenge to the traditional gender roles, but a deeper exploration reveals another kind of boys' empowerment, which I explore below.

Göran, the protagonist of *In the Land of Twilight*, personifies this type of the boy character. He is incurably sick and lonely, and an unspecified pain in his leg has kept him bedridden for a long time. One day, he overhears his mother saying that he will never walk again, and at dusk, a fanciful little Mr. Lilyvale appears on the windowsill in Göran's room and invites him to take a magic flight to the

Land of Twilight, which is a slightly modified version of Stockholm. On the one hand, this fantastic secondary world abounds with unequivocal references to the primary one and fulfils children's dreams of an eternal arcadia. On the other, it is shrouded in an eerie blue glow, marked by overall emptiness, and inhabited by some strange little people. These properties dovetail with the other name of this place, the Land That Is Not, the title of a famous poem by Edith Södergran, and they allude to the afterlife and seem to have been devised for more experienced readers. Vivi Edström calls this deliberate technique a double exposure, meaning that 'at the same time we are in Stockholm […] and a weird fairy-tale land' (1997, p. 80). She also detects other intertexts in the verbal story, hinting not only at Södergran but also at Selma Lagerlöf, Viktor Rydberg, and Nordic folk tales.

During the fantastic trip, Göran and Mr. Lilyvale have a great time, and the boy is given an opportunity not only to experience many activities from which he is barred in his primary world, but also to take part in those that transcend everyday life and embody the dreams of all boys (at least in those times): flying, picking sweets that grow on trees, driving a tram, meeting the queen and the king, and operating a digger. Stereotypical masculine dreams are presumably different today. Growing up in digital worlds among characters from fantasy books, computer games and dystopian movies, boys more likely dream of operating a spacecraft rather than a digger, or of having superpowers that may save the world instead of meeting a royal family. Göran's fears about physical constraints are countered in the Land of Twilight by Mr. Lilyvale's repeated assurance: 'It does not matter in the Land of Twilight' and turn out to be groundless. In this world, he is completely healthy and strong, and he can walk, dance, and fish with his new rod.

The first-person verbal narrative is told by Göran himself, who is thus an autodiegetic narrator since he is also the protagonist of the book. This method of telling the story makes it more convincing, engages young readers, and invites them to empathize and identify with the character. However, Göran is focalized externally, which means that he mainly recounts the events around him and does not express his own feelings. The only vaguely emotional remark occurs at the end, when he exclaims that the Twilight Land is wonderful, professing that he would like to return there and that it does not matter that his leg hurts. This manner of narrating may promote a well-balanced emotional engagement of young readers, who are exposed to moving and sorrowful content but are protected from too deep an immersion in it.

Obviously, the verbal message is informationally complete since this is a short story which is illustrated. But the visual component – four full-page images and

one minor picture of Mr. Lilyvale by illustrator Eva Billow – contributes to the interpretation of the iconotext, making it more comprehensive. The choice of episodes to illustrate was purposive and meaningful, and the additional visual information provides reader-viewers with numerous specific details affecting their perception. All the illustrations are black and white drawings, which not only elevates[3] what is primarily a children's book but also evokes nostalgia, whereas their relation to the text is predominantly symmetrical and complementary[4].

The first image is representative and depicts the initial situation in the primary world: a bed with a young boy in it. Half-lying and propped on a big pillow, he is staring at a book he is holding in his hands. The boy has a little snub nose and round, slightly freckled cheeks. He is wearing striped pyjamas with a small collar, and his thick black hair is slightly rumpled. The image conveys the sense of loneliness and is deeply poignant. The boy's palpable vulnerability and helplessness are not expressed in the text, and the visual message is complementary in this respect. Interestingly, the subsequent illustrations, which show Göran in the Land of Twilight, portray him as wearing the same pyjamas but participating in quite different activities. In the first one, he is holding Mr. Lilyvale's hand as they are flying over Stockholm, and in the second, he is sitting in a tree and eating sweets. Later, he is meeting the queen and dancing in Skansen. In all of them, he is smiling and enjoying somebody's company, so it seems that the illustrator tried to highlight the difference in the boy's condition.

Since viewers can see Göran, the visual narrator[5] employs a third-person perspective and consequently is not identical to the verbal one. Although these two different forms of focalization put high demands on inexperienced readers (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 125), they belong to the convention of visual communication in which readers-viewers expect to see protagonists even if they hear their first-person voices. Furthermore, in this iconotext the external visual narrator enhances the distance and, along with the external verbal focalization, contributes to constructing a safe buffer that protects young readers, who may be distressed and made anxious by Göran's illness and suffering in the primary world.

[3] Black and white drawings impart an air of elegance associated with literature for an older readership.

[4] I refer to the taxonomy developed by Nikolajeva and Scott (2006, p. 12).

[5] In this article, I build on Nikolajeva and Scott's system of iconotextual narrative perspectives (Nikolajeva & Scott, 2006, p. 117-120). The visual narrator tells her/his story using images.

Lindgren's literary production reflects her times by combining the traditional pre- and wartime child image and the novel, post-war belief in a better future constructed by the "new" kind of child. Interestingly, this new child is mainly epitomized by self-sufficient, empowered girl characters, whereas boy protagonists, such as Göran, still embody innocence and vulnerability, reminiscent of the old times of poverty and war. However, Göran copes with his predicament by escaping into a fantasy land where he obtains support and develops self-identity. Instead of relying on his parents or complaining, he makes use of his imagination to trigger an inner combat, which makes his life tolerable. He is a precursor of Lindgren's other boy figures, Mio and Rusky[6], who will transform from timid children into real heroes fighting for the right cause in the secondary worlds.

The Wild Baby Gets a Puppy: An angry child's dream

After the politically and socially engaged 1970s, the Swedish children's book market of the 1980s saw a return to the fantasy and fairy-tale tradition, and picturebooks experienced a particularly spectacular revival. Increasingly experimental, they became more and more complex, blending numerous generic features (Westin, 1999, p. 48-51). They did not try to convince readers that there was such a thing as happy childhood, but honestly showed both its bright and its dark sides. Adults were neither omniscient nor omnipotent in these books, and they often did not know the answers to many questions posed in them (Rhedin, 2004, p. 164-165). In those days, Eva Erikson was a prominent illustrator and made pictures for popular picturebooks about Vilda bebin, the Wild Baby, written by Barbro Lindgren, an ALMA-winner in 2014.

The Wild Baby Gets a Puppy from 1985[7] is the last part of the picturebook trilogy. Its opening considerably differs from the beginning of *In the Land of Twilight* as readers encounter a small but very strong-willed and determined protagonist. The rhymed text reveals that he is nagging his mum about getting a dog or, alternatively, a horse or a cat. His demands are written in block letters, expressing his shouting and resolve. Finally, his poor mum promises that he will be given a dog on his birthday, and the boy awaits the gift impatiently. When the longed-for day comes, to his surprise and great disappointment, he is given merely a stuffed toy dog: "There's a puppy here, but the puppy is not real" (Lindgren & Eriksson, 1988, *unpaginated*). Naturally, the boy becomes extremely angry and exclaims – again in block letters –

[6] I mean the protagonists of Lindgren's novels *Mio, My Son* and *Brothers Lionheart*.

[7] This is the year the book was published in Sweden.

his displeasure: "I WANTED A DOG THAT COULD BARK! I WANTED A DOG THAT WAS ALIVE, NOT ONE LIKE THIS! I AM GOING TO SHOOT IT WITH MY GUN!" (Lindgren & Eriksson, 1988, *unpaginated*).

But the same night, the Wild Baby is woken up by the dog, which has come to life, and they set out on a fantastic journey together with the boy's other toys. The story is told verbally in a lively and humorous way. The boy, his plush friend and the other toy animals travel through a fabulous universe, visiting various planets – including an ice-cream planet, where they eat so much that they slip down and fall off it – and the moon, overcrowded with other babies and their dogs. There is a lot of drifting, falling and laughing in this playful journey, which finishes at home, where the Wild Baby's longing mum is waiting for the travellers, as is her wont.

The verbal third-person narrator internally focalizes the protagonist, producing an impression that the story is told from the Baby's perspective. Readers obtain an insight into the boy's emotions and can see, for example, that he continues to be upset and is not going to be glad. His anger is spectacularly shouted out, and thus his disappointment and desperation are tangibly conveyed, making readers empathize with him rather with anyone else.

Eva Eriksson's watercolour illustrations in this picturebook predominantly stand in a complementary and expanding relation to the text, depicting the Wild Baby in a comic manner: he is visualized with a mixture of characteristics typical of both a toddler and a little child. His frowning face expresses his constant dissatisfaction, and his postures are dynamic and hyperbolized, which makes him hilarious. The boy's tiny physique, chubby childish cheeks, blond spiky hair, and white nightgown are in contrast with his determination. Partly symmetrical with the verbal information, this visual information also enhances it, strengthening its evidently humorous tone. As opposed to the boy's vigour, his mother is portrayed as a lonely woman, carrying heavy bags and tired of struggling with her little, stubborn "wild" son, and she is scarcely featured in the text. Readers are only given two verbal signals of the woman's condition: she is dizzy and faint, and she sighs deeply. The gloominess around her is visually suggested by her invariably brown clothes, weary body postures, and facial expressions manifesting helplessness in confrontation with her little child.

The visual narrative converges with the third-person verbal narrative; both stories – told in images and in words – are presented by the same external agent, which can theoretically make reading easier for young children. The illustrated rag dog is brown, lop-eared, and cute, and its slightly clumsy movements suggest it is of a young age. All images are brightly coloured and crafted in a fairy-

tale convention, living up to the traditional expectations of a bedtime story. A particularly meaningful point in the visual narrative is marked by the last double-spread, which is "sylleptic", as the visual narrative becomes independent (Nikolajeva & Scott 2006, p. 12) and carries on its own story.

The picture depicts a garden enveloped in a typical picnic atmosphere, with the smiling mum crouching on the grass and holding the Wild Baby in her arms. The dog, perfectly alive, is sitting by their side while the other travellers, the stuffed toys, are lying around, inanimate. The visual narrative ends happily, hinting that magic exists and big wishes can come true, whereas the verbal one is open-ended, implying more ambiguity[8]. Based on the illustration, it cannot be ruled out that the boy's mum finally gave in and bought him a dog. This represents an ingenious use of the iconotext consistent with Nikolajeva's observation that: "Picturebooks have great potential for subversion of adult power and interrogation of the existing order. The two narrative levels, the verbal and the visual, allow counterpoint and contradiction between the power structures presented by words and images" (2010, p 169). As the Wild Baby's emotions are too difficult to express verbally because of his age, the iconotext relies on images to convey them. In the illustrations, the boy's facial expressions and postures express power and determination while his mum is pictured as trying to satisfy him. She is helpless, dominated by her empowered son and overwhelmed by her child-raising duties that rest exclusively with her as there is no dad in the family. She is depicted as a tired, unkempt woman, wringing her hands. The Baby is constantly with her, making new demands. The strong position of the child reflects societal changes in a slightly caricatured way: in Sweden, children's rights have been consistently strengthened since the early 1970s. In 1971, a politically and religiously independent organization called Barnens Rätt i Samhället (BRIS; Children´s Rights in Society) was founded to support children's and young adults' rights in society. In 1979, Sweden became the first country in the world to make it illegal to hit children, both at home and in school.

Kivi & Monsterdog: A genderless child's dream

The third book, *Kivi & Monsterdog*, played a crucial role in a heated debate around the gender-neutral pronoun *hen* that swept across Sweden in 2012. *Hen* is

[8] The Baby's mum only says how happy she is that her son is back and how much she has missed him. There is no mention of any dog. As Eriksson confessed, she decided to provide this additional bit of information because she felt sorry for the Wild Baby. Lindgren did not comment on it (Rhedin, 2004, p. 94).

an intentionally coined, artificial alternative to two gender-specific, natural Swedish pronouns – *hon* [she] and *han* [he] – and can be employed when referring to non-binary individuals, or when one's biological gender is irrelevant or unknown. The supporters of *hen* claimed that it was free of stereotypical associations and prejudice, and particularly useful when referring to transgender people. The opponents of the pronoun emphasized that *hen* was dangerous as it could eradicate the natural male and female gender roles and – if applied in early education – lead to disturbances in children's identities (Dymel-Trzebiatowska, 2017, p. 14). Surprisingly, the first attempts to implement it in the Swedish language took place as early as in the 1960s (Grönblad, 2017), but this venture did not receive a wider acknowledgment back then. About 50 years later, *Kivi & Monsterdog* helped the pronoun *hen* break through spectacularly, involving children's literature in a nationwide debate that even drew some attention from international media.

The picturebook narrates a story of the eponymous Kivi, who is consistently referred to as *hen* throughout the text. Kivi wants to get a dog, which is reported by the third-person, intra-heterodiegetic narrator at the very onset of the story. The opening rhymes explain that Kivi categorically demands to get a dog and threatens his family that otherwise s/he will not fall asleep. The concerned adults bend over the child and ensure her/him in all possible ways that s/he will be given a dog on condition that s/he goes to sleep. Notably, this first scene makes it explicit that we are dealing with a hybrid world where gender markers have been erased. Besides the use of *hen*, the names of all the family members are nonce-words in the form of hilarious compounds of regular lexemes, such as *pammor*, which resembles the plural form *mammor* [mums] with the first syllable taken from the word *pappa* [dad], and *parvelpysor*, combining the words *parvel* [toddler] and *pys* [a little fellow], completed with [or], a plural inflectional ending, typical of feminine forms.

When Kivi finally falls asleep, s/he has a dream about cute puppies, but when s/he wakes up the home is empty, and a gruesome monster dog is waiting at the door. The child enthusiastically welcomes the animal, but it soon turns out that the creature is not only physically disgusting but also bad-mannered. When Kivi tries to wash the dog, it wreaks havoc in the home, and Kivi decides to take it out. The animal continues its destructive activity outdoors, causing a commotion in the neighbourhood so that numerous emergency services must be called to the scene. When the dusk begins to fall, Kivi recalls her/his promise of going to sleep and returns home. S/he is tired and realizes how exhausting it is to have a dog. When s/he wakes up the next morning, her/his 'motley' relatives sing, play, and

congratulate him/her on her/his birthday. When they say that a sweet puppy will soon arrive by taxi, Kivi declares outright that s/he does not want a dog but… a gorilla.

The language of this picturebook does not shun colloquial adjectives when describing the monster dog's appearance and behaviour. The animal is mangy and scurfy; it devours everything while smacking loudly, stinks 'so that fleas flee', and 'goes to the toilet' in the middle of a fine carpet. All these nuisances are even more overtly featured in the visual narrative. Bettina Johansson, who illustrated this picturebook, seems to have been inspired by the style of the Danish modernist illustrator Ingrid Vang Nyman:

> Vang Nyman displays curiously assorted objects, animate and inanimate, in a range of textures, colors and shapes. The elements in her compositions are often presented at tipped angles, where everything is observed without overlapping perspectives. Why this constant defiance of gravity, the free distortion of proportions and multiplicity of details? Everything seems to be in motion, in a state of flux and turmoil, pointing to the adventurous potential of everyday places and objects. (Druker, 2011, p. 57)

Elina Druker also points out that this sophisticated imagery captures a childlike liveliness and embraces the irrational, naive and playful. Similar visual tools[9] were employed by Johansson. Kivi's home is filled with plentiful objects, some of them absurd – a palm tree, a beach umbrella, and a crocodile in a pram – chaotically scattered around, while the perspectives are distorted, enhancing the sense of mundus inversus, the world upside-down. The vivid bright colours and flat surfaces also invite associations with modernist artists. The onlookers can see Kivi in most of the scenes, so the visual narrator's perspective is the same as that of the verbal narrator, making it easier for young readers to appreciate the iconotextual narrative.

As regards gender neutrality, the visual representation in this picturebook is symmetrical with and complementary to the text. The textual *hen* is paralleled by hybrid images of Kivi and her/his family. Already the first opening offers a close-up of the protagonist's face, which is pictured in an ostensibly simplified style, imitating a child's drawing. The full-face image shows a child of ambiguous sex, with a funny checked hat on its head, closed eyes behind big round glasses and a wide-open mouth, black inside. The grimace evidently indicates that the child is

[9] The convention can be called postmodern, for one, with touches/echoes of naturalistic ugliness.

crying, which fits in with her/his verbal demand to have a dog, whose vehemence is emphasized by three exclamation marks and capital letters. The face contrasts against a white background with a pattern of styled orange carrots, a visual leitmotif of the story, with no clear reference to its plot.

The subsequent image of Kivi's relatives illustrates their gender hybridity as well. A group of bizarre, caricatured figures that resemble a troupe of disguised circus clowns are leaning over the bed. The vivid colours – predominantly red, green, light blue, and orange – and the hyperbolized postures both imply that the family are unusual and evoke humour. It is impossible to determine whether the characters are male or female since they consistently combine all traditional sex markers. Furthermore, the image of the family seems to be a deliberate illustration of diversity as the picture depicts both slim and obese figures; bald and red-haired; short, medium-sized, and tall; and characters of different ages and races (one of the nine family members is dark-skinned). This variety implies people's right to be different, their right to be themselves, to be individuals with no concern for the norms and views of the majority. It constitutes an unmistakable call for nonconformity and is an iconotextual incarnation of the Swedish Discrimination Act, whose purpose is "to combat discrimination and in other ways promote equal rights and opportunities regardless of sex, transgender identity or expression, ethnicity, religion or other belief, disability, sexual orientation or age" (Discrimination Act, 2008). Hence both the text and the image of this book become powerful ideological tools employed in an elaborate and intentional manner. The book continues to be topical ten years after its publication as it discusses a still commonly debated issue of normativity.

The changing paradigms

All the three stories outlined above follow the same traditional pattern of old fairy tales: home [primary world] – trip/dream [secondary world] – back home [primary world], but the differences in how they handle this motif in words and images offer interesting insights into the child image. Göran is apparently rendered as fragile and vulnerable, and he still represents – verbally and visually – an innocent child. Importantly, he is empowered in a particular way as he proves capable of solving his serious problem on his own. In the secondary world, the boy is furnished with all the qualities he lacks in his real life, which indicates that his unconscious was unlocked and activated a huge therapeutic potential. He accomplishes the state of compensation all by himself, as the processing of his problem starts when his parents are out of his room, and it is quite explicit that he does not want to involve

them in his dilemma, or even that he is protecting them from his own sorrow and pain. Considering his age and condition, he is surprisingly strong and self-reliant, and his empowerment is psychological empowerment. Göran remains an obedient, though sorrowfully experienced, child, and his visual image enhances the seriousness of his condition.

Both Göran's and the Wild Baby's journeys start in the similar circumstances of darkness: Göran's at dusk (he even asks his mum not to switch on the lamp) and the Wild Baby's when the moon appears in the sky. The dark and the absence of adults are presented as necessary conditions for magic to start, or for… sleeping and dreaming. There are further similarities in the representation of the fantastic worlds in these two books as they rest on motifs of flight, fun, and play, and feature elements of "the culinary arcadia," such as sweets growing on trees and the ice-cream planet. Despite these narrative resemblances, the boys' characterization is significantly different, as the reflexive Göran does not defy adults and quietly accepts his fate, whereas the Wild Baby's predominant quality is his loud resistance.

The Wild Baby is a child of his times, self-confident and demanding. He is an absolute reverse of the sick and physically weak Göran. He is filled with vitality and aware of his power and rights, which he consistently uses against his resigned and lonely mum. Instead of the nuclear family, with the mum and the dad as in *In the Land of Twilight*, a single-parent family is portrayed, reflecting the tendency of the 1980s. For all this, the Wild Baby is still typically childish, and his visual representation partly overlaps with Göran's. Both boys have round cheeks and little stub noses, although the Wild Baby's body posture in images displays strength and motion while Göran appears distinctly vulnerable. Also, both are explicitly featured and constructed as boys.

The Wild Baby's plush dog is visually depicted in a traditionally child-friendly manner. Eriksson's pastel drawings express both the oneiric landscapes and the dynamics of the crazy adventures. They seem to invite the viewer to join and participate in the wonderful play; as such, they meet the traditional expectations of a good children's illustration. This iconotext sparkles with fantasy, in line with the prevailing tendency of the times, being a response to the societal and political preoccupations dominant in literature in the 1970s (Westin, 1999, p. 48).

Like the Wild Baby, Kivi is also physically empowered compared with Göran. His strong will and privileged position in the family are expressed in the same manner as in *The Wild Baby Gets a Puppy*, that is, by the extensive use of block letters to convey his shouting. Transformations in the family model are even more far-reaching, with the single mother replaced by a group of genderless individuals,

who are visualized in a hyperbolic way, emphasizing their diversity and producing comic effects. Both Kivi and the Wild Baby wish to get a dog for their birthdays, and both of them fall asleep and have a dream about it, which makes the basic narratives surprisingly akin. Furthermore, both texts are rhymed, which further enhances their similarity and hints that the storyline of *Kivi & Monsterdog* can be interpreted as a modernized hypertext of Lindgren and Eriksson's book[10].

However, this storyline is presented in a significantly different manner, representing an empowered child and embedded in the parodic aesthetics of the 2010s. Kivi's relatives give in and buy the dog s/he wants, but it is not so evident in the case of the Wild Baby's mum. The dream that functions as compensation for the Wild Baby turns into a cautionary experience for Kivi. S/he needs no compensation, as s/he can successfully terrorize adults and be given a real pup, but the story reveals that s/he is not aware of what s/he wants. The book does communicate a didactic message, but its 'moral' is of a different kind. Its novelty lies in the aesthetic convention of the images – a cute dog has given way to a disgusting monstrous creature that stinks and flatulates, both verbally and visually contradicting the ideal of a child's book of former times.

Stephens observed that: "Picture books can, of course, exist for fun, but they can never be said to exist without either a socializing or educational intention, or else without a specific orientation towards the reality constructed by the society that produces them" (2018, p. 158). Maria Nikolajeva has developed this 'ideological' view of literature: "However, ideology is a dimension of a literary text that lies in the tension between the text itself, the reality behind it, the authors and their intentions or implicit views, and also the readers and their ability to create meaning out of texts" (2010, p. 3). Lundqvist, the author of *Kivi*, has explained that he decided to write the first 'hen book' because it did not matter to him whether the protagonist was a boy or a girl, and he hoped that it would promote the process of identification (Alvasdotter, 2012). The intentions of OLIKA (Swedish: DIFFERENT), the publisher of this picturebook, are even more straightforward and are explicitly stated on its website. The publisher's goal is to disseminate equality, inclusion, and diversity, "a hundred possibilities instead of one" (https://www.olika.nu/foretag), and to release books about various families, races, dysfunctions, and gender identifications, fostering children's openness and tolerance.

The fact that *Kivi & Monsterdog* employs exclusively the gender-neutral pronoun *hen*, dispensing with the traditional *hon* [she] and *han* [he], stands

[10] In the light of Cherie Allan's theory, the book can be called postmodern since it utilizes metafictive strategies such as intertextuality, parody, and irony (2018, p. 202).

as the publisher's significant manifesto. The publisher insists that the book was supposed to address children in general, regardless of their biological sex. Be that as it may, the picturebook did stir up a lot of publicity and sparked a lively debate, which was called *hen-debatten* [*hen* debate] in Sweden, although in 2012 it was still impossible to predict whether *Kivi & Monsterdog* would be able to make the new pronoun settle in the Swedish language for good. Three years later, this became a fact when the Swedish Academy added *hen* to its official glossary, where new entries are determined by their frequency (Dymel-Trzebiatowska 2017, p. 17). Thus, the picturebook had a central part in establishing a new pronoun and thereby confirmed the pre-eminent position that children's literature has gained in the 21st century. *Kivi & Monsterdog* is a representative picturebook of the group that "functioned as a way to promote 'progressive' ideals concerning children and society" (Christensen, 2018, p. 365).

The three above-discussed books exemplify discourses typical of egalitarian systems and include components of both tradition and novelty, continuity and transformation. All of them draw on the same literary motif of a fantastic dream, but their verbal and visual contents differ, as they have developed and morphed in line with the social climate of their times.

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