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(You know you didn’t.)

1. Introduction

“Don’t cry, please,” said Mrs. Tod. “I can catch rabbits for us.”

“How can you?” cried Mr. Tod. “You are only a woman.”

“I will show you,” she said. “You go home and look after the cubs.”

“That is women’s work,” said Mr. Tod.

“But you are so clever,” said Mrs. Tod. “You can do it.”

Mr. Tod wiped his eyes. He blew his nose and went home. (Mr. Tod’s Trap, 54)

The short exchange above contains the focus of this diploma thesis in a nutshell: What does it mean to be and to act like a woman or a man? Can femininity and masculinity be determined at all and is it not rather each person’s way of expressing themselves as human that should gain centre stage? Men’s and women’s roles have been increasingly questioned over the last decades and this interest in and critical awareness of gender roles also manifests itself in literature. Children’s literature is no exception: brave, adventurous heroines or sensitive, cooking boys have appeared in novels just as well as in picturebooks for very young children. Nevertheless, gender stereotypes still persist in some books and in the wider culture in general. My aim in this thesis is to highlight depictions of male and female characters, of roles, stereotypes, behaviours and interpersonal relationships in recent picturebooks and critically question the former.

A family is usually the main living environment for children in their early years and thus also the primary unit of socialisation. Even with more and more children being cared for by external caretakers, kindergartens etc., the family is still a focal point in a child’s early experience. For this reason, I am looking at both gender roles and families in picturebooks and try to analyse how parents, siblings, grandparents and even the family form itself can provide models of behaviour. Importantly, families also feature heavily in picturebooks: children, siblings, parents, grandparents and other family members appear as protagonists and side characters and usually outnumber friends, teachers, police officers or shop assistants (who, it might be argued, are influential parts of society as well).

Picturebooks are usually among the first cultural artefacts children encounter and they can have a lasting influence on their young readers. These books transport verbal and visual images of men and women or of family constellations and the precise way this is done will depend on the particular society a book originates in:

Children's books reflect cultural values and are an important instrument for persuading children to accept those values. They also contain role prescriptions which encourage the child to conform to acceptable standards of behavior. (Weitzman et al., 1126)

While the influence of picturebooks on children can hardly be doubted, it is virtually impossible to determine the effect an individual picturebook will have on an individual child. Since I did not conduct an empirical study, reader responses are not available. Therefore, I will centre my analysis on close observations of gender and family issues in contemporary picturebooks but I cannot make predictions about the books' actual impact (which will differ from reader to reader in any case).

Reading picturebooks is not as straightforward a process as it may seem. Reading images requires the acquisition of certain codes and conventions just as well as reading words does. As Nodelman puts it,

picture books are clearly recognizable as children's books simply because they speak to us of childlike qualities, of youthful simplicity and youthful exuberance; yet, paradoxically, they do so in terms that imply a vast sophistication in regard to both visual and verbal codes. Indeed, it is part of the charm of many of the most interesting picture books that they so strangely combine the childlike and the sophisticated – that the viewer they imply is both very learned and very ingenuous. (Nodelman 21)

What is important for me here is that picturebooks are not simple or minor literature just because they usually address the very young. In fact, they can reach high levels of complexity and deserve to be analysed as elaborate works of art. I will go into further detail on these aspects in chapters 3 and 5.

I selected 20 picturebooks published in the UK and the US between 1980 and 2010 and analysed them according to their verbal and visual presentation of male and female characters and their presentation of families. In my interpretation of the selected books I tried to answer the following research question: How are concepts of gender and family depicted in verbal and visual text? This broad question implies further, more detailed questions, such as: Which concepts of normalcy do these books promote? What is openly, what is tacitly introduced as normal? Does the verbal text in a picturebook sometimes differ from what the pictures show and if so, how can we interpret this deviation? Another question regards temporal aspects: Is there a change detectable in the depiction of gender and family over the last 30 years? Obviously, I will need to be very careful with definite statements since my choice of books is limited and subjective. I do not wish to evaluate any

book as a good read for children, either, because such judgments would inevitably imply an adult assumption about what characterises good literature for children. I would like to provide a critical view on picturebooks from a literary and cultural perspective rather than giving pedagogic or moral (and possibly unfounded) recommendations.

In terms of structure, I will start with providing an overview of relevant theory from gender and family studies as well as picturebook theory in chapters 2 and 3. My approach is twofold: the framework of gender and family studies serves as a thematic focus for the analysis, while literary studies provides me with the tools to analyse the specific books. Chapter 4 will be concerned with earlier studies of gender and family in picturebooks in order to give an idea of findings in the field so far. My choice of books and methodology will be explained in chapter 5. The analysis proper will be presented in chapter 6, which is further divided into thematic categories such as activities and behaviours, family forms or family work. In chapter 7, I will try to sum up my findings and look for general tendencies in them. Covers of all picturebooks discussed can be found in the appendix.

2. Theory 1: Gender and Family

Whether someone grows up in a so-called nuclear family consisting of a mother, a father and one or more children, or whether someone is brought up in a patchwork family with three mothers and six stepsiblings, these families will provide some of the earliest examples of male and female role models. The experience of being a member of a family is inextricably linked to the experience of being a gendered person: a mother is still most of the time assumed to be the natural primary caregiver to her children, whereas a father who stays at home is often either admired or slightly ridiculed (e.g. Coontz 16, Nicholson 35, and Anderson and Hamilton 146). Thus, being a member of a family ultimately also means being (made) a woman or a man.

Given the importance of families for the child protagonists in many picturebooks (and also for their young readers), I believe it useful to analyse the concepts of gender and family in picturebooks in conjunction and pay attention to how they mutually influence each other.

2.1. Gender

Until not many decades ago, being a woman or a man was an easier and much more clearly defined task; or so it may seem to some people. Men were believed to be born as independent, strong and reasonable; women as soft, emotional and caring. Proper behaviours, occupations and spaces for both men and women were distributed accordingly, resulting in the “typically” male technician or politician and the “typically” female mother or nurse.

Nowadays though, the concept of “gender” has arrived even in broader society, e.g. through governments’ efforts in gender mainstreaming. Particularly in academia, it is more and more widely acknowledged that the pendulum might actually be swinging more towards nurture than towards nature (Louie 142). Our attachment figures, our education, social and political environment and culture are seen at least as influential in the process of our becoming women and men (or something entirely different) as our genes are.

Still, confusion remains in terms of how to distinguish between and define “gender” and “sex”, what this distinction entails both theoretically and in actual life, and how it can be a useful tool in uncovering fossilised conventions and prejudices. After an attempt to arrive at

one or more definitions of the term “gender”, I will move on to discuss the way in which we reveal ourselves (often unconsciously) as gendered persons in our actions, looks and relations before treating the influence of gender on children’s literature and literature in general.

2.1.1. History and definition

The term “sex-role” was still in use in a study of picturebooks by Richard Kolbe and Joseph C. La Voie from 1981 although the term “gender” had been established by that time. The latter term was originally coined in 1955 by John Money, a psychologist and sexologist from New Zealand. Money intended to emphasise the social aspects that influence a person’s behaviour, depending on whether they see themselves as male or female. He introduced the term “*gender* to refer to differences in behaviour by sex” (Udry 561). Since he did not see these differences as biologically determined but only as constructs to which society applies the labels “male” or “female”, he used the term gender instead of sex. In recent years and with the establishment of gender studies as a broad academic field, definitions of gender have tended to move even more into the direction of explaining gender as something created by society. Jule gives a very clear and concise definition, which I find helpful for general guidance. She defines sex as “referring to the male and female duality of biology and reproduction” (93), whereas gender “refers to the social construction of behaviors in alignment with masculine or feminine behaviours, rather than the biological condition of maleness and femaleness. [Gender] refers to socioculturally adapted traits” (91). So far, we have only considered gender and sex as two neutral categories. There is, in fact, often an evaluative component involved when we speak and think of feminine or masculine behaviour. Cranny-Francis et al. highlight this bias in their definition: “Gender is the culturally variable elaboration of sex, as a hierarchical pair (where male is coded superior and female inferior)” (4). A list of behaviours and characteristics considered typically feminine or masculine in a given society would probably have to be endless. Here I would like to mention only one more major divide that has its roots in the body-mind problem, an issue heavily discussed in philosophical anthropology. Butler asserts that “[t]he cultural associations of mind with masculinity and body with femininity are well documented within the field of philosophy and feminism“

(*Gender Trouble* 10). As a consequence of these associations, society expects women to raise and nurture children and men to think and direct the public sphere. It is easily visible that many of the masculine/mind associations are commonly more highly valued than many of the feminine/body associations. This is particularly true for sexuality and eroticism, which by definition involve the body, but which women have often been alternately denied and accused of using to mislead men.

Lately, some scholars have not even seen the biological dimension of sex as clearly determined. When Cranny-Francis et al. state that “[s]ex is a theory about human beings which divides them into two biologically based categories – male and female” (7), they are alluding to the artificial divide of all human beings into two categories. Judith Butler (*Gender Trouble* 6) asks what can justifiably be taken as the basis of determining the sex of a person; is it hormones, chromosomes, anatomy or something else? She also criticises binary distinctions in general, whether they are drawn between the sexes or the genders. Arguing that sex as well as gender is a construct, she maintains that neither of them is a natural prerequisite but only a framework that is filled by culturally dependent specifics:

As a result, gender is not to culture as sex is to nature; gender is also the discursive/cultural means by which „sexed nature“ or „a natural sex“ is produced and established as „prediscursive“, prior to culture, a politically neutral surface *on which* culture acts. (*Gender Trouble* 7)

We can therefore ask: Is it still possible to assert that any behaviour is biologically preset or is each and every behaviour always only the result of socialisation and environmental influence? Presumably, none of these issues can be definitely solved but I think that the merit of considering them lies in a heightened attention towards categories (man/ woman, masculine/ feminine) that we easily tend to take as given. Gender is not a natural force that bends us into a predetermined direction, though. Gender is what we see performed, what we can experience in our own actions and in the actions of other people. Insofar, gender has cultural significance rather than being just a small, irrelevant mark. If we see a girl in a picturebook wearing a pink skirt, we might simply assume that pink is her (or her parents’) favourite colour. Many people who have grown up in the context of a Western culture, however, will recognise the colour as one typically associated with girls and women. In the act of wearing a pink skirt, the girl is shown performing a gendered behaviour just as much as when she is shown playing with dolls or talking politely to her grandmother. My

main aim here is to point out that everyone of us grows up in a society that assigns certain codes to attributes, behaviours, occupations and looks, coding them as masculine or feminine. These codes may differ from one society to the other but the fact remains that our behaviours, looks, and choices are coded along the lines of femininity and masculinity. These codes resemble tacit agreements on what constitutes proper behaviour for men and women and in most cases, we learn and know them implicitly. As we grow up, we receive our share of gendering and moulding towards a certain direction of assumedly proper behaviour, usually remaining unaware of the whole process and the binary categories into one of which we are put. We often only notice the norms when they are breached. Statements such as “Boys don’t cry” and “Women can’t drive” remind us of our proper place but they also provide opportunities to question the norms because they make them obvious and assailable.

The two statements above are examples of gender stereotypes. Stereotypes facilitate our ways of viewing the world but they must necessarily be unfair to the diversity of the groups they describe. “A stereotype is a radically reductive way of representing whole communities of people by identifying them with a few key characteristics. Individuals from the group who don’t fit that stereotype are then said to be atypical” (Cranny-Francis et al. 141). Gender stereotypes are very pervasive and we have to pay close attention to be able to discover them in our own attitudes and beliefs. Not all of them seem to be negative at first sight, either. If women are held to be communicative and empathic, these positive features might also restrict them to the mentioned attributes and not allow for deviant behaviour. At the same time, it might make it more difficult for men to act empathically as this behaviour is already coded as feminine.

The fact that gender studies could evolve as a field of studies in its own right certainly owes a great deal to the achievements of feminism. Although feminism today appears in various forms, it can be safely said that it originally arose from a concern for women’s interests and rights. Only once the discrimination against women and their invisibility and powerlessness in many areas was acknowledged as a fact could there be investigations into the causes of this unjust treatment of women that had been going on for centuries. In 1949, Simone de Beauvoir published her influential work *The Second Sex*, claiming that women are made by societal influence and expectations rather than being born as women (or men)

(Walters 99). Thus, deBeauvoir prepared the ground for further inquiries into male and female behaviour, which was beginning to be seen as at least as much acquired as it was seen as innate. The struggle for suffrage during the first wave of feminism in the 19th and early 20th centuries and the struggle for equal payment, working opportunities and bodily autonomy during the second wave of feminism in the second half of the 20th century raised public attention for women's concerns, both in the public and in the private sphere (Jule 11). Since the 1980s, the movement has taken a turn towards "identity feminism" (Jule 11), which acknowledges the huge variety of different women's experiences. The most pressing concerns for an individual woman will vary depending on her socioeconomic status, ethnicity, sexual orientation, age, etc. While for a white single mother in search of work, the danger (or reality) of poverty will be foremost on her mind, for a young black woman living in a neighbourhood prone to aggression, racism might be of greater concern. Third-wave feminism tries to make these differences visible and thus embraces a broader concept of what it means to be and live as a woman. As Butler puts it, "[t]here is, in my view, nothing about femaleness that is waiting to be expressed; there is, on the other hand, a good deal about the diverse experiences of women that is being expressed and still needs to be expressed" (Performative Acts 530-531).

2.1.2. Gender expressed, gender performed

How do we reveal ourselves as men or women? What allows us to put the people around us into one of two categories? Even more interesting, why do we immediately notice someone who does not fit into a category or someone who breaks the rules by mixing them?

Without explicitly being told, we have learned what is considered properly "manly" or "womanly" behaviour from our earliest years on. We use dozens of individual marks that we perceive in a person to judge whether they are in conformity with established gender roles. A person's looks, clothes, activities, character traits, emotional expression, language, social relationships, work and domestic life are all more or less marked for gender. None of these marks of gender are coercively and inevitably attached to either men or women, though. A man can wear pink just as well as a woman can, but the meaning that society will attach to his choice of colour will differ from the meaning that will be attached to a woman's wearing pink clothes. Such a man even risks punishment because his choice does

not agree with what has been established as masculine. The act of putting on a costume for playing a stage role is comparable to the act of displaying a certain behaviour to play a gender role. To continue this train of thought with Judith Butler, gender is not so much an essence but a performance. “gender proves to be performative – that is, constituting the identity it is purported to be” (*Gender Trouble* 25). It is not a single act that produces one’s gender, though: “In this sense, it is not so much performance, a one-off thing, as performativity. You create yourself by repeating a series of steps over and over again, and it is the repetition of such a series of steps that produces you” (Cranny-Francis et al. 169). The repetitiveness of gender creation (and creation of self) allows us to become acquainted with certain patterns which, taken together, form our image of men and women.

These images are strongly dependent on a given cultural context, as Judith Butler notes: “As a shifting and contextual phenomenon, gender does not denote a substantive being, but a relative point of convergence among culturally and historically specific sets of relations” (*Gender Trouble* 10). Men and women in 17th-century England would have had an entirely different self-image and public image than men and women in 21st-century Japan may have. Butler calls gender a “cultural fiction” because it is only ever created in the acts it consists of; there is no universal, fundamental gender (*Performative Acts* 522). The constant creation and re-creation of gender in our acts marks it as a fluid concept, far from being engraved in stone and allowing for changes. Seen from this perspective, gender becomes opened up for challenge, play and experimentation:

As the effects of a subtle and politically enforced performativity, gender is an ‘act’, as it were, that is open to splittings, self-parody, self-criticism, and those hyperbolic exhibitions of the “natural” that, in their very exaggeration, reveal its fundamentally phantasmatic status. (*Gender Trouble* 146-147)

We might quite easily play with colours and clothes but there are areas of life in which gendering is much more difficult to discover and challenge. I would like to mention just two interrelated examples, namely symbols and language. Symbols help us to make sense of what we perceive associatively and holistically rather than analytically and it is for this reason that they are heavily used in the media. For Acker, the construction of symbols is one of the major ways in which gendering occurs. These symbols “[...] explain, express, reinforce, or sometimes oppose those divisions [divisions of labor, of allowed behaviors, of locations in physical space, of power]. These have many sources or forms in language,

ideology, popular and high culture, dress, the press, television” (110). Advertisements are particularly prone to conveying a reduced image of women (and men). Women’s bodies are often used, if not to say exploited, in advertisements to evoke desire – both the desire for the woman or to be like that woman and the desire to consume the advertised product. In other cases, the whole setting of a poster or television commercial might be made up of individual symbols connected to femininity or masculinity. Car commercials are mostly aimed at men and usually emphasise speed, power, intelligence and cool colours as opposed to commercials for washing powder, which try to reach female customers by using supposedly feminine attributes such as a domestic environment, children, softness, personalised communication and brilliant, warm colours. The (verbal and pictorial) language used in advertisements must in many cases be called sexist but advertising is by far not the only domain in which language is used to such an effect. Even in academia and much more so in everyday talk, people tend to use the generic masculine and thus exclude women from their language. Moreover, stereotypes are frequently reinforced by being verbally expressed. “Oh, that’s so typical! Carry’s been on the phone for hours – I’d never talk for hours about nothing special at all”, is a remark that can still be expected from a considerable number of men (and many women would agree with the basic idea that being overly talkative is a feminine trait). Since “language is a powerful medium through which the world is both reflected and constructed” (Jule 13), we shape and are shaped by language at the same time. Ways of talking about men and women influence our views but we can, in turn, also influence attitudes towards men and women by a conscious choice of language. The effort to account for gender equality in language through the use of both the male and the female third person pronoun (he and she) or neutral terms for certain occupations (such as “police officer” instead of “policeman”) can sometimes be counteracted by the use of marked forms such as “woman doctor”, which implicitly claims the normalcy of doctors being men (Jule 14). Normalcy is a very tricky term in itself since what is seen as normal always depends on time and culture. In this thesis, I try to use it in an exclusively critical way to draw attention to how certain looks, behaviours or ways of using language tend to be seen as normal and are consequently often valued more highly than others.

As I have suggested earlier, the domain of gendered behaviours is also the domain of stereotypes. Although most people would have little difficulty in assigning the labels

“typical of men” or “typical of women” to a list of behaviours and activities, probably few of them could explain why and how they labelled reading as a “female” activity and home improvement as a “male” activity, to name just two examples. Our views of what constitutes feminine or masculine behaviour are usually not based on a conscious choice. Many of us might already be aware that reading is no more natural for women than is home improvement but a conscious effort is needed to keep this idea in mind in everyday situations where habits win over insights made in a focused situation such as a lecture on gender studies. Thus, these widespread assumptions persist to influence our thoughts and consequently our ways of approaching and dealing with men and women. Their covert and almost untraceable origins make stereotypes virtually impossible to detect before they are fully operating in society (and as soon as they are operating, they tend to be taken for granted). This hidden way of operating is certainly one of the reasons why stereotypes spread so easily and can have such a lasting effect. It might also explain why, even in academic writing, surprisingly little concrete material on the origins of stereotypes can be found. Most of us seem to intuitively know what is commonly considered feminine or masculine, but to quote an authoritative source for this knowledge proves to be a difficult task. In my analysis, I will therefore also resort to what has already been firmly established as a stereotype in academic writing on gender in picturebooks and on social psychology (see also chapters 4 and 5).

Stereotypes give us a guideline to what is commonly considered normal and acceptable. Interestingly, normalcy has often been associated with maleness. Taking the way men behave, feel and talk as a benchmark, women were frequently marked as “the other”, as abnormal.

Psychological theorists have fallen as innocently as Strunk and White [professor of English and writer respectively; writing on style] into the same observational bias. Implicitly adopting the male life as the norm, they have tried to fashion women out of a masculine cloth. It all goes back, of course, to Adam and Eve – a story which shows, among other things, that if you make a woman out of a man, you are bound to get into trouble. (Gilligan 6)

Gilligan’s ironic comment does not weaken the seriousness of her argument. A society that only values characteristics associated with masculinity will neither value assumedly feminine behaviour nor will it allow women to escape the boundaries of their pre-

determined roles. While the “qualities deemed necessary for adulthood – the capacity for autonomous thinking, clear decision-making, and responsible action – are those associated with masculinity” (Gilligan 17), women are assumed to be emotional and intuitive. The latter abilities have often been dismissed as irrational and unworthy of attention in a world where success is expected to be built on rational thought and assertiveness (Prentice and Carranza 278f.).

2.1.3. Gender in (children’s) literature

A surprising number of well-known female writers suffered from mental illnesses; Virginia Woolf is just one case in point. One way to look at this fact is to see these women as also suffering from the constraints of a world that judged them as non-conforming. Writing, an activity and ability that is traditionally connected to logic thought and reason and therefore (as I have pointed out above) gendered male, was over a long time span considered an improper activity for women. Women who dared to write in spite of these difficulties often could not make their voice heard (Goodman 142 ff.).

From the reader’s point of view, gender has an influence on the way we read texts, on our expectations of characters and on the general attitudes we bring towards a text (Goodman 4). Reading and interpreting texts within a framework of gender analysis encourages the reader to focus on certain aspects of the text, particularly the depiction of men and women, power relations and the use of language. Both writers and readers act within the framework of a society with precisely defined gender roles. Readers will often be influenced in their evaluation of a text by the knowledge of the author’s gender. Woman writers might struggle with the choice between purposely imitating a “masculine” norm in both topic and style on the one hand and dealing with certain themes such as “motherhood; domestic responsibility; conflicts in women’s lives; power relations between the sexes [...]; and the conflicts between private and public roles and responsibilities” (Goodman xiii) on the other hand.

Women’s voices have often been suppressed on account of women being considered as “the other”, as the abnormality opposing male normalcy. Similarly, as Lissa Paul argues, children have been marginalised and silenced. In her view, women and children have been physically, economically and linguistically trapped, in reality as well as in literature

(Enigma Variations 208ff.). Paul argues for rereading the canon of well-established literature and including (“reclaiming”) female writers as yet unacknowledged (Feminist Criticism 103ff.). For her, the next step would be “redirection”, in which feminism and post-colonialism could discover similarities (108): If the colonised (women, ethnicities and children) have been seen as innocent, naïve and in need of being told what is good for them, how does this discovery change the way texts are produced and to whom they are addressed?

Historically, there has been a strict distinction between boys’ books and girls’ books. Since the greatest number of readers could be found in the middle class during the 19th century, middle-class values were the strongest in children’s literature and literature in general. Children’s books’ heroes and heroines often represented the ideal of male or female qualities: boys could immerse themselves in liberating adventure stories, while girls were confined to the house in reality as well as in domestic stories aimed at them (Segel 190 ff.). Although the appearance of boyish girls (tomboys) in a considerable number of children’s books has sometimes challenged conventional role assignments, girlish boys are much less frequent and it is still much easier for girls to behave like boys (in reality and literature) than for boys to behave like girls (Simons 147 and 154ff.). Similarly, many girls read boys’ books, often striving to resemble the male heroes and thereby perpetuating the supremacy of traits associated with masculinity, but comparably few boys read girls’ books (Segel 196). Female characters in children’s literature today are allowed much more freedom and possibility for adventure than heroines of the 18th, 19th and early to mid-20th century were. The latter can only be explorative and daring in a dreamworld from which they finally wake to find themselves in safe surroundings and happy to obey the rules set by parents, caretakers and society. Goodman cites Alice, Dorothy in *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and the fairy-tale characters Sleeping Beauty and Snow White as examples (15).

Fortunately, girl and women characters in modern and contemporary children’s literature are depicted in a range of activities and occupations. Girls and boys are less stereotypically portrayed and can be both wild and mild, regardless of their gender. There is, however, no reason to dismiss the matter as settled. Even some very recent works show a disturbing blindness towards gender issues. Adventure stories written for boys such as Anthony Horowitz’ Ales Rider series or vampire love stories written primarily for girls such as

Stephenie Mayer's *Twilight* series are just two very fresh examples. Although many authors are aware of the need to create a balanced view on gender identities in their stories, deeply entrenched (unconscious) convictions and assumptions (acquired in the socialisation process) might still result in stereotypical portrayals of men and women (Louie 143). From my own research impressions, I daresay that this is even more true for children's fiction than for picturebooks. Picturebooks may have the advantage of addressing very young readers (or listeners and viewers) for whom the gender divide is not yet such a prominent issue. There are, however, dozens (or probably hundreds) of picturebooks very decidedly aimed at either boys or girls. Some of them do not question conventional gender roles but I have also found a considerable number of sophisticated picturebooks which either deal openly with gender issues or elegantly weave them into the main story implicitly.

2.2. Family

2.2.1. The idea(s) of the family

Once upon a fabulized time, half a century ago, there was a lucky land where families with names such as Truman and Eisenhower presided over a world of Nelsons, Cleavers, and Rileys. Men and women married, made love, and produced gurgling Gerber babies (in that proper order). It was a land where, as God and Nature had ordained, men were men and women were ladies. Fathers worked outside the home for pay to support their wives and children, and mothers worked inside the home without pay to support their husbands and to cultivate healthy, industrious, above-average children. Streets and neighborhoods were safe and tidy. This land was the strongest, wealthiest, freest, and fairest in the world. Its virtuous leaders, heroic soldiers, and dazzling technology defended all the freedom-loving people on the planet from an evil empire that had no respect for freedom or families. A source of envy, inspiration, and protection to people everywhere, the leaders and citizens of this blessed land had good reason to feel confident and proud. (Stacey 487)

What is a family? Judith Stacey offers us one way of answering this question with her ironic Family Values Fable, alluding to the ideal of the 1950s US family. We just have to take a look around us, though, to notice that this family model is and was very rare in reality. The type of family we perceive as traditional today has its origins in developments affecting the European and US middle class of the 18th and 19th century when bourgeois values became prevalent, placing men in the public, occupational sphere and women in the private, domestic sphere. The decline in importance of extended kinship ties and the shift towards affection and intimacy as a constitutive part of family life added to this development (Nicholson 31f.).

In Europe, the United Kingdom and Ireland there does not seem to have been such a precisely defined norm as the 1950s US family provided. Still, the developments that led to the establishment of the nuclear family in the 18th and 19th century and that I have mentioned above were the same and produced a family ideal that is at least similar to the US-American one. Moreover, American media became influential in Europe during the second half of the 20th century and probably did their share in conveying an image of the (assumedly) perfect family. However, literature on the topic referring to (present-day) Europe is scarce in comparison to the work on US families. Also, some authors such as Nicholson or Midgley and Hughes remain vague in their references to temporal and geographical context as they discuss the development of families over time.

How real was the US family ideal for people in the 1950s? Historically, the “nuclear family” consisting of married parents living together with their children developed as both the required norm and the ultimate goal of family life in the United States after the Second World War. There were indeed a number of factors which supported the emergence of the nuclear family in the US: the overall wealth increased, birth rates were high and a housing boom allowed more and more families to move into the suburbs (Coontz 23ff.). However, this model did not have a long tradition before it arose and for many American citizens it was simply unattainable. For most blacks, Mexican-Americans and other ethnicities, as well as for many poorer white families, the “‘cereal box’ model of the white, Western nuclear family” (Chapman 3) could not become reality. As Coontz puts it, the “happy, homogenous families that we ‘remember’ from the 1950s were thus partly a result of the media’s denial of diversity” (31). Nor were the model families necessarily happy with their achievements. Women often wanted to work but either were not given the possibility to do so or could only work in lowly-paid jobs. The suburbs, providing relative security from the outside, were frequently places of wife battering and sexual abuse. Even today’s high divorce rates cannot be called such a new phenomenon: a fourth to a third of marriages were terminated in the 1950s in the USA (Coontz 31ff.).

Although the number of really “traditional” families is probably very low today, the model persists as an ideal at least in people’s beliefs. Social insecurity and instability prompt the desire to live a glorified past, in which current problems are believed to have been non-existent. Many complain of a decline of the family in the light of high divorce rates, teenage pregnancies, poverty, violence, substance abuse and the overall moral attitudes in families. Dissatisfaction with the current state of affairs is not new, though. Over the centuries, the downfall of the family has been feared and various attempts at reforming it have been taken (Coontz 11). Still, there are voices, particularly in the US, that call the traditional family a “haven in a heartless world” (Popenoe 333) and especially lament the state of today’s parent-child relationships. For me it is highly questionable, though, whether a return to the conventional model can succeed in a rapidly changing and challenging society. As societies open themselves up in a globalised world rather than isolating themselves, raising children in a secluded, traditional family does not appear a sensible way

to prepare them for connecting to people either in their immediate surroundings or in a bigger community.

But what is it that people expect from having a family? According to Nicholson, a family's aim lies in "provid[ing] economic and emotional sustenance to its members" (28). The openness of this definition allows for every imaginable composition in terms of family members and points towards two major aspects of family life at the same time: labour, both waged and unwaged, and social relationships.

Is it proper work if I cook a dinner for four or can only work in an office, a shop or on a construction site be justifiably called work?

[T]here is still a popular perception that the term 'work' refers to waged labour alone. [...] Early feminist work on the unpaid labour of housekeeping showed that our very conceptions of what work is relate to what we are prepared to recognise as work.[...] Discussions of work almost always exclude unpaid labour, such as work performed in the home. Work is conventionally equated with waged or salaried labour. (Cranny-Francis et al. 223)

Although attitudes have changed in recent years, many people still tend to value paid labour much higher than housework and childcare, which is usually unpaid and traditionally done by women. Domestic practices are not fixed to one sex or gender, though. Culturally embedded beliefs determine who is responsible for the different tasks necessary in a household, be it earning an income, raising children or cleaning the toilet. Chapman sees domestic practices as subject to change in accordance with changes in society and argues for a broader definition of "domestic practices" as a "wide range of activities that take place within or outside the home including: housework, childcare, leisure, providing income and wealth, strategic planning, managing and spending money and maintaining relationships through caring" (1). In my opinion, this definition places various activities on the same level which are all important and necessary but have been differently valued traditionally. Thus a pool of possible responsibilities is created for both men and women to choose from rather than being trapped in definite role ascriptions. Certainly, there has been a change in attitudes towards paid and unpaid labour during the last decades, not least due to the work of feminists. Catherine Hakim, in her study of models of the family in modern societies, found that the majority of those polled in Britain at the beginning of the 21st century believed that roles both in the household and in the workforce should not be segregated and

that work should be equally distributed. In 1974, one half to two thirds of adults had still supported the idea that housework and income-earning should be allocated by sex (52). Attitudes do not equal behaviour, though, and continuous awareness-raising appears to be necessary in order for these changes to become manifest in people's actions.

In terms of social relationships, families provide care, support and emotional ties to their members. Although many people value their families precisely for this aspect, the need to give emotional support can also become overwhelming. Midgley and Hughes argue that, while in former times social networks in Western cultures (such as clans, schools, clubs, churches and villages) were stronger and more permanent than now, the last stable unit of today's society seems to be the family (63f.). This unique position puts great pressure on families, which understandably cannot meet every expectation. Parents find themselves particularly under stress to fulfil the demands of politics, schools, and also other parents. Working mothers who put their children into day care are still often frowned upon, even though studies show that these children can form secure emotional attachments just as well as children with mothers who stay at home. Children in day care even seem to cope better with other children and adults (Coontz 217f., referring to US studies). The role of fathers is often mysteriously neglected, with mothers still seen as the primary caregivers. Coontz notices a polarisation in the behaviour of today's fathers: some of them leave their children alone and do not seem to care about them (especially after a divorce), some seem to be more committed and caring than ever (16). Divorce is another problematic and controversially discussed issue. While children are very likely to suffer if parents argue constantly, pass them from one to the other in changing intervals or prevent them from seeing one parent at all, children from divorced families are not necessarily doomed for life. Importantly, Coontz notes that the discussions about divorce, neglect and day care put children into a very passive and vulnerable position. She argues that children tend to be far more resilient than we concede to them and that concern for good parenting should not overshadow the importance of the socialisation process as a whole, including the influence of schools, peer groups, neighbourhoods and the media (225f.).

The growing acceptance of alternative family models also allows for alternative ways of caretaking. Anderson and Vail promote a combination of "informal" child care performed by "extended family members or neighbors" (361) and formal child care in institutions,

depending on the income and preferences of each individual family. Similarly, Coontz suggests sharing childcare responsibilities with the wider kinship, childcare institutions, friends and extended social networks (231). As same-sex partnerships have become more accepted, gay and lesbian parents have slowly become visible in the public perception. In most countries there are still many legal problems to overcome: custody arrangements and adoption rights often discriminate against gay and lesbian families. Great Britain and some US states allow officially acknowledged same-sex partnerships and adoption but couples (and children) still often face hostility from the public. Judith Stacey takes these difficulties into consideration but also stresses that children in same-sex partnerships are more likely to be really wanted and to grow up in an atmosphere of openness and acceptance (391f. and 395).

“Are families out of date”, as Midgley and Hughes ask? Given the strong attachment many people (still) feel to their families, I believe that families are as alive as ever. During the last decades, however, families have definitely changed in composition, allowing for stepparents, same-sex partners or foster children to be included as family members. This change slowly seems to be accepted in (Western) societies at large, resulting in a broader definition of “family” that transgresses the boundaries of the nuclear family. Individuals’ personal agency is stressed when we can accept “families created through choice rather than biology” (Reynolds 205). If we accept and appreciate a family as a fluid and flexible social unit, incorporated into a larger web of neighbourhoods, social networks and institutions, Midgley and Hughes’s vision does not sound as utopian as one might think at first. They set the ambitious aim for families to combine “secure social bonding” with “complete individual freedom” (66).

2.2.2. Family in children’s literature

Families are what most of us grow up with, in a way that seems so natural and self-evident that we seldom question it. As we have seen in the discussion of gender, though, what remains unquestioned often has great potential for one-sidedness. Recent children’s literature criticism has concerned itself with issues of ideology in children’s books and has indeed found the family as a particularly useful example to illustrate ideological structures: on the one hand, a family is the first setting of relationships, education and safety, on the

other hand, it can be threatening precisely because it seems so natural and we cannot easily escape it (Thompson 147f.). Interestingly, as Reynolds has found, there is a long-standing tradition of protagonists in children's fiction "who succeed outside conventional families" (193), e.g. Little Goody Two-Shoes, Anne of Green Gables, Kipling's Kim and today's Harry Potter, Alex Rider or Lyra and Will (from Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials*). Also, family sagas for children in the 19th century increasingly focused on the relations between and adventures of siblings while their parents are absent (199f.). These tendencies contrast with the ever-present tendency to show the family as a realm of good parenting and harmonious, stable relationships (195f.). Recent children's books usually take a critical look at family life and do not exclude precarious topics, though.

The depiction of families in children's books has been changing continuously in accordance with changes in attitudes towards families and childhood. For instance, as Avery and Kinnell note, children's books in the late 18th and early 19th centuries became lighter in content and style as they became more child-centred. This development went hand in hand with the emergent possibility of a prolonged childhood and the recognition of adolescence as a separate stage in the developmental process (50ff.). Despite this orientation towards children's (assumed) needs and interests, books of that period were mainly concerned with religious education, even though they were sometimes clad in the form of a story or family saga (46ff.). During Victorian times, moral tales with religious contents still prevailed but they were becoming more secular, humorous and reality-oriented (Butts 78ff.). In the US, children's literature remained didactic and moral well into the 19th century. But as society changed and conflicts arose (e.g. those of urban life and poverty), authors of children's literature became increasingly sensitive to these issues and incorporated them into their works, often with a strong touch of sentimentality (MacLeod 115-119). Reality and current topics often entered children's books with some delay, presumably because children were believed to be innocent and should remain that way. During the inter-bellum years, a retreat from the outside world, which had before already been incorporated into children's books, was visible in Great Britain and the US: domestic stories flourished since they preserved the ideals of family and childhood (Avery et al. 242). Unlike adult literature, which concerned itself with the growing disquiet of the modern world, children's literature fled into established genres and fantasies (Hunt, *Retreatism* 195). Improved production

technologies allowed for magazines to be widely circulated, which supported the growing popularity of comics. Picturebooks, although more expensive than comics, also profited from the technological progress (*Retreatism* 205ff. and Avery et al. 232 and 247f.). After the Second World War, children's literature reflected major social changes both in Britain and the US. Children's novels from the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries can often be categorised as either social realism or fantasy, with these two possibilities constituting two main strands in children's literature (Hollindale and Sutherland 252f.). In terms of social realism, teenage and young adult novels deal with topics so diverse and controversial as divorce, sex, disease, ethnicity or war (298).

Kimberley Reynolds notes that the much-feared decline of the family is mirrored in children's literature from the late 20th century: protagonists often come from dysfunctional families, struggle with crime and addiction and/or denounce their families and instead embrace other models of communal living (202f.). While some topics can be better dealt with in young adult novels, picturebooks lend themselves to the portrayal of families because of their very young target group for whom their family is still the major (or only) social environment. Literature for very young readers thus provides a chance to establish diversity as "normal" and desirable: "a large number of picture books [...] feature single-parent families; blended, adoptive and step-families; families parented by gay or lesbian couples; and the many cross-household families that are products of remarriage" (Reynolds 205).

3. Theory 2: Picturebooks

What is a picturebook? Is it a thin booklet with colourful pictures illustrating an easy, cheerful narrative for very young children? Or is it rather a complex work of art, combining many related strands of verbal and visual communication into a (more or less) harmonious whole? Although we can find examples of both, Zipes et al.'s claim that "[p]icture books are probably the most innovative, experimental, and exciting area of children's literature" (1051) is fortunately true for many contemporary picturebooks. Nodelman's preliminary definition of picturebooks, though somewhat dry, concisely and neutrally sums up the main features of picturebooks in describing them as "books intended for young children which communicate information or tell stories through a series of many pictures combined with relatively slight texts or no texts at all" (vii). What, in my opinion, is missing from such a definition is the complexity provided by the interplay of words and images and the playfulness with which we are invited to approach a picturebook and its multiple meanings. The process of reading and understanding a picturebook is actually far from easy and requires certain skills of interpreting verbal and visual language. As Nikolajeva and Scott note,

[t]he common prejudice that picturebooks are literature for very young readers is apparently based on Lacan's notion of the preverbal, imaginary language, which is, if not dominant, then conspicuous in picturebooks as compared to novels. As it appears, picturebooks, successfully combining the imaginary and the symbolic, the iconic and the conventional, have achieved something that no other literary form has mastered. (262)

Reading images is often considered a natural ability as compared to reading words, which we have had to learn consciously. Since images are iconic, i.e. they resemble the real object they are intended to represent, we tend to believe "that pictures can communicate automatically and be understood effortlessly by even very young children" (Nodelman 5). Perceiving and understanding images is not so straightforward, though. Some pictures may seem very simple to us because the objects shown are highly stylised and stereotyped, removing individual marks and concentrating on the main features of the object. Most of us would probably call the image of a bike marking a bike lane very simple but in fact, such an image is highly abstracted and does not resemble an actual bike very much. We first have to learn that the image is supposed to stand for all the different real bikes we might

have already seen. Even photographs, which seem to us so close to reality, do not tell us about reality by themselves. Rather, we have to acquire conventions of what is judged “worthy of attention” (Nodelman 13) in our culture and direct our gaze there. Children are impressively quick at learning pictorial conventions, which might be one reason why we think that reading pictures is a natural ability.

One very elaborate theory of how we make sense of pictures is Gunter Kress and Theo van Leeuwen’s grammar of visual design. There is no space to go into detail about their theory here but I would like to quickly state their main proposition. (David Lewis provides an excellent summary of their ideas, 145-167). Basically, they argue that pictures, similarly to language, work according to an underlying structure that tells us how their individual parts function. As Lewis notes,

in this grammar, structure – whether of verbal language or visual imagery – is conceived in terms of meaning and function. In other words, the authors are not interested in dissecting the image into its separate features (line, colour, shape, etc.) and analysing them apart from each other, but are looking at the way the structure of an image contributes to what the image says to us. The participants in an image – the people and things that have roles to play – are organized upon the page, and are related to one another, in various ways. (119)

Thus, we might, in the authors’ terms, detect an “actor” in a picture performing a “transactional process” directed towards a certain “goal”: a mother throwing a ball for her child to catch. Of course a picture’s formal features such as colour and line also contribute to its meaning and I will say more on this topic in chapter 5 on methodology.

Going back and forth between pictures and words, we use both ways of communication to make sense of what we are seeing. Words raise expectations that are confirmed or flawed by the pictures and vice versa. Thus, meaning is never finished but newly and differently created every time we read the same picturebook or even the same page. Nikolajeva and Scott compare this process to a hermeneutic circle, in which readers can gain a deeper understanding with every step they take in their unique interpretation of a text (2).

With regard to subject matter, picturebooks can deal with virtually anything. The range of topics is only restricted by considerations of what is suitable for children:

The subject matter of picture books continues to cause debate, partly, perhaps, because images are supposed to have an immediate effect, partly because of the unthinking assumption that children’s books are innocent or should preserve some kind of

innocence (usually by their omissions), and partly on the grounds of good taste. (Zipes et al. 1057f.)

Concern for the appropriateness of certain topics is usually voiced by those who see picturebooks mainly from a pedagogic standpoint. Children's literature in general frequently finds itself in the dilemma of different, sometimes opposing, demands: parents and teachers often try to find the "right" book for children in accordance with their beliefs about childhood, while literary critics might be more interested in the artistic qualities of a book and argue for the inclusion of controversial topics. In my opinion, the basic difficulty lies in the impossibility of determining what will be good and right for any given child (and whether goodness and rightness in a morally pedagogic sense should be the most important factors in choosing books at all). Since picturebooks are usually written, selected and even read (aloud) by adults, it is also adults who impose certain views and topics on children. We will be hardly able to change these circumstances but I believe it is fruitful not to lose sight of our own biased views and how we tend to assume authority on the basis of the latter. In any case, authors and illustrators have been inventive, imaginative and daring during the last few decades and subjects such as diversity, sexuality or war have found their way into both critically acclaimed and commercially successful picturebooks.

Literary criticism has been somewhat late in starting to pay attention to picturebooks as serious literature and acknowledging the importance of both pictures and words rather than treating one of them as a mere accessory to the other (Nikolajeva and Scott 3). In the last 30 years, a number of scholars have studied the characteristics of picturebooks closely and even though they might put different emphases in their work, they have all contributed to a growing academic interest in picturebooks (see Nikolajeva and Scott 3-6 for a detailed overview of work in the field). As a basis for my analysis, I have chosen three major works on picturebooks which, in my view, offer a comprehensive toolbox for interpreting picturebooks, with particular attention paid to the interaction of words and images. Perry Nodelman's *Words About Pictures*, Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott's *How Picturebooks Work* and David Lewis's *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks* all focus on the importance of the text-picture interaction and the multiple meanings that can be derived thereof. Their intention is clearly literary rather than pedagogic but Nodelman and Lewis also take

questions of the intended audience, the reading context and reader-response into consideration.

One seemingly minor problem, which still complicates academic communication about picturebooks, concerns terminology. Since picturebooks differ considerably from other texts in their form and because critical interest in picturebooks has not yet a long-standing tradition, almost every scholar seems to have developed his or her own terminology. We can start quite simply with asking the question whether “picture book”, “picture-book” or “picturebook” (which my spell check marks as wrong) is the most appropriate spelling. I am using “picturebook” because I favour Lewis’s view that this form can best “reflect the compound nature of the artefact itself” (xiv). The interplay of images and words Lewis alludes to is also visible in the names scholars have given to the entirety of text and pictures in picturebooks: Kristin Hallberg calls it “iconotext”, Lawrence Sipe “synergy”, W.J.T. Mitchell “imagetext” (Nikolajeva and Scott 6 and 8) and David Lewis “picturebook text” (xiv). All these names capture the two forces at work in a picturebook but I will use iconotext since it seems to be best established (Nikolajeva and Scott 6). We might also ask which kinds of books the category “picturebook” includes. For my study, I have decided to focus on narratives where pictures and words tend to be equally important, thus excluding illustrated stories, picture narratives without words and non-fiction. At least there seems to be general agreement as to the labelling of the individual parts of an actual picturebook. We enter the book through the cover, which is followed by the front endpaper (the page immediately following the front cover), travelling through the book with its double page spreads and leaving it through the back endpaper and back cover. The right-hand side of a double-page spread is called recto, the left-hand side verso (Lewis 168 – 171).

In the following sections, I will discuss some of the unique characteristics of picturebooks in general. I will go into more detail about some specific aspects of analysis such as time, space, modality and visual qualities in chapter 5 on methodology. Since words and pictures constitute the foundations of a picturebook, I would like to start here with considering the special relationship and interaction between the two. Words communicate in a different way than pictures do; we can equate words with the diegetic function (telling) and pictures with the mimetic function (showing) (Nikolajeva and Scott 26). Thus, images are more suitable for visually describing a scenery than words, which can, however, better represent

a series of actions or a dialogue. Sometimes it may seem as if the words were merely repeating what the picture is showing, e.g. when we see a rural landscape under a bright sun with a caption telling us “It was a beautiful day in the little valley”. Nikolajeva and Scott (12) call this relative redundancy a symmetrical relationship as opposed to a complementary (“words and pictures filling each other’s gaps”) or counterpoint relationship (“two mutually dependent narratives”). Some of the most attractive picturebooks make use of contrapuntal relationships between words and images, with the pictures somehow contradicting the words and vice versa. As readers, we are asked to actively engage in the process of interpretation and be ready to accept multiple meanings. If words tell us that the boy protagonist of a picturebook is very well-behaved and the picture shows him secretly playing a joke on his mum, we can delight in this discrepancy. Obviously, there is a great potential for irony in picturebooks even though they are mainly addressed to very young and comparably inexperienced readers. Although a categorisation such as the above always appears convenient, it can hardly be applied with clarity and ease to actual picturebooks. Most picturebooks will exhibit many or all ways of the word-image relationship to some degree and in many cases, we cannot determine which type fits a certain book, sequence or page-opening best. Moreover, as Lewis notes, “[...] a picture can only offer ‘the same information’ in the loosest possible sense [...and t]he symmetry that many picturebooks appear to exhibit is thus illusory” (39). If we take the example of our imaginary beautiful valley again, we may notice the following in the picture: there are green hills, a small stream running through the valley, some old-fashioned farmhouses and a yellow sun casting a brilliant light on the scene but the picture does not inherently tell us that the day is beautiful. We might infer this idea from stereotypical knowledge about landscapes and weather conditions but in fact, the caption might just as well read “The day began quietly but there was trouble ahead”. Words and images work together to create a focus for the reader. In Nodelman’s words, “[w]e need to be told what we are being shown” (211).

In discussing irony earlier, I noted how unusual we might perceive the use of this literary device in books for very young children. On the one hand, children still need to learn about literary conventions but on the other hand it seems that they often understand the jokes created by “the dissonance between what the words say and what the pictures show” (Lewis 69) very well. When considering irony, we should also take into account the fact that

picturebooks are seldom read by children alone. Of course children do engage with picturebooks on their own, possibly paying attention to completely different parts of the books than many adults would. At an age where most children are not yet literate, reading picturebooks is very often an experience shared with parents, teachers or other caretakers, though. Adult readers may alter, enhance, explain, play with or act out the story for a child while delighting in the subtleties of the narrative themselves. Picturebooks thus have a dual audience, addressing “a spectrum of ages and experience” (Nikolajeva and Scott 21).

Understanding picturebooks does not only depend upon the knowledge of literary conventions, either. Just as we need words as contextual information to interpret pictures, and pictures as a context for verbal information, so do we also need the context of society and culture to make sense of a picturebook’s possible meanings. Lewis develops an interesting and very adaptable theory about “the ecology of the picturebook” (46-60), arguing that picturebooks, like natural eco-systems, have an internal logic with all parts of the system working together. Also, picturebooks are influenced by “external” systems of social reality since “[l]anguage and literacy is always embedded within social and cultural contexts which have a shaping influence upon discourses and utterances and which are, in turn, shaped by language and literacy events” (47). Lewis emphasises flexibility and complexity as two main characteristics of ecosystems and, consequently, of picturebooks (47-54); creating an image of a fluid, exciting and polysemous genre that asks for an active reader. In order to comprehend the meaning or meanings of a picturebook, we need to be familiar with at least some of the conventions of our culture in which the book is embedded and which it uses, whether fulfilling or flawing our expectations. For Lewis, there are various ways to approach the meaning of a picturebook:

We can apply the methods of semiotic analysis to picturebook images or look for the ways in which pictures and words interanimate one another. We can try to understand the picturebooks as an object of aesthetic contemplation or as an imaginative experience for a child. We can understand it as embedded in its contexts of use, both constrained and enabled by routines and rituals. All of these possibilities are open to us by virtue of the fact that picturebooks can be and are seen under a number of different aspects: they deliver up their meanings to us in a number of ways. (136)

4. Anxious, cooking girls saved by bold, fighting boys? - previous studies of gender and family in picturebooks

Gender studies needed some time to establish itself in the academic world and in society in general. In a similar vein, picturebooks took a while to become accepted as serious literature and an object worthwhile of study. The late 20th century saw an increasing interest in both areas and scholars began to investigate the numerous ways in which gender and gendered behaviours manifest themselves in picturebooks. The first major studies of gender issues in picturebooks were conducted in the 1970s. The authors already assumed some progress in terms of the depiction of male and female characters due to the influence of the second wave of feminism. Their hopes were not quite fulfilled, though. Recent studies found various improvements, which I will discuss below, but it would still be too early to claim that gender equality has been reached in picturebooks. In contrast to the great number of studies concerned with gender, only very few studies can be found that deal with families in picturebooks. There are, of course, many intersections between the two, e.g. with regard to domestic work, parenting and characters' roles. Still, it seems as though family life provides a huge field of material as yet almost untitled by scholars.

Studies of gender in picturebooks, by their very existence and orientation, draw attention to the fact that the formation of a gendered identity starts in the earliest years of childhood. Gendering is pervasive and already confronts children at an age at which they only begin to respond to the world around them and easily take up every influence:

One of the many experiences common to many preschool children is listening to and reading stories in books, particularly illustrated, picture books. These books may be an important early source of children's sex-role learning, and as such contribute to the socialization of the sexes in the early years of childhood. (Davis 2)

Even though television might be a more frequent entertainment for today's children, picturebooks remain popular and influential not least because of the experience of shared reading with parents or other caretakers. This potential influence on the formation of children's opinions and attitudes justifies a close and serious examination of picturebooks and their treatment of men and women, of boys and girls. Naturally, conducting an empirical study would be the best way to investigate the effect of picturebooks on children. Children's responses to books and their interpretations of words and images might show,

for example, how and if a stereotypical depiction of a girl influences boys' and girls' views of girls and women. It could also show to what extent children (at least those children interviewed) even notice aspects of gendered behaviour or the absence of female characters. After all, one child might pay attention to some beautiful artwork only, completely ignoring the courageous heroine of the book, while another child might delight particularly in the depiction of the heroine going bungee-jumping. Moreover, every reading will be a different experience with a different focus so that we will never be able to gain a definite interpretation, neither from an adult nor from a child. Thus, as Kolbe and La Voie note, "without question, sex-role portrayal in books has an influence on children, but the magnitude and generalization of this influence and its impact on behavior are as yet not totally understood" (374). They do, however, see picturebooks as one possible mediator of gender equality in the early years of childhood (374).

In 1972, Weitzman et al. published their landmark study of award-winning picturebooks, which set standards and has since often been used as a point of reference by other academics. As the authors summarise their study, we gain an insight into methods and findings that are representative of other studies and their results:

An examination of prize-winning picture books reveals that women are greatly underrepresented in the titles, central roles, and illustrations. Where women do appear their characterization reinforces traditional sex-role stereotypes: boys are active while girls are passive; boys lead and rescue others while girls follow and serve others. Adult men and women are equally sex stereotyped: men engage in a wide variety of occupations while women are presented only as wives and mothers. (Weitzman et al.1125)

First, we note that award-winning picturebooks were used for the study. Awards (such as the Caldecott Medal in the USA or the Greenaway Medal in the UK) bestow a good reputation on the winning books, which also means that sales will increase. Award-winners are therefore usually well known and widely distributed but they are not necessarily of higher quality than other books in all terms. Moreover, some books are considered trashy by critics but are loved by the audience and these may have at least as much influence as award-winning books. The second aspect of the study I would like to discuss is its object of investigation. Weitzman et al. found that girls and women were underrepresented in the majority of the examined picturebooks (1128f.), i.e. there were far more male protagonists (and characters in general) both in the verbal and in the visual text. Where girls and women

appeared, they often had insignificant roles, acting only as a support of the male characters (1129-1131). “Loving, watching, and helping are among the few activities allowed to women in picture books” (1130), while excelling both intellectually and physically is reserved for boys (1133). The boy as the rescuer and the girl as the rescued represent the classic dichotomy of the active, independent male and the passive, dependent female. A similar distribution of roles was detectable for adult characters: women were found to act mainly as wives and mothers while men could play diverse roles, working outside the home, taking the children on exciting outings and generally displaying a lot of knowledge and skill (1142f.). This corresponds to the allocation of space for men and women, placing women indoors, in the domestic sphere, and men outdoors, in the public sphere. Additionally, women’s roles were often undervalued: “Her duties are not portrayed as difficult or challenging - she is shown as a housebound servant who cares for her husband and children. She washes dishes, cooks, vacuums, yells at the children, cleans up, does the laundry, and takes care of babies “(1141), activities in which the men in the picturebooks concerned seldom take part.

I can basically distinguish between two approaches that Weitzman and her colleagues, as well as later authors, took in order to examine the depiction of male and female characters in picturebooks. The first approach involves counting the number of male and female characters in titles, as protagonists and in individual images, as well as in verbal mention by other characters. This is what I would call the quantitative approach. The second approach involves analysing behaviours, occupations, looks, emotional responses and the extent to which the former are stereotypically assigned. I would call this the qualitative approach since it is more concerned with actual content, with cultural idiosyncrasies, subtleties and personal interpretations. It is also the approach that, although its results are not directly measurable, I find more interesting because it can tell us about how gendering occurs in a picturebook rather than merely providing a head count of male and female characters. Quantitative studies are mostly conducted by authors with a background in sociology or psychology, whereas a qualitative approach allows for picturebooks to be analysed from a literary standpoint. Numbers can give us an initial orientation but they often lack validity when it comes to the complex interactions between words and images and their interpretation in a specific cultural context. The qualitative approach leaves room to include

these aspects and challenges us to search for the precise mechanisms of gendering in a given picturebook. I will describe my own qualitative approach in more detail in chapter 5.

Another relatively early study dates back to 1975, when Stewig and Knipfel examined stereotypes in picturebooks and compared the results with those of their own initial study from 1972. They found that only little progress had been made: women appeared more often outside the home but they were still far from being shown in all occupations open to men (151). On the whole, the majority of books showed women in homemaking roles rather than in professional ones (152) and even the professional roles remained rather stereotypical (e.g. teacher, medical assistant or theatre actress), with the exception of two female doctors and one lawyer appearing in the books discussed (153). Some books seemed to be even more traditional than non-fictional discourses were at that time: men, for example, were often portrayed in occupational roles related to farming or the circus, but hardly ever in homemaking roles (154). Stewig and Kipfel analysed a random selection of picturebooks published between 1972 and 1974 instead of choosing subjectively or on the basis of awards given. This procedure probably allows for a broader and more representative cross section of books to be included although these might not be the ones most frequently read.

Later studies often took the study by Weitzman et al. as a model but changed the focus or the methods, thus highlighting the various aspects in which gendered identities express themselves and providing an insight into the direction towards which picturebooks develop in general. In 1981, Kolbe and La Voie published a study clearly referring to Weitzman et al.'s study and yielding similar results: "With the exception of one book in 1972 and the latest award selection in 1979, female roles were presented as expressive, nonsignificant, and stereotyped, whereas males were cast in instrumental and significant, but also stereotyped roles." (373) As is already suggested by the above quote, Kolbe and La Voie examined Caldecott Medal winners from the years 1972 to 1979 but they developed their own dimensions of analysis. Roles of male and female characters were evaluated and classified as expressive or instrumental, significant or insignificant, and stereotyped or nonstereotyped. While an expressive behaviour is marked by the character's display of "concern for the well-being of another, caring, affection, warmth, dependency", an "instrumental role portrayed the character as task-oriented, self-sufficient, somewhat

competitive, and appropriately aggressive” (370). The authors found both men and women in stereotyped roles, i.e. in roles that agree with cultural expectations. But what are these culturally defined traditional gender role expectations? Kolbe and La Voie refer to Weitzman et al. and list passive-dependent behaviour and confinement to the home as typical of female characters and active-independent behaviour in the public sphere as typical of male characters (371). They do not, however, further describe their notion of stereotyped or nonstereotyped behaviours. Again, stereotypes are assumed to be generally known but defy close description at the same time.

Albert J. Davis touches precisely the problem of vague methodology in his attempt to define clear behavioural categories for his investigation of non-sexist picturebooks (a selection based on recommendations by feminist media alliances) and “conventional” ones (Caldecott winners and runners-up as well as bestselling picturebooks from the decade of 1965 to 1975). Davis devised detailed descriptions for the following behavioural categories: dependent, independent, competitive, cooperative, directive, submissive, persistent, explorative, creative, imitative, nurturant, aggressive, emotional, active, and passively-active (5f.) and rated the characters in his sample accordingly. As expected, female characters were independent and self-directed much more often in non-sexist picturebooks than in conventional ones. Male characters displayed nurturant, helpful and emotional behaviour more often in non-sexist books and were seldom shown as aggressive in these books (12f.). Even the women and girls in non-sexist picturebooks were highly emotional and caring, though, thus failing to challenge this particular stereotype (12). While Davis seems to deplore this finding, I think that we should not lose sight of the most important achievement of some non-sexist picturebooks: they do no longer restrict certain behaviours or occupations to one sex but rather allow both male and female characters to adopt the whole range of possible behaviours.

Situated midway between the earlier studies from the 1970s and very recent studies from the 2000s, Kortenhaus and Demarest’s study of gender role stereotyping in children’s literature lends itself to serving as a halftime result. The authors intended to find out whether the outcomes of older studies were still valid in 1993. Essentially, their study revealed that males and females were roughly equally represented in newer picturebooks in titles, central roles and pictures but that the roles and activities they exhibited did not yet

totally correspond to the reality of all the roles men and women could adopt at the time they were writing (219). Since the authors examined a sample of both Caldecott winners and other picturebooks published between 1940 and 1990, they could draw some conclusions concerning the changing depiction of male and female characters over time. Interestingly, they note that the increase in female characters in picturebooks began before the 1960s, when the women's movement might have been expected to make a larger impact on society in general and literature in particular (229). In terms of methodology, Kortenhuis and Demarest identified frequently occurring behaviours displayed by boys and girls in their sample books, classified them as active-independent or passive-dependent and counted how often they occurred in boys and girls (see 229 for a list of these behaviours), concluding that

while it is encouraging to note that the instrumental role of females in children's literature has increased twofold between the 1960s and 1980s, even this progress seems inconsequential when taken in the context of overall male activity. In the last two decades, boys were still shown engaging in active outdoor play three times as often as girls, and they solved problems five to eight times as often. Girls, it would seem, are still busy creating problems that require masculine solutions. These characterizations provide children with a strong message as to the gender appropriateness of active and passive roles. (230)

Diane Turner-Bowker (1996) took yet another approach in order to identify gendering and stereotypes in picturebooks. As she explains,

one of the main goals of this study was to examine the more subtle aspects of gender stereotyping in children's literature through the use of differential language. So rather than investigate characters' roles, activities, occupations, etc., this study instead focused on the text of the books. In particular, the actual adjectives used to describe characters were examined. (475)

Applying a complex system with multiple raters, she produced a list of the most commonly used adjectives to verbally describe male and female characters in her picturebook sample, Caldecott winners and "honour" books from the years 1984 to 1994 (see 472f. for a list of those adjectives). While Turner-Bowker's methodology is innovative, her results do not differ so much from the original Weitzman et al. study on which hers is modelled. She found that the number of female characters in central roles had increased but that girls and women were still underrepresented in individual pictures and in book titles (474). Neither was there a significant change in characterisation as females were mainly described as beautiful, frightened, worthy, sweet or weak and males as fat, big, great, horrible, fierce,

brave or furious (473). The focus on differential language adds another quality to the discussion of gender stereotypes, a quality which seems especially useful in the domain of literature for young children whose world is just about to be formed, not least by the words that are used to describe it.

Two more studies worth mentioning due to their ambitious methodology are those by Evans (1998) and Tepper and Cassidy (1999). Evans's is one of the few empirical studies, providing rare insights into children's actual responses to picturebooks. 36 children between eight and nine years of age were presented with *The Paper Bag Princess*, a picturebook subverting traditional fairy tale stereotypes. Initially, the children were only told that the story would involve a prince, a princess, and a dragon, who would finally be defeated. Most children had obviously integrated traditional concepts of gendered behaviour: when, prior to reading the actual story, they were asked to draw pictures and write an ending to the story, most of them assigned roles and characteristics conventionally, i.e. a passive, weak princess was saved by an active prince. However, there was a number of unconventional guesses concerning the storyline, with some children making the prince the evil and the dragon the good character (7). Responses to the actual story, in which the princess defeats the dragon, are best described in Evans's own words:

It was evident that many of the children had expected the story to run along traditional gender stereotyped lines and were quite indignant when this story went "against the grain". They had a kind of "how dare this story not do as it should" attitude. However their responses also disclosed the fact that far from being concerned about who did or didn't get rescued, killed or married, quite a few of the children were much more preoccupied with other, more unexpected details such as the fact that the paper bag didn't get burnt, even when faced with extreme heat. Incidentally none of the children questioned why the princess herself didn't get burnt . . . presumably it was taken for granted that the main good characters in a story do not die. (9)

Evans touches an important point here, proving with empirical data that children might just focus on aspects of the story that appeal to them at a given moment rather than focus on what parents or teachers might have in mind. Moreover, we cannot take it for granted that children will adopt non-stereotyped views of men and women just because they read books which are careful in their depiction of male and female characters. In order to internalise such concepts, children have to understand what they read and see (and, in case of parody, be familiar with the conventions of the genre and recognise when these are subverted) (10).

Tepper and Cassidy took yet another look at gender portrayals, examining the use of emotional language by male and female characters:

A popular cultural stereotype is that females are more emotional than males. It was expected that this stereotype would be reflected in children's books and that overall, more emotional words would be used in conjunction with female characters than with male characters. (269)

Interestingly, though, they found that in Caldecott award-winning books, "males were associated with significantly more emotional words than females" (278). The emotional categories "like-love", "fear-anxiety" and "anger" were found to be central for both males and females, without the previously assumed bias towards anger on the part of male characters and anxiety on the part of female characters (278).

Recent studies, such as those by Gooden and Gooden (2001) or Hamilton et al. (2006), failed to report a revolution in the depiction of male and female characters. Both studies mentioned essentially reproduced the Weitzman et al. study, examining the number of males and females as well as occupations and roles. Gooden and Gooden reported a roughly equal percentage of male and female protagonists but an ongoing traditional distribution of roles with men uninvolved in housework and women only rarely seen as doctors or in other untraditional (and prestigious) occupations (94-96). These findings were consistent with those of Hamilton et al., who examined 200 top-selling picturebooks, "both award-winners and popular books" (759), concluding that

there is weak evidence that there is less gender stereotyping in aggressive and active behaviors and in one aspect of employment than there was in the previous 20 years, but women continue to be less likely than men to be visibly employed outside the home, and they continue to have a narrower range of jobs. There is no change in the portrayal of female versus male characters outdoors or indoors; there is a continued slight tendency for boys and men to be seen outdoors more than girls and women are. Nurturant behaviors are even more likely now than in the 1980s and 1990s to be performed exclusively by girls and women. (764)

Although all the advances mentioned above should not be underestimated, it seems that a lot still needs to be done before children can choose from a wide range of picturebooks embracing equality and diversity.

While academic interest in gender and picturebooks is a welcome development, the limitations of these studies should not be overlooked. Some of the authors do not make their choice of books clear, merely stating that they took a random sample (e.g. Stewig and

Knipfel), which complicates traceability. More importantly, though, the behaviours and characteristics labelled as stereotypical mostly remain undocumented. Some authors, such as Kortenhaus and Demarest, take their lists directly from behaviours found in the picturebooks examined, but others provide lists and simply state that the behaviours included are culturally defined (e.g. Kolbe and La Voie 370). Since this procedure merely reflects the difficulty of accounting for and naming stereotypes in any given culture, I would not like to heavily criticise this approach but rather point it out as an issue to be aware of. Finally, counting male and female characters seems to me a somewhat restricted method of investigation, which does not provide us with any information with regard to content. Most authors do combine their quantitative analysis with an examination of behaviours but none of the studies I have found focus on picturebooks as works of art and as indivisible entities whose parts work together to create an overall meaning.

Families in picturebooks have been oddly neglected by scholars so far, being almost as invisible in academic writing as the fathers in some picturebooks Anderson and Hamilton analysed in their study from 2005. Hypothesising that families would be represented in a highly stereotyped way even in picturebooks published between 1995 and 2001, they found their expectations fulfilled: mothers appeared more often in text and images than fathers and mother-only scenes were more frequent than father-only scenes (147). With regard to nurturing behaviour, the authors found mothers ten times as often engaged in nurturing actions for babies as fathers and twice as often for older children. As Anderson and Hamilton point out, “in support of the hypothesis that fathers would be relatively hands-off parents, there was no action that fathers performed significantly more often than mothers, and fathers were never seen kissing or feeding babies.” (148). In agreement with the cliché of the emotional woman, mothers were found to express both happiness and sadness more often than fathers. Contrary to the authors’ assumptions, however, fathers were not shown disciplining children more often than mothers were (148).

Kay Chick, writing on gay and lesbian families in picturebooks (2008), provides an overview of the literature available and critically discusses the depiction of alternative families in contemporary picturebooks. She sees picturebooks as an important source for transmitting cultural values and (new) family values that deviate from the norm and might therefore be hard to address for some parents. While Chick welcomes the presence of gay

and lesbian families in picturebooks such as *Heather Has Two Mommies*, she regrets that these families are not necessarily depicted in a realistic way and that stories, particularly earlier ones, sometimes lack characters to identify with (17). According to her, recent picturebooks deal with the topic more subtly instead of sacrificing an engaging story and amiable characters for a moral lesson (18). Given that so few studies of families in picturebooks have been published so far, a great number of family secrets still remains to be unearthed.

In the above review, I have tried to expose the various aspects of analysis devised and used by different authors. I will return to the behaviours and descriptors used by Davis and Turner-Bowker in my own analysis as they are relatively concrete and can be more easily applied than a vague, general category such as “stereotypical”. I believe I can safely conclude from the studies at hand that female characters have become more and more visible in picturebooks during the last decades. Proceeding from this promising base, I will look more closely at individual books and ask whether the way they depict male and female characters can be called similarly progressive. My methodology is explained in the following chapter.

5. Methods and tools of analysis

Before briefly discussing the individual aspects of analysis I am going to apply, I would like to name all the books I will deal with and give reasons for my choices.

- *And Tango Makes Three* by Justin Richardson, Peter Parnell and Henry Cole
- *Granpa* by John Burningham
- *Guess How Much I Love You* by Sam McBratney und Anita Jeram
- *Heather Has Two Mommies* by Leslea Newman and Diana Souza
- *I'm Gonna Like Me* by Jamie Lee Curtis and Laura Cornell
- *Little Critter: Just Me and My Mum* by Mercer Mayer
- *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* by Michael Rosen and Quentin Blake
- *Mommies Don't Get Sick* by Marilyn Hafner
- *Mr. Tod's Trap* by Malcolm Carrick
- *Not Now, Bernard* by David McKee
- *Owl Moon* by Jane Yolen and John Schoenherr
- *Pinkalicious* by Elizabeth Kann and Victoria Kann
- *Princess Smartypants* by Babette Cole
- *Stellaluna* by Janell Cannon and Jewell Cannon
- *The Berenstain Bears and the Trouble with Grownups* by Stan and Jan Berenstain
- *The English Roses* by Madonna
- *The Hello, Goodbye Window* by Norton Juster and Chris Raschka
- *Tiny and Bigman* by Phillis Gershtator und Lynne W. Cravath
- *Ug* by Raymond Briggs
- *Zoo* by Anthony Browne

These 20 picturebooks were all published in the time period between 1980 and 2010. This time span of thirty years can be said to roughly equal one generation and can be termed contemporary. By 1980, the impact of the second wave of feminism was definitely visible in broader culture but not necessarily in children's literature in general and in picturebooks in particular. I am interested in how progressive picturebooks could already be thirty years ago and in whether a clear change in attitudes towards gender roles is detectable over the years. The sample picturebooks are mainly aimed at children between three and seven years of age. During these preschool and early school years, children acquire an enormous amount of knowledge about their world and its social conventions. With regard to reading books, most of them still require another person to understand the verbal text of a book, which opens up more possibilities for interaction and the negotiation of meaning in the shared reading event.

My choice of books was influenced by two major factors, topicality and availability. I first considered choosing a random sample of books published during the time period in question but soon discarded this idea. While looking through a great number of books, I noticed that some simply did not feature families at all and that in some, even gender roles were more or less insignificant. Discussing such books would have made hardly any sense for my study. Naturally, most picturebooks which do not explicitly deal with family or gender issues do show male and female characters and some aspects of family life. It could be argued that these books actually have a stronger and more lasting influence because they simply incorporate concepts of social life into their story and by an unquestioning attitude present them as normal. By contrast, books with a more or less clear social agenda can quickly seem didactic and patronising. Spitz even claims that dealing with social issues too openly might destroy a good book (9f.). I still chose to discuss mainly books that fairly openly address family and gender themes as I am interested precisely in the various degrees of subtlety and sophistication with which these books accomplish what we may see as their self-set task. Therefore, picturebooks such as *And Tango Makes Three* and *Mommies Don't Get Sick*, which deal with homosexual parents and the allocation of domestic chores, respectively, are included just as well as *Pinkalicious*, which provides a surprise ending to a story that seems gender-stereotyped at first sight.

Availability was another decisive factor: Some books, even though their stories and art might be innovative and attractive, were obviously not successful enough and were no longer in print. Faced with this problem, I was forced to take a pragmatic choice where necessary and decide for those books that were still available or just recently published. My list thus includes a number of best-sellers and award-winners besides a few less famous books such as *Tiny and Bigman*. To some extent, availability might even correspond to influence because best-sellers, prize-winning books and books easily available are widely distributed and thus reach more readers than unknown books.

Clearly, this sample of books is subjective rather than representative and constitutes a mere cross section of works available. For this reason, a qualitative approach seems the only practicable way of providing an analysis with a certain significance, apart from also providing more attractive and meaningful insights than numbers can.

The books will be analysed in the light of what I have said so far about gender and family. Gender studies and family research will provide the lens through which I will look at the picturebooks, acting as a basic framework and topical orientation but leaving space for various tools of analysis. It should have become clear by now that there is no unified body of theory on gender, family, picturebooks and their interrelations. Thus, I am given the challenge and the chance to work very much in a spirit of eclecticism, drawing on theories of gender stereotypes or gendered language just as much as on narrative theory and the interpretation of visual codes. Essentially, my approach is a literary one with an interest in the depiction of gender and family. The results of my study will be necessarily limited for two main reasons: Firstly, a study of hardly more than twenty books can never be representative, given the huge number of picturebooks published each year. Secondly, my whole analysis, although based on what I hope is sound theory, will inevitably be subjective and represent the view of an adult with a background in gender theory. The main addressees of picturebooks, however, might respond to the stories, to words and images, in a completely different way. Obtaining responses from children is certainly highly desirable, but unfortunately, it is just as unfeasible for me as obtaining a more objective rating of my books by employing various raters. An empirical study with a larger scope might yield results that deviate considerably from my own. What I wish to offer here is a close analysis of the internal workings of the selected picturebooks and their possible effects. Since so many studies have already examined the number of male and female characters and some more superficial aspects of gendering in picturebooks, it seems high time to go deeper and cast a critical glance at the subtle ways in which picturebooks show what is deemed normal, acceptable and desirable in Western culture. Even with a sample of twenty books, I will hopefully be able to illuminate some tendencies and directions contemporary picturebooks take in presenting their versions of a world for men and women, boys and girls.

In what follows, I will first introduce the specific aspects of analysis taken from picturebook theory and studies such as those discussed in the previous chapter. Finally, I will present the overarching themes according to which I will structure my analysis. Rather than discussing one book after the other, each in isolation, I prefer spotting parallels and differences in the way the individual books deal with a certain topic such as parenting and childcare.

One of my major lines of analysis will clearly be characterisation, both in the verbal and in the visual text. Characters may, as in any other narratives, be described explicitly in the verbal text by the narrator, by other characters or by themselves, or implicitly, through their actions, attitudes and speech. Pictures add another dimension to characterisation, particularly in the way they comment on the verbal text and vice versa. What we see in a picture might be contradicted, doubted, complemented or supported by the words, the dual communication often requiring the reader to arrive at his or her own personal interpretation of the ambiguities presented by words and picture. As Nikolajeva and Scott note, pictures are best at external, physical characterisation, while words allow for better psychological insight into a character and focus the reader's attention to specific details more clearly than pictures usually do (82f.). The actual impact of any technique of characterisation will, however, depend on the interplay between words and images. Nikolajeva and Scott claim picturebooks to be "plot-oriented rather than character-oriented" (82) and therefore to be lacking dynamic, round characters. In fact, this tendency to simplify characters harbours the danger of reverting to (gender-)stereotyped depictions, a point to which I will pay close attention in my analysis. While oversimplification may be a general tendency, I believe that gendering occurs in virtually innumerable ways and that even picturebook characters and their environments will supply ample and also nuanced material for discussion. We may learn about characters in extremely subtle ways, sometimes through their facial and gestural expressions, location and size in a picture or relationship to other characters, but also through the setting (Nikolajeva and Scott 105-107), which may enforce an emotional atmosphere or immediately tell us about a character's preferences, e.g. by showing a woman proudly standing in a stately office building. Human characters also often appear in disguise in picturebooks, assuming the looks of anthropomorphised animals. Small children are often assumed to have an intuitive access to animals, particularly to those animals which might be viewed as sharing children's experience of being small in a world of larger beings (Nodelman 116). Picturebooks are accordingly replete with animal characters, such as mice and rabbits, but also bears and cats, all of which trigger certain cultural associations. While animals usually adopt human attributes (and even clothes) in picturebooks, they also allow authors and illustrators to veil some aspects we habitually draw on to judge a person, such as ethnicity and gender (Spitz 73f.). The tensions between

animal and human traits in animal characters and the ways in which gender ascriptions still surface in more or less genderless beings deserve special attention.

Gender, in the performative sense, is acted out in the form of behaviours, activities and occupations. I will examine, amongst other things, to which extent boys and girls are shown as either dependent or independent human beings, whether physical activity and the public space are still mainly reserved for male characters and whether it is beauty, character or both that is emphasised in female characters. I will also look at the emotions displayed by boys and girls, men and women, and ask if the former are valued differently in male and female characters. As a general guideline for what is typically considered as masculine or feminine behaviour, I will use some of those instruments already provided by scholars who have written on gender and picturebooks. Davis's descriptions of behavioural categories (5f.) can be applied to both pictures and words. Turner-Bowker's list of adjectives used to describe male and female characters (472f.) can serve as a basis of comparison for my sample picturebooks.

The analysis of narrative perspective in picturebooks often proves to be a difficult task. Images and words may present differing perspectives, the images actually providing us with a visual point of view and the words usually representing the narrator's voice that provides comments, descriptions and focus. The narrative voice can be highly didactic, speaking directly to the child reader but it can just as well be completely hidden, e.g. if the verbal text consists exclusively of dialogue. Nikolajeva and Scott spot the dilemmas of narrative perspective in "the fact that the verbal and the visual perspective in picturebooks can never fully coincide" (137). For instance, words may convey the inner landscape of a character's emotions in the first-person perspective, while the corresponding images may show a bird's-eye view of the dark garden he or she fears. A first-person narrator may also be "detached" (Nikolajeva and Scott 129-132), not talking from a child's perspective but from a (sometimes didactic) adult one. This incongruence in narrative perspective may be partly due to the fact that pictures and words communicate differently. According to Nodelman, "the fact that visual images do actually resemble the objects they represent means that they cannot force a subjective attitude toward the objects depicted as directly and as efficiently as verbal imagery does" (229). Moreover, authors and illustrators are faced with the challenging task of representing a child's perspective in words and images, a

perspective that is probably hardly accessible for them. Some authors might also wish to impose certain values on their child readers and therefore lend their own moral voice to the narrator, which might not be for the benefit of either the readers or the quality of the story. Narrative perspective thus almost inevitably creates tensions that readers are invited to face with critical awareness.

As mentioned above, setting and space can add to characterisation, create a certain mood and even support the progress of the plot. Contrasting settings, such as urban and rural environments, do not only possess strong symbolic meaning but can also illustrate emotional conflicts and contrasts within a character. The contrast between familiar (e.g. home) and unfamiliar settings (e.g. a new town or a dreamland) is often used to represent a character's movement from the well-known into the challenging and even frightening, which finally contributes to his or her maturation (Nikolajeva and Scott 70f.). Pictures can also show the passage of time although words are more typically used to relate a sequence of events. In picturebooks, the flow of time may be represented by multiple pictures on one page, movement lines and pictorial conventions which, for example, let us assume that movement (as well as causality) is usually proceeding from left to right in harmony with the Western reading direction (Nikolajeva and Scott 153). Reality, possibilities, wishes and necessities are the subject of what Nikolajeva and Scott refer to as the modality of picturebook narratives (173-209). Since words and images never tell the exactly same story, a picturebook may play with our expectations of what is true and what is not, the words and images either largely supporting each other's message or the one subverting the other and creating ambiguity. Most children can certainly relate very well to parallel worlds and fantastic journeys, elements they frequently use in their own play, and probably create their own view of events in a picturebook. While a child's view might differ from an adult's view, it seems that most children are well able to make sense in their own way of modal ambiguities, which are actually highly sophisticated narrative devices.

Another area that is conventionally held to be reserved for adult literature is that of figurative language, metafiction and irony. All of these can be said to question the power of language (and images) to clearly name and represent the real world. In this respect, they possess an obvious proximity to postmodernism. As Nikolajeva and Scott put it, "[o]ne of the distinctive features of postmodernism is the interrogation of language as an artistic

means” (220). They cite examples of the collaboration of words and images to express figurative language, e.g. when a personification mentioned in the text, such as a personified sun or moon, is actually visually depicted. Metafiction points to the artificiality of texts and can take the form of authorial comments, communication with the reader or multiple narrative levels, with one narrative embedded in another like a system of Chinese boxes (Nikolajeva and Scott 220f.). Lewis names further qualities of the postmodern picturebook: excess, indeterminacy and performance (Lewis 94-96 and 98), all of which bring along a considerable amount of playfulness. If books push the limits of what is deemed normal and acceptable, they are engaging in what Lewis calls excess, often resulting in events that are far from realistic. Interestingly, picturebooks, which are still seen by many as didactic stories for very young children, make frequent use of excess, particularly by means of fantastic narratives, characters’ imaginations and dreams (95). On the other hand, the gaps between images and words that readers are left to fill can become so great that determining one single meaning is no longer possible (96). In a way, indeterminacy and excess could be said to flout the speech maxims and the cooperative principle, offering us either too much or too little information but making the reading event more attractive precisely for this reason. Picturebooks displaying such a degree of sophistication are clearly addressed to adults as well as children and are certainly enjoyable for both. I appreciate the stress on playfulness as the reading of picturebooks is very likely to be an event shared by children and adults that incorporates acting, playing, guessing, looking, talking and listening and is thus in itself boundary-breaking: it transgresses the usual solitude and silence of reading alone.

Finally, I would like to briefly mention some of the artistic features of images that can come to possess meaning. On the whole, pictures have the ability to convey atmospheres and moods very directly. We tend to comprehend them more intuitively and immediately than words but exactly what it is that makes us feel a certain emotion when we look at a picture is difficult to define. The various components of a picture usually work together to create a holistic impression. Still, there are three very basic and well-investigated aspects that can account for much of the significance of an image, quite apart from its obvious subject matter. An artist’s choice of colour contributes to our interpretation of a picture in various ways. There are, of course, conventionalised meanings we have learned to associate

with specific colours. The perception of something red triggers concepts such as love, aggression or energy in our minds, while blue is often associated with calmness, the sea and the sky, to name just two examples. We also tend to perceive orange, red and brown as warm colours and blue, green and grey as cool colours. Nodelman stresses the importance of colours in communicating mood: “[...] specific colours come to evoke specific emotions and attitudes and thus can work to convey mood more exactly than any other aspect of pictures. A nonnarrative effect thus develops profound narrative implications” (60). However, interpretation of colour clearly also depends on an individual’s background knowledge, experience and attitude at the time of reading, as well as on the context the picture itself provides. Colour also serves as a link between objects or characters in a picture: two characters sharing a similar colour scheme are more likely viewed as belonging together in some way (Lewis 105). Using black and white instead of colour can result in an impression of detachedness and objectivity, reminiscent of documentary films or photographs (Nodelman 67). Most people tend to perceive black and white pictures as more serious than coloured ones but on the other hand, black and white is also often used in comics and cartoons (Nodelman 69). While in coloured pictures shape and solidity prevail, black and white pictures often depict action through the use of swift, energetic lines (this effect is particularly exploited in the action lines used in cartoons). In contrast to thin, broken outlines that suggest action and movement, thick, strong outlines framing the shape of objects suggest solidity (Lewis 103f.).

The last aspect of visual meaning I want to mention is symbolism. Illustrators have endless possibilities of including elements in their pictures that bear a high cultural significance, a significance that typically exceeds the usual denotation of an object. Understanding symbols is of course a matter of becoming familiar with the conventions of one’s culture and the more of these conventions we know, the more we can appreciate the wealth of allusions an author and/ or illustrator may use. A lot of an image’s meaning is lost on us if we do not recognize its symbolism: “[...] the meanings of symbols such as the red cross are hidden from those who do not possess the knowledge necessary to unlock their secrets” (Lewis 115). While the red cross is indeed a symbol of Western cultures (the red crescent being used in many Islamic countries), other symbols are almost universal: “[...] doors and windows are symbolic thresholds, and roads and streams are symbolic paths to wisdom”

(Nodelman 108). These aspects might seem straightforward if they are thus briefly presented but in fact, we are continuously negotiating meaning in the reading process as we interpret the text in the light of the pictures and the pictures in the light of the text. Even though the mentioned aspects are not specifically linked to the depiction of gender and family, they are essential for the interpretation of the overall meaning of the iconotext.

In the discussion of pictures, we can differentiate between different styles, such as realistic or abstract, to speak in the broadest terms. What we perceive as realistic, though, depends on our cultural background (Nodelman 15). In Western cultures, “the word [realism] is used as vaguely as ‘naturalism’, implying a desire to depict things accurately and objectively, [...] representational rather than abstract” (Oxford dictionary of art). Nodelman basically distinguishes three styles: realism in the sense of the definition above, yielding pictures that more or less resemble photographs; cartoons, which can give us an impression of movement; and stylised depictions, which he calls stereotypes since they represent the fundamental qualities of the depicted object in a very reduced way (e.g. a tree as a brown stick with a few green clouds arranged on its upper parts). He concludes that “each of these is indeed ‘like’ reality in that each successfully conveys a different quality of actual objects” (27). Therefore, when I speak of a realistic depiction in the analysis section, I mainly refer to a realistic artistic style but not necessarily to the content of the picture, which might still be unlikely or fantastic.

Working with the above framework, I will discuss the selected picturebooks under the following topical subheadings: outward appearance, characteristics and stereotypes; behaviours, activities and occupations; emotional behaviour and response; family forms; and family work (with subchapters on housework and waged labour, parenting and child care). These overarching themes can be identified in most of the books concerned and their differing treatment compared using the combined forces of picturebook theory and gender and family studies.

6. Analysis

Picturebooks as complex unities of words and images provide us with a rewarding reading event but also challenge the person who tries to analyse them. The following sections will therefore each be focused on one main topic and on those books in which the respective topics feature prominently. Frequently, there will be overlaps with other topics. Whenever possible, I will indicate these overlaps as they contribute to meaning, and either discuss related aspects directly or refer to the respective section where these aspects are dealt with in more detail. For instance, if the outward appearance of a character provides contradictory information to that given by the character's action and if this deviation creates an interesting and possibly meaningful tension, I will respond to this point immediately in the chapter on outward appearances rather than adhering to artificial topical constraints.

6.1. Outward appearance, characteristics and stereotypes: confirmation and surprise

This first chapter is intended to serve as an initial glance into the picturebooks concerned. When we open a picturebook and scan through its pages, we quickly take in the main characters, their looks, expressions and positions in space, and we might even get an idea of how the story develops. Similarly, I would like to discuss first impressions first: the next pages will deal with the outward appearance of characters as well as with the way characters are overtly described by themselves, by others or by the narrator, including characterisation by visual depiction. As Nikolajeva and Scott note (82), picturebooks are largely plot-oriented and most of the time lack detailed descriptions of characters. In most picturebooks, characters are scarcely described in the verbal text and we receive most of our knowledge about them from the pictures instead: the latter communicate characters' appearances, activities, facial expressions, relationships to other characters and relative size and position of characters as well as the atmosphere and mood (supported by artistic features such as colour and line). The setting and the attributes characters are shown with also lead us on certain paths of interpretation. While chapters 6.2. and 6.3. will go deeper into what characters actually do, how they behave and feel, this chapter is mostly concerned with the impression the reader gets when he or she cursorily reads through a book. Although I cannot possibly examine or know children's views, I do believe that this concentration on the primarily visual aspects might to some degree also resemble the way

preschool children perceive a picturebook if they engage with it on their own in the absence of someone who might read it to them.

In terms of the visual presentation of characters, picturebooks can be positioned along a continuum ranging from the traditional, conservative and stereotyped over the relatively neutral to the innovative, creative and non-stereotyped. Both extremes are represented in my book list, for example with *The English Roses* and *Ug. Boy Genius of the Stone Age*, two books that could be hardly less alike. *The English Roses* features four girls on their way to the realisation that Binah, another girl they all envy, actually leads a much harder life than they do. In spite of the fact that all the important characters in the book are female and despite the emphasis on friendship and inner qualities clearly voiced through an intrusive adult narrator, the pictures strongly suggest a concern for style. If we look at the pictures only, we are led to believe that this is a girlish story with characters anxious for good looks even though the verbal text explicitly tells us that personal qualities count for more than the style of hair and clothes. The girls are shown in wealthy surroundings with many material goods, wearing colourful, carefully selected clothes and jewellery, their hair seems to have received more attention than a simple morning combing and the drawings even suggest their wearing make-up. The girls' large, long-lashed eyes and small, pastel-coloured mouths along with their fashion-conscious choice of clothes (mostly skirts and dresses) almost ridicule the narrator's calling them "four *little* [emphasis added] girls" (6). Since the drawings resemble cartoons, the readers more readily accept deviations from realistic colouring or body proportions such as the girls literally being green with envy (14) or their extremely thin limbs and large heads. Diversity is represented not so much by interindividual differences in the girls' preferences or traits but rather externally by different hair colours and by one of the girls, Grace, being black. Still, Binah as the model and ideal of the book is a blue-eyed blonde. The fairy godmother, who helps the girls to see Binah's life through a dream, embodies the fairy tale stereotype of her kind, being plump, wearing a dress, glasses and a bun.

Interestingly, the four girls (called "The English Roses", hence the title of the book) are hardly ever shown engaging in interaction with each other and in everyday postures. Whatever they do, they seem to pose for the onlooker instead, staging their activities and emotions and presenting them to the viewer in such a way that he or she almost always sees

the girls face on (e.g. 14 or 39). This technique creates a sense of artificiality that is amplified by the use of bright colours and the cartoon style of the illustrations. Artificiality and staging also produce distance and aggravate feeling empathy with the characters, which might be one of the reasons why a comparatively large amount of text is needed to verbalise the characters' feelings and thoughts. In the verbal text, the four girls are not distinguished from each other and no sense of individuality is created. Rather, we are told that they all like the same games, books and boys (8). Binah, by contrast, is described very closely by the narrator:

She was very, very beautiful. She had long, silky hair and skin like milk and honey. She was an excellent student and very good at sport. She was always kind to people. She was special. But she was sad. Because even though she was the most beautiful girl anyone had ever seen, she was also very lonely. She had no friends and, everywhere she went, she was alone. (12)

Binah's intellectual abilities and her sportiness are mentioned but again, her beauty takes centre stage.

Beauty is of less concern to either women or men in *Ug. Boy Genius of the Stone Age*. During the Stone Age, survival is all that counts and Ug, the boy protagonist of the book, tries in vain to convince his parents and friends of his ideas for an easier, more comfortable life. All his ideas, e.g. building a wheel, domesticating animals and making clothes from fur are taken for granted today, creating an enjoyable irony for readers who have acquired some concept of historical developments. Indeed, the story and comic-book design seem intended for younger children at first but the background knowledge both needed and provided is rather complex and sophisticated: readers have to be basically informed about the Stone Age, concepts of time and cultural achievements and their proper dating, otherwise much of the book's humour is lost. The Stone Age provides a visual and verbal metaphor for hardness, both in terms of the actualities of everyday life and in terms of emotions and relationships. The characters are surrounded by stone in every possible form: mountains, boulders and caves but also hewn stones used as tables, blankets and even clothes. All the characters are heavily built and have a rough appearance, defying any emphasis on styling or attractiveness. In the pictures, no difference between girls and boys is discernable. Adults are clearly differentiated but merely by physical attributes such as Ug's father's beard and his mother's larger breasts. In none of the images do we find

clichéd, cultural attributes such as jewellery for women. Remaining true to the Stone Age setting, the pictures show only the bare essentials, oftentimes including absurdities like stone blankets, which cannot possibly have any heating effect but contribute to the humorous effect. Ug's wish for warm, soft trousers is received badly by his mother, as are his other ideas for improvement. Ug appears as quite feminine, at least much more feminine than his mother, who resists any attempts for innovation and mostly scolds her son for thinking too much. While the other children call Ug "useless" and "spoiling the game" (third doublespread) and his mother complains about his concerns for "warm, soft, nice" (thirteenth doublespread), we notice immediately that he does not only develop brilliant ideas but also appears much more human than the hard people around him. His facial expression is softer and he combines in himself qualities and activities associated with femininity as well as those associated with masculinity: feeling, thinking, exploring, building, playing, dreaming and communicating. The otherness of the Stone Age allows for Ug's unusual behaviour to become even more apparent and thus points to the need for an entirety of different characteristics in any human being, regardless of gender.

A considerable number of picturebooks still show male and female characters with largely clichéd appearances. Three books on my list do so in a manner almost shockingly old-fashioned: *Mr. Tod's Trap*, *Just Me and My Mum*, and *The Berenstain Bears and the Trouble With Grownups* all feature animal characters who seem to have been set back in time if we are to judge by their clothes and immediate surroundings. Considering the iconotext as a whole, we notice how these books differ from each other in terms of how conservative they really are but appearances first lead us on the path of a very traditional interpretation. *Mr. Tod's Trap* revolves around a family of foxes who find themselves hungry due to the father's inability to catch rabbits. The difficulties can only be solved when Mr. Tod stays at home, caring for the children, while Mrs. Tod goes out hunting. Being one of the oldest picturebooks on my list, dating back to 1980, its artwork does not betray its innovative story. Rather, we get a traditional and anachronistic impression both from what is depicted and from how it is depicted. The foxes are extremely anthropomorphised, wearing clothes, using tools and living in a house with furniture and sanitary equipment but leading a life still centred on survival by hunting. Their house is set in a rural environment and seems naturally integrated into a tree. The colour scheme used in

the artwork, centring heavily on hues of brown and yellow, underscores how outdated the foxes' clothes appear: Mrs. Tod wears a high-necked dress and an apron, her husband is clad in a jacket, knickerbockers and boots, which as a whole we easily identify as a hunting outfit. Their daughter wears a dress while their sons have sailor suits. Clothes and interior decoration are reminiscent of the early 20th century and might in their remoteness actually strengthen the counterpoint provided by the modern twist in the story. Both male and female characters are shown in domestic environments as well as outside the home but we only ever see Mr. Tod in the actual act of hunting even though the words tell us that it is his wife who finally succeeds in bringing home food. Thus, Mr. Tod's being called "clever" several times by his wife and once by the omniscient narrator creates a largely mocking impression. While he himself admits that he is a "flop" in terms of setting traps and hunting rabbits, his wife encourages him and emphasises his fatherly qualities: "You are clever, a fine fox, and a great father" (52).

The Berenstain Bears, a family of anthropomorphic bears, have lost all of their animal attributes except for their ursine physique. *The Trouble With Grownups* is one out of a series of many books featuring the bear family, all of which are clearly intended to teach a moral lesson that is even phrased in a short rhyme on the title page of the books. I let this rhyme undertake the plot summary: "Grownups and cubs get quite a surprise when they see themselves through the others' eyes". Cubs and adult bears can understand each other better after having tried out what the unknown roles feel like. While the artwork in *Mr. Tod's Trap* is fairly realistic, *The Trouble With Grownups* employs a simplified cartoon style, very much reminiscent of Mickey Mouse or Donald Duck comics. The bears' gestures and postures seem unnatural and their emotions heavily exaggerated, e.g. when their eyes change from large circles to half-moon slits with the transition from surprise to anger. The comic-book style, while exaggerating some features such as facial expressions, smoothes out others: there are no visible differences between male and female bodies, a fact that is helped by the characters being bears but nevertheless not necessitated by it. Instead, the characters' gender is revealed by small (human) details: female cubs wear hair bands and bows while some male cubs wear baseball caps. Sister Bear is clad in the obligatory pink and a dotted shirt, mirroring her mother's dotted dress and thus creating a connection between these two characters. Male bears wear ties and hats while female adults wear

earrings, headscarves and hats with flowers or bows. The family's clothes fit the traditional and somehow anachronistic country life context of the book with father bear wearing dungarees and a chequered lumberjack shirt and mother bear wearing a loose-fitting gown and a headdress curiously resembling a bathing cap. Although comics are often seen as a genre mainly intended for children and a cartoon style is broadly believed to appeal to child readers, *The Berenstain Bears* destroy what little appeal there is in the rather blunt artwork by the comments of an extremely intrusive and moralistic narrator. I will further explore the effects of these narratorial intrusions, which also appear in the characters' statements, in chapter 6.5.2.

Just Me and My Mum is likewise taken from a series of comic-style books, the *Little Critter* series, and basically tells a story about humans in animal form. While the setting of most books in the series is rural, the trip to the city featured in this book is presented as a special adventure. The protagonist and first person narrator resembles a hamster behaving like a human being and similarly, all the other characters in the book are humanised animals. The characters wear old-fashioned, traditional clothes and move in an environment of trains, cars, shops, museums and restaurants that seem at least 30 or 40 years older than the book itself (which was published in 1990). Little Critter explores the world in his green dungarees and striped T-shirt but funnily, neither he nor any of the other characters wears shoes. Little Critter's mother is draped in shades of violet from head to foot, her long skirt showing a flower print and her hat being adorned with real flowers. In contrast to mother bear, she is also identified as female by her larger breasts, taking one more step out of the animal domain. We see her several times as the caring, nervous mother when she gapes and lifts her paws to her mouth as her son makes mischief. Little Critter seems carefree and active, exploring his surroundings while his mother mostly stays glued to one spot in the pictures. The book is more economic with words than the two books mentioned before and together with the limited view of the narrator allows for more subtlety in the interaction between words and images, e.g. when the verbal text dryly relates a series of events while the pictures show the characters' emotional reaction. There is even a small sylleptical side story: a frog appears in every single picture, accompanying the characters and sometimes underscoring emotions, sometimes embarking on its own adventures.

In *Not Now, Bernard* words are likewise scarce and reduced to the minimum necessary for comprehension. Bernard, who does not get any attention from his parents, is eaten by a monster which assumes his role and is still ignored by the adults. Although neither the illustrations nor the words ever openly betray a sign of doubt in the truth of these events, other signs lead the reader to believe that Bernard has externalised his anger about being ignored and given it monster form (see chapter 6.6.). The monster, though looking fierce with its horns, big teeth and claws at its big hands and feet, does not really seem frightening, mostly because of its human behaviour and emotions, partly perhaps also because it is coloured violet, a colour which rather evokes calmness and mystery than brutality. Bernard and his parents display a classic style of clothes and relatively plain, average looks. Bernard himself signals childhood normalcy with his jeans, sneakers and colourful pullover, his father signals middle-class, white-collar worker normalcy with his shirt and vest, trousers and black shoes. Bernard's mother combines a dress and an apron with high heels, leaving us to wonder whether this is her usual work attire. Since the story is stripped down to its bare essentials and there is no verbal description of the characters at all (much of the verbal text consists of dialogue), details are only communicated through the characters' actions, facial expressions and gestures, requiring the readers to look very closely.

Neither of the four books above thematise the characters' styling explicitly but the interplay of words and pictures in each of them accounts for differing modes of interpretation, which, in turn, influence the significance we attach to outward appearances. While the very fact that words are used sparingly in *Not Now, Bernard* focuses our attention on what the pictures show us in relation to the words and allows for irony, the Berenstain Bears' old-fashioned looks work together with their exaggerated indignation and the narrator's patronising voice to accentuate the book's obvious attempt to teach a moral lesson. Thus, our curiosity is directed towards what happens to Bernard rather than to what he or his mother are wearing. By contrast, the almost absurd seriousness mediated by the verbal text in *The Trouble With Grownups* is underpinned by the redundancy of most pictures where the new information mostly consists in characters' looks.

Those picturebooks which show male and female characters in traditional styles and roles with a seemingly unquestioning attitude mostly belong to the older publications from the

1980s or to an ongoing series that has established certain looks for its characters and maintains them through the years. A concern for style and looks is actually much more apparent in some more recent picturebooks which are, however, by far more subtle and reflective in their depiction of styles, clothes and the characters' attitudes towards those. Moreover, styles are explicitly addressed as being a matter of choice in these books. At first sight, *Pinkalicious*, a picturebook about a girl whose skin turns pink from eating too many pink cupcakes, might seem grossly stereotyped given the girl's fascination with pink and her clichéd, girlish looks. She wears dresses (once it is even a pink one with wings) and carries a star and a princess crown while her little brother wears the traditional boy's clothes: a T-shirt, short dungarees and a cap, all in blue to contrast the pink of the girl. All these outer appearances (matched by the parents' clearly gendered styling) can easily lead us down the garden-path since in fact the book emphasises the importance of staying and liking oneself regardless of appearances. The artwork, resembling computer-animated films, might even support such an initial assumption about the superficiality of *Pinkalicious*: it is lively and colourful, yet somewhat artificial. Still, the readers also immediately receive some hints from both words and pictures that the gender divide is not as straightforward as the colour symbolism and the characters' styling suggest. “ ‘I wish I were pink like you’ ”, *Pinkalicious*'s brother tells her (11th doublespread), obviously desiring to get as much attention as she gets, never worrying about the possibility of being ridiculed for choosing a colour so clearly associated with women and girls. Moreover, *Pinkalicious* does not care about polite reservation or passive dependency: she sticks out her tongue at her mother, wildly jumps around at bedtime and cleverly finds ways to get the cupcakes she wants on her own (see also chapter 6.2.). The interaction of text and pictures is crucial here and our impression of the book might be altered considerably if we look at the pictures only.

I'm Gonna Like Me is another example for a picturebook which consciously plays with stereotypes and whose interpretation thus very much depends on the focus a reader brings to the text. We can either focus on the empowerment the two child protagonists are given through their active choices or we can focus on the gender divide that is still apparent in their choices, e.g. when the boy plays firefighter and the girl makes a glittery get well card for a sick friend. *I'm Gonna Like Me* follows the girl and the boy through their day from

getting up in the morning over going to school, playing and helping in the house to being read a bedtime story at night while they are continuously “letting off a little self-esteem” (as we learn from the pun in the subtitle). The book’s extremely elaborate artwork displays lots of details and intraiconic text that refers back to the pictures and the story (on intraiconic text, see Nikolajeva and Scott 73). The colourful images are paired with the verbal text, which is put in rhymed verses and often changes from one first-person narrator to the other, e.g. from the girl to the boy. The reader can easily shift between those two foci by jumping back and forth between pictures and text and by distinguishing the different fonts: while the boy’s text is printed in bold, simple typeface, resembling blockletters, the girl’s is more rounded and exhibits some decorative flourishes. Thus, the male protagonist is linked to straightforwardness, simplicity and practicality merely by the font of the text he speaks. By contrast, we tend to associate the girl’s font (and, consequently, the girl herself) with a concern for form and beauty, with dreaminess and imagination. These impressions are largely confirmed by the two protagonists’ appearances. While great care seems to have been taken to represent the girl and the boy in an equally appreciative manner and in an equal number of pictures, the children’s looks and activities remain to some extent stereotyped. The girl unites aspects typically considered feminine (a pink and violet dress, a nurse’s cap with a red heart, plaids with ribbons and a flower in her hair) with some seemingly random items of her own choice (“wearable fins”, first doublespread, chequered trousers, a blue cloak and white gloves) to create her unique style: “I’m gonna like me/ wearing flowers and plaid./ I have my own style/ I don’t follow some fad” (third doublespread). Her brother also proudly presents his preferences and creativity, wearing a firefighter’s helmet and badge and his tool belt for “Mr. Fork” and “Mr. Scissor” along with a shirt, short trousers and a superman’s cloak (which might be the same as the girl’s blue cloak, adapted for its new purpose simply through attaching a big, red “S” to it with adhesive tape). Their classmates at school seem carefully styled to include looks, ethnicities and preferences as diverse as possible to underscore the idea that runs like a common thread through the book: everyone is wonderful in their individuality. Very few adjectives are used to describe the main characters. Rather, the description is left to their activities, their emotions and the settings. If we closely examine the first doublespread showing the children’s rooms, we are already given a wealth of information about them through the

items lying around, the titles of books and the predominant colours: the boy's room, though tidy, is laden with tools and books connected to the fire brigade and in the first picture, we see him jumping out of his bunk bed and sliding down the pole in a firefighter manner. By contrast, the girl is still lying in bed (perpetuating the stereotype of active men and passive women already from the start) in her room overflowing with the colours violet and orange, with mixed decoration and books on diverse themes such as "exercising your illegal turtle" and the "inspirational stories" of actresses, nurses and "trucker gals" (first doublespread). Her room seems much more chaotic and in the process of constant change than the boy's and the children's partly unusual likes and dislikes prevent us from hastening to simple conclusions about their gendered identities.

In my list, I have identified a number of books mostly dealing with family life in which appearances are simply not stressed either by the verbal text or by the images. The books' stories do not centre on looks, the words focus our attention on relationships and feelings more than on external features, and the images show us people whom we might in very broad terms call common and everyday: their appearances, activities, occupations and language mark them as relatively inconspicuous members of the middle class. Although these books employ diverse styles in both the verbal text and the artwork, ranging from reduced and factual to poetic language and from realistic to comic style pictures, readers can easily identify the books' common features: *Mommies Don't Get Sick!*, Michael Rosen's *Sad Book*, *Zoo*, *Owl Moon*, and *Heather Has Two Mommies* all revolve around instances of family life where the gender of characters is of no great concern, at least in terms of appearances. Activities, behaviours and tasks may provide potential for conflict between the genders, though, especially in *Zoo* and *Mommies Don't Get Sick!* (see chapters 6.2. and 6.5.). Since I am primarily discussing visual features here, I would like to group these five books by the style of their artwork. *Mommies Don't Get Sick!* and Michael Rosen's *Sad Book* feature a comic book style that is still rather realistic in the first book, suiting its obviously mimetic intent of representing a tale from everyday life. We follow the girl protagonist Abby as she tries to help in the household while her mother is ill. Speech bubbles create a sense of immediacy and enforce the comic book appeal. The characters are allowed to speak for themselves and the few added explanatory notes by the omniscient narrator are not only very objective and avoid intrusion but they are also mostly redundant

as the pictures and speech bubbles present all the important information. Abby, her parents and her little brother wear casual clothes and no pretence is made to seem fancy. Instead, we can witness the results of Abby's struggle with cooking, washing and nursing her brother in the form of her stained clothes and the untidy state of the house. Characterisation is subordinate to the events of the story but Abby actually tells us a lot about herself through her actions and words. "I can do a lot of things to help", she claims self-confidently in the second doublespread and we watch her doing her best to busily fulfil various tasks. In the end, Abby reveals that she is still a child and prefers being cared for to caring for somebody else: "We hope you don't get sick again, Mommy. But if you need a vacation, we can manage okay!" (final doublespread). Although the picturebook stresses cooperation, this remark leaves a curious aftertaste that echoes its title: Is it the "normal" state for mothers to be healthy and manage the household alone and only receive help in times of sickness?

Family interactions are actually only a small part of *Michael Rosen's Sad Book*. The protagonist and first person narrator tells us about the different ways in which he experiences sadness, one of them being the sadness about the death of his son Eddie. Again, we are faced with a cartoon style, which is in this case further removed from reality, its quick lines evoking motion and inner agitation and seeming almost careless. This carelessness is matched by the character design, which focuses on expression and movement much more than on style. Looks seem unimportant for both men and women, characters are not intentionally styled and sometimes even resemble caricatures with their distorted faces. Despite the treatment of external beauty as a minor matter, many women wear earrings and necklaces, which might help to identify them as women since the artwork is not too distinctive. Emotions are brought to the foreground by colour (grey and sadness are linked to each other, hope is signalled by the use of yellow), by facial expressions of characters and also through a sophisticated use of space in the pictures, e.g. when the protagonist is shown sadly walking under a huge, empty, hanging sky. Along with the pictorial information, we are provided with insights into the protagonist's thoughts and feelings through his open and honest words, which tell us what makes him sad and also how he deals with this sadness: "I tell myself that being sad is not the same as being

horrible. I'm sad, not bad. Every day I try to do one thing that means I have a good time" (eighth doublespread).

A family outing to the zoo should perhaps mean having a good time for everybody involved, but the family in *Zoo* seems less than happy at the end of the day. Intricate family processes surface simply in the way father, mother and the two sons behave towards each other and towards the animals at the zoo. Realistically painted pictures of calm, almost majestic animals on the recto are contrasted with exaggeratedly behaving humans on the verso. The characters, wearing everyday clothes and showing no externally visible gender stereotypes, reveal a lot about themselves through their actions and words, e.g. when the father is the only one to laugh about his own jokes or the two boys fight in a manner that could be called more apish than the monkeys'. Characterisation is cleverly assisted by pictorial details: the sturdy father literally takes more space in the pictures than his diffident wife and when we look at him from below in the fourth doublespread, the clouds form horns at both sides of his head, corresponding to his grim mood.

The father in *Owl Moon* behaves quite differently from the father in *Zoo*, taking his daughter on a special walk to watch owls on a winter's night, never raising his voice and walking silently with her in what seems like an unspoken, yet tight connection. Neither the father nor the daughter are closely characterised but their relationship is clearly emphasised, gaining priority over looks. In accordance with the snowy surroundings, the two are dressed for a winter's night with boots, jackets, shawls and gloves. The thick clothes actually hide their distinctive features and make them seem slightly out of place and yet embedded in what seems like the perfect harmony of nature. The stillness of the surroundings, the darkness and the moonlight create an almost magic atmosphere and we feel that something special is happening. The fact that the scene is described using minute observations of sights and sounds combined with personal impressions of the girl, who is also the first person narrator, underpins the importance of the event. Both *Zoo* and *Owl Moon* are painted in a realistic style but the impact the style creates is totally different for one and the other. The colourful and clearly delineated objects in *Zoo* contrast with the softly washed-out watercolours of *Owl Moon*, which enforce the snowy, wintery and mysteriously calm atmosphere of the book and wonderfully correspond to the poetic yet childlike words used: "The moon was high above us./ It seemed to fit/ exactly/ over the

center of the clearing/ and the snow below it/ was whiter than the milk/ in a cereal bowl” (eighth doublespread).

Another picturebook showing a special parent-child-relationship is *Heather Has Two Mommies*, the only picturebook on my list that is drawn in black and white. When the book was first published in 1989, it raised a lot of controversy because it brought homosexuality to children’s picturebooks in the form of a lesbian couple. While the first edition still shows how Heather’s biological mother Jane gets pregnant by artificial insemination (GLSEN Annotated Bibliography), this part has been removed from the 10th anniversary edition I am dealing with here. Instead, the readers are presented with various situations in the life of Heather and her two mothers and with the difficulties Heather faces in her play group when she notices that not everybody has two mothers like her. The images are located somewhere between realism and quick, reduced sketches. In my opinion, this style creates a distance between the reader and the characters and evokes little vivacity or closeness to life. The pictures alone hardly invite empathy and it is mainly through explicit narratorial characterisation that we learn more about the characters and can relate to them. At the beginning of the book, the narrator tells us that Heather’s favourite number is two, cleverly preparing the stage for the appearance of her mothers. As in the previous books, looks do not seem to be important and Heather’s mothers are shown with both feminine and masculine attributes, caring for their daughter, working as a carpenter and as a doctor respectively. The attempt to avoid stereotypes by all means is also visible in the diversity represented by the children in Heather’s playgroup: they seem to have different ethnic backgrounds and live in diverse families with mothers, fathers, stepparents, stepsiblings, adopted siblings and grandparents. Even though these diversities are a fact in contemporary Western societies, the book sometimes appears overanxious to be politically correct.

Two books that are, from my point of view, more successful in eliciting the reader’s identification with and empathy for the characters deal with a family situation admittedly less controversial but still not as commonplace as the nuclear family model. In both *Granpa* and *The Hello, Goodbye Window*, a little girl’s relationship to her grandparents is the starting point for stories mainly revolving around days spent together and small, but important images, jokes and games shared. If judged by artistic design, *Granpa* appears to be the older book of the two (which is actually true) but both stories are highly

sophisticated and innovative in their interplay of words and pictures. *Granpa* tells two parallel narratives, the verso showing Granpa's memories in black and white and the recto, which is coloured, showing the girl protagonist and her grandfather actually spending time together in the present time of the book. Throughout the whole book, the verbal text consists exclusively of dialogue that is sometimes only very loosely connected to the corresponding picture and thus leaves a lot to be interpreted by the reader. The thin lines and soft colours in *Granpa* contrast with the distinctive artwork in *The Hello, Goodbye Window*: reminiscent of naïve paintings, it uses bright colours and a few bold, black lines to support the strongly abstracted forms. The lively and positive impression of the images is supported by the girl telling the story in her own, joyful words, often creating jokes that seem delightfully unintended, e.g. when she explains about the Tyrannosaurus Rex, who might walk past the window: "He's extinct, so he doesn't come around much" (twelfth doublespread). The introduction of elderly people to the world of children (and picturebooks) means bringing in some traditional aspects for both books. The grandparents are shown in clothes typically associated with elderly people, e.g. corduroy trousers, slippers and braces for *Granpa* and a loosely fitting dress for the girl's grandmother in *The Hello, Goodbye Window*. Although the verbal texts already make it clear that the people concerned appear in their role as grandparents, these conventions have not been given up. Neither do we see any of the grandparents at work outside the home. Being retired or unemployed, they can devote themselves fully to their granddaughters, which is not necessarily the case for many contemporary grandparents in Western societies. However, both books show a high degree of individuality, creativity and unconventionality, which, in my view, tend to dominate the reader's impression. The diversity of activities and surroundings and the subtleties in the grandparent-grandchild relationship we are presented with in both books certainly prevent these books from being considered stereotyped. Moreover, no attempt seems to be made to stress the characters' somewhat traditional outward appearances. Our attention is far more likely to be drawn towards the interaction between characters, who emit an air of naturalness in their behaviour, never posing for the onlooker.

Two women to whom posing and appearance seem to be of similarly little concern are the protagonists of the two picturebooks which most clearly represent unconventionality on my

continuum. Although *Tiny and Bigman* and *Princess Smartypants* differ greatly from each other in their story, setting and visual design, they both play with gender and genre stereotypes and clearly subvert them. The story of *Tiny and Bigman* is set on a Caribbean island, where Tiny, a tall, strong and technically skilled woman, lives and falls in love with a newcomer to the island, Bigman, who is small and weak, but very clever and a great cook. Complementing each other perfectly, they continue their lives together in happiness. Even though the story follows the typical fairytale trajectory to some extent (a strong character with a substantial fortune falls in love with a weak character and protects them both in a difficult situation so that they can live together with their children for what seems like eternity), these conventions actually make the almost complete change in gender roles even more conspicuous as they thwart our expectations. The irony in the characters' naming becomes immediately apparent as we learn about Tiny in the first and second doublespread, the narrator and the pictures providing us with an unusual amount of information for a picturebook and thus preparing us for the story's unconventional development. Tiny is described as "super friendly and always ready to offer a helping hand" (first doublespread). In the corresponding picture, we see her waving to a family and quickly walking along a path, carrying boards and a hammer. The image expands on the verbal text and shows us that "offering a helping hand" probably refers to activities broadly considered "unwomanly" by many people, an assumption that we see confirmed on the following doublespreads. The men she helps carrying stones, chopping sugarcane and digging a foundation only grumpily thank her and represent the voice of tradition: "Who likes a woman stronger than man? Make him look weak, weak, weak, that's what" (fifth doublespread). Tradition also comes to the fore when the narrator highlights Tiny's beauty and the fact that she does not have a husband, but in what follows, Tiny's strength, helpfulness and cheerful, extraverted character prevail over those conventionalities. In fact, we do not even need the text to tell us that Tiny's behaviour fits gender stereotypes as little as her name fits her size: she literally takes a lot of space in the pictures and even though she is wearing a flowered skirt, sandals and earrings, these clothes do not prevent her in the least from doing hard physical work. Bigman, by contrast, is "a skinny thing, with not a muscle in sight" (sixth doublespread) whom we see cooking, working on the computer (his glasses symbolising his concentration on intellectual work) and, most of all, showing his

affection for Tiny. Men and women are mostly distinguished by their clothes, which is probably a necessity resulting from the simplification and abstraction of the book's artistic style. The bright colours and thick, black lines used suit the story's vivacity and evoke the exotic Caribbean setting. Depicting a close-knit community whose members live in small houses, till fertile land and are threatened by hurricanes, the book certainly simplifies the setting for Western readers, thus resorting to some cultural stereotypes even if gender stereotypes are avoided.

Western readers will surely recognize the fairytale conventions and setting *Princess Smartypants* exploits par excellence but here, we meet a princess with decidedly different ideas of what constitutes a happy ending. The cover illustration, showing Smartypants on her motorbike accompanied by a small dragon, already mocks the pink background colour, suggesting that this princess will not readily confirm to the girlishness readers might associate with the colour pink. The first doublespread clarifies the princess's intentions: "Princess Smartypants did not want to get married. She enjoyed being a Ms.". Although the narrator also tells us that Smartypants is pretty, the pictures show her and other characters as far more funny than beautiful by conventional standards. There is a continuous play with norms: the princess, though carrying a small crown on her long blonde hair, is shown barefoot or in rubber boots and wearing a loose, grey overall hiding her figure. Obviously, convenience counts for more than beauty with her. The whole array of princes, who try to fulfil the tasks she sets them in order to become her husband, are depicted in a way far from flattering: they look weak, frightened and generally unfit to be her match. The pictures marvellously comment on the text, which dryly states the tasks but does not mention how all the princes fail in accomplishing them. The princes' speaking names provide additional jokes, mainly for adult readers, who will laugh at Prince Vertigo shrinking from climbing a high tower and at Prince Pelvis, who is defeated by Princess Smartypants in a roller-disco marathon. Interestingly, the attributes they are given also allude to particular nationalities, e.g. the fur cap of one prince suggesting his being Russian and Prince Swashbuckle's uniform and his turning into a toad (instead of a frog) suggesting he might be French. These hints will probably only be understood by an adult audience, who hopefully recognizes the ironic play with stereotypes rather than seeing the latter confirmed. Most pictures show the

princess in relaxed, physically active or triumphant positions, spending a lot of her time outdoors with her pet dragons and remaining happily unmarried in the end.

Finally, there are three picturebooks on my list that circumvent the problem of depicting men and women altogether by their use of animal characters. *Stellaluna*, *Guess How Much I Love You* and *And Tango Makes Three* all allow their characters to remain animals even though they are given names and personalities and, in case of the first two books, the ability to speak. Neither the fruit bats in *Stellaluna*, nor the hares in *Guess How Much I Love You* nor the penguins in *And Tango Makes Three* are forced into human clothes or activities. Personal pronouns make the characters' sex clear but their experiences and feelings are emphasised as being universal rather than depending on sex or gender. Admittedly, the concepts of love and interpersonal relationships as well as some of the postures assumed and emotions shown by the characters in the first two books are unlikely to be found in these animal species but the books maintain a skilled balance between distance and closeness to the characters, allowing for both identification with the characters and a high degree of authenticity in the depiction of animal life. All these books are painted in a cartoonish, yet fairly realistic style and the lack of pictorial markers from which to derive characteristics we as humans can relate to is compensated for by a relatively large amount of verbal description. There are, however, also visual clues that define the characters' relationship with each other and that clearly originate in human behaviour, e.g. when the two hares in *Guess How Much I Love You* are shown hugging or the little one wipes his eyes out of tiredness (ninth, tenth, and final doublespread). Love, family and friendship are the foci of all three books and although these are, in the particular forms shown, decidedly human concepts, the animal characters help us to see their universality. Freed from typical gender and other role ascriptions, the animals show us some essentials of being human.

6.2. Behaviours, activities and occupations

This chapter will consider characters in action and attempt to give some exemplary answers to the following questions: To what extent are male and female characters shown in traditional roles and occupations? How do characters express their gender through their behaviours and activities? How do pictures and words create each book's individual attitude towards gender roles? Do the picturebooks show ways for both female and male

characters to transgress rigid gender boundaries? How are unusual heroes and heroines represented? The analysis is based on noteworthy examples from several picturebooks rather than a simple recital of activities occurring in the entire twenty books. Playing and school environments will be given special attention in chapter 6.2.2.

6.2.1. Behaviours, activities and occupations: any boys up for needlework?

As I have mentioned earlier, even comparably recent picturebooks often portray female and male characters in very distinct and clearly gendered ways. Sometimes a single attribute or action is enough to brand a character as typically feminine or masculine, confirming a stereotype and preventing readers from further reflection on the character's identity. Readers might nod their heads in approval to a girl quietly playing with her dolls while her brother is noisily playing soldier. According to Spitz (25), boys in picturebooks typically fight and use their imagination, whereas girls try to relate to others rather than seeking independence. I will draw on Davis's list of behavioural categories (6) to support my analysis, first discussing behaviours and activities and concluding the chapter with some remarks on adults' occupations in my picturebooks.

As a general tendency for all the books in my study, I have found that women and girls are shown performing more instrumental-independent activities than passive-dependent ones. Could we draw universal conclusions, we might say that these findings reverse those of many previous studies (see chapter 4), but even within the limits of the present study, this tendency is remarkable. Most books allow their characters to engage in a wide range of activities and express themselves individually in their preferences. In fact, these idiosyncrasies make the books interesting and let us empathise with the characters. The female characters in the picturebooks at hand are not content with sitting at home, reading books, cooking and waiting for orders or help. Even in those books that I might classify as more traditional, females are given some agency or perform activities which, especially considering the whole book as a context, seem unusual. For instance, the mother in *Not Now, Bernard* does not only care for her son and perform typical household chores but is also shown painting a wall, thus engaging in a type of physical work more often associated with men. Characters in other books present themselves as far more self-directed: Smartypants enters the male-dominated area of motorsports and spends most of her time

outside, Pinkalicious, though infatuated with the feminine colour pink (Crawford et al. 448¹), uses her brains and her muscles to reach the cupcakes she wants and Mrs. Tod takes over the hunting job from her husband, relying on his nurturant behaviour and leaving the children in his care.

Yet again, I can identify some books in which characters' activities and behaviours lean more towards the traditional side and others that present their characters in more innovative ways. In *The Berenstain Bears* and *Just Me and My Mom*, we find the first impressions we got from the characters' outward appearance confirmed to some degree when we look at their actions. The cover page of *The Trouble With Grownups* seems virtually intended to prove my point: The adult bears, towering over their cubs and enclosing them from both sides, represent the voice of grownup authority, scolding their children, who are reduced to a small size and almost seem to vanish from the page. Power relations are clearly delineated between adults and children and more subtly between men and women. Through the space given to them, the parents gain influence over their children with Papa Bear standing erect like a statue and Mama Bear more leaning in towards her cubs with a worried expression, subtly suggesting that she wants the best for her children in contrast to Papa Bear, who mainly expresses his anger. Both cubs look annoyed and stubborn but while Brother Bear shows himself independent by crossing his arms in front of his chest, Sister Bear clutches a teddy bear, a symbol of consolation and safety for children. The first two doublespreads provide two more examples of typical gendering: Brother Bear is lying on the floor reading the sports section of Papa's newspaper (not the lifestyle section or the horoscope) and Sister Bear is chatting with a friend on the phone, underscoring the stereotype of over-talkative women. *Just Me and My Mom* provides particularly interesting insights if we compare it with an earlier book in the series, named *Just Me and My Dad*. Both books employ a fine humour in letting the pictures comment on the words but what Little Critter experiences with his mother differs greatly from what the weekend with his father encompasses. His mother takes him to town to offer him arts and culture in a museum and to buy him new clothes, an idea that the child frowns upon, noting "Mom wanted to go to a big store full of dresses an stuff like that. Yuck." (ninth doublespread). His father, on the contrary, takes

¹ Crawford et al. compiled a corpus of gender-related words in which words were rated as feminine, masculine or neutral. "Pink" is rated highly feminine in this corpus.

him to the country to go camping and fishing, physical outdoor activities typically associated with masculinity (Crawford et al. 456). Moreover, while Little Critter actively explores his environment in both books, his mother remains fairly static and so do the pictures themselves. In *Just Me and My Dad*, a river is depicted running from the top of one page to the opposite end of the next page, implying movement and a clear direction in the male-dominated scenery.

In *Zoo*, stereotypical roles are confirmed if we take the characters' words and actions literally. The father, an irascible man with a poor sense of humour, is contrasted with the anxious, thoughtful and empathic mother. Their children, both boys, quarrel, fight and care for the food at the zoo more than for the animals they cannot relate to. If we take the rhythm of the narrative and our contextual knowledge about stereotypes into account, however, we notice that these clichéd depictions actually serve the criticism we can read into the story. Most versos are reserved for the verbal text and those pictures showing members of the family and their reactions to the "stupid" animals (eighth doublespread). The animals are depicted on the rectos and actually seem much more dignified in their mere existence than the family, who continuously embarrasses themselves (e.g. when the father does his "King Kong impersonation", one but last doublespread). Only after the visit to the zoo do we see one of the boys, who tells the story from his perspective, sitting on the floor by himself with what seems like the bars of a cage casting their shadows around him, wondering whether animals have dreams like he does and suggesting that the events of the day have given him food for thought after all (final doublespread).

The fox characters in *Mr. Tod's Trap* most of all long for food to fill their stomachs with when Mr. Tod time and again fails in his hunting endeavours. At first, roles are clearly assigned: Mr. Tod goes hunting while Mrs. Tod stays at home caring for the children and working in the household. When Mrs. Tod suggests she might go hunting instead of her husband, he angrily explains why she cannot, in his opinion, do so: "Because you are a woman [...] and a mother. Your place is here at home, looking after the cubs. *I* will go out hunting." Over time, though, Mrs. Tod succeeds with her quiet, persistent way, convincing the boisterous and proud Mr. Tod to stay at home. They change roles and she brings home enough food for the whole family. Interestingly, Mr. Tod, despite his obvious affection for the cubs and the loving care he offers them, still seems unable to accept the role reversal as

brought on by necessity and calls it his “best idea yet” (64). His wife, rather than pointing out that the idea has in fact been hers, supports him unconditionally, fostering his self-confidence and making her family’s well-being a priority over her personal achievements.

While adult roles are clearly and unquestioningly assigned in the Stone Age setting of *Ug*, the boy himself challenges his parents and peers with his unconventional ideas. He takes explorative, creative action, inventing the wheel, a boat and trousers made from fur instead of the ubiquitous stone simply by watching his surroundings attentively and being open to change (sixth doublespread). We see Ug’s mother incessantly working in the household (or, rather, cavehold) with a grim determinedness, warding off any attempts on the part of Ug to make her life easier by inducing her to accept new ideas. As Ug’s father remarks, “it’s the women who wear the trousers round here” (ninth doublespread), hinting at the reversal of typical gender roles in this picturebook that features a stony, imperious woman and two rather soft and emotional male characters. The irony created by the exaggerated use of stone reminds the readers that the book has a mocking tendency throughout and that the one-dimensionality of the mother character mainly serves to strengthen the contrast between the Stone Age (with all its connotations of coldness, hardness and hardship) and the dawning of a new era represented by Ug’s cleverness and sensitivity.

The protagonist of *Michael Rosen’s Sad Book* does not conform to an image of male toughness either. His most frequent activities belong to Davis’s category of passively active behaviour: thinking (in the sense of philosophising, remembering and reflecting), talking to others or watching TV. The plain honesty of the narrator’s words account for the latter’s even stronger effect. We are confronted with a man far removed from stereotypical masculinity and yet the book does not seem to forcedly challenge gender roles; rather, it appears convincing because it presents the character’s words and actions so simply and openly. The narrator also tells us the everyday absurdities he uses to cope with his sadness, such as “shouting in the shower”, “banging a spoon on the table or making my cheeks go whooph, booph, whooph” (fifth doublespread), talking about emotions in a way certainly often considered unmanly. His son Eddie is shown as more active, both in what he does and in how he does it. We watch Eddie playing, acting, swimming and animatedly talking to friends in images the narrator presents to us like the pages of his mind’s photo album. Eddie seems to embrace the world with his open gestures while his father mainly looks

downcast and as if curling into himself. Correspondingly, those images depicting Eddie employ a lot of light and various colours in contrast to the grey-dominated images concentrating on the protagonist. Two male characters show the readers essentials of being human in a manner that, in my opinion, might appeal to audiences of all ages and genders, thus making this book one of the few that parents and caretakers might pick for their girls as well as for their boys.

Tiny and Bigman and *Princess Smartypants* much more deliberately put traditional worlds upside down. Tiny, always ready to help and care for others, displays a very physically active form of nurturing behaviour. She engages in classic men's jobs, building houses and roads, planting, harvesting and fishing. Continuously keeping a smile on her lips, she even seems to enjoy her work in contrast to the men, who are shown with twisted faces and who are shoved to the background by Tiny's impressive presence. Her husband Bigman, being unfit for hard physical work, makes the kitchen his domain, combining nurturant behaviour (preparing food) with passively active work on the computer (which somewhat compensates for his housewife image due to the associations with technical skill, intellectual work and male brainpower that the computer might trigger). The couple cooperate in such a way that each person's special skills complement the other's deficiencies. Smartypants, by contrast, seems to care only for herself (and her pets) and does only as she pleases. Her hobbies range from the relatively normal (at least for a princess) to the risky and bizarre: she likes to ride her pony as well as her motorbike and after an afternoon of roller skating, she goes to feed her pet dragons. Readers might get the impression of a very active heroine striving for masculinity and consciously staging her individuality. For even though the princess seems to just naturally follow her whims, we also see her posing triumphantly in her roller-disco outfit (fifth doublespread) and in the last doublespread celebrating her everlasting unmarried state. The way she stages her emotions and positions herself towards the onlookers suggest that she is very well aware of her unconventionality's unsettling effects. Interestingly, Prince Swashbuckle, who accomplishes all the tasks Smartypants sets him, succeeds by using thought and wit, thus presenting himself as a man succeeding with the mind. The fairy tale frame of the story allows the princess to turn the odds against him once more when she gives him a magic kiss

that turns him into a toad. Magic and witchcraft, which is basically held as something irrational, is thus again connected to a woman while clever ideas are connected to a man.

What I find remarkable about these two women protagonists is how, in order to live independent lives, they comprehensively adopt traits typically considered masculine (although this is admittedly true only to a smaller extent for Tiny, who is also portrayed as emotional and nurturant). In other (and very much simplified) words, it seems as if women had to become men if they want to be seen as strong and self-directed. Davis observes that for his sample of books

it appears that the authors and illustrators of these [nonsexist] books, reacting to a perceived distortion in the portrayal of females in conventional books, overcompensated in their characterization of self-reliant, spirited, and competent heroines. Instead of presenting a picture of equality between the sexes in the dimension of independent functioning, the balance has been tipped in favor of the female, at the expense of the male, thus reversing the traditional stereotype. (12)

Possibly, authors and illustrators (and maybe Western cultures in general) are still facing difficulties in establishing characters as multifaceted individuals without reverting to stereotypes of one sort or the other. However, we should also take into account the fact that it is even more challenging to depict multidimensional characters in the limited space of a picturebook and that simplified or even stereotyped representations are therefore often a matter of necessity. Moreover, much of the irony in *Princess Smartypants* would be lost if she was shown less uncompromisingly. Nevertheless, the issue of truly independent heroes and heroines remains a rich field of exploration for both artists in their work and readers in their reception of that work.

Some picturebooks, whether they do so consciously or unconsciously, combine tradition and innovation in a way that makes for ambivalent readings (and to some extent, this is true for the whole list of books as meaning can never be ultimately determined). In my opinion, these books provide most intriguing material for analysis due to the many nuances of meaning we can detect, the importance of each reader's personal interpretation and the differences in meaning created by adult mediation in the process of reading aloud to children. A case in point is *The English Roses* in which the obtrusive narrative voice seems to lay out the whole interpretation of the story for the readers while, at first sight, the images do not add significant information to the words. However, the pictures' design

somewhat contradicts the ideas so emphatically expressed by the narrator (and also through the fairy godmother): On the one hand, we are told that friendship, tolerance and openness are more important than brands and styles but on the other hand, we see the English Roses adhering to a certain dress code and presenting themselves very much in the way models would (e.g. 16, where their carriage and styling makes them appear like risen from a fashion magazine). The girls are mostly shown independently acting on their own and making their own choices about activities, friends and preferences. They occupy both indoor and outdoor spaces, engaging in physical activity (ice-skating, dancing, pillow fights) as well as in quieter activities (reading, having a picnic, doing homework). Still, it is only under the guidance of the fairy godmother, an adult figure, that they arrive at a better understanding of Binah's situation. Some agency is also taken from them by purely depicting them in carefully selected colours and clothes, suggesting the influence the fashion industry and the media exert over them. It is mainly the tension created between the overly didactic voice and the lively, yet to some extent artificial pictures that makes for ambivalent readings here. The pictures might draw us in were it not for the patronizing narratorial voice that rather lets us shy away from identifying with its teachings too closely.

The possible didactic intention in *Pinkalicious* is greatly eased by the fact that the story is told from the perspective of the girl protagonist herself rather than by an adult narrator. Since the central statement is distinctly expressed only at the very end of the book ("I was me, and I was beautiful", one but last doublespread), the girl's actions and behaviour are needed as a counterweight to balance the abundance of pink, which might otherwise lead us to believe that we are dealing with a very clichéd book. *Pinkalicious* is a surprisingly round character for a picturebook: we perceive her as independent, emotional, resourceful and active. She wants the world to go her way and if it does not, she finds ways to make it go her way. In the twelfth doublespread, we watch her building a ladder from various household objects to reach the cupcakes on the fridge. The precarious look of this makeshift ladder corresponds to the risk that we can already anticipate. The visual design of these two pages beautifully underlines the direction of *Pinkalicious*'s movement and the verbal text on the recto is arranged in a narrow column, giving the impression of supporting the girl in her unsteady position. *Pinkalicious* creates herself through her own actions rather than imitating someone else. Her boldness and strength combined with her strong

emotionality allow her not to be simply dismissed as either feminine or masculine. Pink cupcakes, princess dresses and adventurous exploration seem to be compatible after all.

I'm Gonna Like Me features a similarly independent and idiosyncratic girl character. The words of the title are continuously repeated, reminding the reader of the importance of individual development and choice. Indeed, both the girl and the boy choose their very own styling that is in turn strongly connected to their favourite objects and activities. The boy is mostly shown in active outdoor play, imagining himself as superman or as a firefighter, jumping around and generally conveying an impression of physical activity and strength paired with an interest in technical experiments. The girl, on the contrary, prefers dressing up, designing and dreaming, mostly staying indoors. From a gender studies perspective, these activities are highly ambivalent in the context of the book as a whole. Although personality, choice and individuality are heavily emphasised in words and supported by creative, colourful pictures, the children's activities quite clearly mark them as a boy and a girl respectively. Still, there is a number of activities, particularly household chores, that are the same for both children. Here, the images funnily expand on the short texts, showing how the children use their imagination to make boring tasks more interesting: the boy tries to "clean in a flash" with his firefighter's water hose while the girl takes the opportunity to apply her dubious nurse's skills when she plays with her baby brother (13th doublespread). Moreover, how the children behave is at least as important as the specific action they are performing. Whatever they are doing, they are adopting a stance of happy self-assurance, acting independently and cooperatively at the same time (e.g. when sharing their meals, sixth doublespread). Neither are we presented with an unfailing hero and heroine: the girl is the slowest runner in her PE class and the boy, whom we first see jumping high up in the air and all over the page (at least in his imagination), finally trips and hurts himself. Thus, the book shows success and failure and promotes self-confidence in either situation

Finally, I would like to mention just a few relevant aspects of *Granpa*, a picturebook which allows for multiple interpretations for every single doublespread due to its triple communication (the individual viewpoints of two characters plus the information provided by the pictures). The book shows us an impressive array of activities the two protagonists share. These range from active outdoor play (Granpa even skillfully skips along the garden path) over role playing and working in the garden to quietly watching the rain pouring

down. The girl is active and creative in her play and cooperation on the part of both characters is vital for their mutual understanding of their games. This requirement becomes apparent when there are slight misunderstandings such as in the following exchange: “This is a lovely chocolate ice-cream. *It’s not chocolate, it’s strawberry*” (seventh doublespread). What is essential here is not the exact flavour of the ice cream, though, but the willingness to enter the other person’s imaginative space. Due to the large diversity of activities and the fact that the latter are always based on shared experience rather than being performed by only one of the characters, we do not run the risk of hurriedly assigning labels such as “masculine” or “feminine” to Granpa and the girl. If we look carefully, we can even detect a narrative rhythm in this book corresponding to the cycle of growth and decay: at the very beginning of the picturebook, we observe the girl and her grandfather planting seeds which then, we may assume, grow just like the characters’ relationship, which is shown as passing through the seasons, ending with ice-skating in winter before Granpa gets weaker and his empty chair in the one but last picture suggests his death.

Most of the selected picturebooks emphasise their child protagonists’ adventures while adults provide only background support. Therefore, in many books adults’ occupations do not become apparent. Still, readers familiar with typical family settings and the possible significance of characters’ appearances might be led to certain conclusions regarding the adult characters’ work situation. The pictures in *Not Now, Bernard*, for example, strongly suggest that Bernard’s father, wearing a shirt and shiny, black shoes, has just come home from work and is ready to relax with the evening newspaper while Bernard’s mother is depicted in her apron busily preparing food and caring for her family. The newspaper and the apron alone can be seen as markers of work outside and inside the home respectively. *The Berenstain Bears and the Trouble with Grownups* actually employs the same codes. A few other picturebooks do make characters’ occupations explicit, though. *Heather Has Two Mommies* makes a conscious attempt to break traditional gender boundaries by placing Mama Kate in a scientific and medical job and Mama Jane in a technical one involving manual labour. Both “doctor” and “carpenter” are rated masculine in the Crawford Corpus (456) and interestingly, the only other doctor appearing in my choice of books is also a woman (in *Pinkalicious*). The first book obviously has gender on its agenda but the second book merely incorporates this piece of information into the main storyline and might thus

work on a more subtle basis. *Mr. Tod's Trap* and *Ug* take us back to a more traditional distribution of work with the male characters responsible for hunting and the female characters working at home. Notably, though, both men seem dissatisfied with their lot, which finally even leads Mr. Tod to switch places with his wife. Ug's father does not see a way to change his occupation even though his triumphant pose and radiant smile show him much more thrilled with tailoring than with hunting when he tries to make trousers for his son.

6.2.2. Children at school, children at play: maths and languages, balls and dolls

Schools are usually environments heavily furnished with norms and rules. Some of these rules refer to appropriate behaviours and activities for each gender in a given context and most of these rules pass unnoticed, being silently incorporated into children's thoughts and bodies. Gendered domains may have an influence on children's favourite subjects at school: As I have noted before, men are typically associated with logical, rational thought (e.g. Gilligan 17). Thus, boys are often held to be more talented in maths and sciences. Girls, by contrast, are both believed and encouraged to take an interest in other people and interact with them through language (Kolbe and La Voie's "expressive" behaviours, 370). If boys frequently perform better in maths and girls in languages, this should be seen at least partly as due the fact that society in general and schools, parents and teachers in particular still present this division as natural. Even in nurseries and kindergartens, we can see gendering in operation if boys and girls are encouraged to play differently. Learning and playing are two chief occupations for children and both are part of picturebook stories.

The only picturebook on my list in which specific school subjects are explicitly mentioned is *I'm Gonna Like Me*. Researchers in gender studies might be disappointed by the classic distribution of areas of knowledge as the girl recites the letters of the alphabet in a language class and the boy is called upon to solve a calculation in a maths class. Since the girl succeeds and the boy makes a mistake, though, attention is directed away from the content of the classes and rather placed on the attitude with which the children master the situation. The school mostly serves as a background setting in *The Berenstain Bears* and in *The English Roses* but in both cases, the centrality of this specific environment for the characters becomes clear: it is a place of achievement and competition (that Binah is an

“excellent student” [12] is one of the reasons why the English Roses envy her) but also of encounter and cooperation (boy and girl bears work together to create a play). Similarly, Heather’s playgroup is primarily a place of interaction with other children and a means to open up to new experiences and forms of life brought in by each child’s individual background.

Playing is probably more enjoyable for most children than attending school and during the early years, it will also be a more central part of life for them. Correspondingly, we see children at play far more often in picturebooks than we see them at school. As I have mentioned before, in *I’m Gonna Like Me* there is quite a clear divide between the kind of games played by the boy and those played by the girl. The talents exhibited by the cubs at school in *The Berenstain Bears* also appear traditionally gendered: physical activity for a girl is restricted to ballet, naturally performed in a tutu, while for boys it means juggling and acrobatics. When Mama and Papa Bear change roles with their children, they leave insignia of male and female activity messily lying on the floor. We hardly need to be told that the vacuum cleaner and the sewing kit belong to Mama Bear whereas the chainsaw and the painter’s tools are assigned to Papa Bear. Both parents then proceed to dynamic play in the garden but they remain well within the proper domains of their respective gender, the mother skipping rope and the father skateboarding (according to the Crawford Corpus, “jumprope” is associated with femininity, 449, and “skateboard” is associated with masculinity, 456, even though no explanation for this association is provided).

Several picturebooks allow their characters to play in a way that is not obviously gendered. We see different kinds of toys (crayons, books, dolls, a rocking horse, books, a ball, a model railway and roller skates, amongst others) lying around in the homes of Pinkalicious’s and Mr. Tod’s family but no mention is made whether they belong to boys or girls. Pinkalicious may well play princess but she also wildly whirls around her room at bedtime. The verbal text simply tells us “I refused to go to bed” (fourth doublespread) and it is only through the illustrations that we get an idea of how energetically Pinkalicious tries to delay her bedtime as she jumps up to the ceiling and down to bed, followed by a broken, pink line tracing her trajectory. In fact, those activities identified as passive-dependent by Kortenhaus and Demarest (229) and typically associated with girls hardly occur at all in the selected books. Both boys and girls much rather engage in active outdoor play than quietly

sitting at home and most of them seem well able to solve problems on their own without reverting to outside help. Since Kortenhaus and Demarest investigated books published between the 1940s and the 1980s, these categories might no longer apply to contemporary picturebooks and it is to be hoped that these changes point towards a more egalitarian depiction of boys and girls.

As I have noted earlier, *Granpa* is heavily focused on play, involving forms of indoor and outdoor play, building, role playing and storytelling and thus creating a very holistic image of the grandparent-child relationship. Playing is not just playing here, it serves a relational function and uncovers the subtleties of the two characters' communication. While words and images in *Granpa* manage to convey this additional information with impressive lightness, *Heather Has Two Mommies* seems to me over-eager in the manner it promotes diversity. The repeated reference to the number two appears artificial, and great care seems to have been taken to show Heather in activities traditionally associated with boys, such as building and dressing up as a firefighter. Admittedly, the number two might also serve as a red thread and simplify orientation for children but I doubt whether young readers actually need such a strong narratorial orientation, especially if they share the book with an adult, who can further influence and enhance the reading experience. The exaggerated, risky and absurd leisure time activities in *Princess Smartypants* are mainly used for comic effect as are those versions of popular ball games we encounter in *Ug*. After all, grooming dragons and playing baseball, tennis or football with stones cannot be called the most likely activities for today's children who live neither in a fairytale nor in the Stone Age. Postmodern features of excess and irony underscore these two picturebooks' attempts to reveal clichés and make way for new readings and protagonists.

6.3. Emotional behaviour and response: do boys cry after all?

Emotions lend colour and depth to characters' experiences and allow the reader to directly relate to the characters' interiority. Sometimes the multicoloured nature of feelings is even interpreted literally such as when the *English Roses* turn green from envy (14f.) but there are also picturebooks which weave emotions into words and pictures fairly unobtrusively and leave it to the reader to discover and understand them. The latter possibility usually

coincides with a larger degree of overall complexity in a picturebook while the former is mostly to be found in books with a straightforward plot, often in combination with a cartoon style and sometimes also with a clearly discernable narratorial intention (such as in *The Berenstain Bears*, which openly aims at teaching a moral lesson). Admittedly, the limited space available to tell a story in the average picturebook often calls for simplification and clarity or even exaggeration. I still think that careless use of stereotypes should not be mistaken for clarity and that critical awareness of the sometimes very thin line between these two possibilities is needed.

Are there differences in emotional expression between girls and boys, between women and men? Certainly, it is widely believed that women are more emotional than men (Crawford et al. cite “emotional” as feminine, 449) and that they express their emotions more openly. It is also certain, though, that emotions are part of everybody’s life and picturebooks might provide models of “acceptable” emotional behaviour for children by showing instances of how boys and girls live their emotions. I would first like to discuss the kind of comparatively hidden and complex emotions mentioned earlier and then move on to those books which, in various ways, show very openly emotional characters.

Roy and Silo, the two penguin fathers in *And Tango Makes Three*, are characters we can easily relate to as they show their love and concern for the egg they are given to hatch and for the baby chick that hatches from it. In their caring attitude towards their baby and towards each other they very much resemble a human couple. The picturebook skilfully maintains a balance between conveying the penguins’ emotions and human-like qualities on the one hand and their essentially remaining penguins on the other hand. As the penguins do not talk nor perform any actions unusual for average penguins, it is mostly the way their special connection is communicated that allows us to make inferences based on our knowledge of love relationships. When the verbal text tells us that “Roy and Silo were both boys. But they did everything together” (fourth doublespread) and the images show the two penguins bowing, walking, singing and swimming together, we are very likely to connect this information to a concept of human partnership and falling in love. Naturally, we need some prior knowledge about human relationships and typical forms of interaction in order to arrive at such a judgment. To clarify matters, we are also provided with a human character’s interpretation, which is a way of verbalising the theme without forcing it on the

animals: “Their keeper Mr Gramzay noticed the two penguins and thought to himself, ‘They must be in love’” (fifth doublespread). Another factor that conveys emotional information is the artwork that is situated approximately in the middle between naturalism and cartoon and can therefore make use of elements typical of either style. In the eighth doublespread, for instance, Roy and Silo are shown sitting on their stone egg in various positions penguins might actually assume but still, their postures, faces and relation to each other in space send rather unambiguous messages such as “I’m bored” (supporting his inclined head on one wing, eyes closed and the beak suggesting a corner of the mouth drawn down) or “Is there something wrong?” (one penguin sitting on the nest, head turned away but eying the pile of stones with an uncertain expression, the other penguin standing behind the nest with a similarly worried look). Love and care are clearly the emotional foci of *Tango* whose narrator takes great care to present these emotions and the concept of a loving, supportive family as universal, transgressing borders of gender and even species (probably chiefly to be consistent in the argument and also to remove the topic from the much more loaded human realm): “At night the three penguins returned to their nest. There they snuggled together and, like all the other penguins in the penguin house, and all the other animals in the zoo, and all the families in the big city around them, they went to sleep” (last doublespread).

Although it might not be immediately obvious, love is also the central emotion in *Granpa* and *Owl Moon*. Both books focus on the relationship between a child and an adult and even though the characters’ joint experiences provide the foundation of the plot, these experiences mainly serve as illustrations of the relationship. The connection between father and daughter or grandfather and granddaughter gains quality and depth through shared adventures, play and memories. Searching for owls demands silence and so father and daughter walk without exchanging a word in *Owl Moon*. Their closeness is only hinted at in small gestures (e.g. when the two tiny figures hold hands as if not to lose each other in the vast wood surrounding them, seventh doublespread) and by the very fact that they take the time and energy to walk together for hours on a winter’s night. The snowy woods and fields constitute the main visual impact of this picturebook while the humans seem like mere additions in the pictures. Emotions are therefore barely visible on the characters’ faces or in their gestures but this apparent emotional restraint corresponds to the need for silence and

the awe and anticipation that filters through the girl's words: "The shadows/ were the blackest things/ I had ever seen. They stained the white snow. [...] I didn't ask/ what kinds of things/ hide behind black trees/ in the middle of the night./ When you go owling/ you have to be brave" (seventh doublespread). The verbal text in *Granpa*, by contrast, consists exclusively of dialogue. The matches and mismatches in the characters' communication allow the readers to fathom the deepness of the characters' connection, e.g. when Granpa recalls his childhood while ice-skating with his granddaughter, who proves she has heard the story before: "Harry, Florence and I used to come down that hill like little arrows. I remember one Christmas... *You nearly slipped then, Granpa*" (twelfth doublespread). Each doublespread shows the girl and her grandfather engaged in a different activity, which can in itself be seen as a way to signal their closeness and continuous affectionate relationship. Since the two protagonists pay attention to each other and to their talk and games but not to the spectator, they seem to assume a stance of casual naturalness, showing a smile, a pout or heavy, tired eyes but they never seem to perform their emotions as part of self-dramatisation. In my opinion, *Granpa* succeeds very well in turning everyday experiences into meaningful ones precisely by economising with the amount of information provided. Unfinished dialogues, scraps of memories, parts of stories and the wealth of pictorial detail (such as toys, tools in the greenhouse or the backdrop of a city at the seaside) trigger numerous ideas but leave a great deal of interpretation to the readers.

The majority of books on my list feature very emotional characters, i.e. characters who express their emotions through facial expression, gestures and words or whose emotions are distinctly mentioned in the verbal text. Those emotions identified as central for both female and male characters by Tepper and Cassidy (278, see also chapter 4) also frequently occur in the books concerned: love, anger and fear (though fear and anxiety appear much less often than love and anger). I would like to add sadness and happiness (or joy), which have an important role to play in several books.

The girls in *The English Roses* live through joy, anger and anxiety, all of which are communicated to the reader in a very bold and simple way. Usually the verbal text tells us about the girls' feelings and receives support from the illustrations which show the girls distorting their faces in anger or envy or joyfully throwing their arms into the air. This dual communication is often redundant but can add a humorous note, e.g. when the narrator tells

us for the first time that the English Roses are jealous of Binah, which is followed by an individually framed picture of each girl sulkily looking at Binah, who is depicted on the following page sitting on her own beside a water basin in a melodramatically empty park (12f.). The narratorial voice is so strongly didactic and serious throughout the book, though, that cases such as this one, which bear great ironic potential, run the risk of losing their humour and turning plainly ridiculous. At times, emotions appear so artificial that the images give us the impression of being taken from a manual titled “Emotional gestures for actresses” (e.g. when the girls feel very embarrassed at the sight of Binah’s living conditions: one touches her head, closing her eyes in disbelief, another lifts her hands to her mouth and yet another stands cross-legged, eyes down-cast and fumbling with her dress, 39). Men are absent from the book with the exception of Binah’s father, so feelings remain an entirely female domain as a matter of course. The book does not seem to promote restraint in expressing one’s emotions and permits female characters to fully live their anger just as well as their amicable feelings. However, since the girls seem to overact their emotions and present them in a theatrical manner, readers will find it difficult to perceive these characters as actual human beings rather than types.

A considerable number of picturebooks on my list centre on love as the most prominent emotion displayed in words and pictures. Understandably, these also tend to be the family-centred books since the love between family members is usually the first form of love children experience. Feelings of love and affection are often expressed through physical contact, through hugging, caressing, holding hands or kissing. These signs of affection appear so frequently that they are obviously assumed to be unambiguous and universally comprehensible, which is probably true if we consider how common and natural the sight of a parent holding a child seems to us. Even the event of sharing a picturebook with an adult might actually be popular with most children at least partly because it provides physical comfort. In *Guess How Much I Love You*, the two hares try to show the magnitude of their love for each other by different physical means: “I love you as high as I can reach” (fourth doublespread) and “I love you as high as I can HOP” (sixth doublespread), says Little Nutbrown Hare as he lively jumps all over the pages to prove his words. This playful competition for the greatest love ends with the little hare going to sleep and the big hare acting very much like a human as he kisses the child good night and tactfully refrains from

overbidding the little hare's last offer until the latter has fallen asleep. Only then does he speak the final sentence of the book: "I love you right up to the moon – and back" (last doublespread). Both hares are referred to as "he", thus providing an example of a close and loving relationship between two male characters.

Heather Has Two Mommies focuses on female characters, *The Hello, Goodbye Window* shows grandparents and granddaughter and *Tiny and Bigman* focuses on an unusual couple but we might say that these three books all express the same core statement: mutual love is the basis for any family, regardless of its composition or its members' looks, abilities or preferences. Heather and her mothers are depicted hugging and touching in several pictures, e.g. in the last doublespread, which also mentions the number two again that symbolises the element of choice on the level of Heather's everyday likes and dislikes but also on the level of her mothers' way of creating a family: "Mama Kate and Mama Jane both laugh and give Heather a great big hug. Heather gives each of her mommies two kisses before she takes their hands and heads for home" (final doublespread). Their physical proximity in the pictures suggests a tight bond between them in general.

Those books in which love plays a great role also involve a great amount of joy; obviously it is desirable for the one to accompany the other. Smiling, happy faces abound in *The Hello, Goodbye Window* and the joyful mood receives strong support from the boldly and warmly coloured pictures, the large, energetic blotches of colour signalling resoluteness and a certain carefreeness. Although the girl wisely observes "You can be happy and sad at the same time, you know. It just happens that way sometimes" (13th doublespread), the cheerful impression definitely prevails. Similarly, the bright colours of *Tiny and Bigman's* Caribbean setting immediately imply joy. Bigman does not hesitate to show his affection for Tiny openly, just as well as he is not embarrassed to admit his physical weakness (and thus actually shows strength in his honesty, which makes him truly deserve his name). We often see Tiny and Bigman smiling and touching each other and even dancing in the streets for joy when Tiny realizes that she is pregnant (twelfth doublespread). What the images show us is supported by the verbal text that frequently provides an additional humorous note: "Tiny was showing off her strength, painting and weeding and fixing. But Bigman didn't seem to mind. He was doing just fine. He was properly grateful, too, kissing Miss

Tiny all day long on her soft brown cheek and once in a while on her pretty red lips” (tenth doublespread).

The characters in the selected picturebooks have to deal with fear and anxiety far less often and when they do, they differ greatly in their reactions. *Heather* soon starts to cry when she realizes she does not have a father like many other children. In the accompanying picture, we see only her worried face so that our attention is clearly focused on the shock this information means to her (seventh doublespread). It is also worth noting, though, how other characters answer to the protagonist’s feelings. Children might feel more confident expressing their fears if they see how Heather’s are met with love and understanding. Abby in *Mommies Don’t Get Sick!* only bursts into tears after she has tried to manage various household chores on her own and has found them overcharging. Importantly, though, she does her best to organise the laundry, the cooking and the cleaning by herself, actively engaging in this work she is unfamiliar with rather than shying away from it. When she finally runs to her father for help, he hugs and comforts her, providing safety and sympathy.

Pinkalicious, by contrast, is clearly shocked when she finds herself completely altered, her whole body having turned red over night, but she does not break down and cry. Her shock is comprehensive but so is her ability to cope with the situation. Her horrified face takes up almost the entire page and the colour red is omnipresent, underscoring her anxiety. At the same time, however, she does not let herself be taken by fright: “I wanted to be myself again. I knew what I had to do” (13th doublespread). She readily takes steps against the unwanted state, eating as many green foods as she can possibly swallow. Thus, a slightly didactic but also humorous intrusion about the benefits of eating greens (“I choked down artichokes, gagged on grapes, and burped up Brussels sprouts”, 14th doublespread) combines with the colour symbolism that connects alarm with the colour red and calmness and naturalness with the colour green.

Whether she feels anxiety or anger, *Pinkalicious* does not hold back her emotions. She obviously does not care about traditional voices that demand of girls to be nice and quiet and behave themselves. Instead, she openly expresses her frustration when her mother forbids her to eat more cupcakes. “But I got very upset”, the words merely tell us while we see the girl sticking out her tongue at her mother. Her feeling of powerlessness in this

situation is emphasised by the picture's perspective: we feel just as small as Pinkalicious, seeing only her mother's legs, which reach up and out of the picture. *Princess Smartypants* also chooses to clearly show her dissatisfaction when her mother demands that she find a husband. As the words merely cite the queen's words, the accompanying illustration is necessary to convey the princess's feelings: claspings a pitchfork behind her back and leaving a trail of mud on the floor, Smartypants angrily eyes her parents from below (third doublespread). The cartoon style allows for her facial expression to show the extremes of an emotion, the corners of her mouth drawn far down and her eyes narrowed and glowing when she is angry. Neither does the princess hold back her satisfaction and joy when she finally gets what she wants: we see her celebrating her single state surrounded by her pets, seemingly raising her glass to the observer in a triumphant gesture with a broad smile on her face (last doublespread).

The *Berenstain Bears*' household seems to be frequently loaded with anger but less with subsequent relief. Outbursts rather seem to leave the family members uncomfortable and glowering. How they deal with tensions inside the family is part of the narrative, though, and more complex than in the two former books which basically focus on the protagonist's emotions only and exclude the reactions of the outside world. At the end, the bears' conflicts are actually resolved and everybody has been given food for thought. What I find problematic about this otherwise noble motive of also showing difficult times of family life is the manner in which emotions are depicted and the way in which the moral intention is imposed on the reader. Throughout the first half of the book, the adult bears are depicted with angry faces in every single illustration. Their faces and gestures often seem overbearing and Papa Bear obviously needs to establish male authority by assuming stereotypical and theatrical postures (clenching his fist or shaking a warning finger) and by repeatedly raising his voice: "'Forgot? Forgot?' roared Papa. 'Why, you cubs would forget your heads if they weren't attached to your shoulders!'" (fifth doublespread). In *Zoo*, we also encounter a highly irascible father, whose anger is complemented by the mother's worry and concern for her children's safety, thus representing the typical gender split: "Come DOWN you little rat-bag!", the father yells at his son, while the mother's words, "Oh Harry, DO be careful..." emphasise her nurturant side (third doublespread). But while in *The Berenstain Bears*, gendered emotions remain unquestioned, *Zoo* presents itself as a

continuously critical book on a very subtle level. When the father, for instance, laughs at this own bad joke so much that he has to cry, this strained humour just proves his difficulties with truly opening up (seventh doublespread). The noisy, inconsiderate humans on the verso are repeatedly contrasted with the silent animals on the recto, which decelerates the pace of the narrative and leaves the readers time to judge the family's crude behaviour.

Spitz observes that "little girls turn anger against themselves, whereas little boys send it outward" (48), which might hold true for many more conventional picturebooks and also for the way many girls and boys are still brought up in Western societies. Bernard (in *Not Now, Bernard*), Smartypants and Pinkalicious provide three counter-examples, though: the girls openly throw their angry feelings at their parents or, in the case of Smartypants, at a persistent suitor, while the boy accomplishes a curious mixture of externalising and internalising his anger by giving it the form of a monster. Bernard's monster can be seen as an instance of what Nikolajeva and Scott call "metaphoric and symbolic external manifestations of emotional and spiritual states of mind" (101). The boy's psychological state does not get immediately expressed by Bernard himself but is first transformed into an imaginary being, making anger visible as an entity for the readers and also taking responsibility away from Bernard and assigning it to the monster.

Michael Rosen's Sad Book could be said to hold a special status because its central theme is an emotion. Since sadness is the book's main topic, crying as one form of expressing sadness seems to stand to reason, but the picturebook's protagonist is never shown crying (although we cannot be entirely sure due to the agitated lines of the artwork, which show faces in motion but without clear outlines). In fact, the book goes much further by providing many insights into the numerous ways in which sadness can manifest itself apart from crying. The protagonist's observations appear everyday and poetic at the same time when he talks about his way of perceiving the emotion: "Sad is a place/ that is deep and dark/ like the space/ under the bed/ Sad is a place/ that is high and light/ like the sky/ above my head" (ninth doublespread). Colours, space and symbols used in the pictures greatly enhance the verbal text, e.g. when the sunny setting becomes rain-swept and lonely step by step as the protagonist talks of sadness that appears with no obvious reason (sixth doublespread). On the whole, the *Sad Book* conveys the idea that sadness can easily

overcome anybody, whether there is a special reason behind it or not, and that there are not only numerous ways of experiencing sadness but also numerous ways of dealing with it and finding relief.

Do crying men occur in picturebooks at all? There is indeed one male character who is depicted heavily sobbing and being comforted by a female character. *Mr. Tod*, the caring fox, might be too proud to accept “women’s work” at first but he is not too proud to cry in front of his wife (52-55). After having shed his tears, he also appreciates the fact that childcare and household work seem to fit him better than hunting for rabbits and he acts accordingly. A crying man still remains a conspicuous sight in literature, a sight that we tend to find unusual (Crawford et al. cite “cry” as a feminine word, 449), which makes examples such as Mr. Tod’s even the more interesting in terms of achieving an equilibrium.

We have seen a number of angry heroines, several happy families and even a crying male protagonist. As an overall tendency, I cannot detect a bias in the depiction of male and female characters’ emotions. Boys and men are just as emotional as girls and women in my selected picturebooks, echoing the result of Tepper and Cassidy’s study. It is to be hoped that such a balanced representation of emotions in picturebook characters encourages children to view any kind of emotion as justified for any person and to communicate their feelings honestly.

6.4. Family forms: who belongs?

The child protagonists in picturebooks rarely appear on their own in a social vacuum. Every child seems to be part of some sort of family, usually constituting a central and unchallenged element of the respective family. With regard to other family members, though, membership is not always so easily established and it can be very revealing to pay attention to those frequently excluded from picturebook families.

Many picturebooks still perpetuate the purported normalcy of the traditional, nuclear family. *The Berenstain Bears and the Trouble with Grownups*, *Just Me and My Mom*, *Mr. Tod’s Trap*, *Not Now, Bernard*, *Zoo*, *Mommies Don’t Get Sick!*, *I’m Gonna Like Me*, *Pinkalicious*, and even *Tiny and Bigman*, *Princess Smartypants* and *Ug* could all be said to show some kind of nuclear family model. Relationships between family members are often

expressed by names, e.g. when parents are addressed as “Mummy” or “Daddy” (in *Pinkalicious*) or as “Mum” and “Dad” (in *Zoo* or *Not Now, Bernard*). Names used by the narrator to identify characters can also provide information about these characters’ roles in the family or even about their marital status. The adults in *The Berenstain Bears* are only referred to as “Mama Bear” and “Papa Bear” while the adult foxes in *Mr. Tod’s Trap* share the same surname. In both cases, the couples’ being married is strongly suggested by naming and enforced by the fact that they live and raise children together in the same household. The last two markers also apply for all the other books mentioned above. The family as such is introduced in these books as a natural part of the children’s living environment, a part that is simply not to be questioned. A formal introduction and presentation such as in *Zoo*, where portraits of the four family members are shown on the first doublespread under the heading “My Family”, seems unnecessary since we are so used to the concept of a family and to what it encompasses in terms of social interaction, living arrangements and activities. In *Zoo*, this presentation can be said to heighten the sense of awareness for how the people in this family actually fail to interact harmoniously in the subsequent story. Notably, rather than showing the whole family together in one picture, each person is given an individual image, separated from the others.

Activities and tasks shared (more or less equally) among family members in picturebooks provide easily interpretable clues as to who belongs to a certain family. We perceive a group of characters as a family simply because they engage in activities we have learned to associate with family life, particularly doing housework and raising children. Technically, child characters in picturebooks could just be visiting another family and adults caring for them could be paid babysitters if they are not referred to as mother and father, but we hardly consider these options, having internalised the conventional model so much. In some books, such as *Zoo*, *Mommies Don’t Get Sick!* or *Pinkalicious*, the plain fact that the story focuses almost exclusively on a clearly limited group of characters already creates a bond between these characters that quickly lets us interpret them as a family. Sarah, Abby’s friend, who briefly appears in *Mommies Don’t Get Sick!*, is clearly defined as an outsider to the family: we see her pressing her nose to the door from outside the house, signalling that she is not an original part of this home and needs to ask for permission to enter it. She also

marks herself as an outsider by asking, “Why is *your* [emphasis added] baby crying?” (sixth doublespread) and timidly staying on the threshold and the margin of the picture.

Few of the above mentioned picturebooks actually make the family form they are presenting explicit. Why then do we so easily arrive at the conclusion that they must be depicting nuclear families? Obviously, our perceptions and interpretations depend to a great deal on our habitual assumptions that we use to fill the information gaps with. There are, in fact, a great number of gaps: we do not know, for instance, whether Pinkalicious’s parents are married, whether the boys in *Zoo* have any stepsiblings or whether Princess Smartypants has been adopted, all of which are theoretically possible. However, most readers will tend to map their ideas of normalcy on any family that fulfils the basic requirements: a woman and a man acting as parents and at least one child in the role of the son or daughter. Since the books mentioned do fulfil these requirements without actively contesting the idea of a nuclear family or providing alternative family models, they actually enforce a conventional interpretation.

The majority of the selected picturebooks also focuses on a rather narrow sector of the population. Even if it is not explicitly voiced, the families depicted mostly seem to come from a white middle class background. This assumption is based on observations of the characters’ milieu, their surroundings, activities, consumer behaviour and the distribution of work. We can deduce most of this information from the pictures: characters with pink faces reside in houses equipped with everything necessary for a comfortable life and often surrounded by a garden, suggesting wealthy, suburban settings; adults go to work to earn the money which is then spent on clothes, toys or leisure time activities. By contrast, in none of the books do we find the main characters dressed in rags and just a few (e.g. in *Heather Has Two Mommies* and *I’m Gonna Like Me*) live in a multiethnic community. I do not want to imply that picturebooks never address poverty or differing cultural and ethnic backgrounds at all (in fact, there are some that do so very skilfully), but simply that there is a whole range of picturebooks which do exclude these issues.

Those books on my list that present an exception to this general tendency basically fall into two categories. Firstly, books that deviate from the everyday surroundings we might expect in Western cultures, e.g. because they show a Stone Age setting or because the characters have been given animal form. Interestingly, even in these cases normativity finds its way

in, for instance by presenting one species of animal as the one to empathise with while another is placed on such a low level its members serve as food (foxes and rabbits in *Mr. Tod's Trap*). Another example is the allocation of rooms in *Ug*: although we have little reason to believe that humans in the Stone Age divided their caves into rooms in a way similar to the one of today's middle class, we frequently see Ug's parents in a kind of bedroom, sharing a stone blanket and having an argument. These markers obviously serve as orientation for the readers and can also be read as ironic comments but at the same time they show the pervasiveness of what we conceive of as normal.

Secondly, there are some books that actually challenge the default setting, which in several cases means challenging the nuclear family and the white middle class background at the same time. In *The Hello, Goodbye Window*, for example, images are so far removed from what we conventionally see as objective, photographic depiction of people and objects that the characters' ethnicity is not certifiable even though Poppy's rosy cheeks suggest his being white and Nanna's mahogany-coloured face implies her being black. Most importantly, though, the girl's grandparents belong to the core of the family rather than being just an old couple one has to visit every once in a while. The girl's tale is filled with jokes and shared knowledge that can be only accumulated over a longer period of time spent together, which implies that her grandparents' place is a second home to her. When she relates how her grandfather plays "Oh Susannah" on the harmonica, the picture shows her comfortably sitting on the floor and watching Poppy, her words implying that the sight is not new to her: "He can play it slow or fast or he can play it sitting down or standing up. He says he can even play it and drink a glass of water at the same time, but I've never seen him do that" (fourth doublespread). The girl's parents are present, too, and provide a safe framework as they accompany their daughter to her grandparents' house and take her back in the evening, making sure there is no discontinuity in the loving care offered to her. In fact, they already wave goodbye to their daughter on the title page before the actual beginning of the story and their presence suggests that there is mutual understanding between all three generations. The girl in *Granpa* is closely connected to a grandparent, too, and in contrast to *The Hello, Goodbye Window*, this book exclusively focuses on these two characters without showing the girl's parents or any other relatives. This exclusiveness, along with the wealth of shared activities and stories, makes the bond between the two

characters appear very strong while their sometimes diverging words and thoughts preserve each one's individuality and autonomy.

Tiny and Bigman occupies a curious intermediate position with regard to family life and cultural background. While we might well describe the family arrangement we are presented with at the end of the book as very traditional (a married heterosexual couple with a rather large number of children), few readers will actually view it as very conventional. The Caribbean island is depicted as a setting where gender roles are still quite firmly established and unambiguously assigned, which is why Tiny's physical strength, technical skill and bold attitude are resented by some men on the island and appear even more conspicuous, as do Bigman's weakness and his inclination for cooking and running a household. Situating the story on an (for British and American readers) exotic island enforces its fairy tale quality while also providing the possibility of setting an alternative standard of normalcy in cultural and ethnic terms. Since everybody is black on this island, readers will tend to perceive as natural something they might find unusual in their own surroundings. Thus, Tiny's "unwomanly" and Bigman's "unmanly" behaviour along with the distribution of work and the ethnic background influence our perceptions of the characters' family.

Typically, mothers are more involved and present in picturebooks families, while fathers tend to be absent or "ineffectual" (Anderson and Hamilton 145, see also chapter 4). However, in *Guess How Much I Love You* and *Michael Rosen's Sad Book*, two books otherwise very unlike each other, fathers play a critical role while mothers are not even mentioned. Given that the characters in *Guess How Much I Love You* are hares, it is questionable whether we can speak of a single father and his son but the connection between them certainly resembles a father-son-relationship. Since it is precisely the love between these two characters that is the topic of the whole book, other characters might actually withdraw attention from this focus. The absence of other family members might thus rather serve the straightforwardness of the story than express a certain narratorial idea about families. Still, the fact that two male characters are depicted in a close and loving relationship might in itself prompt readers to accept and consider various family arrangements.

The *Sad Book*'s protagonist also seems to have had a close connection to his son of whom he tells the reader, "What makes me most sad is when I think about my son Eddie. He died. I loved him very, very much but he died anyway" (second doublespread). Whether a mother figure has been present in Eddie's life or not, his father has certainly cared for him very much, a care that is communicated through a number of memories the narrator shares with the readers, e.g. showing Eddie being bathed as a baby, laughing with friends or rehearsing for a play (third doublespread). The group of people we watch celebrating a birthday towards the end of the book does not get closely defined. They could be a family, a group of friends or a mixture of both. Whatever their constellation, they obviously wish to celebrate together, creating a common event. The sense of belonging together is amplified by the characters' uniformly happy faces and by the candles on the birthday cake, which cast the same light on every person. As I have mentioned before, diversity is unobtrusively incorporated by including characters of various sizes, ages, ethnicities and styles. The people in the group, forming an open circle, actually seem to look at the reader intently as if inviting him or her to the party, as if the reader was the one to celebrate his or her birthday (one but last doublespread). These details in visual design emphasise that what counts is the desire to be together and not the specific heading the community is given.

While in all the books mentioned above, family relations are more or less tacitly introduced and established by pictorial or verbal allusions, *Heather Has Two Mommies* explicitly addresses the issue of family forms. The book clearly makes an attempt to present diverse family forms as possessing equal value and legitimacy. The children in Heather's playgroup draw pictures of their families as they see them, which is a clever device to show a wide range of possible family forms without evaluating them from the outside, by adult voices or by a narrator. The drawings include a nuclear family just as well as adopted children, stepsiblings, single parents, grandparents, heterosexual and homosexual couples, different ethnicities and abilities (one boy is depicted in a wheelchair). While the children's drawings add a convincing touch of authenticity even if they might in fact have been drawn by the illustrator, the verbal text sometimes appears too strained in propagating the blessings of equality and diversity. Although interpretation always depends on the reader, this book hardly leaves a doubt about the message it wants to convey. Molly, the teacher, is the one to voice it:

“It doesn’t matter how many mommies or how many daddies your family has,” Molly says to the children. “It doesn’t matter if your family has sisters or brothers or cousins or grandmothers or grandfathers or uncles or aunts. Each family is special. The most important thing about a family is that all the people in it love each other.” (one but last doublespread)

Although this declaration describes a very desirable state of affairs, having a mission in telling a story also makes the story seem artificial and thus possibly less engaging for the readers. Personally, I tend to distance myself from a book whose narrator, characters or mode of presentation seem intent on imposing some moral on me. In *Heather Has Two Mommies*, the moral is not even supported by inviting or persuasive artwork. The black and white design creates distance and fails to evoke warmth. The absence of colour along with the use of abstraction aggravates feeling empathy with the characters as they resemble the anonymised figures on street signs more than the lively cartoons characters we find in other picturebooks. Perhaps the wish for a different visual design was voiced and heard, for Lesléa Newman created two more books on the same topic (*Mommy, Mama and Me* and *Daddy, Papa, and Me*) with another illustrator, Carol Thompson, in 2009. These books use warm colours and soft lines instead of *Heather*’s hard black and white design. According to the publisher, they are also intended for an even younger audience (two- to four-year-olds), which suggests that here, as in many other cases, cuddliness is associated with appropriateness for very young children.

Another picturebook on my list actually does describe a same-sex relationship in a way that could be seen as more cuddly because of its animal characters and visual design. Although the love story between two male penguins in *And Tango Makes Three* might appear less realistic than the story told in *Heather*, the penguins’ is indeed based on true events. The fact that Roy and Silo really hatched an egg in the Central Park Zoo in New York will certainly elicit some amazed nods on the part of the readers. I assume that the power of facticity is not to be underestimated: there seems to lie justification in a true account. The warm colour scheme works together with the depiction of the two penguins’ common activities and concern for their nest to easily evoke empathy and let us draw connections to human behaviour. The book’s introduction and ending frame the penguins’ story by emphasising that there are families of different kinds, even of different species, but that they all have in common a concern for their family members and a feeling of belonging. “Every day families of all kinds go to visit the animals that live there [in the zoo]”, we are

told on the first doublespread as we watch several human families approaching the entrance of the zoo. On turning the page, we move from the humans to the other animals, some of which are depicted living peacefully together in a jungle environment that almost spreads two entire pages:

The animals make families of their own. There are red panda families, with mothers and fathers and furry red panda cubs. There are monkey dads and monkey mums raising noisy monkey babies. There are toad families, and toucan families, and cotton-top tamarin families too. (second doublespread)

Thus, the iconotext sets the stage for yet another kind of family to appear, one that is not confined to the boundaries of heterosexual coupledness.

A very promising expansion of typical family concepts is addressed in *Stellaluna*. As Stellaluna loses her mother in an owl attack, she is raised by a bird who makes it clear she does not originally belong to the nest but is welcome there as long as she follows the rules and adapts to the bird way of life:

“You are teaching my children bad things. I will not let you back into this nest unless you promise to obey all the rules of this house.” Stellaluna promised. She ate bugs without making faces. She slept in the nest at night. And she didn’t hang by her feet. Stellaluna behaved as a good bird should. (seventh doublespread)

When Stellaluna finds her mother again, she happily returns to her bat habits but she does not forget about her bird siblings, either. The book encourages staying true to oneself as well as opening oneself up to other people’s experiences and feelings. This idea is beautifully illustrated in the eighteenth doublespread, where Stellaluna is shown hanging upside down on a mango tree, hungrily and happily swallowing the fruit instead of the insects she has been given in the bird’s nest, but thinking about her bird friends: “I must tell Pip, Flatter, and Flap!”. Birds and bat then notice that they are very much unlike each other and yet they can be friends:

They perched in silence for a long time.
“How can we be so different and feel so much alike?” mused Flitter.
“And how can we feel so different and be so much alike?” wondered Pip.
“I think this is quite a mystery,” Flap chirped.
“I agree,” said Stellaluna. “But we’re friends. And that’s a fact.”

The image on the recto supports their words, depicting the three birds perching on the branch of a tree, touching wings, and Stellaluna hanging from a branch above them, embracing them all with her own wings. The friends form a triangle with a steady base, coloured in the same greyish brown hue and set off from the serene dark blue background

(final doublespread). Birds and bat seem to have formed a connection resembling a family, a family of their wish and choice rather than a family of birth.

Alternative families slowly seem to find their way into picturebooks even though many families are still depicted as a traditional, close-knit group of mother, father and child (or children). As we have seen, we also need to be careful with our interpretation of nuclear families: sometimes we create a nuclear family in the reading process ourselves from the few hints given in a book, drawing on our own and on cultural experiences of normalcy, and sometimes nuclear families might not be as traditional as they seem (as in *Tiny and Bigman*). Neither is an alternative family necessarily innovative, e.g. when a homosexual couple reproduces the typically heterosexual form of marriage in their living arrangements. Obviously, there are traps to be considered even in the portrayal of superficially alternative families and there is still a great potential for picturebooks to broaden their concepts of family life.

6.5. Family work

6.5.1. Housework and waged labour: can daddy do the dishes too?

Who prepares the food and who brings home the money in a family is not a matter of predetermination; mostly it is simply determined by convention. The fact that “housework” is rated as feminine in the Crawford corpus (Crawford et al. 449) reflects a still widespread assumption about the distribution of labour that places women in the private and men in the public sphere. Many picturebooks already refrain from drawing such clear boundaries between the domains of men’s and women’s responsibilities and some even deliberately thematise the allocation of work in a family.

“Never mind, Abby. We’ll all help together”, Abby’s father assures her, standing like a pillar of support for her to lean on and filling the whole height of the page that also shows father and daughter engaged in cleaning, storing away groceries and feeding the baby (*Mommies Don’t Get Sick!*, tenth doublespread). Although Abby and her father do not hesitate to take over the housework while the mother is ill, the images provide a number of clues that it is usually the mother who is responsible for all the work shown. We see Abby struggling on her own with the demands of the washing machine and her crying baby

brother, but even when she is joined by her father, who assures her that they will manage all the tasks, some pictorial details clearly tell us that the two of them are not used to keeping the house in shape: The stains on Abby's shirt and trousers, the food spilled on the table and the toys dangerously lying around on the steps in the hall provide an ironic counterpoint to the mother's exclamation, "Oh how beautiful everything looks!" (one but last and final doublespread). Since the omniscient narrator mostly steps back and leaves the storytelling to pictures and dialogues (presented in speech bubbles), the readers are free to create different possible meanings. On the one hand, Abby and her father are ready to help in the household and try to handle all the tasks necessary, on the other hand, it seems to take the mother's sickness for her to receive support at all. We can therefore also read the book as a critical comment on current conditions in which mothers still frequently do the largest proportion of the housework while other family members only help under special circumstances.

Mr. Tod's Trap, although it is one of the oldest books on my list, seems much more innovative because the ideas presented seem to stand in stark contrast to the artwork's old-fashioned impression. The design of the foxes' clothes and surroundings as well as the rural setting and the reduced colour scheme could easily take us a hundred years back, which makes Mr. Tod's staying home and his loving care for the children even more surprising in an environment we might expect to be very patriarchally organised. Once Mr. Tod has accepted his difficulties with hunting, he assumes full responsibility for the children and the house and even seems to thrive as a consequence. The picturebook also leaves a curious aftertaste, though, as Mrs. Tod seems to sacrifice herself for her family, always successfully doing the work that needs to be done and still supporting her husband's pride after the change of roles: "'Mom!' cried Elsie. 'How did you catch all those rabbits?' 'I had a good teacher,' said Mrs. Tod and smiled at Mr. Tod." The corresponding picture shows the family united at the dinner table with Mrs. Tod and two of the cubs raising their glasses to Mr. Tod, who sits at the head of the table and also seems to remain the unquestioned head of the household (60f.).

Several more picturebooks promote an egalitarian or at least non-traditional distribution of work although they do so in different ways and more or less explicitly. The topic of equality and openness to various forms of (family) life runs like a red thread through

Heather Has Two Mommies (see chapters 6.1. and 6.4.). Given this atmosphere of acceptance as a context, shared household and work responsibilities seem self-evident and the books seems to make a point of showing Heather's mothers together as a couple when they care for her and presenting them both as independent, self-directed members of the working population at the same time. *Tiny and Bigman* strongly emphasises the roles of women and men and does so in a similar distinct way as *Heather* emphasises equality of different forms of life. While Tiny engages in physical activity and thus earns money, Bigman leads the household and lives his love for cooking, but he also keeps the accounts. Their family form might be called nuclear but the distribution of work among them reverses stereotypical gender roles. Another cooking man appears in *The Hello, Goodbye Window* as we learn that Poppy is the one who prepares breakfast (eighth doublespread). Nanna is responsible for the garden, a fact that slightly echoes the association of femininity with nature but also simply shows aspects of the family's daily life. Work of any kind is not explicitly addressed in this book but rather woven into the story, which gives it a more relaxed appeal than the somewhat strained intentionality in *Heather Has Two Mommies*. Since grandmother and grandfather care for their granddaughter during the day, it can be assumed that they are retired, which makes sharing housework (as the main work to be done) seem an even more obvious choice.

Some picturebooks do not address housework and waged labour at all and even in those that do, work outside the home is not a major issue. Perhaps housework is still presented as more central because it happens in the realm of the child protagonists. I have identified four books in which work appears to be more traditionally assigned. Importantly, though, none of these books explicitly tell us that the father works in an office or on a construction site while the mother stays at home and cares for the children. Rather, I deduce the mentioned division from small, mostly pictorial hints that are, theoretically, far from unambiguous. Clothes are actually the strongest indicators of work distribution I can detect. Clothes make the man (and the woman) and they easily let us put characters into categories. When we see Bernard's mother in *Not Now, Bernard* wearing an apron and working in the kitchen while his father reads the newspaper (second and seventh doublespread respectively), we tend to associate her with the home and him with an office from which he has just come home to his well-deserved evening rest, still wearing a white shirt and shining shoes. *Pinkalicious*

uses similar codes, which in combination with some activities shown lead us towards a fairly clichéd interpretation. As the girl's mother bakes cupcakes with her daughter, she is depicted with the obligatory apron (second doublespread) and throughout the book, she is the one who seems to always be available to the children. Pinkalicious's father, by contrast, only appears in the evening to send his daughter to bed, implying that he is occupied during the day (fourth doublespread). In the *Berenstain Bears*, it is the mother character again who serves the food, a fact that is just introduced as a sideline into a scene relating a family quarrel (third doublespread). Papa Bear's overalls and farmer's hat suggest his doing manual work outdoors whereas at home, he is occupied with the newspaper and positioned in the living room on his way to an armchair that suggests relaxation rather than toil (first doublespread). Obviously, wearing overalls, a shirt or an apron might just as well be a matter of stylistic preferences on the part of the characters, but if we consider that picturebooks have to tell a whole story within a very limited space, symbolism in the choice of clothes seems probable as it adds information without the need for further explanations. Presumably, many readers socialised in Western cultures will similarly assume these books to present a traditional distribution of labour even though they might not even become conscious of this assumption as they read. Thus, small clues provided by words and pictures can correspond to a traditional interpretation that does not actually get pronounced and thereby silently contribute to continuous role segregation.

Both the boy and the girl in *I'm Gonna Like Me* help in the home and doing housework is obviously perceived as part of good behaviour: "I bring in a plate before I am asked. I'm gonna like me when I clean in a flash and play with my brother and take out the trash" (one but last doublespread). Their parents are shown involved neither in household chores nor in a paid job but they seem to be equally responsible for the children, waving goodbye as their son and daughter leave on the school bus or reading a bedtime story to them at night. In this book, the children's experiences and their parents' attentiveness are foregrounded, which leads me to the final chapter that deals with childcare.

6.5.2. Parenting and childcare: relationships and responsibilities

Taking care of the children in a family and fostering relationships is an integral part of family work, a part that is traditionally more associated with mothers and female persons in

general. “Babysitter”, “nurse”, “caring” and “pregnant” are among those words in the Crawford corpus that test persons related very strongly to femininity (Crawford et al. 448f.), which mirrors a still widely held belief that childcare is women’s work. Of course, reality is never so simple and straightforward and picturebooks today reflect some developments in society, e.g. showing fathers and grandparents as deeply involved in childcare. In this chapter, I will try to find some answers to the following questions: Are parents usually shown as the primary caregivers? Are mothers still more present than fathers and if so, how is this imbalance expressed in words and images? Do other relatives (such as uncles, aunts, grandparents or siblings) appear in caring roles? Is day care mentioned as a complement to parenting? How do children and caregivers interact and how can the quality of interaction be described?

Not surprisingly, parents are still the central persons of reference for children in the selected picturebooks. After all, the same probably holds true for most child readers, who might find it easier to relate to the protagonists if the latter are depicted in a familiar (and familial) setting. *Just Me and My Mom* shows the protagonist Little Critter on a trip to the city with his mother. As the title suggests, the two of them are not joined by any other family members and the mother has to take full responsibility for her son. She holds the ground in a supportive way, appearing at the margins or in the background of the pictures, but seldom actively steps in to prevent her son from exploring the museums, shops and streets on his own. The fact that she can often only react by showing a shocked or angry face when Little Critter behaves inappropriately (e.g. fifth and seventh doublespread) presents her as liberal and somewhat ineffectual at the same time. Obviously she wants to provide Little Critter with an outing both entertaining and instructive and she uncompromisingly stands by her son even when he tries out the Native American exhibit as a costume to play with at the museum or when they get expelled from a restaurant. Interestingly, *Just Me and My Dad*, which was published earlier, features a father who behaves similarly. Although he pronounces warnings and advice, he does not seem truly annoyed when Little Critter fails to listen to him and easily provides the basic securities needed: a tent for shelter, fish for supper and his arms for a hug. Thus, both books emphasise uncompromising parental love and support over rules and obedience. That camping with the father and shopping with the mother constitute rather traditionally

gendered activities is at least balanced by the fact that both outings are presented as a special treat for Little Critter. He appreciates the special day by addressing its exclusivity (“We went to the city, just me and my mom”, first doublespread) and by concluding that he has enjoyed it (“We had fun, just me and my mom”, final doublespread).

In *Not Now, Bernard*, the mother is much more associated with the child even though the father is present as well. Bernard’s father appears in only two doublespreads, though, and he never seems to take a particular interest in what his son is doing. Bernard’s mother, by contrast, shows herself responsible for Bernard’s physical and mental well-being as she prepares dinner for him and puts him to bed. Curiously, though, she does so with an air of indifference: we see her leaving the frame of the picture on the right margin after she has set the tray of food in front of the television without waiting for her son to appear on the scene (eighth doublespread). In the final doublespread, she is depicted switching off the light in Bernard’s room with her eyes closed, not even looking at her son and consequently missing his monstrous appearance. Both parents remain unaware of the changes their son has undergone, of his turning into a monster. This blindness is a crucial element of the book as it prevents Bernard’s parents from seeing the monster in him, i.e. noticing his anger and frustration. The ending of the picturebook actually appears quite shocking because it implies that parenting has become a tedious task which the father totally withdraws from and the mother fulfils only automatically rather than with sensitivity.

A number of books present mothers and fathers as more or less equal in taking responsibility for their children. Considering the discussion so far, it might seem strange to group books such as *The Berenstain Bears*, *Zoo* and *I’m Gonna Like Me* together, though. Again, it is the subtleties of verbal and pictorial presentation that make for different readings in these cases. We get the impression that both parents and children have a hard time in the bear household, the children misbehaving, the parents scolding, and all of them complaining about these conditions. It is quite obvious that the readers shall be led to follow the narrator’s intention, which is clearly voiced in the moral introductory poem (on the title page) and through precise explanations of the events, e.g. “It’s very simple,” explained Mama. “You helped us understand what it’s like being cubs. By pretending we’re the cubs and you’re the grownups, we’re going to show you what it’s like being parents” (eleventh doublespread). Explanations such as these often seem superfluous since the

pictures closely mirror the words' content: in this case, we see Papa and Mama Bear cheerfully presenting their children's outfits to their cubs, who look at them in shocked amazement. As the children have already assumed their parents' roles before, another change of roles is to be expected anyway (and anticipated in the poem). Also, the readers' freedom of interpretation is taken away from them to some extent through this didactic intrusion since the rigidity of the narrator's statements leaves little room for alternative readings. A rather uncomfortable atmosphere in the family is created through the combined use of a didactically ambitious narrator and irascible parent characters. Angrily grimacing and scolding in a joint effort, Mama and Papa Bear at least seem to distribute childcare tasks evenly among themselves.

While both parents in the bear family apply similar educational measures, the father and mother in *Zoo* differ greatly in how they treat their children. Both of them feel responsible for their sons but while the mother adopts a nurturant, caring, and calm role, the father is shown as loud and aggressive. Her concern seems to be mainly for the children's safety and well-being while his seems to be for discipline (see chapter 6.3.). This gender divide does not pass without criticism, though: as the family watches the gorillas, the silent, sad mother and the grunting, red-faced father appear much more ridiculous than the ape that seems to eye them gravely from the opposite page (one but last doublespread). In the end, the mere presence of the animals evokes more reflection in the boys than their parent's worries, rebukes and staged emotions. The parents' grief as the school bus leaves in *I'm Gonna Like Me* (fourth doublespread) also appears staged but for various reasons, readers will tend to interpret the depiction as ironic. The scene seems intentionally designed to show the children's courage in happily leaving their parents and therefore, the crying parents and laughing children humorously inverse the usual picture (in fact, we see a wailing boy clinging to his mother's skirt in the background, providing additional contrast). The role reversal is thus in tune with the picturebook's emphasis on self-confidence. The children's parents only rarely appear in the pictures but if they do, they are shown together, suggesting an even division of childcare responsibilities. As the children are read bedtime stories in the one but last doublespread, they express how certain they are about their parents' affection in a simple but crucial sentence: "I'm gonna like me 'cause I'm loved and I know it, and liking myself is the best way to show it".

Love as the central element in a family is also stressed in *Heather Has Two Mommies*. There is of course a clear focus on acceptance of homosexual couples as parents but there is also another focus on different family forms in general (see chapter 6.4.). In the children's drawings (ninth to eleventh doublespreads), we encounter various family forms and we can therefore assume that these families have also established various childcare arrangements. Loving relationships are not only reserved for blood relatives, an idea that is beautifully illustrated by Joshua's drawing in which the boy is on his way to his biological father but still holds hands with his stepfather, who in turn holds hands with Joshua's mother. The verbal text reads, "Joshua's mommy and stepfather are dropping him off at his daddy's house" (eleventh doublespread). Families of choice are thus given equal status to families connected by genes.

As I have pointed out before, *Owl Moon* and *Michael Rosen's Sad Book* focus on father characters, never even mentioning mothers. There is one thing I find striking about my own interpretation of this fact: While I would readily assume that a mother in a book that does not mention a father is a single mother, I just as readily assume that those books centring on fathers simply do not mention the associated mothers. In other words: I find myself accepting single motherhood much more readily than single fatherhood. If my thoughts roughly reflect those of other people brought up in a Western culture, the concept of mothers as the more natural caregivers still seems to influence our opinions on who should take care of the children and who should rightly do so. That is not to say these two books make the slightest advance to imply one single reading; they provide no hints at all as to the presence or absence of a mother. Once again, interpretation of a single detail heavily depends on the context of the whole books as verbal-pictorial unities. In *Owl Moon*, we are given to understand that the night adventure with her father is a unique experience for the girl but that her brothers have already experienced it before. On the first doublespread, we witness father and daughter leaving for the woods from a large farm surrounded by fields. The existence of siblings and a large household suggest that the family would be difficult to manage for one person, the father, alone but this does not necessarily mean that the mother of the children is the only one able to assist the father. Theoretically, the family home in *Owl Moon* could accommodate the children's mother just as well as a stepmother, the father's male partner, grandparents or employees at the farm. The *Sad Book* does not focus

on family life so much but rather on mutual support in general, whether those involved belong to friends or family. Here, too, we are not given any clues about the mother of the narrator's son Eddie. Moreover, the protagonist is almost always depicted alone, without a partner or close family members, which makes the possibility of him having been a single father seem more likely. Both books strongly emphasise the bond between father and child that is mostly expressed through personal memories (e.g. as the *Sad Book*'s narrator recalls his son "doing his old-man act in the school play", twelfth doublespread) and through joint activities. Love, understanding and having fun together are foregrounded while discipline and rules take a backseat. If there are rules, they do not have to be authoritatively enforced: for the girl in *Owl Moon*, the need to be silent is just part of the exciting night trip, and as she can easily understand the reasoning behind it (not to scare away the owls), she readily obeys it.

Brothers and sisters often appear as side characters in picturebooks but in none of the selected books do children have to bear responsibility for their siblings. Abby briefly has to take over for her mother in *Mommies Don't Get Sick!*, but it is made clear that this is a temporary arrangement. Grandparents do appear in major roles, though, and they are presented as very close persons of reference for the girls in *The Hello, Goodbye Window* and *Granpa*. While parents in other picturebooks (such as *Pinkalicious*, *Ug* or *Zoo*) sometimes have to enforce rules and discipline their children, discipline interestingly does not seem to be an issue in the two books featuring grandparents. Poppy asks his granddaughter not to ride the bike in the street but he does so with a smile and a "please", still leaving his granddaughter enough freedom. In *Granpa*, we can find a nice instance of the tension between concepts of time for a child and an adult, related to discipline and structure but apparently not limiting the child's possibilities. We simply assume that both characters' needs can be met as we read the following exchange: "*When we get to the beach can we stay there for ever?* Yes, but we must go back for our tea at four o' clock." Correspondingly, the coloured image shows the two characters on a large sand dune on their way to the seaside, while the black and white drawing on the recto mirrors Granpa's thoughts about teatime in its depiction of a set table with two empty chairs (eighth doublespread).

Obedying rules is not a major issue in either book; what matters is the quality of interaction between old and young. The relationship between grandparents and grandchildren in these books seems to work so well as a consequence of a well-balanced combination of the extraordinary with the everyday. Presumably, ice-skating and going for a boat ride (in *Granpa*) or counting the stars and splashing around with the garden hose (in *The Hello, Goodbye Window*) do not count among the characters' daily activities but they are embedded in a familiar framework in which the protagonists seem to feel at home, a framework of little shared codes, stories and environments. Although this sense of familiarity is established throughout the whole book, *The Hello, Goodbye Window*'s third doublespread might even suffice to comprehend how deeply the characters are connected: We are given a view of the kitchen in which the girl dreamily colours a picture while her grandmother reads the newspaper and her grandfather proudly eyes a pot plant. A coffee cup, an opened book and the cheerful faces are indicators of a joyful, relaxed mood. The girl explains the scene to the reader, adding further clues about a shared history: "There are shelves full of glass jars with lots of everything in them, a step stool so I can wash my hands, and all kinds of pictures from the olden days. Nanna says she even used to give me a bath in the sink when I was little – really!" It is also the fact that the young girls and the elderly can agree on imaginary journeys and alternative realities which makes their relationship appear so touching and special. The magic window that could suddenly frame the Queen of England (twelfth doublespread) or the ice-cream made from earth (in *Granpa*, seventh doublespread) can act as secret knowledge shared only between the main characters and bringing them more closely together.

Uncles, aunts or other family members are nowhere mentioned as significant in terms of childcare and neither are friends or other members of an extended social network. The same holds true for day care, which is only present in *Heather*, thus underscoring the book's attempt at providing new perspectives on families and childcare. Heather's teacher Molly also shows that comfort and care need not be given by parents alone but that extra-familial caregivers can just as well establish a close relationship to a child. Although playschools for very young children are no longer a rarity in Western societies, children in picturebooks still seem to be mainly surrounded by their parents. Given the current developments, however, it is probably only a matter of time until these alternatives and additions to

parenting make their appearance in picturebooks. We could of course also ask the very general question whether picturebooks should merely reflect changes in society (and therefore be inevitably lagging behind) or whether they should rather anticipate and advance certain changes. The answers will depend on each individual's conscious and unconscious ideologies and the kind of changes he or she wishes to see in the world. Personally, I think that a picturebook with its multiple channels of communication and endless thematic possibilities can act as a useful eye-opener and tool for fostering tolerance. Quite apart from any societal and political ambitions, though, we should not forget that picturebooks are primarily wonderful pieces of literature and visual arts to be enjoyed by people of all ages ready to explore their wealth.

7. Conclusion

Twenty picturebooks and a pile of children, parents, stereotypes and surprises later, I return to the initial question: How do contemporary picturebooks depict women and men, girls and boys and families of all kinds? Given the degree of diversity present in even such a small number of books, there is no single right answer and there is no single one clear direction into which picturebooks are headed, either. Looking through both the lens of gender studies and the lens of literary criticism, I have found three basic threads in my analysis. Firstly, there is a number of books that pay close attention to equality, gender fairness and diversity in terms of family forms. Secondly, there are very few books that seem to be stuck in stereotypical depictions and thirdly, there is a considerable number of books in which we find openness and more progressive ideas combined with conventional aspects, thus yielding an inconclusive picture.

I would categorise almost half of the selected picturebooks as belonging to the first group, e.g. *Heather Has Two Mommies*, *And Tango Makes Three* and *Princess Smartypants*. While these books clearly fall into the first category due to their open rejection of traditional gender roles or nuclear family concepts, my choice might not be as clear for books such as *Zoo* or *Granpa*. In the first case, emotional behaviour and family form are presented in a very stereotypical way. The complex interplay of words and pictures actually serves to criticise the inconsiderate way the characters interact, though. *Granpa* might be a surprising choice, too, precisely since it does not contain a lot of surprises. It does, however, convey a sense of the characters' self-determination combined with a concern for other people. Rather than forcing a certain attitude on us, this book silently but even the more strongly shows round, multi-layered characters who seem free from the constraints of rigid gender roles or narrowly defined family models. By contrast, some of the books in the first category, e.g. *Heather Has Two Mommies*, appear overconscientious in their efforts to further fairness and thus convey an artificial impression. The question remains whether issues such as gender roles or alternative family models should be made the main topic of a picturebook to raise awareness of possible problems or whether weaving these issues into a picturebook inconspicuously is a better way to advance tolerance and openness.

Only two or three picturebooks can be said to use really stereotypical depictions throughout. *The English Roses* and *The Berenstain Bears* adopt an unquestioning attitude to the clichéd way they portray male and female characters. Roughly a third of the books I would term ambivalent since they do not avoid all stereotyped depictions in spite of their attempts to promote self-confidence and freedom of choice. In books such as *Pinkalicious*, *Just Me and My Mom*, *Mr. Tod's Trap* or *I'm Gonna Like Me* aspects such as clothing, which might seem too trivial to pay attention to, can act as additional information which stands in contrast to the characters' self-confidence and agency. Maybe these books can actually best mirror our difficulties with realising equality and tolerance.

On the whole, many active girl protagonists appear in the selected picturebooks and choice and agency are stressed by a number of books. There is a large range of behaviours possible for both male and female characters and classically stereotyped activities such as playing football or playing with dolls seem to have almost vanished in comparison to earlier books. Still, activities and outward appearances in some books such as *Not Now Bernard* or *The Berenstain Bears* still appear stereotyped to a large extent (e.g. women wearing aprons and cooking or men doing manual work). Relationships are opening up to include people aside from the nuclear family and most families are built on mutual care and respect. Interestingly, female characters adopting "masculine" traits do not strongly outnumber male characters adopting "feminine" traits. Mr. Tod, Bigman and the *Sad Book's* protagonist are all men who deviate from the typical image of the brave, strong and emotionally composed hero. Unusual heroines like Smartypants or Tiny mostly adopt traits typically associated with masculinity to set themselves off from other women or girls. In a way, these depictions could even be seen to perpetuate the equation of normalcy with maleness as women must, in order to become strong and independent, adjust to a model of masculinity (which might, for example, include bravery, competitiveness and physical strength). In order to depict characters as self-directed and capable of acting, picturebooks often seem to take them out of one category (e.g. "feminine") and place them into the opposite one ("masculine"). Perhaps it is as long as gender stereotypes are still relatively strongly present in a culture that books have the tendency to revert to these binary oppositions as a means to open up new possibilities for their characters.

The ambivalent aspects mentioned above are perhaps the most interesting ones because they shed light on the intersections between established norms and novel possibilities and developments. Many of these ambivalences only become apparent with a close reading, though. Quickly scanning the pages, readers might miss the subtleties present in some of the apparently clichéd picturebooks. Taking into account the fact that picturebooks are often read and shared again and again by children and adults, every reading might yield a different interpretation. Repeated reading thus also offers a possibility for discovering more and more subtle aspects of meaning.

Interestingly, the passing of time does not seem to play such an important role in initiating changes, at least with regard to the picturebooks at hand. *The English Roses*, a book that apparently blindly adopts some clichéd gender roles, was published in 2003, while *Mr. Tod's Trap*, which reverses traditional divisions of labour, dates back to 1980. It should be noted, though, that the discussion about men's and women's roles was already well advanced by 1980 and has continued ever since. Therefore, it has doubtlessly found entrance into children's books from the last 30 years, whether as a topic in itself or as a more hidden part of a book's story, setting and character design. Some picturebooks still seem to cling to traditional role and family models, others try to advance equality and alternative living arrangements, and still others walk a path delicately meandering between these two poles. Interestingly, it is those books that feature animal rather than human characters which, through sophisticated character depiction and the use of analogies, sometimes communicate human traits, relationships and dreams and most clearly. Whereas older studies sometimes found more straightforward results than I did, the picturebooks I have discussed might be said to mirror in all their ambivalence a society that is opening up to new possibilities but that is still searching for ideas of what it means to be a woman, a man, and a human being and for ways of living together.

In my opinion, the crucial point here is not to find a simple answer or to categorise books as good or bad but to foster a critical awareness of the way gender and family issues are dealt with in picturebooks. Picturebooks can both be windows on the world for young and older readers and provide a picture of and commentary on the current state of social development. In other words, they can show children possible realities in an imaginative and playful way and reflect current concepts of normalcy and desirability at the same time.

As children grow up with what we present to them as normal, the picturebooks accompanying them can be part of this process that is both a challenge and a chance.

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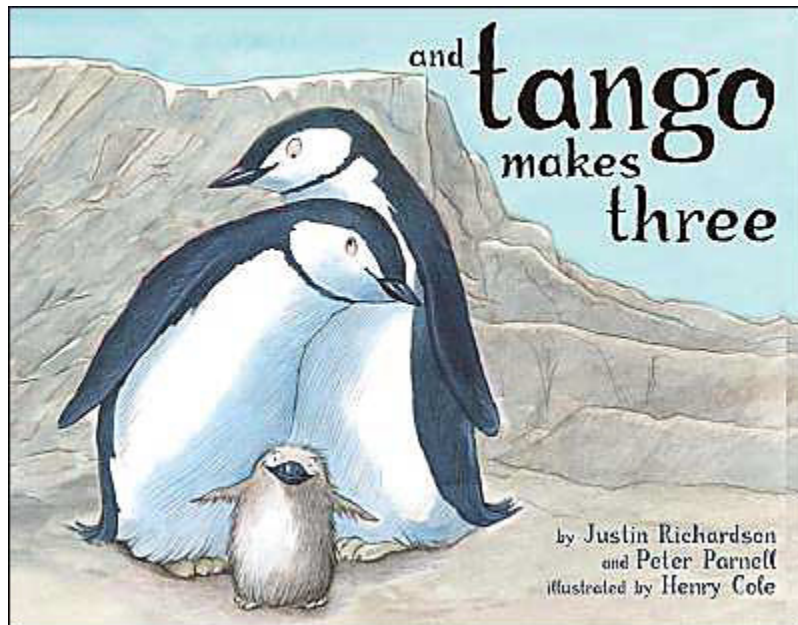
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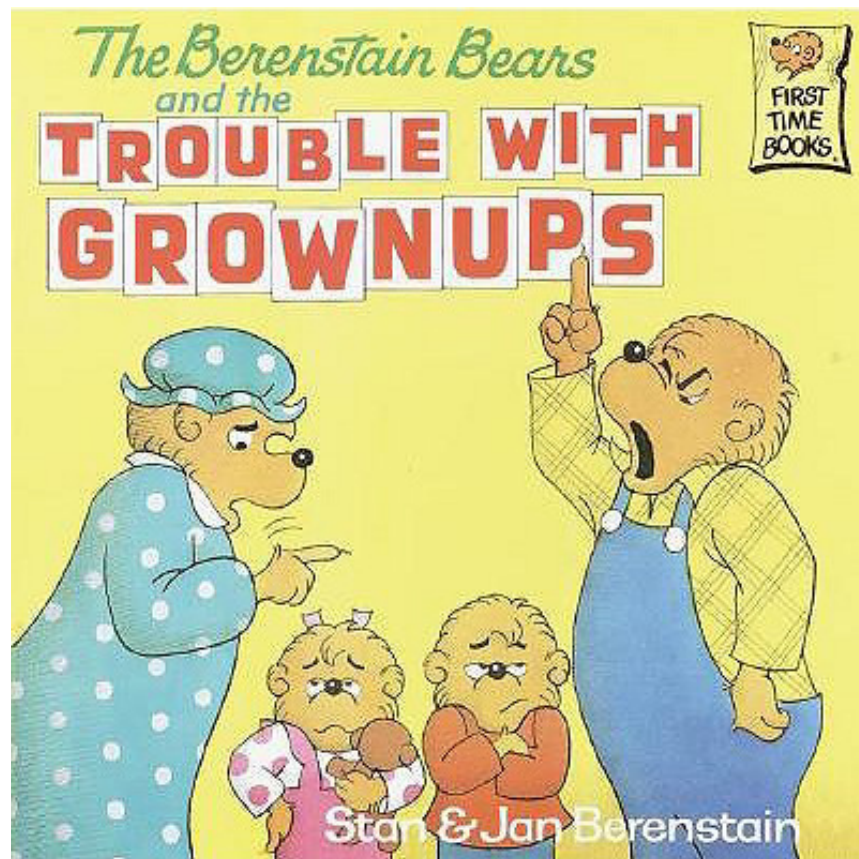
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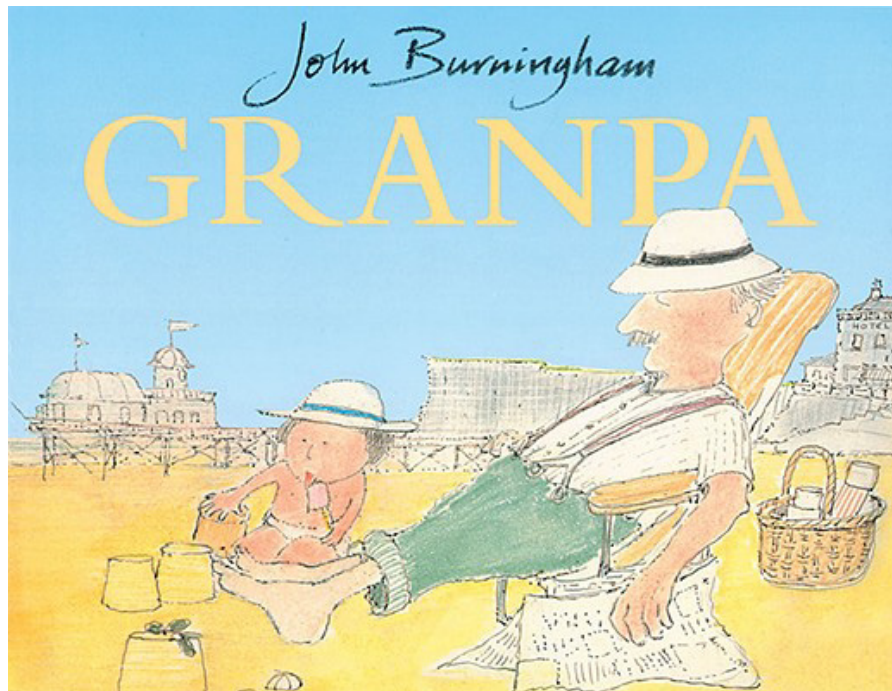
Appendix



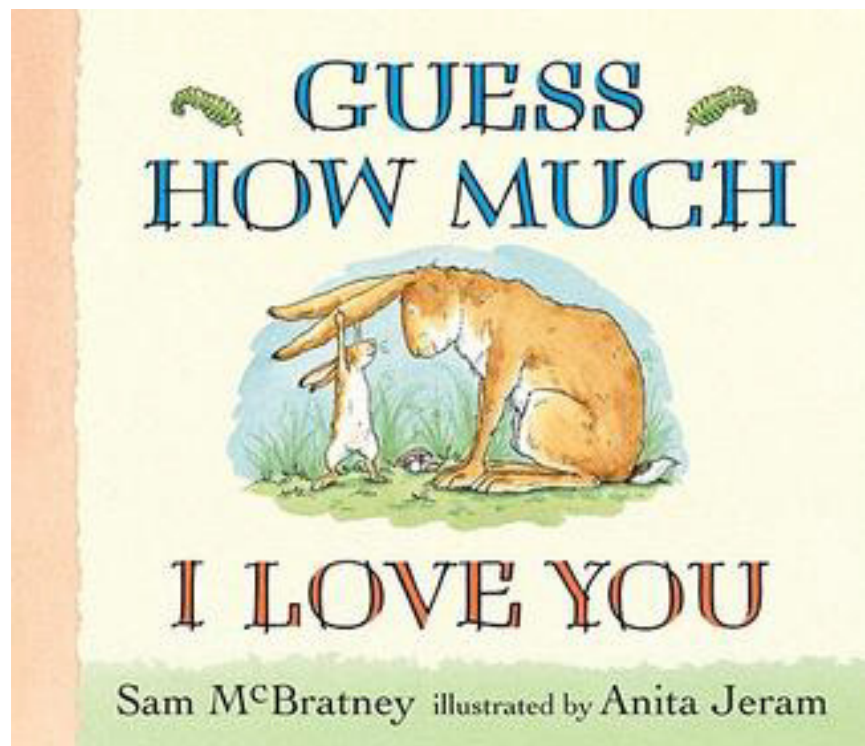
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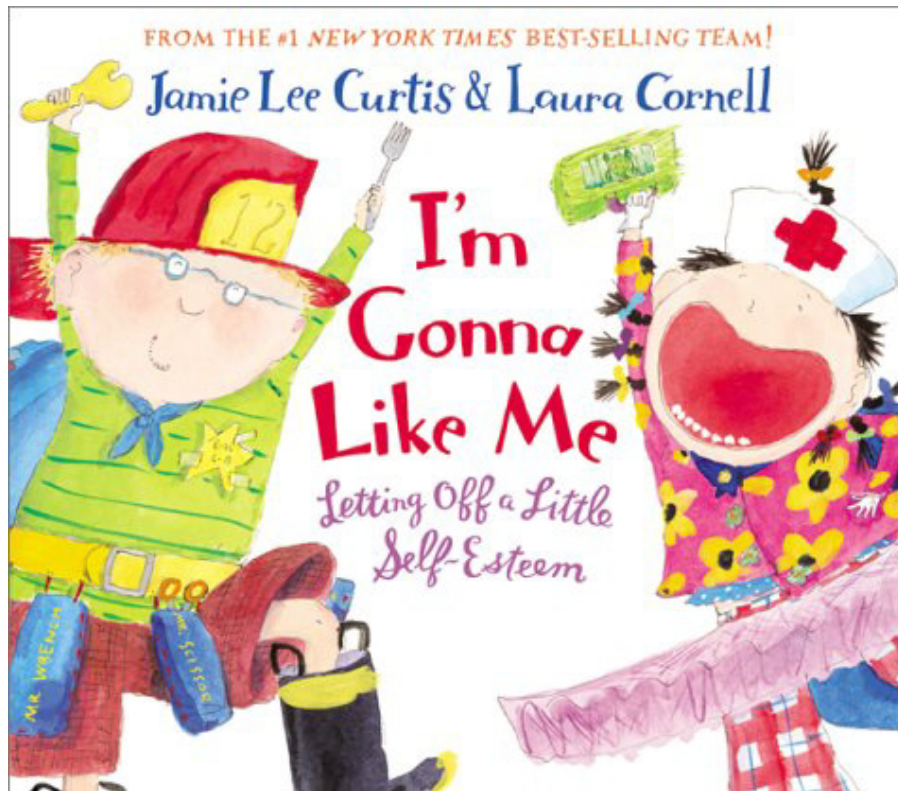
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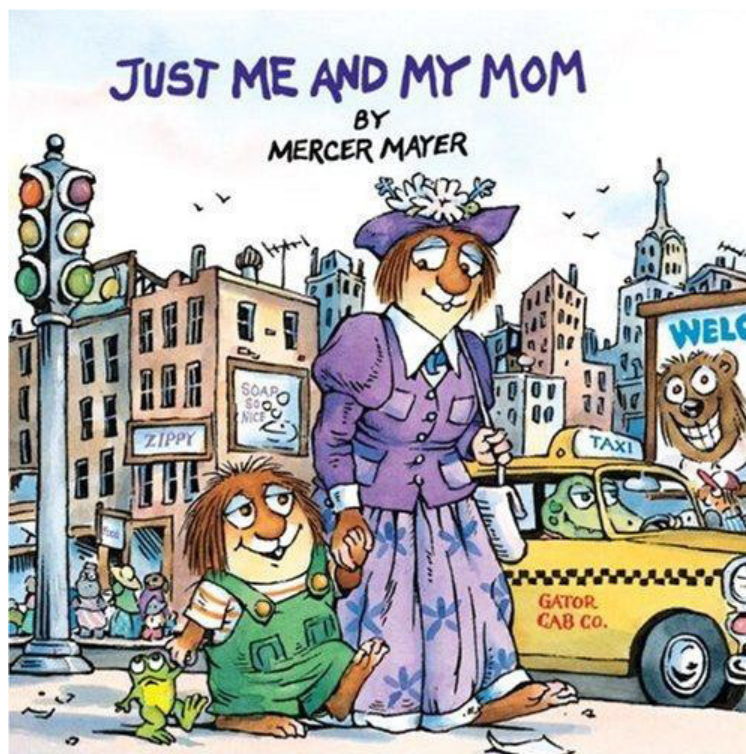
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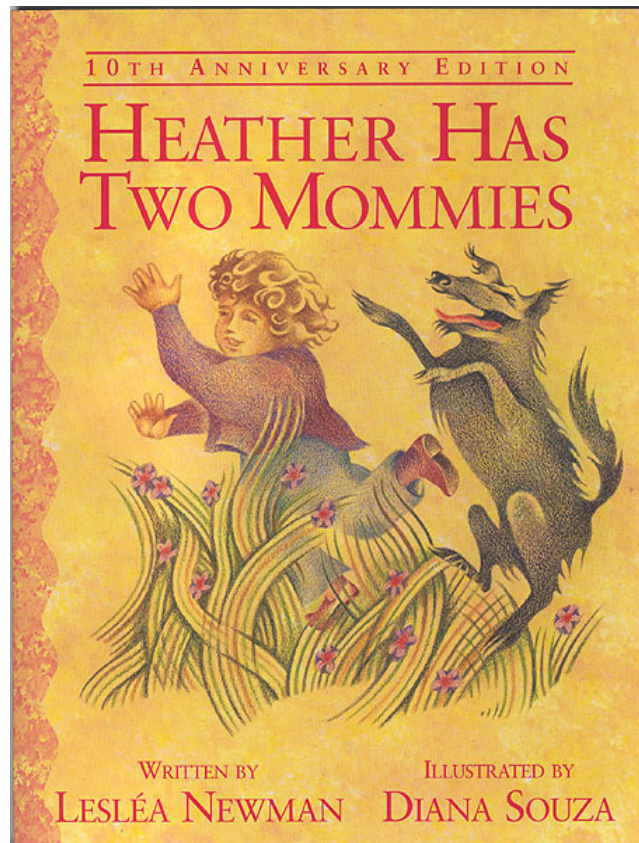
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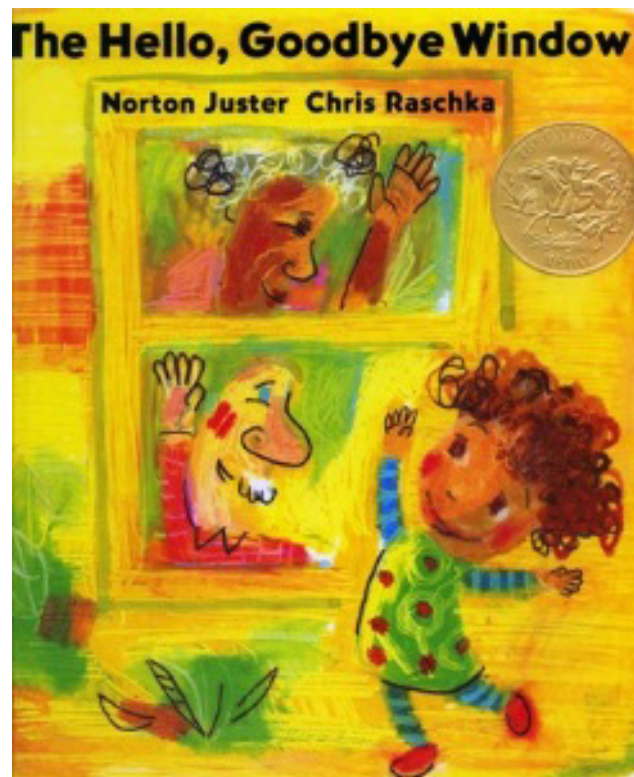
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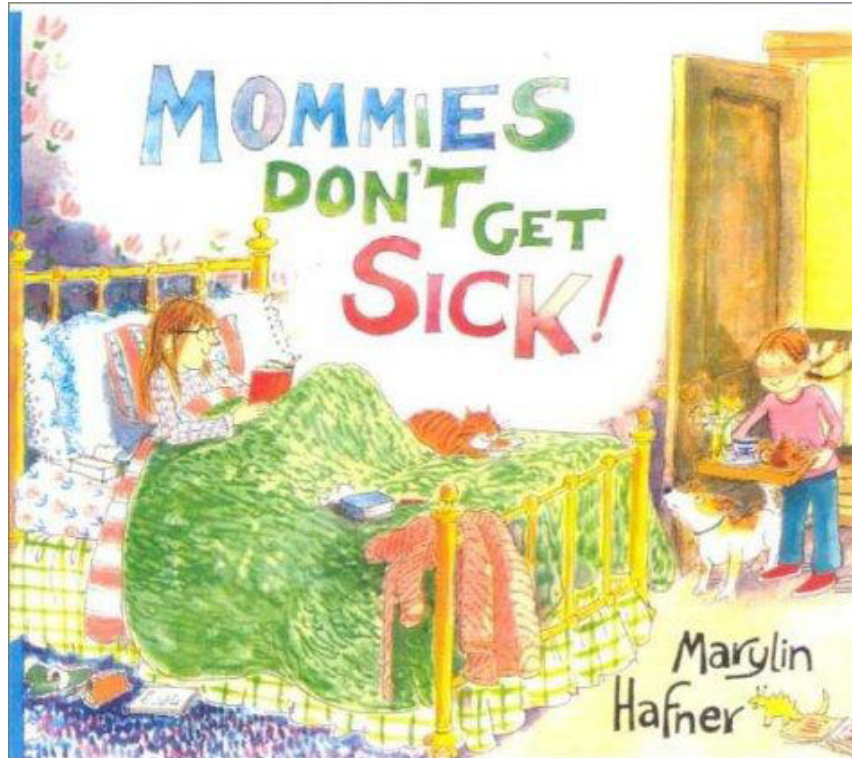
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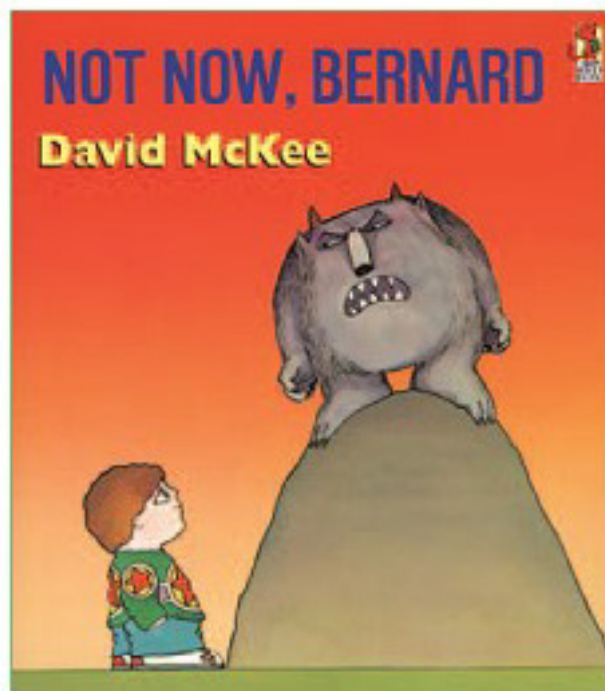
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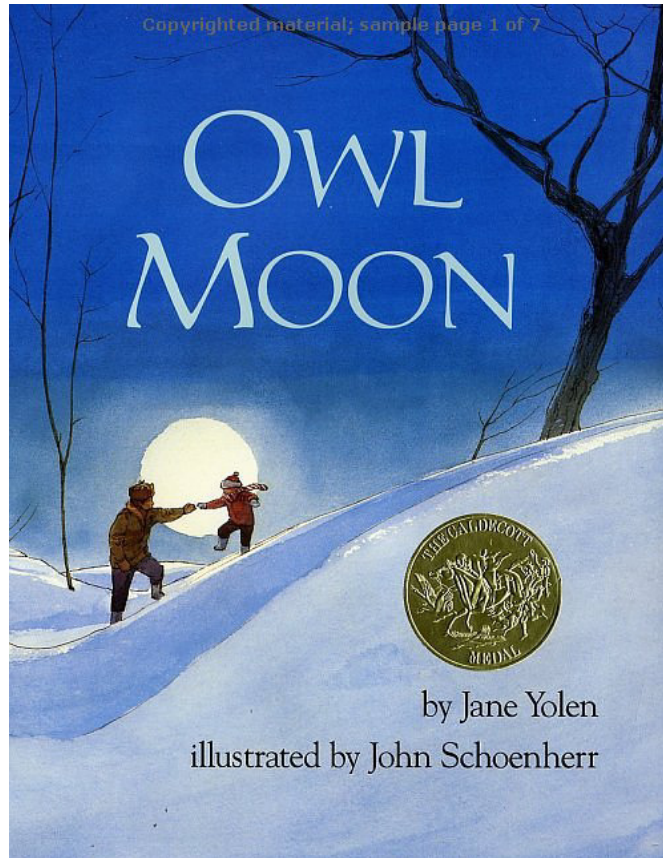
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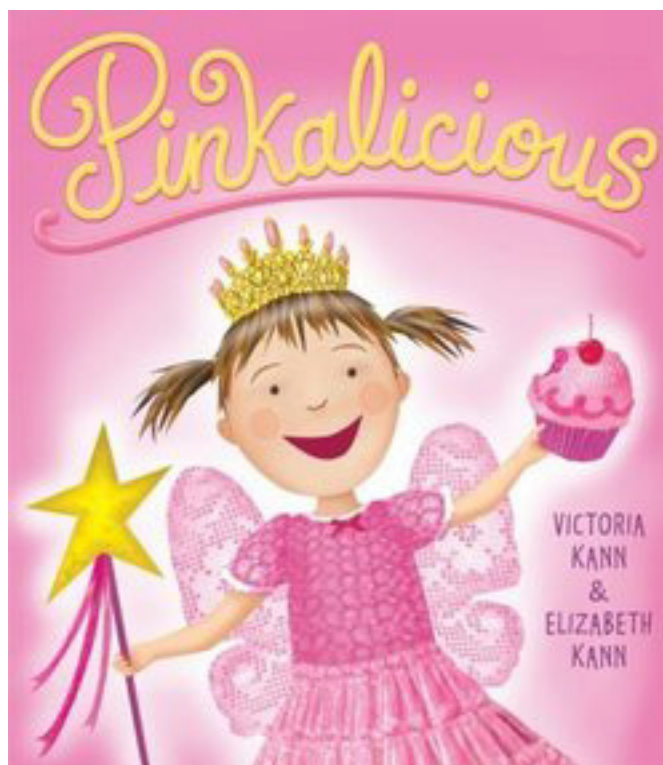
Hafner, Marilyn. *Mommies Don't Get Sick!*



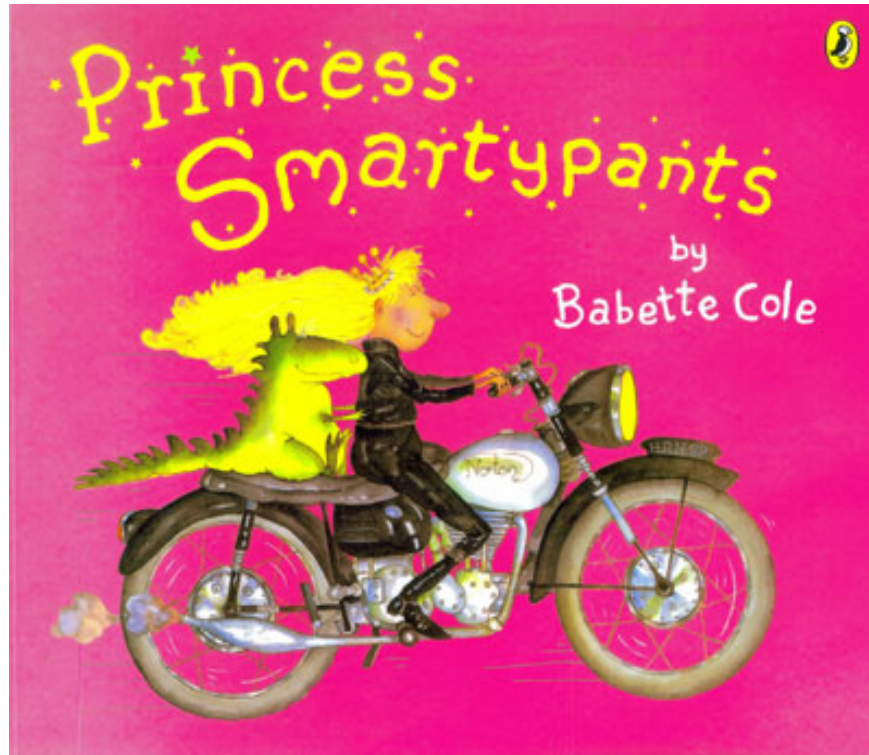
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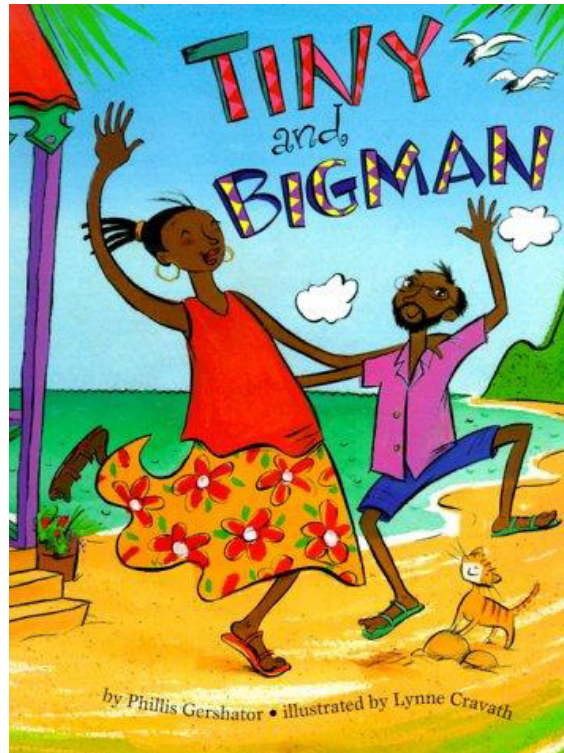
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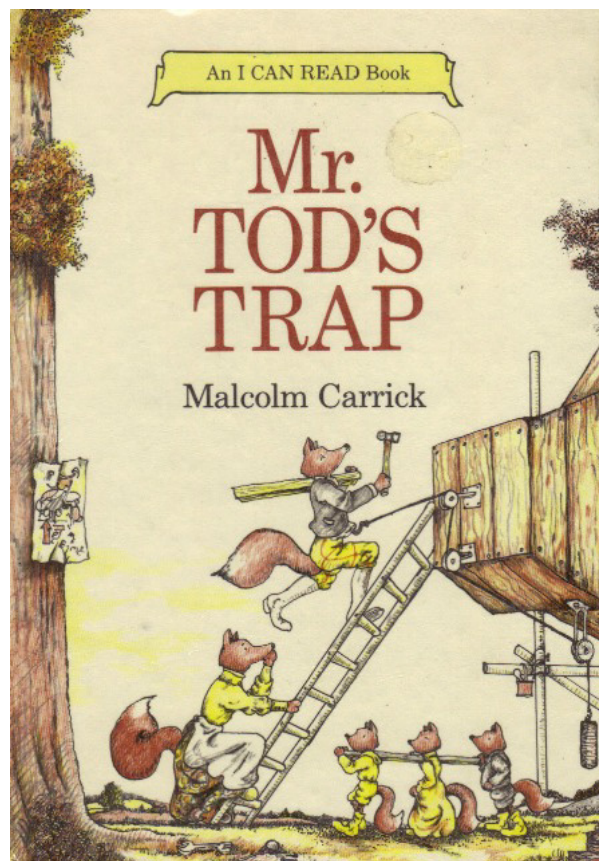
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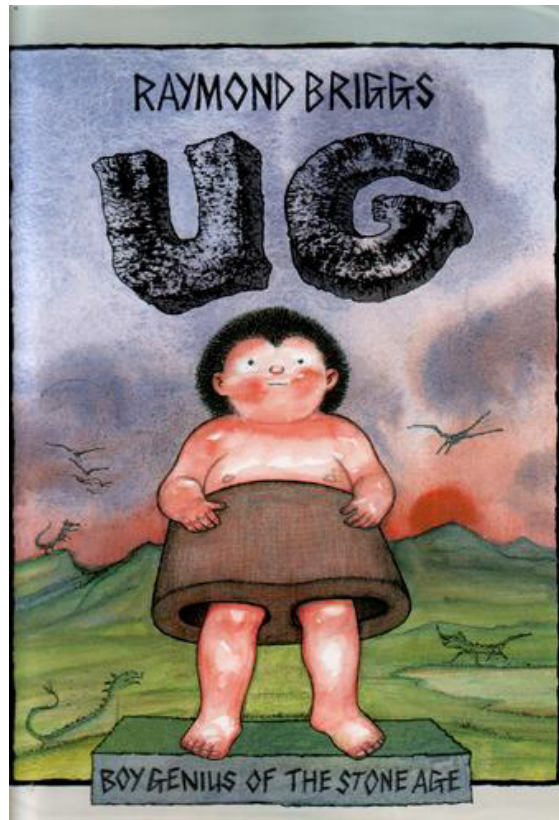
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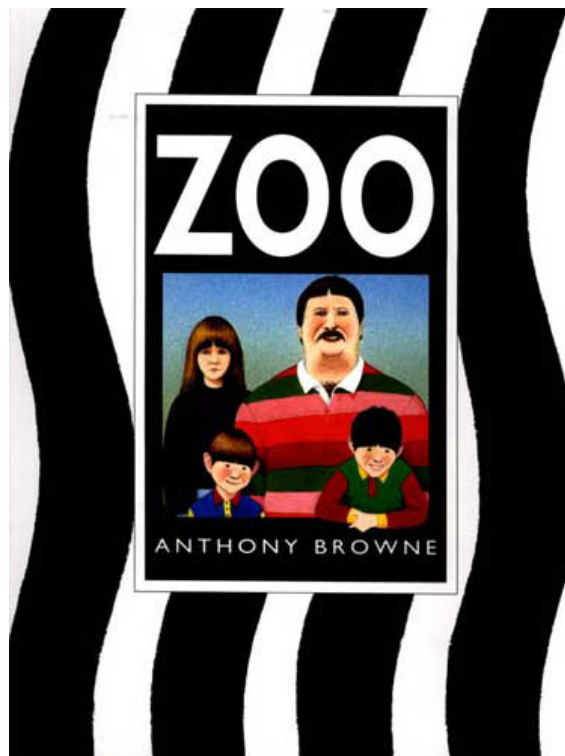
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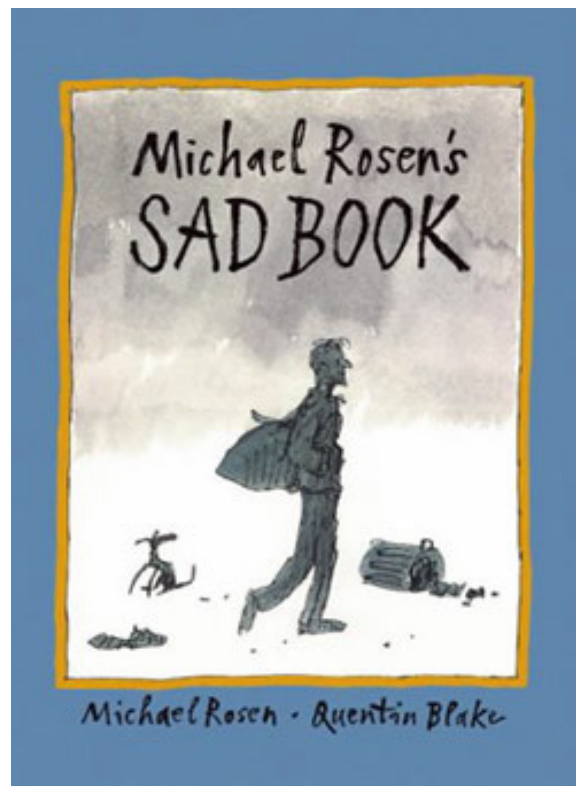
Briggs, Raymond. *Ug. Boy Genius of the Stone Age and His Search For Soft Trousers.*



Browne, Anthony. *Zoo.*



Madonna, and Jeffrey Fulvimari. *The English Roses*.



Rosen, Michael, and Quentin Blake. *Michael Rosen's Sad Book*.

Abstract (Deutsch)

Bilderbücher gehören zu den frühen prägenden Erfahrungen für Kinder in westlichen Kulturen, einschließlich der USA und dem Vereinigten Königreich. Mein Interesse gilt der Frage, ob bewusstseinsbildende Arbeit im Bereich der Gender Studies bereits in Bilderbüchern der letzten dreißig Jahre Auswirkungen zeigt, ob Rollenklischees von Weiblichkeit und Männlichkeit weiter vorherrschen oder ob Charaktere abseits von stereotypisierenden Vorgaben selbstbestimmt handeln können. Da Familien in den ersten Lebensjahren das einflussreichste Umfeld für Kinder darstellen, in denen Genderrollen vorgelebt werden, und da Familien auch in Bilderbüchern sehr präsent sind, verbinde ich die Analyse der Geschlechterrollen mit der Untersuchung von Familienformen und Arbeitsteilung in Bilderbüchern.

Eine Auswahl an zwanzig Bilderbüchern wird in dieser Hinsicht analysiert. Methodisch bediene ich mich einerseits der Bilderbuchanalyse, andererseits performativen Ansätzen aus den Gender Studies. Die Kombination aus diesen beiden Ansätzen führt zu einer genauen Analyse der Text-Bild-Interaktion. Dabei konzentriere ich mich vor allem darauf, wie Worte und Bilder gemeinsam Bedeutungen schaffen und wie durch die Erzählung Konzepte von Normalität vermittelt werden: Wie werden Charaktere dargestellt, sowohl in Bezug auf ihr äußeres Erscheinen als auch in Bezug auf ihre Handlungen, ihr Verhalten und ihre Emotionalität? Welche Familienform wird als die Norm angesehen, welche alternativen Familienformen abseits der Kernfamilie werden dargestellt? Wie sind Arbeiten im Haushalt verteilt; sind Frauen gleichermaßen wie Männer erwerbstätig; wer übernimmt die Kinderbetreuung?

Die Analyse der gewählten Bücher zeigt, dass moderne Bilderbücher teilweise sehr aufmerksam mit Geschlechterzuschreibungen und Familienkonstellationen umgehen, so tauchen z.B. homosexuelle Paare mit Kindern genauso auf wie eine unabhängige Märchenprinzessin, die lieber unverheiratet bleiben möchte und ihre Verehrer vertreibt. Gleichzeitig scheinen einige Bücher auch noch in traditionellen Rollenbildern verhaftet zu sein, die Kernfamilie als Nonplusultra darzustellen und Dichotomien wie männlich-weiblich durch ihre unterschiedliche Darstellung der Kleidung, Tätigkeiten oder des emotionalen Verhaltens männlicher und weiblicher Charaktere zu erhalten.

Ziel meiner Arbeit ist es, Bewusstsein zu schaffen für die Unzahl an kulturellen Besonderheiten und Eindrücken, die Kindern schon im frühesten Alter mitgegeben werden. Bilderbücher können erheblichen Einfluss auf die sich entwickelnde Einstellung und Ansichten von Kindern ausüben und bieten gerade deshalb auch eine Chance, jungen (und älteren) Leser_innen ein breites Spektrum an Vorbildern zu bieten und aufzuzeigen, dass jeder Mensch die Wahl hat, sich auf diese oder jene Weise zu verhalten und zu entscheiden, unabhängig von einengenden Geschlechterzuordnungen.

Abstract (English)

Picturebooks belong to the early formative experiences for children in Western cultures, including the USA and the UK. I am interested in the question whether the awareness-raising work of gender studies has already manifested itself in picturebooks published during the last thirty years. I am asking whether clichés of femininity and masculinity still predominate or whether characters can act in a self-directed way, leaving stereotyped prescriptions aside. Families are usually the most influential living environment for children in their early years and provide models of gendered behaviour. Since families also appear frequently in picturebooks, I am connecting an analysis of gender roles with an investigation into family forms and the division of labour as these appear in picturebooks.

A selection of twenty picturebooks is analysed according to these aspects. Methodologically, I employ both picturebook theory and performative approaches from gender studies. The combination of these two approaches yields a close analysis of the interaction between words and images. In this analysis, I am primarily concentrating on the way in which words and pictures create meaning together and how concepts of normalcy are mediated through the narratives: How are characters depicted both with regard to their outward appearance and with regard to their actions, their behaviour and their emotionality? Which family form is viewed as the norm and which alternative family forms apart from the nuclear family are presented? How is household work distributed? Are both women and men shown as working outside the home? Who is responsible for childcare?

The analysis of the selected books shows that modern picturebooks partly deal with gender role ascriptions and family constellations very attentively and consciously. For example, homosexual couples with children appear just as well as an independent fairy tale princess who prefers remaining unmarried and drives away her suitors. At the same time, some books seem to stick to traditional role models, to present the nuclear family as the ultimate family form and to preserve dichotomies such as male-female through their differentiating depiction of male and female characters' clothes, activities or emotional behaviour.

It is the aim of my thesis to foster awareness of the innumerable cultural idiosyncrasies and impressions that children are already faced with at a very young age. Picturebooks can exert a considerable influence on children's developing attitudes and perspectives. It is also

for this reason that these books also offer a chance to provide young (and older) readers with a broad range of role models. Moreover, they can show that each human being has the option of acting and choosing one way or the other, independently of constrictive gender role prescriptions.

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