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in Picturebooks“

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1. Introduction

Picturebooks, as one of the first cultural artifacts children encounter, play a fundamental role in the socialization of our young generations (Gilmore and Howard; Blaska). Bearing this responsibility, picturebooks have the important task to introduce children to our diverse world and the variety of groups and individuals that live in it. Since disabled people form a population of individuals larger than any other cultural, ethnic or racial group (Anti-Defamation League; Disabled World), their occurrence in this type of book can be clearly considered of immense significance. "[P]ositive attitudes towards disability need to start young" stresses the specialist in the field of picturebooks and diversity, Alexandra Strick. Exposing young readers to inclusive literature "with diverse and textured depictions of people with disabilities" can help to eradicate negative stereotypes and prejudices, argues the Anti-Defamation League, an American civil rights organization fighting all forms of bigotry. Despite a small increase in their occurrence in picturebooks, disabled characters, as research has shown, are still underrepresented in the vast spectrum of children's picturebooks currently available (Dychess et al., Koc et al., Ayala, Beckett et al.). Nevertheless, it is not merely the number of disabled heroes and heroines that is relevant, but also the manner in which those individuals are represented. Thus, in my research I intend to investigate the representation of the disabled individual.

Disability is diverse and cannot be limited or pinned down to a few characteristics or types. Yet, due to the limited scope of this thesis, I have decided to focus merely on physical disability. This choice was made, inter alia, on the basis of Koc et al.'s (146) findings, which reveal that physical disability has been comparatively less studied. According to them, much research has been conducted on the representation of mental or learning disabilities as well as on autism, however, physical disability, even though it is the most frequently represented disability in picturebooks, has yet received comparatively little attention. In addition to this argument, my interest in the representation of the human body in different cultural production has inspired me to focus on body

diversity; this interest has ultimately led me to the investigation of the physically disabled child body in the field of children's picturebooks.

In my analysis I closely examine a small selection of four picturebooks featuring a physically disabled child protagonist in order to investigate how the physically disabled child body is currently represented in this genre. Thus, the aim is to identify strategies picturebook authors and illustrators currently adopt to portray physical disability in general and physically disabled individuals in particular. Since I do not conduct an empirical study, I cannot conclude on the impact those portrayals have on its young readership. However, through the identification of representation strategies, I intend to contribute to present research within the field and shed light not only on how disability is currently perceived, but also on what kind of image of disability is conveyed to the child audience. Since young readers typically identify with characters of their age and in most cases also remember their childhood heroes and heroines for a very long time, the representation of those individual child figures appears particularly crucial. As the representation and characterization and thus the meaning-making in picturebooks primarily works on two levels, the visual as well as the verbal (Nodelman 40, Serafini 10), both of these systems are closely examined. Consequently, I investigate the images and the language used in these books, as well as the interplay of these two systems.

As for the language choices in this thesis, I decided to utilize the term *disabled people* rather than *people with disability*. I am aware that the preference of language use depends on the community or individual dealt with and sensitivity needs to be shown when addressing someone. With this awareness I have adopted the phrase *disabled people/person*, which is used and commonly preferred in the social model of disability. What the social model is and why the phrase disabled people is favored by many individuals who ascribe to this model will be outlined and elaborated on in the second theoretical part of this thesis.

Not only language use is of great importance, but also one's intentions. My thesis is primarily concerned with the concept of representation, which I would

argue in concurrence with Stuart Hall, is strongly linked to the idea of objectification and stereotyping. Simi Linton, one of America's crucial figures in disability and arts, criticizes the objectifying tendencies within disability studies. She (Linton 526-527) argues that "objectification is fostered by the dominance of empiricism in the study of disability, by the large number of stereotypes and simplified versions of disabled people's experience presented across the disciplines, the absence of critical analysis, the pathologizing of the experience and the use of diagnostic categories or other means of labeling." Similarly, Oliver and Barnes (551) put forward the problem of studying disability from a colonizing, able-bodied perspective. Aware of this problem, I aim to position my analysis in a field that Linton calls a "liberal art based inquiry into disability" (525), in which the ambitious and probably demanding aim is to "break down stereotypes through the analysis of metaphors, images and all representations of disability" (Linton 531). As my aim is to critically analyze and discuss a selection of picturebooks featuring disabled child characters, the question of judgment ultimately arises. While I believe that rigid categorization should clearly be avoided, the analysis of books from a cultural as well as literary perspective might inevitably involve some form of evaluation.

In terms of structure, my thesis is divided into two main parts: a theoretical and an analytical section. I start the theoretical part of my thesis by defining and discussing the term dis/ability as well as the academic discipline, disability studies, which has evolved around the subject. Subsequently, I introduce different models of dis/ability and elaborate on disablism, ableism and the idea of normality. This section on disability is completed with a view on the representation of disability in literature and culture. The second theoretical part then deals with the topic of picturebooks. After presenting some general theoretical knowledge from the area of picturebook research, four aspects of picturebook theory are further amplified. Those aspects include the text-image relations and visual qualities of picturebooks as well as characterization techniques and narrative perspectives. This theoretical input follows a literature review of already existing studies conducted on the topic of disability in children's picturebooks. Moreover, a set of guidelines that have been developed for the evaluation of picturebooks dealing with disability and disabled characters

is presented and discussed for their benefits and drawbacks. Part three of my thesis is concerned with the analysis of four picturebooks, each featuring a physically disabled child character. After explaining my choice of books as well as some theoretical considerations, I present my analysis in four structurally separated sections: the visual and outward appearance of characters, the language and verbal representations, the character roles and relationships, as well as the setting. In a final section I conclude the thesis with a summary of some general tendencies and insights as well as some final remarks.

2. Theory 1: Dis/ability

disability

dis/ability

dis_ability

DisAbility

Dis/Ability

All those variant forms of spelling of the word disability are results of numerous individuals' involvement with the idea of ability and disability. The construction and reconstruction of the word reflects their thoughts with regard to the term as it appears both historically and in contemporary society and likewise exemplifies the complexity of their considerations. The spelling I chose for the heading of this section - dis/ability - is a split term that emphasizes the construction of the word disability and simultaneously questions the meaning of the two words, ability and disability, both of which appear to be more easily definable as individual words. As Goodley explains, the term dis/ability

acknowledges the ways in which disablism and ablism (and disability and ability) can only ever be understood simultaneously in relation to one another. The slash and split term denotes the complex ways in which opposites bleed into one another. People find it difficult to define 'normal' and 'ability' but are far more ready to have a go at categorising 'abnormal' and 'disability'. Dis/ability studies keep disablism and ableism, disability and ability in play with one another, to explore their co-construction and reliance upon one another. (Goodley, *Disablism and Ablism* xiii)

With Goodley's thoughts and the questioning of the meaning of ability and disability, of norms and categorizations, I want to start this theoretical part of my thesis that deals with the topic of disability and ability in the context of disability studies.

As already highlighted in Goodley's quote, defining categories such as disability is particularly challenging. Altman (97) underlines this problem by stating that "[p]art of the difficulty of defining disability has to do with the fact that disability is a complicated, multidimensional concept". Despite those difficulties, various individuals and institutions have aimed at providing definitions. Two such

institutions are the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation (UPIAS) and the Disabled People's International (DPI); both of which are organizations concerned with the living conditions of disabled individuals and their role in society. More specifically, the UPIAS was an early disability rights organization situated in the United Kingdom; formed in 1972 by disabled individuals, the UPIAS was one of the first disability liberation groups, which not only initiated discussions about the definition of disability, but also aimed at tackling the problem that disabled people were systematically segregated from society into separate facilities (Hunt). Opposed to the UPIAS, which disbanded in the 80's, the DPI is an international non-governmental organization still operating today; with a similar aim as the UPIAS, the DPI as a human rights organization is "committed to the protection of the rights of people with disabilities and the promotion of their full and equal participation in society" (Disabled People's International). As a result of their analysis of disability, both organizations quite similarly offer definitions in which they make a precise distinction between impairment and disability. According to the DPI, impairment "is the functional limitation within the individual caused by physical, mental or sensory impairment", whereas disability is "the loss or limitations of the opportunities to take part in the normal life of the community on an equal level with others due to physical and social barriers" (DPI qtd. in Goodley, *DS Introduction* 8). This definition of disability, as opposed to the idea of impairment, underlines the external and disabling aspect of our society, rather than the belief that a disabled individual is missing something internally. David Mitchell and Sharon Snyder, two pioneers in the field of disability study and culture, define and use "the term disability to designate cognitive and physical conditions that deviate from the normative ideas of mental ability and psychological functions" (Mitchell and Snyder, "Introduction" 2). This definition, similarly to the differentiation between disability and impairment, foregrounds the existence of external forces, in this case the "normative ideas" within our society that construct disability. The view that disability is a construct of a society with standardized cultural norms is also an essential idea of the academic discipline that has evolved around disability - Disability Studies.

2.1. Disability Studies

The development of disability studies has its roots in the 1970's and 80's, the boom of critical social sciences, the exploration and critical analysis of the human body and human identity as historical and cultural phenomenon (Waldschmidt 10) and most importantly, the beginning of the disabled people's movement (Oliver and Barnes 547; Hunt). In this global movement disabled individuals fought for their rights and against discrimination on grounds of their disabilities, which Davis (*Disability Studies Reader*, xv) explains has been enormous:

For centuries, people with disabilities have been an oppressed and repressed group. People with disabilities have been isolated, incarcerated, observed, written about, operated on, instructed, implanted, regulated, treated, institutionalized, and controlled to a degree probably unequal to that experienced by any other minority group.

What Davis does not mention is the fact that disabled individuals have also been killed at the beginning of the 20th century under the policies of racial hygiene (Hubbard 96-101). Crucial to the disabled people's movement was the idea that it is not someone's disability, but the difficulties and barriers those individuals with particular conditions have to face that actually disable them. As the British Council of Organisations of Disabled People clarifies, "it is society, designed and run by non-disabled people, that puts those barriers up" (BCODP 5). This basic idea has then become the central principle for the foundation of disability studies as an academic discipline. Until today the field of disability studies has greatly expanded and is now taught and studied all around the world.

According to Waldschmidt disability studies have had two major purposes, which in parts I would argue have already been achieved. Firstly, disability studies have intended to take disability from its peripheral position to a serious and critical interdisciplinary academic discipline. Secondly, they have aimed at forming a countermovement to the medical and pedagogical paradigm around disability, which predominated in the 70's and 80's. While the first goal concerning the growth of research interest and activism around the world

seems to have been partly reached, the latter has probably only recently become the prime objective of disability studies. In this respect Ferguson and Nusbaum (qtd. in Goodley, *Disablism and Ableism* 6) underline that the term disability studies "should not be allowed to become little more than a synonym for special education or rehabilitation sciences". Goodley (*Disablism and Ableism* 6) further clarifies, "Disability studies is not simply a reaction to the medicalisation and individualisation of disability but also an antidote." In this position as antidote, disability studies is not simply an academic discipline, but aims to be activist. As Davis (*Disability Studies Reader* xv) underlines, "[t]he exciting thing about disability studies is that it is both an academic field of inquiry and an area of political activity." In this respect, disability studies is in line with feminism, gender studies, queer theory, as well as postcolonial studies, all of which are inherently political and operate in the field of activism.

As already mentioned, disability studies are originally ascribed to the social model of disability, one of a number of models surrounding disability. The following section will discuss three of those models more closely.

2.1.1. Models of dis/ability

'Dis/ability' is not natural. Dis/ability is socially constructed.
(Goodley, *DS Introduction* 8)

This idea is the guiding principle of the social model of disability, the model on which disability studies have been grounded. At the same time, those conceptions quite directly criticize what has come to be known as the medical or individual model of disability from which the social model strives to distance itself.

The medical or individual model of disability is in close connection with the concepts of rehabilitation and integration and the idea that disabled people need to be rehabilitated into society. The cause for the need of integration and the general problems and disadvantages disabled people have to face in this sense is their individual condition and impairment, as David Hosking (6)

explains. Those problems, according to Waldschmidt (15), were thought to be solved by trying to adjust disabled individuals to their environment. The need for adjustment results from the belief that disability is "an inherent characteristic of a person arising from an objectively identified impairment of the mind or body" (Hoskin 6). Consequently, crucial to the medical model are the notions of objectivity as well as the medicalisation of the body. In this respect, Goodley (*Disablism and Ableism* 6) mentions that "[m]edicalisation also has been historically predicated on a didactic monologue about bodies", meaning that not disabled individuals or their relatives, but health professionals have taken important decisions, for instance, concerning the education for disabled children or young adults. Crucial to this idea of disability is also the notion of 'cure'. Disabled people need to overcome their disability individually by taking advantage of medical and therapeutic treatment. This model has been criticized for different reasons. According to Waldschmidt (16), one part of the criticism focuses on the fact that the model is based on medical definitions and a simplistic idea of normalcy. At the same time, the medical model puts disabled individuals in a position of dependency in which they need to adapt. Moreover, I would argue that a crucial point of criticism should be the fact that this model reinforces processes of othering and the possibility for one group to feel superior to another. This view could be underscored by Waldschmidt's (17) argument that society itself is merely in an external or distant position, which can be read as a reinforcement of the gap between us and them.

Contrary to society's marginal position in the individual or medical model, in the social model of disability, which has evolved as a reaction to the medical model and became the basis of disability studies, society performs an active role in the disabling process. As the Union of Physically Impaired Against Segregation clarifies:

In our view, it is society which disables ... Disability is something imposed on top of our impairments, by the way we are unnecessarily isolated and excluded from full participation in society. (UPIAS qtd. in Waldschmidt 17)

As mentioned in the above quote, the relationship between impairment and disability appears crucial. While in the medical or individual model the link between disability and impairment is close, the social model severs this causal

connection. According to Tom Shakespeare (198), the difference between impairment and disability is clear in the social model as "[t]he former is individual and private, the latter is structural and public". He further exemplifies this by referring to feminism and the distinction between biological sex and gender. "Like gender, disability is a culturally and historically specific phenomenon, not a universal and unchanging essence" (Shakespeare 198). In the social model, impairment and disability are clearly distinguished, yet, as Oliver and Barnes (548) state, "[t]he 'reality' of impairment is not denied but is not the cause of disabled people's economic and social disadvantage. Instead, the emphasis shifts to how far, and in what ways, society restricts their opportunities to participate in mainstream economic and social activities rendering them more or less dependent." Following those thoughts it is not the disabled individual who needs to change, but society as a whole. Shakespeare further illustrates that in the social model disabled and non-disabled people are distinguished. He explains, "[d]isabled people are an oppressed group, and often non-disabled people and organizations - such as professionals and charities - are the causes or contributors to that oppression" (Shakespeare 199). While this clear distinction between disabled and non-disabled could be linked to my earlier criticism of the medical model as reinforcement of othering processes, I believe that in this model the clear distinction aims at identifying disabled people as an oppressed group rather than normalizing disability. This notion is further underlined by the development and common usage of identity-first language within the social model. Identity-first language, opposed to person-first language, promotes the usage of the phrase 'disabled person' instead of 'person with disability'. The preference to put the disabled before the individual is based on the idea that it is society which disables a person, as Cara Liebowitz argues. The expression 'person with disability', on the other hand, is favored by many groups or individuals and has been promoted as part of the people first movement. Person-first language, in contrast to identity-first language, puts the disability after the individual and therefore insists on using the phrase 'person with disability'. While the argument to see the person before the disability is powerful, Liebowitz notes that "at the same time, there's no way to see the person without the disability. A person is not a blank canvas that other things are added onto." Even though there is the positive and respectful

intention of person-first language, Liebowitz states that by positioning the disability after the individual the notion that disability is something negative and requires a marginal position is promoted. For her, "[s]aying that I am disabled more accurately highlights the complex biosocial reality of disability. I am not merely a person existing with a label, I am constantly disabled and enabled by the interplay of my body and the environment" (Liebowitz).

Another disability rights activist and journalist who actively ascribes herself to the social model of disability and makes use of identity-first language is Stella Young. Young, who also works as a blogger and comedian, recapitulates the main arguments of the social model and illustrates her language preferences on her blog:

To say that a person "has a disability" is to say that these barriers are our responsibility. My disability exists not because I use a wheelchair, but because the broader environment isn't accessible. In my own home, where I've been able to create an environment that works for me, I'm hardly disabled at all. I still have an impairment, and there are obviously some very restrictive things about that, but the impact of disability is less. In environments that are less disabling, I'm free to refer to myself in other ways that make me feel proud. In fact, "crip" is my preferred identifying term. I find the term "crip" an empowering way to refer to myself, in much the same way that some of the gay community, but by no means all, find the term "queer" empowering. (Young, "Reporting")

While the social model of disability has been a grounding element for disability studies and the basis for many activists such as Stella Young, it does not only have positive aspects. According to Shakespeare, it also brings with it certain weaknesses. As for the strengths, the model is simple and straightforward; it "places the moral responsibility on society" rather than on disabled people and intends "to enable disabled people to participate" (Shakespeare 199). Moreover, Shakespeare (199) explains, the model "has been effective psychologically in improving the self-esteem of disabled people and building a positive sense of collective identity" as opposed to other models that place a burden on them. Nevertheless, there also appear to be limitations to this model. For instance, as Shakespeare (200) highlights, it has an authorship of physically impaired white heterosexual men and therefore again focuses on a very narrow group of people and even reinforces exclusion. Furthermore, the social model "so strongly disowns individual and medical approaches, that it

risks implying that impairment is not a problem". To clarify this, the social model argues that it is only society, not the impaired bodies, which disable individuals and by that it can be interpreted as rejecting any medical treatment. Additionally, according to Shakespeare (201) and Waldschmidt (21) the causal link between disability and oppression can be criticized as can be the clear distinction between disability and impairment. The questions arise, whether being disabled automatically means being oppressed and if one can actually distinguish the effects of impairment and disability in everyday life? Finally, there remains "[t]he concept of the barrier-free utopia" (Shakespeare 201).

As a result of this criticism, Shakespeare (203) concludes, "[m]ore sophisticated and complex approaches are needed, perhaps building on the WHO initiative to create the International Classification of Functioning, Disability and Health". Waldschmidt sees a cultural model of disability as a necessary supplement to the social viewpoint. She raises the question what would happen if disability was seen as a specific form of problematization of bodily difference and less as a problem that needs to be solved. From a cultural perspective it is insufficient to view disability as an individual problem or the problem of a discriminated group; rather is it necessary to gain a deeper understanding of the categorization processes themselves. In this respect it is not only disability, but the rarely reflected 'normality', which needs to become the focus of attention. This shift of perspective from disability to ability and the deconstruction of the idea of normality, the norm, and normativity are further discussed in the following section.

2.1.2. Disablism / Ableism and Normality

Reconsidering the spelling convention of disability addressed at the very beginning of this section as well as the already discussed concepts of disability and disability studies, it seems crucial to return to the dichotomy of ability and disability. Thereby, the studies of disablism and ableism and the concept of normality seem to play an essential role.

Disablism, as Campbell describes, is "a set of assumptions (conscious or unconscious) and practices that promote the differential or unequal treatment of people because of actual or presumed disabilities". Disablism as a social practice is therefore concerned with the disabled body in society and the oppressiveness this body has to face. While Rachel Hurst and Tony Manwaring (15) critically ask, "Why talk about another 'ism'?", they simultaneously answer it by underlining that only by being named, can it be fought. Consequently, it is within, but also outside the field of disability studies that disablism needs to be tackled.

In contrast to disablism, ableism puts its focus on the able-bodied. As Veronica Chouinard (qtd. in Campbell) explains, ableism is defined as "ideas, practices, institutions and social relations that presume ablebodiedness, and by doing so, construct persons with disabilities as marginalised ... and largely invisible 'others'". By focusing on ablebodiedness, ableism "promotes smooth forms of personhood and smooth health; creates space fit for normative citizens; encourages an institutional bias towards autonomous, independent bodies; and lends support to economic and material dependence on neoliberal and hyper-capitalist forms of production", as Goodley (*Disablism and Ableism* 21) explains. In this respect, ableism is strongly linked to the idea of norms and normality and those concepts, as it seems, are key elements of society - more specifically of contemporary society - as Davis ("Constructing Normalcy" 1) underlines. He stresses that the idea of the norm is neither natural nor inherent, but has been socially constructed in certain kinds of society, including our western world. In this world, norms appear to play a crucial role, as Davis ("Constructing Normalcy" 1) quite interestingly illustrates:

We live in a world of norms. Each of us endeavors to be normal or else deliberately tries to avoid that state. [...] We rank our intelligence, our cholesterol level, our weight, height, sex drive, bodily dimensions along some conceptual line from subnormal to above-average. [...] There is probably no area of contemporary life in which some idea of a norm, mean, or average has not been calculated.

A norm, as it can be drawn from Davis' exemplification, is some sort of standard that has been set for various parts in life. Linked to this idea of the norm is that of the ideal. It is an objective which, as Davis explains, can never be

accomplished. However, unlike such an ideal, the concept of a norm "implies that the majority of the population must or should somehow be part of the norm" (Davis, "Constructing Normalcy" 6).

Likewise important to the concept of the norm is that of the body, which historically has been used as an element of comparison and categorization. As previously mentioned, the norm is linked to the idea of categorization and despite the existence of an ideal still implies some aspects of idealization as Mitchell and Snyder (*Narrative Prosthesis* 7) highlight:

The body is up against an abstraction with which it cannot compete because the norm is an idealized quantitative and qualitative measure that is divorced from (rather than derived from) the observation of bodies, which are inherently variable. This false model of an ideal body also fails to consider the contingencies of bodies functioning within specific social and historical contexts. It is, in other words, a body divorced of time and space—a thoroughly artificial affair.

The application of such an artificial, idealized and standardized body then most logically "creates the idea of deviance or a" deviant" body" (Davis "Normality, Power, Culture" 5). Such a deviance to normality could then be described as abnormality. The abnormal, as Davis ("Normality, Power, Culture" 9) explains, is thereby often associated with "the Other, the disabled, the native, the colonized subject".

Crucial to the establishment and fostering of the idea of normality as well as abnormality is the moment of representation. Goodley and Runswick-Cole (5) note that "the normative body is understood as being fashioned and materialized through cultural, political and social conditions". Shildrick and Price then extend this argument by adding that representation is not a single momentum, but implies repetition. More specifically they note that the dis/abled body "is constructed, not by once-and-for-all acts, nor yet by intentional processes", but that "[i]t is through [...] repetitive practice that the body as abled/disabled is both materialized and naturalized". (Shildrick and Price qtd. in Eggermann 182).

The materialization of the disabled body also finds its expression in what Stella Young terms "inspiration porn". This provocative concept describes the

objectification of disabled people for the purpose of inspiration.

Inspiration porn is an image of a person with a disability, often a kid, doing something completely ordinary - like playing, or talking, or running, or drawing a picture, or hitting a tennis ball - carrying a caption like "your excuse is invalid" or "before you quit, try". (Young, "Inspiration")

Such images, as Young ("Inspiration") explains, are displayed "so that non-disabled people can put their worries into perspective", to make them feel grateful to be lucky enough not to be in this position. Inspiration porn therefore exists for the sole purpose of making non-disabled individuals feel good about themselves. In this respect such images act as "feel-good tools" (Young, "Inspiration"). What is particularly striking about inspiration porn is the fact that it is based on the assumption that disability is something negative and the people portrayed in the images have a pitiful life. But Young ("Inspiration") proclaims: "For many of us, that is just not true."

My everyday life in which I do exactly the same things as everyone else should not inspire people, and yet I am constantly congratulated by strangers for simply existing. It happened twice last week. [...] That's the thing about those kids in the inspiration porn pictures too - they're not doing anything their peers don't do. We all learn how to use the bodies we're born with, or learn to use them in an adjusted state, whether those bodies are considered disabled or not. So that image of the kid drawing a picture with the pencil held in her mouth instead of her hand? That's just the best way for her, in her body, to do it. For her, it's normal.
(Young, "Inspiration")

Practices such as inspirational porn, which lead to the materialization and objectification of disabled individuals, can be found in various parts of society and most definitely in cultural representations. In the following section I consider different cultural productions as a context for the construction of disability.

2.2. Disability in Literature and Culture

Drawing on the idea of constructing disability and the disabled body through norms and recurring practices, it is essential to consider literature and culture as forms and spaces of representation. Generally, most people tend to believe that disability is a particularly marginal topic within literature and culture. However, Mitchell and Snyder argue that different from the perspectives of racism or

sexism, which base the critique on an underrepresentation in cultural productions, disabled people, even if mostly unnoticed, do actually have their place in literature and culture. While their role appears to be quite distinct, as will be explained later, the effects of the representation of disability are significant.

Rosemarie Garland Thomson, a noted disability studies theorist, underlines that it is not people's actual encounters with disabled people that foster their ideas about disability, but cultural representations they come to know:

The discursive construct of the disabled figure, informed more by received attitudes than by people's actual experience of disability, circulates in culture and finds a home within the conventions and codes of literary representation. (Garland Thomson 9)

Garland Thomson thereby defines literature and literary representation as the core element of the formation of societal beliefs. Nevertheless, she does not miss to mention that vice versa, literature is informed by societies' views and ideas about various subjects including disability. This interplay then reinforces its effect. "The more the literary portrayal conforms to the social stereotype, the more economical and intense is the effect; representation thus exaggerates an already highlighted physical difference." (Garland Thomson 11) Yet, those stereotypes and their literary representation "depend[s] more on probability - what people take to be accurate - than on reality", as Garland Thomson (11) highlights by referring back to Aristotle and his famous work, *Poetics*. Davis similarly underlines the strong connection between literature and the real world and the conclusions readers draw in the context of the literary genre of the novel:

I am asserting that the very structures on which the novel rests tend to be normative, ideologically emphasizing the universal quality of the central character whose normativity encourages us to identify with him or her. Furthermore, the novel's goal is to reproduce, on some level, the semiologically normative signs surrounding the reader, that paradoxically help the reader to read those signs in the world as well as the text. (Davis "Normality, Power, Culture" 9)

This assertion again reinforces Garland Thomson's argument that literary presentation forms individuals' beliefs about disability and disabled people. Yet, those images and forms of representation of disability in literature are quite

prejudiced, as already mentioned. For instance, as Emerson et al. (13) note, characters with disabilities in classic fiction all seem to have the same fate, they are either healed or killed - "a tendency that suggests authors have not been able to envision a happy future for someone with a disability." This idea of tragedy might appear to be a driving force for authors to include disabled characters, as Mitchell and Snyder argue. According to them, "the socially 'forbidden' nature of the topic has compelled many writers to deploy disability as an explicitly complicating feature of their representational universe" (Mitchell and Snyder *Narrative Prosthesis* 2). This deployment of disability as representational feature is what Mitchell and Snyder quite illustratively name "narrative prosthesis".

2.2.1. Disability as *narrative prosthesis*

Disability has its distinct function in literature, as already mentioned above. According to Mitchell and Snyder (*Narrative Prosthesis* 48) this function is twofold: "disability pervades literary narrative, first, as a stock feature of characterization and, second, as an opportunistic metaphorical device." This dependency of literature on disability is what Mitchell and Snyder term narrative prosthesis. In other words, disability acts as a literary device that lends any character peculiarity, which underlines their deviance from an unnamed norm. This peculiar position seems epoch-spanning:

Keeping in mind that the perception of disability shifts from one epoch to another, and sometimes within decades and years, we want to argue that the disabled body has consistently held down a "privileged" position with respect to thematic variations on the mind/body split. [...] disability perpetually serves as the symbolical symptom to be interpreted by discourses on the body. Whereas the "able" body has no definitional core (it poses as transparently "average" or "normal"), the disabled body surfaces as any body capable of being narrated as "outside the norm". (Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis* 49)

What is essential to this argument is again the relation between normality and abnormality, deliberately and aptly emphasized by Mitchell's and Snyder's choice of words. When writing about the historical use of disability as narrative prosthesis they reinforce that disability has been used as a "crutch upon which literary narratives lean for their representational power, disruptive potentiality,

and analytical insight". The usage of words such as prosthesis or crutch quite vividly illustrates how the authors perceive this device as a tool within literature. Simultaneously, this particular wording establishes a connection with the field of disability studies. Additionally, disability as narrative prosthesis is linked to the idea of compensation. Mitchell and Snyder (*Narrative Prosthesis* 53) underscore that "narrative prosthesis (or the dependency of literary narratives upon disability) forwards the notion that all narratives operate out of a desire to compensate for a limitation or to reign in excess".

Despite being rarely noticed, disability appears quite frequently in various cultural productions including literature and film, as already mentioned above. In the context of film, Paul Longmore (qtd. in Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis* 51) therefore critically asks, "why we screen so many images of disability and simultaneously screen them out of our minds". The answer to this question, as Longmore (qtd. in Mitchell and Snyder, *Narrative Prosthesis* 51) argues, lies in the problem that "we are trained to compartmentalize impairment as an isolated and individual condition of existence. Consequently, we rarely connect together stories of people with disabilities as evidence of a wider systemic predicament."

While Mitchell and Snyder direct their attention to the broad field of literature and culture and particularly to the genre of adult literature and film, I want to employ their approach in a further field of study, namely the genre of children's picturebooks. Longmore's argument might not be applicable identically to this particular literary genre, yet, I would argue, it should definitely not be disregarded. While it might be true that disabled characters are more likely underrepresented in picturebooks, the (scarce) existence of the disabled body in picturebooks has so far remained widely unnoticed. Before elaborating on the existence and representation of disability in children's literature and children's picturebooks quite specifically, in the following section I first intend to introduce the field of picturebook theory.

3. Theory 2: Picturebooks

3.1. Picturebook Theory

picture book

picture-book

picturebook

Likewise to the previous theoretical part on dis/ability, I start this chapter by bringing into focus the various forms of spelling of the concept dealt with - the picturebook. Similarly to dis/ability, the spelling convention of the word varies not only depending on the field or person using the term, but also on the thoughts and beliefs behind the concept of this particular kind of book. While in most dictionaries one can merely find it written as two separate components, *picture book*, the compound word *picturebook* has become the predominant spelling within literary studies and research (even though it is the only variety the spelling check marks as incorrect). In accordance with a number of other researchers including Nikolajeva and Scott, Sipe, or Lewis, I have adopted the compound spelling picturebook, as it foregrounds and recognizes the strong interplay of both, the verbal and visual components within the book. Lawrence R. Sipe, a crucial figure in picturebook research, describes this relationship between the two components as "synergetic", explaining that "what is constructed from the combination of the two sign systems is greater than the potential meanings offered by either written text or visual image in isolation" (Sipe qtd. in Serafini 10). Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (8), authors of the book *How Picturebooks Work*, likewise underline that while the terms *picture books* or *books with pictures* put the focus on one of the two elements, only *picturebook* underlines the strong text-image interaction. Different scholars have also introduced altering terms to describe the union of text and image in picturebooks. While Sipe ("Text-Picture Relationships" 97) refers to it as "synergy", Lewis (*Contemporary Picturebooks* 33) describes the "interweaving of words and pictures" as "picturebook text", Joseph Schwarcz (qtd. in Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* 6) calls it "a composite text" and

Hallberg (qtd. in Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* 6) terms the text-image entity "iconotext"; the latter of which I have decided to use in this thesis. The interaction of the verbal and visual elements in picturebooks also appears to be the key element for the definition of the genre. Perry Nodelman (vii), a pioneer in the field of picturebook studies, defines the genre rather simplistically 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". While this description seems somehow too simple and prosaic, Nodelman then adds that picturebooks "are unlike any other form of verbal and visual art" since "both the pictures and the texts in these books are different from and communicate differently from pictures and texts in other circumstances" (Nodelman vii). With this supplementary definition, even though quite vague, he underlines the specific situation picturebooks constitute through the unique combination of the visual and verbal to form the iconotext. Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 2), similarly foreground the "unlimited possibilities for interaction between word and image in a picturebook", which they compare to a hermeneutic circle. In this circle text and images always create assumptions for the other, irrespective if we start with the one or the other. The experience then creates further expectations, which leads to new and individualized experiences. "The reader turns from verbal to visual and back again, in an ever-expanding concatenation of understanding." (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* 2) This circle could be taken as an explanation for the fact that children can read or like to be read aloud the same picturebooks again and again without getting bored or tired; for them every reading adds new perspectives to the story, this is why each time they can experience a 'new' book, as Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work*, 2) explain. This perception illustrates both, the multifacetedness of the picturebook, and the complexity of this literary genre.

This complexity of the genre, even if it seems obvious nowadays, has only been recognized rather late. It was not until the end of the twentieth century that the picturebook became an object of academic study. Nevertheless, since then research into the genre has expanded and has brought forward impressive insight into the characteristics of picturebooks. (Lewis, *Contemporary*

Picturebooks 31). Some of the pioneer works in the field and also fundamental books for my research are Nikolajeva and Scott's *How Picturebooks Work*, Nodelman's *Words about Pictures: The Narrative Art of Children's Picture Books* and Lewis' *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks: Picturing Text*. They all elaborate on the complexity and variety of text-image relationships in picturebooks as well as other unique features the genre comprises. Understanding this uniqueness and multifacetedness of the genre, it becomes evident that a detailed consideration of individual characteristics is inevitable. In the following subsections I, therefore, focus on some of those unique characteristics of picturebooks and aspects of analysis within literary studies. While the uniqueness of the genre provides unlimited components to write about, due to the defined scope of this thesis, I will confine myself to a few aspects that are relevant for my analysis. The following subsections therefore focus on text-image relations, characterization, visual qualities including space, color or framing, as well as narrative perspective.

3.1.1. Text-image relations

I have asked hundreds of different people [...] to record the stories that occur to them as they experience only the pictures of picture books that do have texts; they always express frustration and arrive at a surprising variety of different stories. While my audience is less frustrated when I perform the reverse procedure [...] they do often seriously misunderstand the implications of the words they hear. (Nodelman 193)

Nodelman's experiment nicely illustrates the significance of text-image relations in picturebooks and the effects one of the two elements has on the other. While text and images share the same significance, their role within a book is quite dissimilar, as Lewis figuratively illustrates: "[P]ictures show and words tell. But of course the distinction is far from straightforward. Pictures and words are not like oil and water; they do not resist and repel one another" (Lewis, *Showing and Telling* 95). On the contrary, they work together in different ways. In order to describe those varied ways of interactions, Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 12) have established five categories of text-image relationships in picturebooks. The first category in which the visual and verbal components of a book show and tell the same narrative is termed

"symmetrical". In such books, they argue, one of the two components could be omitted without changing the meaning of the whole. Text and images are "complementary" when the verbal fills a gap in the visual or vice versa. According to Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 12), those two categories supposedly represent the vast majority of picturebooks. A third category, which is labeled "expanding" or "enhancing", includes books in which the text is dependent on the images or the opposite. In such picturebooks one component expands or enhances the other. Another category consists of picturebooks described as "counterpointing", which is characterized by the mutual dependency of the verbal and visual components. Finally, the text-image relationship can be "sylleptic" when two or more independent narratives exist within a book. Different from the previous categories, sylleptic picturebooks may also include wordless narratives.

A general categorization like Nikolajeva and Scott's classification appears particularly useful, especially for the purpose of literary analysis. Yet, the model has not only gained approval. Particularly the category of the symmetrical picturebook has been under fierce criticism. Lewis ("Showing and Telling" 96), for instance, completely disapproves of this category by stating that symmetry merely arises due to the words' guidance on interpreting the images. Similar to Nodelman's experiment, which exemplifies that neither verbal nor visual narrative can work completely independently, Lewis illustrates how an image of a boy can be interpreted to represent different actions such as hopping or sliding, only until the text explains that the boy is running. In line with Nodelman Lewis ("Showing and Telling" 96) states that the verbal and visual serve dissimilar functions: "Pictures show and words tell", he repeatedly stresses. Being aware of this criticism, I still believe certain elements of categorization are of great value, wherefore I will occasionally refer back to Nikolajeva and Scott's model in my analysis. Nevertheless, I concur with Lewis in the view that the attribution of a picturebook to merely one category is problematic. While a picturebook might appear symmetrical at the beginning of the story it can shift and probably become complementary or even counterpointing. Lewis ("Showing and Telling" 97) ascribes this potential to the genre's flexibility in word-image relationships. Consequently, as Nikolajeva and Scott (*Picturebook*

Communication 226) as well as Lewis ("Showing and Telling" 97) foreground, the model is not absolute, this is why probably all picturebooks comprise elements of different categories.

The notion that the relationship between verbal and visual is on the one hand flexible, but on the other hand particularly strong and complex is also reflected in Lewis's concept of the picturebook as an ecosystem (Lewis, *Contemporary Picturebooks* 46-60). Taking the concept of the ecosystem out of the field of biology into the picturebook context, Lewis argues, such a system, in which various parts of a field influence each other in a larger whole, exists in two forms. The first ecosystem exists within the book, in which the verbal and visual work together with a certain dependency, flexibility and complexity. Nevertheless, the second level, the environment in which the book exists, needs to be considered as well. In this "external" ecosystem the book and the reader form a relationship in the process of the reading event. The cultural context in which the book appears thereby constitutes one essential element of this relationship. Since "[l]anguage and literacy is always embedded within social and cultural contexts which have a shaping influence upon discourses and utterances", the readers' socio-cultural background and knowledge is always reflected in their interpretation and reading of a narrative (Lewis *Contemporary Picturebooks* 47). This influence occurs for the book as a whole and likewise for the reading of verbal and visual components individually.

3.1.2. Characterization

Since the main purpose of this thesis is to investigate the representation of the physically disabled child in picturebooks, characterization is one of the key elements of my analysis. Characters in picturebooks are portrayed through verbal as well as visual elements and how those two components depict the characters' physical appearance, speech, attitude and actions. According to Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 82) pictures are typically more concerned with the portrayal of characters' external features and physical appearance, whereas words allow for the portrayal of characters' psychological

conditions and emotions. However, as we have seen in the discussion on text-image interaction, the verbal and visual can also provide differing or complementary information and thereby challenge the readers; being confronted with such differing information, the readers are invited to draw their own conclusions about the characters. Compared to other narrative genres, "picturebooks tend to be plot-oriented rather than character-oriented. Further, the plot itself is often too limited to allow much development, which means that most characters are static rather than dynamic, and flat rather than round" (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* 82-83). Dynamic characters, as Nikolajeva (158) explains, change in the course of the story, whereas static characters remain the same. As for the distinction between flat and round characters, the latter type possesses various character traits and the readers get to know the character quite well throughout the story, whereas flat characters are merely two-dimensional, poorly developed. Picturebook characters' features, which find their expression on the verbal as well as the visual level, can be conveyed, for instance, through foregrounding, comparison, repetition, character relationships, or hints, from which the readers must conclude and interpret for themselves (Nikolajeva 160). Moreover, characterization occurs on various, probably more subtle levels, such as facial and bodily expressions, the placement of the characters on the page, the colors used to portray individuals and their surroundings, as well as the setting of the story and individual scenes. Many of those aspects are concerned with visual qualities of images, which are subject to certain conventions as will be discussed in the following section.

3.1.3. Visual qualities

One of the reasons for children's fascination with picturebooks is most likely the fact that compared to text, children "are able to interpret visual images without ever having been specifically taught to do so" (Nodelman 6). Quite logically, this might lead one to the conclusion that the visual is easier to understand than the verbal. Even though this is certainly not true, there appears to be a huge difference in the reception of text and images. Whereas the complexity and

enormous power of the verbal language seems obvious to most people, the potential of the visual system is frequently underestimated. Yet, similar to a sentence that can be stated in various tones (for instance sadly or angrily), images can take diverse tones, which all have different effects on the viewer, as Nodelman (41) emphasizes. Since the visual components play such a vital role in picturebooks, various individuals have devoted themselves to the study of images in picturebooks. Two particularly relevant works in this respect are *Image Analysis in Children's Picture Books* by Clare Painter, Jim Martin and Len Unsworth as well as William Moebius' "Picturebook Codes". In both texts the researchers identify a variety of elements that influence the tone of an image, including color, line, space or framing. Those various aspects contribute to an image's composition. Gillian Rose, another leading figure in visual analysis, thus terms the reading of images 'compositional interpretation'. Like Rose I use the term compositional interpretation for my approach, as it accurately illustrates the process of analysis. While compositional interpretation as a tool for the analysis of images is highly practical, it would be misleading to assume that graphic codes can be applied like strict rules; most definitely one graphic choice does not only have one, but several underlying meanings. In this respect, Moebius (315-16) foregrounds that images must always be viewed and interpreted in the context of the story in which they occur; the same color applied in two different images in different picturebooks can have similar but also quite contrary meaning.

Color in picturebooks is generally considered one of the elements with the greatest impact on the viewer, and, according to Painter et al (35), "probably the most instant bonding effect created by a picture book". Picturebook artists and illustrators use color to create certain effects. Those effects, according to Painter et al. (35) are threefold: Firstly, colors are used to refer to actual elements or objects, such as green for grass or white for snow. Secondly, the employment of colors can function for the purpose of foregrounding, linking, or contrasting certain objects or characters, but also create repetition. Thirdly, colors can exert the effect of creating a certain mood or arousing a special feeling in the viewer. Lawrence R. Sipe ("Aesthetic Object", 28) seconds this when he states that "[m]ost artists' choices are [...] based not on a naturalistic

rendering of objects, but on the emotional effects the colors engender. Changes in color can be signs of changing mood". Viewers, according to Sipe ("Aesthetic Object" 28), respond to colors by intuition and cultural and social conventions they have learned. While some colors have specific cultural connotations and meanings - black is considered the color of mourning in many cultures, whereas others perceive white as the color denoting grief - there still appear to exist some trans-cultural associations with certain colors (Sipe, "Aesthetic Object" 28, Painter et al. 35). Sipe ("Aesthetic Object" 28) stresses that there tends to be a connection between the color blue and the states of serenity, melancholy, detachment or calmness, but also between yellow and the feeling of happiness. A variation in the tone of a color likewise affects the viewer's perception, as Molly Bang (104 - 110) foregrounds. According to her (Bang 68), dark colors tend to be linked to the feeling of fear, whereas light colors or white evoke feelings of safety. Moebius (319) adds that particularly bright colors often reflect exhilaration, excitement and discovery.

Space constitutes a further graphic element that greatly influences the reading of images and thereby adds to the story's meaning. Space, which in a picturebook is confined to a double page, includes several different aspects such as the size of elements or their position on the page; applied differently, they convey altering meaning. Moebius (316-317), for instance, defines height as one crucial aspect. "Height on the page may be an indication of an ecstatic condition", whereas "[b]eing low on the page is often by contrast a signal of low spirits or of unfavorable social status" (Moebius 316-317). Sipe ("Aesthetic Object" 30) seconds this argument by stating that the upper half of an image indicates freedom and happiness, whereas the lower half suggests sadness or threat. Similar to a low position, a character is "understood to possess fewer advantages" if he or she is depicted on the margin or in the distance, through reduction in size (Moebius 317). In contrast, characters depicted in the center of an illustration are given greater importance (Sipe, "Aesthetic Object" 30); due to this prominent position they appear to be stronger and gifted with personal advantages. The placement of a character or object on either the right or left-hand side of a double page is of similar importance. Moebius (317) explains, "[a] character shown on the left page is likely to be in a more secure, albeit

potentially confined space than one shown on the right, who is likely to be moving into a situation of risk or adventure."

Another, sometimes overlooked graphic code is framing, which in its variety of applications has various effects. Firstly, framing can simply be used to divide areas and group information (Kress and van Leeuwen 182, Serafini 22), whereby they intend to guide the reader's view to focus on particular elements more than on others, or see them as separate. Secondly, framing can be used as an element to reinforce or diminish the distinction between reality and fiction. In this respect Sipe ("Aesthetic Object" 34) notes, "[b]ecause the frame is the borderline between the illusion of the illustration and the reality of the physical page [...], breaking the frame also blurs the distinction between illusion and reality". An image which covers a complete doublespread without any margin or frame is termed *full bleed* (Sipe, "Aesthetic Object" 33) or *unbound* (Painter et al. 103). Painter et al. (103-104) explain, "[w]here an image is unbound, there is in effect no boundary (other than the page edge) between the world of the child reader and the depicted story world".

3.1.4. Narrative Perspective

The narrative perspective in picturebooks presents a particularly interesting challenge (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* 117). This challenge again results from the dual system of verbal and visual representation, both contributing an individual narrative perspective. Similar to Lewis, who distinguishes between showing and telling, Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 117-118) explain that "narratology makes an essential distinction between point of view ("who sees") and narrative voice ("who speaks")." They suggest that the words in a picturebook tend to communicate the narrative voice, whereas the illustrations communicate the visual point of view. The verbal narrative voice can be nonfocalized, in the form of an omniscient narrator, externally (through one character's perspective), as well as internally focalized (offering insight into a character's inner self); the visual narrative, according to Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 118),

however, lacks the ability of internal focalization since a character's thoughts and feelings can only be conveyed indirectly through graphic features such as color, line, tone or space; thereby, Nikolajeva and Scott seem to suggest that thoughts and feelings are exclusively verbal. Not supporting this argument, I believe that images as visual texts can also directly convey a character's inner self by means of their graphic codes and conventions. Moreover, the narrative voice can be, and, according to Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 119), traditionally is didactic, whereas pictures can again solely be indirectly didactic through graphic choices. They argue that the didactic undertone of the verbal arises from the fact that picturebooks are generally written by an adult, who therefore imposes himself or herself on the narrator. Most often the narrator takes the form of a third-person narrator, however, as Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 119; 132) point out, more and more picturebooks feature a first-person child narrator; the intention is to convey a sense of closeness to the child reader and facilitate identification with the narrating character. While a first-person perspective in the imagery would mean that the narrating character itself is not depicted in the pictures, as it is his or her perspective that is portrayed, other strategies are employed in picturebooks to establish a first-person perspective; the viewer can either be positioned behind the narrating character (see him or her from behind), or share their conceptual point of view (see adults and other tall characters or objects from below) (Nicolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* 125). With regard to the representation of disability, the point of view of the pictures and the narrative perspective of the written text appear particularly relevant; there is an immense difference whether it is the disabled child character himself or herself who tells us his or her story, or an external, omniscient narrator voice; the latter of which, I would suggest, most likely provides a more distant, but probably also controvertible perspective, whereas the disabled child narrator presents us with a more intimate narration, which might be regarded as unassailable truth.

3.2. Previous Studies on Dis/ability in Picturebooks

[P]ositive attitudes towards disability need to start young. From an early age, children need to recognise that disability is not something strange or frightening, but just a natural part of life. (Strick, "Disabled Heroes")

The book as a medium of communication thereby plays a key role in fostering non-disabled children's beliefs about disability and disabled people. An early study by Monson and Shurtleff from 1979 even suggests the book to be the most powerful medium to influence children's attitudes towards disability. Their findings assume that children who read inclusive books or have them read aloud to them show the most positive attitudes towards people with disability. While one might be tempted to believe that picturebooks including disabled characters are consequently primarily valuable for non-disabled children, this is certainly not the case. As Alexandra Strick ("Reflecting Reality?") points out, inclusive picturebooks are not only essential for non-disabled children, but likewise for children who are disabled; disabled children not only need to feel equally included, but most importantly have the right to see themselves represented in the books they read. At the same time, Strick ("Reflecting Reality?") mentions another crucial point when critically asking the question whether or not it is children's books' duty to reflect real life and represent the society children experience in their everyday life.

In 'real life', as many as one in 10 children are [sic!] disabled and in the typical classroom one in five has some form of special educational need. The number of disabled children who appear in children's books does not even come close to reflecting these figures.

Those insights pose substantial reasons for the increase of researchers' interest in the intersection between children's literature and disability studies, which has been noted in the last two decades. Even though rather late, beginning only sporadically around the end of the 1970's, various researchers from different fields have started to investigate the representation of disability and disabled characters in children's literature - at this time, other areas of discrimination such as race or gender have already become crucial issues in this research domain. Concomitant with a growing research interest in disability and children's literature, the number of disabled characters in picturebooks has

moderately increased (Ayala, Blaska). Nevertheless, the majority of researchers (Dychess et al., Koc et al., Ayala, Beckett et al.) agree that there is still a general underrepresentation of disabled characters, both in historical and contemporary children's picturebooks. While a rise in the representation of disability could generally be considered valuable, some researchers stress the need for caution. For instance, Myers and Bersani (1) criticize that "the dearth creates a tendency to uncritically promote any books with messages about disability". Similarly, Baskin and Harris (1977 ctd. in Beckett et al. 474), argue that "literary critics have not always been sufficiently rigorous in their critique of the portrayal of disability in children's books because of an assumption that any book that includes a disabled character serves an important social goal". At the same time, Strick ("Disabled Heroes") expressly underlines the factor of quality, noting that not every book featuring a disabled character can automatically be considered a valuable book. According to Strick ("Disabled Heroes"), "[w]e don't just need more books about disability, we also need books which include disabled people as heroes and heroines alongside the rest of the book's characters without any reference to the fact that they happen to be disabled". Strick thereby raises awareness to the fact that it is not books *about* disability, but books *with* disabled characters what is needed. Furthermore, Strick points out that the manner of representation of disabled characters has gained particular attention within the literary study of picturebooks and disability. While the number of studies on disability in children's picturebook is still relatively scarce, as already mentioned above, a number of researchers have investigated the portrayal of disability and disabled characters in contemporary as well as historical books. However, the fact that disability as an area of research is a relatively new terrain becomes evident in the diversity of approaches used among the existing studies.

One of the few studies investigating disability in early children's literature has been conducted by Davidson, Woodill and Bredberg. They look at the topic from a historical perspective by examining the portrayal of physical and mental disability in a selection of 19th century British children's literature. Considering the depiction of disabled characters as reflection of societal beliefs and norms at that time, they conclude that in the 19th century "[t]he disabled person was

regarded as set apart from the rest of society by his or her disability" (Davidson, Woodill and Bredberg 33). From the very limited number of disabled characters Davidson, Woodill and Bredberg detected in the variety of children's picturebooks published between 1800 and 1900, the range of representations of disabled individuals was found to be particularly narrow. Generally, they conclude that early children's literature in Britain portrays disabled characters in a particularly simplistic way, reducing disability to being either a blessing or a burden. More specifically, the study reveals that the involvement of disabled characters in 19th century children's books functioned predominately through the application of compensation strategies (Davidson, Woodill and Bredberg 43); regardless of the type of disability, disabled characters were found to be portrayed as either divine figures, individuals possessing supernatural abilities, or characters who are described as being 'innocent' or 'blessed' (Davidson, Woodill and Bredberg. 39). Those compensation strategies, as I would argue, could be compared to Mitchell and Snyder's concept of the narrative prosthesis, which has been discussed earlier. Additionally to such compensation strategies, the characterizations in the early literature examined by Davidson, Woodill and Bredberg are mostly accompanied by a didactic or moral undertone. Teaching didactics or moral values was, according to them (Davidson, Woodill and Bredberg 39), the prime purpose of early children's literature. Lois Keith, who also studied 19th and early 20th century fiction for girls, seconds this argument of morality. She underlines that the goal of 'classic' children's literature was predominately to convey moral messages by teaching children religious ideas about duty and guilt.

The novel of the day reinforced the belief that boys should be active and strong, girls must be tamed in order to render them fit for marriage, disability could be a punishment for inappropriate behaviour, and illness could be overcome with sufficient will or good thoughts. (Keith 239).

Instead of attributing disability to characters, it was employed thematically, most commonly in the form of punishment and cure stories, as Keith notes. In the context of disability and morality, Santiago Solis, who studied the messages picturebooks send about disability, has a clear stance. In his article, "The Disabilitymaking Factory: Manufacturing 'Differences' through Children's Books" Solis argues, "disability is not an arbitrary or conventional corporeal element, and [...] nothing is more damaging than the presentation of disability as

including a moralistic element". Yet, the relationship between morality and disability appears to be noticeable, as he supports with his research. Solis' complete sample of ten picturebooks featuring a disabled person or animal, published between 2000 and 2004, "notably conceptualize[s] disability in relation to moral righteousness" (Solis). This therefore reveals that the aspect of morality is not merely a matter of the past, but must still be considered an issue in contemporary picturebooks.

Another relatively early study dates back to 1999, where Emiliano Ayala studied 59 books published between 1974 and 1996 "to determine their literary quality and the extent to which the story line and characters mirror the educational and demographic trends in our society" (Ayala 103). Methodologically, Ayala uses literature reviews of the selected books in order to compare them in respect of 15 content areas including the disability portrayed, the gender and ethnicity of the characters, the story setting, or the existence of a cultural emphasis. Although this method, due to a simplistic categorization, could be criticized to be rather vague, it provides a quantitative comparison of a number of aspects. Ayala's (109) results reveal a general increase not only in the number of books being published but also in the variety of genres; more recently published books show greater diversity including more fiction, but also non-fiction such as biographies, or educational books. Another aspect highlighted in the results of Ayala's study is the roles assigned to the characters in the stories:

The results of this research indicate that a majority (63%) of the literature continues to categorize the protagonist as a hero, typified as the "brave little soul." Interestingly, only 10% of the books reviewed characterize the individual with a disability in the role of victim or outcast while only one book portrayed the main character as being somewhat villainous. (Ayala 111)

This could be read as underlining Davison et al.'s insight that disability is often used in terms of compensation strategies; disabled characters either need to be particularly brave or pitiable. Another aspect within Ayala's study, which is not mentioned by Davison et al., is the diversity of disabilities portrayed. In this respect, Ayala (102) notes an increase in the variety of disabilities represented. Whereas historically the most frequent disability portrayed was either visual impairments or disabilities of orthopedic nature, more recent picturebooks include a greater variety (Ayala 109-110). In the sample books from 1989 to

1996, Ayala (110) did not only find characters with visual or orthopedic disabilities, but also "individuals with multiple disabilities (14%) as well as more recently recognized disabilities including learning disabilities (12%), medical concerns including AIDS, asthma, and leukemia (12%), autism (5%) and attention deficit disorder (5%)".

Dyches, Prater and Jenson's study from 2006, however, challenges Ayala's findings. In their study Dyches et al. focus on the famous Caldecott Medal and Honor books published between 1938 and 2005. They found that from those 276 books that have received a Caldecott medal merely a scarce total of 11 picturebooks featured a disabled character in a prominent role; this finding reveals that the number of award-winning books with disabled characters is extremely low and that an increase, such as noted by Ayala, cannot be seen among Caldecott medal winners. Moreover, Ayala's study might stand in contradiction to Dyches et al.'s findings concerning the representation of different disabilities. In contrast to Ayala, Dyches et al. record a severe lack of diversity in the portrayal of disabilities.

The disabilities portrayed in these books are not necessarily the types children will encounter in their daily lives at school and in the community. The majority of school-aged children with disabilities have specific learning disabilities; however, not one of the books we reviewed included a character with a learning disability. Similarly, the majority of preschoolers with disabilities have speech or language impairments, and this disability was not portrayed in any of the books we reviewed. Of the four disabilities that were portrayed (orthopedic impairments, autism, mental retardation [sic], and visual impairments), only mental retardation [sic!] is considered to be a high incidence disability. (Dyches et al. 13)

The finding that orthopedic disabilities are the most commonly portrayed disabilities is additionally reinforced by a very recent study published in 2015, which was conducted by Melanie Koss. Koss analyzed 455 books published in 2012 for different aspects of diversity including race, gender and disability. Using content analysis as method for her study, Koss (35) identifies different categories for each area. As for the analysis on disability, she divides the category into three types comprising physical, emotional and cognitive disability. Her analysis reveals that the first category, physical disability, was with 44% by far the largest (Koss 36). However, she cautiously underlines that this is mostly true due to the inclusion of characters wearing glasses within this

category - without those characters, the percentage drops to 9%, which still represents the largest part. Cognitive disability was only found in two books, while emotional disability was located in none of the picturebooks (Koss 36). Koss (38) therefore concludes that "Ableism is still apparent in contemporary picturebooks" and that "children who read current picturebooks predominantly see able-bodied people unless they are old and need mobility assistance; wear glasses [...] or are pirates".

Another quite recent study conducted by Beckett, Ellison, Barrett and Shah focuses on the representation of different disabilities. Their large sample of picturebooks, published between 1990 and 2010, comprises one hundred texts for primary school age groups which either feature disabled characters or have disability-related themes. In their analysis they examined the extent to which the books portray disability from the perspective of the social model of disability and in which way disability is portrayed positively or negatively. Generally, they discovered a number of negative as well as positive portrayals. As for the problematic aspects, they found that roughly one third of the books still contained discriminatory language (379). However, I suggest treating this result with caution, since Beckett et al.'s evaluation appears quite rigorous; in their evaluation (Beckett et al. 379) they put words such as 'special', 'different', 'handicapped', or 'dwarf' on the same level, labeling them all equally discriminatory, whereas I would argue that the latter are far more offensive. Moreover, they rated the term 'disabled people' as negative, insisting instead on the usage of 'people with disabilities'. Yet, as discussed earlier, both expressions are regarded emancipatory by different groups of people. Other problematic instances Beckett et al. (378-382) analyzed were the portrayal of disability as an individual tragedy (33 books), unrealistic "Happy ever after" endings (8 books), "A lesson to us all" themes (8 books), or the depiction of disabled people as objects of curiosity (7 books). Nevertheless, they also found a number of positive portrayals, which Beckett et al. (382) grouped into two categories: "'disability as part of diversity' (40 books) and 'anti-disablist' (15 books)". Finally, Beckett et al. conclude that negative stereotypes prevail. As a consequence they postulate that more still needs to be done with regard to

"providing non-disabled children with accurate information about the lives of disabled people" (Beckett et al. 374).

Focusing on the relationship between disabled and non-disabled individuals, Koc, Koc and Ozdemir conducted a study with a particularly distinct research interest. In their analysis of 73 picturebooks published between 1980 and 2003 Koc et al. focus on the relationship between characters with and without physical and sensory impairments. Their analysis reveals eleven different relationship categories ranging between the three broader types of positive, neutral to negative portrayals. From those categories, they found that the equal body as part of the positive category represents the largest part with 76% (Koc et al. 155). Nevertheless, they also found a number of instances with negative stereotypical representations such as "the lonely or unhappy child" or "the rejected person", but also a variety of what they call neutral depictions, including "the different one and the curious observers" (Koc et al. 151-155). While their research focus on the relationship between disabled and non-disabled characters seems very interesting, I consider their categorization problematic. Their division into positive, negative and neutral depictions, the latter of which I would doubt exists, is static and leaves little room for critical reflection. Moreover, I believe it is impossible to assign a whole book to a single category, as I will further explain in my analysis.

Extending those studies presented above, some researchers have delved into the subject of disability in picturebooks, looking at the topic from yet another angle. McGrail and Rieger, for instance, focus on humor in children's literature with disability and argue that the study of humor should not be neglected in the context of picturebook research and disability. From their study they conclude that while the majority of sample books feature inclusive humor, exclusive humor, which is based on stereotypes and prejudices, can still be found (McGrail and Rieger 298-299). In another quite different research project, Nelson and Nelson investigate the "Gendering and Racialization of 'Disability' within Newbery Award-Winning Books". Their study, which is working at the intersection of picturebook research, disability, gender, as well as postcolonial studies, concludes that within the sample of award-winning books from 1922 to

2012 disabled characters are portrayed according to traditional gender roles, reiterating "an active-masculine/passive-feminine dichotomization" (Nelson and Nelson, 73). Moreover, the study found that "[w]ith the notable exception of books in which the majority of characters are depicted as non-white, racialized characters with impairments most often appear as unnamed background characters and in ways that accord with the stereotype of a villain" (Nelson and Nelson, 95-96).

Trying to draw some general conclusions from those studies reviewed, it can be noted that a number of dissimilarities among the studies occur. While such dissimilarities are common, I believe that a crucial cause for the differences in results among the studies is the variety of approaches and methods used by different researchers. As already implied earlier, the existing studies on disability in children's literature, and picturebooks in particular, are very diverse, making use of various different research methods, which quite often are not sufficiently elucidated and outlined; this as well might be an indication of the fact that no clear methodological study approaches exist within this research field, which also poses a challenge for my analysis of the selected picturebooks. Moreover, comparisons are complicated due to the often quite explicit research foci such as in McGrail and Rieger's or Nelson and Nelson's studies. This diversity, although it makes the studies particularly interesting, limits the comparability among them.

Despite the diversity of approaches and consequently of the results, some general tendencies in the representation of disability and the disabled body could be filtered from the reviewed studies. Historically, the common representation of disabled characters appears to have occurred through the use of compensation strategies providing disabled figures with, for instance, superhuman or divine characteristics; those representations were often accompanied by a moral undertone, a strategy that can still be found in today's picturebooks. Despite the strides that have been made Strick, Dyches et al. or Koc et al. agree that there is still an underrepresentation of disability in contemporary children's books. At the same time, by limiting disability to orthopedic impairments, such as noted by Dyches et al. or Koss, it might be

argued that picturebook authors and artists fail at authentically incorporating the broad diversity of disability that exists in contemporary society. By stressing the need for the reflection of real-life situations, Strick or Beckett et al. highlight the aspect of authenticity. As a result of this struggle for authentic and realistic representations of disabled characters, researchers, teachers or activists (Brittain, Bland and Gann, Blaska, Myers and Bersani) have created a number of lists with guidelines on how to appropriately portray disabled individuals in children's picturebooks. In the following section I give an overview of some of those existing criteria and discuss their relevance. Thereby, I aim to illustrate in which ways such guidelines can be regarded as either a resource or a restraint.

3.3. Criteria for Inclusive Picturebooks?

What makes a good inclusive picturebook? A question a great number of people, including myself, appear to have asked themselves while exploring the range of picturebooks that depict disabled characters and their lives - and I again deliberately do not use the phrase picturebooks *about* disability since documentary books that discuss disability are not the genre I intend to investigate. Yet, trying to answer the question what features make a book successfully inclusive seems to issue a challenge to many people; a challenge presumably comparable to the difficulty of providing a definition of disability or ability. Yet, similar to the issue concerning definitions, various individuals and institutions have tried to come up with lists and criteria for evaluating the quality of inclusive picturebooks and their representation of disability. The Anti-Defamation League, for instance, provides guidelines for "Evaluating Children's Books that Address Disability", while Joan K. Blaska establishes "Ten Criteria for Reviewing Books with Characters with Disabilities", or Carol Bland and Linda Gann give "Guidelines for Selecting Inclusive Picture Books". Other researchers have focused on negative portrayals of characters with disability and aim to assist in detecting those; Chloë Myers and Hank Bersani offer "Ten Quick Ways to Analyze Children's Books for Ableism" and Isabel Brittain identifies "The Six Pitfalls of Disability Fiction". Even though those five lists probably merely constitute a part of the criteria available, they provide insight

into what different people consider appropriate and inappropriate when it comes to the representation of disabled characters in literature. While I consider such criteria valuable points of reference for reflecting on ways of representation, the question mark in the heading of this section already reveals my reservations. This skepticism arises most importantly from the fact that most of the guidelines are inherently prescriptive and consequently often appear highly simplistic. Nevertheless, it needs to be mentioned that while some criteria lists are considerably short and might appear oversimplified, others, and I have to mention Myer's and Bersani's guidelines at this point, are particularly elaborate. Myers and Bersani present a very detailed argumentation in which they address a broad spectrum of relevant issues; in this argumentation they do not simply enumerate criteria, but invite the readers to critically investigate the literature. Yet, studying the abundance of criteria existing around the subject of disability in children's picturebooks, I have started to question their existence and overall usefulness. Is it possible to answer a few questions with either yes or no to evaluate a book on such a profound and complex subject as disability? Although I doubt it, I believe it is crucial to present some of those guidelines and criteria in order to discuss them in the light of what has been presented so far from the field of picturebook research and disability studies. Moreover, I would like to use those guidelines for my own purpose and take them as a starting point for my critical analysis of the selected picturebooks. By stipulating rules, such criteria lists are a valuable basis for critically analyzing which choices picturebook authors and illustrators have made concerning the portrayal of disabled characters. Since it would be repetitive to recite or quote all the existing lists, due to the fact that they often contain the same or at least similar aspects, I aim to review the points in which they overlap or differ.

The most frequently mentioned issue on such criteria lists is the aspect of realism and accuracy. Brittain, for instance, mentions that one of the main pitfalls of disability fiction is the inaccurate portrayal of a certain disability. In the same respect, Bland and Gann (256) foreground that an appropriate portrayal of disability requires an accurate, balanced representation of disabled individuals, which for them means that "the characters in inclusive picture books must be believable and relatable to young children, which suggests characters

that are human, not animals" (Bland and Gann 256). Even though this thesis is exclusively concerned with the portrayal of the physically disabled human body, I would challenge Bland and Gann's claim and argue in accordance with Juliet Markowsky (460), who foregrounds that children can identify with anthropomorphized animals particularly well. Blaska also stresses the importance of realistic representations, as he notes that children need to gain an accurate perception of different disabilities. Therefore the Anti-Defamation league (4) postulates the importance of illustrating not only the characters but also adaptive equipment in an accurate manner. In the context of realism, Myers and Bersani address the use of photographs, which are mostly seen in a particularly strong relation to reality. For them the use of photographs is a delicate issue.

Photographs also may deal with disability in a more clinical rather than aesthetic way, creating distance rather than empathy with a character with disability. Use of artistic illustrations, on the other hand, may result in an aesthetically satisfying story open to questioning. (Myers and Bersani 2)

Consequently, since photographs are likely to be seen as presenting indisputable facts, Myers and Bersani ask picturebook readers to scrutinize books using photographs even more closely. However, I would argue that this criticism needs to be taken with caution. During my research I have come across a number of books featuring photographs, one of which is Ellen B. Senisi's *All Kinds of Friends, Even Green!*. This picturebook tells the story of the 7-year old Moses, who has spina bifida and sacral agenesis and in contrast to Myers and Bersani's argument this book is one that I would consider not only well reflected but also creative and aesthetically satisfying. Moses' story is told with images that seem clearly artistic in their composition and selection; they present the viewer with a great variety of perspectives either on the boy himself or from his point of view. At the same time, *All Kinds of Friends, Even Green!* gives the young disabled boy a voice by making him the narrator of the story, which, as I will later explain, is particularly empowering.

Another aspect that reappears in different criteria lists and generally reaches consensus is character development. Bland and Gann (256) state that "[c]haracters with disabilities should be thoughtfully portrayed as whole, multidimensional, and believable, while also contributing to the plot". The Anti-

Defamation League (2) similarly highlights the importance of representing disabled individuals as "developed characters with distinct lives and personalities" and "with the full human range of character traits". Moreover, Myers and Bersani deem the multidimensionality of characters vitally important. They raise awareness of the development of disabled characters by asking readers to

[a]ssess the credibility and three-dimensionality of characters with disabilities. Is their emotional, mental, or physical disability portrayed as part of a full life, rather than something that is all-consuming, to be pitied, or overcome? Are people with disabilities only present as literary devices to convey conflicting classic binaries: power or impotence, favor or rejection, good or evil, inner struggle or enlightenment, suffering or cure? (Myers and Bersani 3)

Language appears to be similarly important. Bland and Gann (258), for instance, stress the significance of "Honest, Positive, Respectful, and Age-appropriate Language". At the same time, Meyers and Bersani (3) call on readers to look for words that limit our view of disabled individuals - examples provided are verbs such as "suffer from", adjectives like "wheelchair-bound" and "poor" or nouns such as "victim". Likely, the Anti-Defamation League (2) warns of books that "utilize condescending or pejorative language (e.g. special, crazy, sick [...])" and underlines the importance of using person first language. The use of "language which stresses person first, disability second philosophy" is also underlined by Blaska and Meyers and Bersani. While there appears to be agreement on the use of person first language among the authors of those guidelines and criteria lists, I want to refer back to the discussion of language use in the context of disability studies. While different institutions have published guidelines that prescribe identity-first language, other disabled individuals such as the activist Stella Young do not see the problem in the placement of the word "disability", but in the general language use:

Putting an end to calling each other "retards" and "spastics", and generally using disability as a shortcut for something we hate, is one thing. Quibbling over whether we say people with disability or disabled people is quite another. (Young, "Reporting")

Consequently, I would argue that it is debatable whether the use of identity-first language is a prerequisite for a good inclusive picturebook and shift the focus on the general sensitivity of a picturebook author's language choice.

Similar to the intention of using person first language, Bland and Gann (258) as well as Meyers and Bersani foreground that a character's disability should not be the main focus of the story. Meyers and Bersani (4) ask their readers to go through picturebooks by taking the following questions into consideration:

Do we see the people beyond their disability? Are people with disabilities depicted as having lifestyles, cultures, and personalities? Do we learn anything about daily living challenges (difficulties associated with poverty, self-determination, transportation, education, housing, caregivers) regularly encountered by people with disabilities or their problems (loneliness, ridicule, excessive attention) experienced as a result of lack of societal acceptance?

By asking those questions Myers and Bersani focus on different aspects of disabled people's lives; besides the portrayal of lifestyles, they mention the representation of the challenges disabled people face in our disabling society. While Blaska foregrounds the importance of emphasizing success of disabled characters, she also stresses that failure should likewise be depicted. However, portraying challenges and failure should not result in pity, as the Anti-Defamation League (2) notes; they warn of recovery or cure stories.

As for the aspect of dependency, the Anti-Defamation League (2) warns of books that "[n]ever show people with disabilities as independent, but rather depict them as overly helpless and in need of excessive support and assistance from people without disabilities in order to lead a functional life." Likewise, Myers and Bersani (4) address the roles of disabled characters in society, and advise against the depiction of dependent individuals. Concerning the roles disabled characters play in books, the Anti-Defamation League (3) stresses the importance of representing disabled individuals in active roles and portraying them as independent and strong. Similarly, Meyers and Bersani (4) underline how crucial it is for children to see diverse heroes in picturebooks and therefore demand to critically analyze the roles disabled characters play in stories. While heroes are often different in a particular way, this difference is exclusively positive. Even though Meyers and Bersani promote the depiction of disabled heroes, they raise awareness for the fact that disabled characters and their differences are sometimes utilized as literary device (Myers and Bersani 2).

Brittain terms this strategy "second fiddle" phenomenon. The second fiddle phenomenon, which is similar to the idea of the narrative prosthesis, occurs when

[t]he character with an impairment is neither the central character within the narrative nor fully developed, merely serving to bring the central character/s to a better understanding of themselves or disability. (Brittain)

Generally, the depiction of disabled characters as different or extra-ordinary, either in a positive or negative way, has been identified as a crucial point in almost all of the guidelines. As for the negative stereotypes, Myers and Bersani (3) question whether the disabled characters "have to exhibit extraordinary qualities or superhuman powers in order to gain acceptance and approval?" Similarly, Blaska disapproves of the depiction of disabled characters as superhuman or subhuman. Seeing disabled individuals' ordinary actions as heroic, which could be related to Young's idea of inspiration porn, is moreover criticized by the Anti-Defamation League (2). Instead of focusing on differences, which promotes an attitude of alienation and reinforces the gap between "us" and "them" (Brittain), disabled characters should be depicted as being more similar than different from non-disabled characters (Anti-Defamation League 2).

Finally, Myers and Bersani (4) name the author's or illustrator's background as a criterion for the quality of an inclusive picturebook. They stress that "[t]he majority of U.S. children's books continue to be written by white, able-bodied, middle class authors, resulting in the predominance of an illusory, single perspective." Criticizing this unilateral perspective, they promote diversity on the part of picturebook artists and intend to raise awareness among the readers of picturebooks. While I believe that a lack of diversity among picturebook artists, as mentioned by Myers and Bersani, can definitely be criticized, I doubt that there is a direct link between an artist's background and the quality of an inclusive picturebook. Thus, I will not include this criterion in my analysis.

Drawing from the studies reviewed in the previous subchapter as well as the criteria discussed in this section, the aspects of appropriateness as well as authenticity have been identified as two particularly important features concerning the representation of disabled characters and their lives. In the

following section, which focuses on the analysis of the selected picturebooks, some of these criteria will be discussed. However, as already mentioned above, I do not wish to simply adopt the arguments presented in the criteria lists, but use them as a starting point for a critical reflection.

4. Analysis

In this section of my thesis I present an analysis of a sample of picturebooks read in the light of what has been discussed so far concerning the two fields of study - picturebook theory and disability studies. In the following analysis I aim to explore the strategies picturebook artists employ to portray physical disability and in particular, physically disabled child characters. Therefore, I closely consider and analyze four aspects of representation, including the outward appearance of the protagonists, the language used in the books, the roles and relationships among the characters, as well as the space and environment of the stories told. Before discussing my examination, I will briefly introduce the methods and tools of analysis. Consequently, in the following subsection I do not only present the four books chosen, but also elaborate on some methodological as well as terminological considerations.

4.1. Methods and Tools

The sample of books I have chosen to include in this analysis comprises the following four picturebooks:

- *Just Because* by Rebecca Elliott, 2010
- *Susan Laughs* by Jeanne Willis and Tony Ross, 1999
- *The Five of Us* by Quentin Blake, 2014
- *Zoom!* by Robert Munsch and Michael Martchenko, 2001

While these books deal with different topics and tell unique stories, they share one common feature; each of the selected picturebooks has a physically disabled child character in a prominent role, either as protagonist or as one of the central characters within the book. In *Susan Laughs*, the physically disabled child Susan is the only main character; throughout the book the readers gain an insight into the girl's everyday life. *Zoom!* features Laretta as child protagonist; this disabled girl is in search of a new and, most importantly, fast wheelchair. In contrast to those two books, *Just Because* presents two main characters; the physically disabled character Clemmie and her little brother, who tells us about

his sister and their experiences. Again different from those books, *The Five of Us* features five disabled child characters going on an outing to the countryside; Mario, one of those five children, is physically disabled, hence, I will focus mainly on him in my analysis. The prominent role of the disabled character was crucial to me since characters in picturebooks are commonly only further developed and portrayed in greater detail if they hold a central position; since my objective is to analyze character portrayal, this appears crucial.

With my research I intend to not only build on, but enlarge upon previous research on disability in picturebooks, which mainly focused on the general occurrence of disabled characters in a sample of books. My aim is to analyze the representation of the disabled child's body in the selected picturebooks with focus on physical disability. While the limitation to this specific type of disability might appear straightforward, one has to bear in mind the diversity of disabilities; like any kind of disability, physical disability takes various forms and is distinct for every individual person. Embracing this diversity, but limiting it for the purpose of my research, I decided to focus on characters with mobility impairment. Since this is a particularly visible form of impairment, the transformation of this variation of the body, which might deviate from what is considered "normal" within our society, into the illustrations of a picturebook thereby seems especially interesting to me. Thus, I try to focus, inter alia, on the visual strategies picturebook artists use to portray various physical impairments.

Two further criteria for the selection of these four picturebooks include the year of publication of the books and their availability. The picturebooks within this sample all have been published since the mid 90's. This time span of roughly twenty years has been chosen for three reasons. Firstly, since the middle of the 1990's disability studies have started to evolve as an academic discipline. Secondly, the area of picturebook research has flourished greatly around that time. Those aspects appear relevant for my selection, since I believe that both developments have had an impact on the portrayal of disabled characters. Moreover, the specificity of the topic has influenced the chosen time span; only a few picturebooks with physically disabled child protagonists are published annually. Thirdly, the aspect of availability has likewise affected the sample. Not

only are relatively few books with physically disabled characters published, but even fewer are available to a wide audience. Since I wanted to focus on books that have been and are currently read by a more or less broad readership, I decided to only incorporate books that are still available or have been published recently. The popularity and thus availability of a book is also often linked to its media presence gained through medals or awards. Nevertheless, I have decided to incorporate award-winning and less famous books alike; on the one hand, because I do not wish to focus exclusively on award-winning books and on the other hand, since awards, even though one might be tempted to believe so, do not distinguish high quality from low quality books. As can be seen, many of my choices have been pragmatic, yet, the selection is still subjective and linked to my personal research. Additionally, since the scope of my research limits the sample size, this selection merely presents a small cross section of English picturebooks available. Consequently, qualitative analysis appears to be the most meaningful but also practical approach; rather than offering numbers and figures, I intend to read the selected picturebooks in the context of what I have written so far about disability and the disabled body. Due to the novelty of this field of research no grounded theory or framework of analysis for the interrelation of disability, body studies and picturebooks is yet available. Thus, the challenge in my analysis lies in the application of various theoretical approaches from different fields of study. Generally, my approach is literary, with theoretical knowledge of disability studies. Consequently, disability studies, the critique of normalcy and concepts such as Mitchell and Snyder's narrative prosthesis constitute the framework and lens through which I look at the chosen picturebooks. At the same time, the tools of analysis provided by picturebook research are used to analyze the visual and verbal portrayal of characters and their lives. Even though I intend to detect general tendencies in picturebook artists' representation strategies, I am aware that the results of this analysis will be evidently limited due to the small research sample of merely four books.

As a basis for the analysis of a particular genre, field specific terminology is essential. Contrary to the spelling of the term picturebooks, there seems to be more or less agreement on the labeling of the various parts of a picturebooks. The front page of a book is the *cover*, which if opened gives insight to the

opening endpaper. "The complete visual display created when a picturebook is opened out flat showing the left- and right-hand pages side by side" (Lewis, *Contemporary Picturebooks* 170) is either termed *page-opening*, *double page spread*, or simply *doublespread*, the latter of which I will adopt in this thesis. While the right-hand page of a doublespread is labeled *recto*, the left-hand page is termed *verso*. After the final doublespread, the *closing endpaper* and the *back cover* finish the book. (Lewis, *Contemporary Picturebooks* 168-171) Despite the general consensus over the terminology used to describe picturebooks, another problem emerges concerning pagination. Unlike most other literary genres, picturebooks' pages and doublespreads commonly lack page numbers. For the purpose of analysis, I provide numbers for those books without page number by counting the doublespreads starting from the title page (the page after the opening endpaper); if no title page or endpapers exist, such as it is the case in *Just Because*, doublespread number one is the first doublespread after the cover.

In the following section I will focus on four particular elements of representation through which disability and the disabled characters are depicted in picturebooks. I will focus on those four aspects separately, however, overlaps will inevitably occur; at such instances of intersection I will either refer to the section in which a mentioned aspect is discussed in greater detail, or elaborate on it straight away if deemed important to be explained immediately. I have chosen to focus on four broad categories including visual representations, verbal elements, setting and environment, as well as character roles and relationships.

4.2. Representation of disability through...

4.2.1. Outward appearance: The body

In their diversity of existence within picturebooks, images have various functions: they set a certain mood, convey feelings to the viewer (Moebius 311-16) and contribute to the development of characters or the establishment of the

setting (Fang 137). As already discussed above, the picturebook conveys meaning largely, yet not exclusively, through its visual narrative. Following Fang's (137) argument that images in picturebooks most importantly exist for the purpose of visual characterization of individual figures, I suggest that the depiction of the characters' bodies, and in this case the physically disabled child's body, should be considered particularly essential. In order to make a character's traits and individual characteristics visible to the viewer, picturebook artists frequently make use of foregrounding techniques. By bringing certain physical features of characters and their behavior into prominence, their role and nature is communicated to the reader. In the four picturebooks under analysis one particularly striking foregrounding of a bodily feature can be seen in Blake's *The Five of Us*, where one of the child characters' arms receives prominence (see figure 1). Mario, the physically disabled boy, is not only visually portrayed as having big, muscular upper arms, but he is likewise verbally described as incredibly strong: "Simona and Mario were so strong they could lift anything you could think of. They were amazing" (Blake 2). However, Blake does not only credit Mario and Simona with amazing abilities, but all of the five disabled child characters receive a certain superpower. For instance, on the verbal level, it is explained that "Angie could see a sparrow sitting on top of a statue five miles away. She was amazing." and "Ollie could hear it sneeze. He was amazing" (Blake 2). All of those "amazing" abilities the children possess can be argued to act as a compensation for their respective impairment. While Angie, who occurs to be deaf, can see incredibly well, the visually impaired boy Ollie has particularly sharp ears and Mario, who is physically disabled, has enormous strength. The characters' superpowers therefore correspond with a respective bodily counterpart, if one considers ears and eyes or arms and legs as working together. Consequently, the focus on the children's incredible features and their description as "fantastic" or "amazing" could be seen as compensation strategy in the same sense as Davidson, Woodill and Bredberg (43) as well as Mitchell and Snyder (49-53) describe it; thus with respect to the physically disabled Mario, his strength appears to be the compensation for his inability to walk. With this argument I tend to challenge Kamilla Carr's argument that *The Five of Us* "is about identifying individual strengths and recognizing the uniqueness of each person" (Carr in Gilmore and Howard 226). While it might

be true that a certain uniqueness of the characters is emphasized, it is clearly not their disability itself, but rather the counterpart or compensation of their disability that is recognized and considered as strength.



Fig. 1: First doublespread *The Five of Us* (Blake 1)

Considering Mario's strength from another perspective, it could be linked to the gender stereotype of boys as strong individuals and helpers in need. However, the second character depicted as strong is Simona, a girl who, as it seems, has Down syndrome. While this might tell us that Blake refrained from a stereotypical depiction of girls as passive and weak characters and boys as active individuals and rescuers (Weitzman et al. 1125), it is still Mario, and not Simona, who lifts and carries around Big Eddie through half of the story and finally saves him; thus the gender stereotype of the strong male character and rescuer is maintained.

Such a deliberate foregrounding of a bodily feature and thus compensation by means of a specific ability, as in *The Five of Us*, cannot be noted in any of the other picturebooks. Yet, focusing on the prominence of certain body parts within the illustrations of the child characters, it is striking that Clemmie, the main character in *Just Because*, conveys meaning largely through her face and facial expression. While her body is portrayed as stiff, hardly ever in motion

throughout the whole book, which communicates the girl's physical disability to the viewer, her eyes receive prominence. Clemmie's body remains motionless, but her eyes move and she changes her line of vision from image to image; thereby the concentration on her brother is striking. In most of the images Clemmie's view is directed towards her little brother, who is busy painting pictures, playing in the sand, or beating the drum. Just as Clemmie, her brother is constantly changing his viewing direction; however, while throughout the book the boy is looking in all directions, he merely looks at his sister in two illustrations. Clemmie's focus on the little boy might be interpreted in two, slightly contrasting, ways. On the one hand it could be viewed as guarding behavior, on the other hand it might represent her dependence on him. While the first meaning could be substantiated with the fact that Clemmie, as older sister, takes on a protective role, the latter meaning is reinforced by a further visual clue; Clemmie is nearly exclusively depicted looking backwards, to the left side. Since the left is the side of the past, of the already given and therefore safer place (Kress and van Leeuwen 187), Clemmie's focus on this side could signify insecurity and a desire for safety. Consequently, this depiction could imply that despite her being older than her brother, her disability causes feelings of insecurity or even dependency. Nevertheless, while the visual representation throughout the book reinforces this notion, the idea is reversed at the end of the book. On the final two pages it is Clemmie who is depicted as a protective character, holding her brother's hand as he is afraid of the thunderstorm, and laying her arm around him while cuddling. Thus, the book ends with the representation of Clemmie as a strong and active individual while her brother is shown in a position of weakness for the very first time. While the rest of the book rather appears to focus on the presumed dependency and difference resulting from the girl's physical impairment, as has already been argued and will be further elaborated in the following sections, the closing scene provides the reader with a more positive representation of physical disability.

In contrast to the portrayal of Clemmie as a calm character, Susan in *Susan Laughs* and Loretta in *Zoom!* are depicted as particularly boisterous young girls. Far from being rigid or immobile, Susan and Loretta are represented in various

different positions, carrying out a great variety of actions. While Susan rides a horse, dances with her grandfather, or spins on a whirligig, Loretta races around in different wheelchairs and finally even saves her brother. In both of those books, the children's activeness is visually represented through motion lines, facial expressions of excitement (eyes and/or mouth wide open) and windswept hair. I would suggest that by foregrounding the vehement character of the two children through their actions, the picturebook artists convey the idea that disability does not limit children's liveliness and friskiness. Whereas in Lauretta's story this notion is conveyed throughout the whole story with the girl's final wish to get an even faster wheelchair, in *Susan Laughs* the ending lacks the previously portrayed action and wildness. Throughout the book the girl is depicted carrying out various actions, on the ultimate page, however, Susan is shown sitting calmly in her wheelchair (see figure 2). Even though her expression on this final image is happy, with a gentle smile on her face, she is not in action as in all of the previous images. While Bland and Gann (256-257) suggest that "[t]he wheelchair doesn't limit Susan's activities", I would argue that this final representation of a motionless girl in her wheelchair very well suggests that the mobility aid restricts her activities.

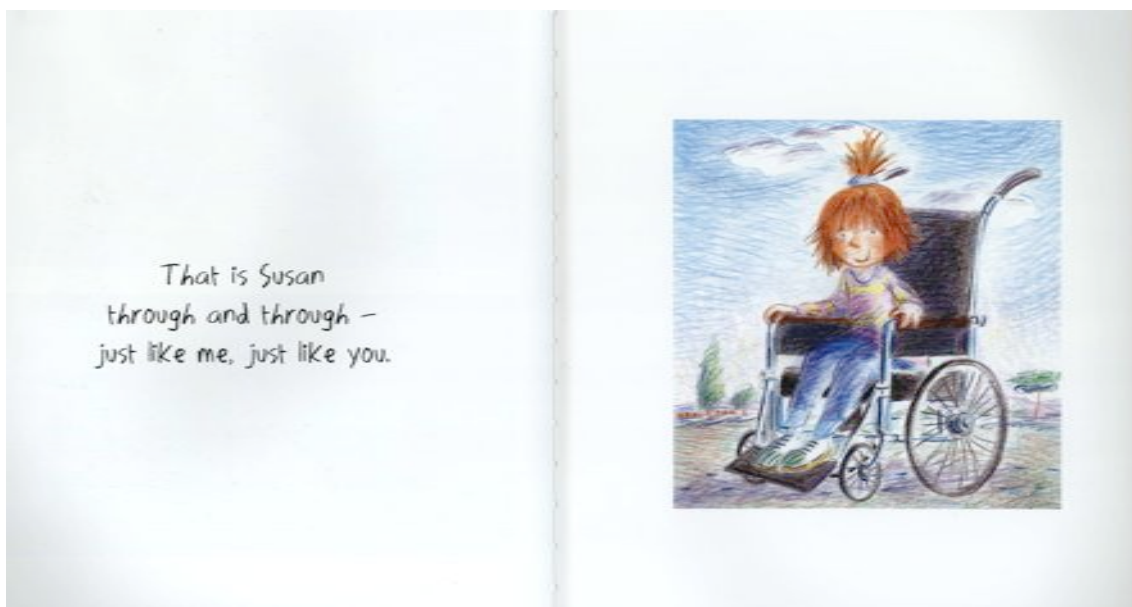


Fig. 2: Ultimate doublespread *Susan Laughs* (Willis and Ross 13)

Considering this depiction of the girl in her wheelchair, another important aspect concerning the representation of the physically disabled child character and its

body is mobility aids. Despite the fact that mobility aids such as wheelchairs or crutches are external, technical tools, I have decided to include their representation within the analysis of the disabled child's body. One of the reasons for this choice has been Stella Young's ("Wheel perspective") perspective on mobility devices; she considers them as part of the body. Young ("Wheel perspective"), who in one of her witty blog posts elaborates on her personal relationship with her wheelchair, explains that for her "leaning on someone's wheelchair is a bit like leaning on someone's shoulder"; thereby she clearly creates a strong symbiosis between the wheelchair and its user. While Young writes particularly positively about the relationship between disabled individuals and their enabling technologies, Matthews (44) refers to critical comments with regard to the depiction of wheelchairs in different media. This criticism is based on the fact that wheelchairs are often used as sole representative and indication of disability. To support her argument, Matthews quotes "the project manager in a podcast on the Canadian children's literature radio programme, *Just One More Book*," who explains:

There are so many ways to depict disability apart from wheelchairs, so I think they are beginning to creep in, they are. If you want some examples, I can tell you about Child's Play¹ who are beginning to show splints and hearing aids, cochlear implants, arm splints, all sorts of things in very young baby books.

Concerning the reasons of picturebook artists to focus on the depiction of enabling technology, and wheelchairs in particular, Matthew draws from the insights she gained from a community art project on the promotion of inclusive children's literature. In this project, the great majority of student illustrators who participated refrained from depicting difficulties disabled individuals face in their daily routine. Instead, most of them opted for presenting a (sometimes utopian) everyday life situation with an emphasis on the mobility aid. For Matthews (45) this indicates that enabling technology acts as identifier for disability. Even though this critique seems legitimate, since my focus is on the representation of physically disabled characters, the wheelchair is evidently one of the enabling technologies on which I have to concentrate. Despite the criticism of limiting enabling technologies to wheelchairs, Matthews (45) also highlights the positive

¹ Child's Play is an independent publisher who aims to not only challenge common stereotypes in their books but also reflect society in its whole diversity.

aspects of the depiction of enabling technologies. She notes that "[f]oregrounding enabling technologies permits these images and stories to present a more realistic image of disabled children's daily lives" (Matthews 45).

From the sample of picturebooks in this analysis, each book represents the children's wheelchairs. Yet, while all of the stories depict a wheelchair, it is only in *Zoom!* that this enabling device is visually as well as verbally brought into prominence. Since the whole story is built around the search for a new, and as Laretta demands it, particularly fast wheelchair, the different chairs take on a central role within the narrative. Especially the "nice new 92-speed, black, silver, and red, dirt-bike wheelchair" (Munsch and Martchenko 14) acts as main story element, probably comparable to the role normally taken on by another character, animal or favorite toy; Laretta has fun in her wheelchair and embarks on adventures. Different from all the other books, which merely depict, but do not elaborate on the usage of any enabling device, *Zoom!* discusses the utilization of a wheelchair in a particularly playful manner. By focusing on the speed and Laretta's racing around, the wheelchair is not only portrayed as mobility aid, but also as fun element. This depiction thus adds a childlike, and, in the context of children's picturebooks, a realistic view to the story. Children's approach to technological devices is mostly curious and playful; so why should their approach to mobility aids be different? From my primary school days I can recall the racing and playing around with our disabled friend and his wheelchair. Thus, instead of making it a taboo, in *Zoom!*, having fun with a mobility device is represented as natural. Consequently, this playful depiction of the wheelchair and Laretta's usage of it appears to present a true-to-life representation, or as Matthews (45) suggested, a "realistic image" of disability.

From another point of view one can also find representations of enabling devices that are less realistic. In *Just Because*, but also in *Zoom!* there are images of wheelchairs which resemble that of a space rocket; yet, both of those representations differ from each other. In *Just Because* the wheelchair itself is illustrated in the form of a rocket. On the title page of the book as well as on doublespread seven (see figure 3 or appendix), which both feature the same image, the disabled child protagonist Clemmie is shown sitting in a wheelchair-

rocket, a wheelchair that is embedded in a small space rocket. This depiction adds a fantastic or even supernatural aspect to the story. As discussed earlier, the portraying of disability through supernaturalism has been criticized for functioning as compensation; an element used to make up for characters' disabilities in certain aspects, or as Mitchell and Snyder would term it, a narrative prosthesis. However, one could also regard this depiction as an additional creative element applied by the picturebook artists; an element that enforces the disabled character's strengths rather than weaknesses. Firstly, it needs to be noted that both, Clemmie as well as her brother, look particularly happy in the image with the space rocket. As mentioned earlier Clemmie primarily has her look directed to the left hand side, indicating insecurity and a holding on to the past; the image portraying her in the space rocket wheelchair, however, is one of the few illustrations in which she has her view directed to the right. This direction stands for adventure, thus representing Clemmie's confidence and joy of taking risks. Secondly, the depiction of Clemmie and her brother in outer space reflects the children's fantasies. While realism and authenticity have been noted crucial criteria for successfully inclusive picturebooks, I would claim the same for the representation of children's fantasies. They are a vital part of most children's everyday life, no matter if disabled or non-disabled, and their depiction is as authentic as the depiction of ordinary real-life situations.

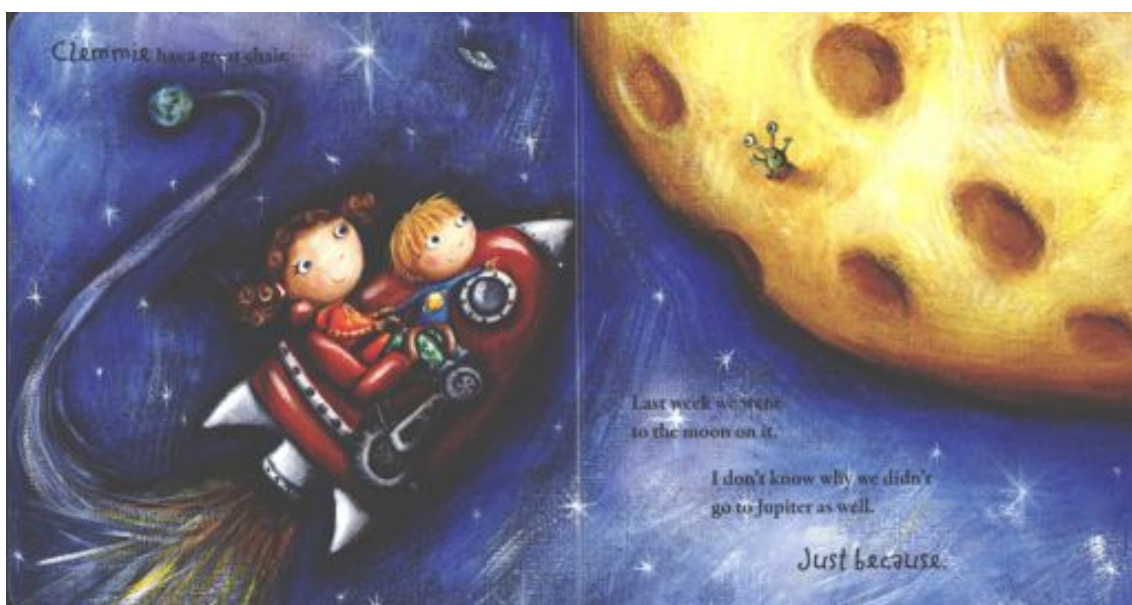


Fig. 3: Doublespread 7 *Just Because* (Elliott 7)

Different from *Just Because*, in *Zoom!* no actual space rocket is depicted. Yet, more figuratively, Laurretta races around in her new and fast wheelchair as if in a rocket or a racing car (see figure 4 or appendix); for this fast ride she even gets a speeding ticket, but finally triumphs and rescues her brother by driving him to the hospital on her incredibly fast wheelchair. Without any verbal reference, the comparison of the wheelchair with a rocket can be drawn from its visual depiction; throughout the story the different wheelchairs are mostly shown hovering, due to the fact that Laurretta drives them so fast. Moreover, dust clouds that are always depicted behind the wheelchair additionally indicate speed.



Fig. 4: Page 18-19 *Zoom!* (Munsch and Martchenko 18-19)

This depiction of the wheelchair as space rocket or racing car finally climaxes on the very last page of the book. Without a verbal reference or explanation, Laurretta is depicted in a wheelchair at least twice as big as the previous ones; with vehicle illumination in the front and exhaust pipes at the back, this wheelchair rather resembles a monster truck than an actual wheelchair (see figure 5). This depiction of the wheelchair as racing machine definitely adds another fantastic and at the same time amusing element to the story. Similarly to the depiction of the space rocket wheelchair in *Just Because*, this ultimate image in *Zoom!* reflects the disabled child's fun and spirit of adventure. Nevertheless, since in *Zoom!* the wheelchair is solely portrayed as fun element or as toy, it might as well be critically argued that the original purpose of this

mobility aid is not communicated. This might also become clear when one considers a substitution of the wheelchair in Laretta's story with another vehicle which children at that age might use, such as a bicycle or a scooter; without any big difference in meaning the wheelchair in *Zoom!* could be replaced for instance with a bicycle with which Laretta could likewise race around, get a speeding ticket and rescue her brother. Thus, the use of a wheelchair might be argued to be equated with riding a bike. On the one hand, this equation and thus extreme normalization of the wheelchair use could be interpreted as a negation of the actual purpose of the mobility aid and thus a negation of disability itself; on the other hand, and quite contrarily, the depiction of the wheelchair as a simple vehicle results in a normalization not only of the mobility aid itself, but also of disability in general. When disability is normalized in such a way, children, the prime audience of picturebooks like *Zoom!*, are confronted with the fact that using a wheelchair is completely normal.



Fig. 5: Ultimate doublespread *Zoom!* (Munsch and Martchenko 32)

In contrast to *Just Because*, *Zoom!* or *The Five of Us*, which continuously present the characters in their wheelchair or even allot the device a central role within the story, in *Susan Laughs* the girl protagonist is shown sitting in her wheelchair solely once, as already mentioned above. Thus the wheelchair receives a very peculiar role. On the one hand, the omission of any mobility

device throughout the whole book might imply that the girl has no need for it in her everyday life; an assumption which is highly questionable. On the other hand, the sole occurrence of the wheelchair on the final page reinforces its meaning: while throughout the whole book Susan's disability is not addressed in any word, only on the final page is the girl portrayed sitting in her wheelchair, and the text emphasizes that Susan is "just like me, just like you" (Willis and Ross 13). This foregrounding of similarity between the readers and Susan on the verbal level in combination with the image that depicts her differently for the first time in the whole story probably stresses difference more than sameness. In other words, the point where it is highlighted that Susan is the same as anyone else, is the only time when she is actually portrayed differently; thus her disability is foregrounded by stressing that only despite her perceived difference, she is just like anyone else. Kathy Cologon, who researches in inclusive education, writes about the embracing of difference in *Susan Laughs*. Cologon (116) ascribes *Susan Laughs* to those books that "incorporate a focus on difference as a natural part of life and avoid stereotyping or inferences of false homogeneity, instead celebrating the individuality of every person". However, with the argumentation that the verbal as well as the visual representation of Susan and her everyday life leads to a nullification of disability, I have to challenge Cologon's view; since the book leaves out any references to the girl's experience as disabled child, most likely in order to climax in a final resolution, disability is used as device for creating tension and is thus not naturally included.

At the same time, while the omission of any mobility aid, and the wheelchair in particular, forbids labeling the girl as wheelchair-bound - an adjective that is frequently used to describe physically disabled people using a wheelchair - Stella Young ("Wheel perspective") maintains that using a wheelchair is everything other than limiting:

We are not, as we so often see written, 'wheelchair bound'. We are liberated by our chairs. They give us the freedom to be who we are, and we love them for it.

Considering Young's argument, the almost complete omission of Susan's wheelchair within the story might thus be a denial of the wheelchair's liberating

function; in contrast, one might even assume the wheelchair to connote negatively. Different from the representation of mobility devices in *Susan Laughs*, the wheelchair is incorporated and depicted in *Zoom!*; this picturebook does not flinch from showing or mentioning mobility aids. On the contrary, *Zoom!* clearly includes and represents the wheelchair as a device which gives its user independence; when the physically disabled protagonist Lauretta is depicted using her wheelchair to race around and have fun, the genuine independence that this mobility device brings to the girl is obvious. At the same time, not only the independence, but also the love for one's mobility aid of which Young writes on her blog, is clearly represented in *Zoom!* as it is shown how much fun the girl can have with a wheelchair. While Susan is likewise represented as being happy while carrying out various actions, the representation of her doing all those activities without a wheelchair or walking aids does not give such a liberating view on mobility devices; it rather implies that Susan might not be able to do many of those activities with a wheelchair, walking aids or another mobility device. At the same time, the complete omission of mobility aids in *Susan Laughs* could as well be argued to result in a nullification of the child's disability. In other words, without any visual or verbal reference to Susan's disability in the iconotext, for instance through the depiction of a mobility device, which, as the final page reveals, Susan also utilizes, the child's disability could be argued to be negated. Finally, even if a child like Susan carries out many activities without a wheelchair, the decision to merely depict it on the ultimate page clearly has a particular purpose. The final resolution through the depiction of the girl in the wheelchair appears as a means to address the reader's consciousness and morality. At the same time, this final change in the depiction of the disabled girl Susan might even trigger feelings of guilt within the viewer for not having considered the possibility of the girl's disability. By using the child's disability as a tool for a final resolution, blame is put on the reader for being biased enough not to see that the girl is disabled. In this sense, because it draws attention to the reader's possible 'blind spot' for disability as well as their presumed normativity, disability could be argued to be applied as a moralistic element. This argument can be further strengthened with the author's incorporation of the personal pronouns 'you' and 'me' in the final sentence. Especially the pronoun 'you', which directly addresses

the reader, reinforces the moralistic undertone of the final sentence; when the reader is directly addressed a stronger connection is established between the picturebook character Susan and the reader himself or herself; as a result this close relationship and emotional connectedness might promote the viewer's strong sense of responsibility.

The analysis so far has been limited to the depiction of the wheelchair, due to the simple fact that merely in one of the four books other mobility aids are represented. In *Zoom!*, which, as mentioned above, directly addresses the use of a wheelchair, the child protagonist Laretta is frequently shown using crutches; however, their presence is not mentioned on a verbal level. Additionally, throughout the book Laretta is depicted with some sort of braces around her feet (see figure 4 on page 55 or appendix). These braces, which seem to act as stabilization for her legs, can be interpreted as a further mobility device; however, like the wheelchair or the crutches it is not further explained in the verbal text. Focusing on the visual incorporation of different mobility devices, the depiction of such braces and the alternating representation of the girl using a wheelchair or crutches can be argued to represent and thereby reflect the diversity of physical disability. More specifically, it shows that being physically disabled is not necessarily bound to the usage of a wheelchair, but is dependent on the individual's type of disability; thus it conveys the idea that people's needs are different and that there is no single physical disability. At the same time, such a representation imparts to the target group, primarily children, that the disabling aspect of our society, which according to the social model of disability is what disables people in the first place, can be challenged with a variety of aids.

Finally, in accordance with Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 82-83), who suggest that characters in picturebooks tend to be flat and static, I would argue that the children in the selected four picturebooks are not fully developed characters; they lack the ability to transform. However, as can be seen from the previous analysis, the visual representation of the protagonists and their mobility aids, which have been allocated a quite important role, reveals much about their characteristics and role as disabled children, even if

no transformation occurs. In the following section the picturebook text and language use is examined more closely in order to identify verbal strategies used for the depiction of disability and the disabled child characters.

4.2.2. Language: The text

As illustrated in the discussions on disability and picturebooks, language and language use plays a key role not only within disability studies, but also within picturebook theory. In the latter, the interrelation of the two sign systems - the visual and the verbal - is considered one of the most crucial elements. In this respect Sipe (qtd. in Serafini 10) stresses that "what is constructed from the combination of the two sign systems is greater than the potential meanings offered by either written text or visual image in isolation." Likewise recognizing this strong interplay, Nodelman foregrounds the importance of an independent reading of the verbal and visual. Only after focusing on each system individually, can one fully understand how they complement each other, he argues (Nodelman 40). Taking this argument into consideration, I have decided to deal with the verbal and visual representation of the physically disabled child characters in two separate subchapters. Consequently, after an elaboration on the visual representation in the previous chapter, this section focuses more specifically on the text and its relationship to the already discussed visual depiction of the child protagonists found in the four sample picturebooks. Yet, since I am aware that a strict separation of this dual system is impossible and probably undesirable, I will respond to the interplay of both text and images whenever I feel it is crucial for the construction of meaning. When considering the verbal elements in the four sample picturebooks I intend to ask the following questions: What kind of language is used to portray disability? How do the words represent the physically disabled child characters and their lives? And which verbal strategies are employed to create meaning?

To start with, it is noticeable that in none of the four sample books the word disability is employed, nor are there any other words describing or explaining the children's disabilities. Nevertheless, while none of the books deliberately

states that the characters are disabled, different verbal strategies are used to portray the children as disabled or address their disability. As for language use and the incorporation of disability-related words, merely in *Zoom!* the word 'wheelchair' is applied, which, even though it addresses disability, does not thematize it; the incorporation of the word 'wheelchair' and thus the verbal (as well as visual) reference to this mobility aid on the very first page reflects the fact that disability plays a role in the book. Different to the consistent usage of the word 'wheelchair' in *Zoom!*, the book *Just Because* avoids mentioning the mobility aid by its name. Even though the wheelchair is also briefly addressed in *Just Because*, when it is explained that Clemmie and her brother make a journey to the moon, it is not the word wheelchair, but the phrase "great chair" which is used. Thereby the wheelchair is clearly euphemized through the usage of the adjective great. This language use can have different reasons. On the one hand, the substitution of "great chair" with "wheelchair" could aim to reflect Clemmie's brother's complete lack of understanding of disability and the actual utilization of a wheelchair; considering the little boy's repeated mentioning that he cannot make sense of why his sister does not know or like things he likes, he probably does not even understand yet why Clemmie needs a wheelchair. On the other hand, the avoidance of the word wheelchair and the euphemizing terminology might as well be regarded as an attempt to nullify disability. This nullification, resulting from the avoidance of incorporating words that directly address or define disability, could be read in two different ways. Firstly, not mentioning disability could be linked to the intention of focusing merely on the disabled character's abilities. Secondly, it might simply reflect picturebook artists' caution for dealing with the subject. Since directly addressing disability generally appears to be a delicate issue, the employment of euphemisms seems to be a welcome strategy in picturebooks with disabled characters. Especially in *The Five of Us* the incorporation of positively connoted words such as 'amazing' or 'fantastic' is striking, particularly when it comes to the description of the child characters. This language use can again be viewed in two quite contrasting ways: on the one hand, the employment of those enthusiastic words sheds a positive light on the disabled children and their abilities; on the other hand, and quite contrarily, Blake's usage of positively connoted words such as "amazing" or "fantastic", as I would suggest, also

reinforces difference. Similar to the word 'special', which occurs particularly frequently in the context of disability, the terms 'amazing' or 'fantastic' stress an individual's difference from a perceived norm quite deliberately by putting the focus specifically on positive characteristics. In this respect Barton (61) notes, "the term 'special' or 'special need' is an example of a 'disabling culture' generating and maintaining a distance between disabled and their non-disabled peers", and Ballard (1995 qtd. in Barton 62) adds that "the continual use of the term 'special needs' inhibits the development of critical analysis". This view is adopted by Matthews (42), who comments on the usage of the term "special" by arguing that "[a] social model perspective would view this language as a legacy of a segregationist education system and a medical model focus on impairment". Thus, Blake's language use seems to reflect a medical model view rather than a social perspective on disability. Moreover, by repeatedly using the words "amazing" and "fantastic", both of which appear as an exaggeration, their meaning and thus the difference of the characters to a so-called norm, is reinforced.

Other techniques that are frequently used for the purpose of highlighting characters' features are the repetition or enumeration of individual words or phrases; yet, it should not be neglected that both techniques can similarly be applied in visual representations. Focusing on the verbal system, repetitions as well as enumerations as methods of foregrounding and reinforcement can be found quite frequently in the sample picturebooks. To start with, what is particularly striking is the repetition of the phrases "I don't know why" as well as "just because" in Clemmie's story, the latter of which also is the title of the book. The first phrase, which is commonly used to express a lack of knowledge, in this specific context seems to be used to show Clemmie's brother's inability to understand different aspects of life; for instance, the phrase is utilized to explain his lack of understanding why he is afraid of thunderstorms or why his sister Clemmie does not like pigeons. However, more importantly it is also mentioned that the boy does not know why his sister cannot walk or talk, which thus shows that the phrase "I don't know why" is eventually employed to reflect the boy's inability to understand disability. The latter phrase "just because" can then be understood as a response to the boy's expression of his lack of knowledge.

However, instead of offering an explanation or helping to make him understand what he cannot comprehend, this response seems to leave the boy as well as all child readers who are similarly inexperienced, with their ignorance. As for the meaning and usage of the phrase 'just because', it can be argued that it is generally an utterance often used by adults to answer seemingly difficult questions, which children frequently ask. Thus, in the same manner as adults might dismiss children's curious questions, the book does not address or explain Clemmie's disability to its audience; by simply stating it as given, disability seems to be naturalized.

Another type of repetition, in the form of an enumeration, occurs in *Susan Laughs*. In this picturebook, which is solely built around what the girl can do and actually does, the reader is confronted with a succession of activities Susan carries out or feelings she experiences. Thus, the written text for instance explains: "Susan laughs, Susan sings, Susan flies, Susan swings" (Willis and Ross 4-5), or "Susan's good, Susan's bad, Susan's happy, Susan's sad" (Willis and Ross 3). With this enumeration of a great variety of verbs, none of which is negated, the child's abilities clearly receive prominence. Consequently, this focus on Susan's abilities could be read as a strategy on the picturebook artist's side to foreground the child's sameness to other children; since the majority of activities or states listed are typical of children at that age. Nevertheless, similarly to *Just Because*, there is no single mentioning of the child's disability in *Susan Laughs*. Nevertheless, the book comprises a final resolution through the depiction of the physically disabled girl Susan in a wheelchair. On the verbal level, it is highlighted: "That is Susan through and through - just like me, just like you" (Willis and Ross 26). Focusing on the text-image relationship, this final doublespread could be either argued to be complementary in the sense that the verbal fills a gap in the visual and vice versa, or it might as well be considered enhancing, since both text and image are dependent on each other to create meaning; without the image the text would not be as evocative for the reader, whereas the illustration alone would probably be considerably less powerful. This discrepancy between text and image creates meaning and likewise keeps the readers in suspense, since they have to infer meaning from the contrast between the verbal and visual message. In addition to my earlier argument that

the final sentence and its relation to the visual representation of the girl in *Susan Laughs* is accompanied by a moral undertone, I would now suggest that this ending can as well be read in relation to Stella Young's concept of inspiration porn. Similar to the idea of inspiration porn, the final resolution in *Susan Laughs* most likely encourages non-disabled people to put their problems into perspective; one might be tempted to think that if a young disabled girl like Susan enjoys her life to the fullest, why do we complain so much? By foregrounding the girl's abilities and presenting her as active and adventurous despite her disability the reader is most likely to be inspired.

In contrast to the focus on Susan's abilities in the verbal text, *Just Because* tends to verbally stress Clemmie's disabilities. Even though it is not deliberately stated on the verbal level that Clemmie is disabled, her disability is implied through the continuous stressing of her presumed difference as well as through an emphasis on all of her disabilities. Clemmie's role as girl and sister as well as the relationship to her brother is discussed in the following chapter focusing on character relationships. Focusing primarily on the textual characterization of the disabled girl, the first two sentences of the book are considerably striking in presenting Clemmie as physically disabled character. The picturebook starts out by explaining what the girl cannot do. Written from the perspective of Clemmie's little brother, the first sentence reads: "My big sister Clemmie is my best friend. She can't walk, talk, move around much...cook macaroni, pilot a plane, juggle, or do algebra" (Elliott 1). Thus, the very first textual characterization of Clemmie is made by signaling her inability to carry out certain tasks; thereby the girl's physical impairment clearly receives prominence. From a social model view on disability, the foregrounding of Clemmie's disabilities presents a medical perception of disability due to the placement of the disabled individual in a position of incapability and most consequently a position of dependency. However, while this characterization clearly puts emphasis on Clemmie's inabilities, the brother's selection of skills appears crucial. Whereas walking, talking and moving around are abilities children of their age most likely have, the latter skills he mentions are rather atypical for young children to possess; thus, this selection adds further meaning. On the one hand, since the illustration on the first doublespread depicts the boy playing with a little airplane toy, one

could argue that piloting a plane is a skill he wished his sister would possess; the same might as well apply for cooking macaroni, juggling or doing algebra. On the other hand, when seemingly crucial abilities are put on one level with such randomly chosen skills it might as well be underline that one can clearly do well without all of them.

So far, the printed text within the sample picturebooks has been discussed on the basis of its possible interpretations and meanings. However, the verbal elements in a picturebook similarly have visual features. Consequently, the means by which text is presented on a spread is likewise meaningful to the interpretation, as Sipe points out ("Visual Meaning Making" 382); thereby the color or form of the printed text, as well as its placement on the doublespread need to be taken into consideration. One great example of such usage of written text can be found in *Just Because*. While in this picturebook the majority of text is written in a rather traditional font, one that could likewise be found in a newspaper or novel (similar to Times New Roman), merely a few words are set apart from the rest through the usage of a dissimilar font. Firstly, a couple of adjectives or adverbs, such as "scream" on doublespread three, or "loudly" on doublespread eight, are printed in a thicker, erratic, more aggressively seeming font; this change of font visually underlines and thereby intensifies the meaning of the activities or feelings associated with these words. Secondly, the disabled sister's name "Clemmie" as well as the recurring phrase "Just because" are always written in a daintier, lighter, squigglier font, which greatly differs from the rest of the printed text. Thus, the font can be argued to act as a marker of difference: by visually foregrounding the girl's name, distance, and most consequently, difference, is created between Clemmie and her brother (whose name is unknown, as is discussed in section 4.2.4). Inevitably, the visual emphasis of her perceived difference results in an emphasis on her disability. Similarly, the foregrounding of the phrase "Just because", which, as already mentioned, aims to be a legitimization of not discussing her disability, results in an additional emphasis on the idea that there are things in our world that do not need explanation - including disability. The visual foregrounding of each of the two verbal elements therefore reflects the notion that Clemmie with, or maybe

even as a result of, her disability, is different from the rest, or as I would rather term it, the so-called norm.

In *Zoom!*, a similar visual foregrounding of text can be depicted. In the course of Laretta's story the recurring word "zoom", which, like the phrase "just because", has been borrowed for the book's title, is emphasized: firstly, by typing it in a bolder font than the regular running text, secondly, through adding a number of additional o's to the word, and thereby lengthening the utterance, and thirdly, by the means of capitalization. This visual exaggeration of the word through three different foregrounding techniques clearly emphasizes its meaning. At the same time, the word zoom is an onomatopoea, as it imitates the natural sound of the action described. Onomatopoeic words are "deliberately used to achieve a special effect" (Cuddon), inter alia, to convey a sense of liveliness. As a result onomatopoeic expressions are often perceived even more intensely by the reader. Thus, the meaning of the word zoom, which describes a very fast movement, is clearly intensified. As the focus on the girl's reckless driving reflects her thrill of pleasure, this visual exaggeration of the onomatopoea "ZOOOOOM" additionally lends substance to the girl's vehement character; thus, as has already been discussed earlier, physical disability is put in a different light: instead of considering physical disability and the use of mobility aids as limiting, the child's agility stresses the physically disabled individual's independence.

4.2.3. Character relationships: The roles

The character's particular role within the story and their relationship to other characters - the first of which often, inter alia, results from the latter - both are ultimately crucial for a story's meaning. Considering the representation of disability and the disabled body, a character's role appears particularly relevant as it presents the basic perspective from which disability is viewed; whether a character is depicted as independent or dependent, as active or inactive, as introverted or extroverted, not only tells the reader what kind of individual the

character is, but might also reveal how disability is perceived; is it rather seen as an individual's problem, or is it perceived as a person's strength?

To start with, I aim to consider the physically disabled child protagonists' relationships to other characters in the books; as already argued, such relationships reveal much about a character's personal features and his or her position in the story. In the four chosen sample books the physically disabled child characters are all depicted interacting with other individuals, yet their relationships and positions within the stories vary greatly. Whereas Mario in *The Five of Us* is depicted as being part of a group of friends, Clemmie's role in *Just Because* is solely that of a sister; in *Zoom!* Laretta finds herself in the role of daughter and sister and Susan in *Susan Laughs* is depicted as a child either in a family setting, with friends or in a school environment. The latter two girls, Susan and Laretta, who are both illustrated within the environment of their families, are represented as incredibly adventurous, as already mentioned in the section on the visual representation of the children. Similarly, Mario in *The Five of Us*, is represented as a particularly active child, since in most of the illustrations he is shown carrying objects or a playmate on his hands above his head. This activeness of the child characters, as well as the fact that they carry out most of the activities and actions by themselves, seem to imply a sense of independence. This independence is particularly strongly conveyed in *Zoom!*, where the disabled girl Laretta is portrayed as the only decisive and dynamic character; firstly, it is the girl herself who signifies her wish for a new wheelchair and altogether is very outspoken about her desires, and secondly, compared to the other family members, who seem lost and desperate when her brother hurts himself during dinner, she takes the initiative and immediately gets her brother to hospital on her incredibly fast wheelchair.

Though not as independent as Laretta, Mario, the physically disabled protagonist in *The Five of Us* is featured as quite autonomous. His independence becomes especially evident when considering his relationship to the other figures in the story. Compared to other characters, and especially the little boy Eric, it is him who takes action; for instance, Mario searches for the cause after Big Eddie faints and he is also the one who carries and

accompanies him on the way to the hospital. In contrast to Mario, Eric, who is the only one of the five child characters that is not allocated a certain superpower at the beginning of the book, appears particularly inactive and dependent; concerning the relationships among the five friends, Eric takes on a quite peculiar role. Even though all of the child characters in *The Five of Us* are disabled, I would argue that solely Eric's disability is emphasized and is thereby used as a narrative prosthesis. Eric's stammering, which is disclosed through his continuous expression of the hesitation marker "erm", is a crucial element for the story line and also particularly important for the final resolution; the story ends with Eric finally being able to produce and vocalize a complete sentence - "And Eric said, 'Erm...erm... Just leave it to the Fantastic Five!'" (Blake 14). Thus, one of the children's disabilities is used as a crutch upon which the story is built. Particularly striking thereby is that even within a story that nearly exclusively features disabled protagonists, one disability is utilized as tool to create tension. While the storyline itself would nearly be the same without the foregrounding of Eric's stammering, his disability is used as a narrative prosthesis in the sense that it lends his character peculiarity; this peculiarity is even reinforced when, at the end of the story, Eric can articulate more clearly for the very first time.

Similar to Eric, but contrary to those active and autonomous characters, is Clemmie, the disabled protagonist girl in *Just Because* who, as already mentioned earlier, is depicted as particularly inactive; additionally, I would suggest that Clemmie is depicted as quite dependent on her brother. Her dependency results, inter alia, from her passivity, which stands in marked contrast to her brother's energetic and self-confident personality. As a result, I would argue that similar to the depiction of Eric, Clemmie's disability is used as a narrative prosthesis to develop her brother's character. Throughout the whole book the little boy appears to feel strong in his actions, but again and again expresses his lack of understanding concerning his sister's habits and preferences and thus her disability. This narration about himself, Clemmie's character and their relationship finally opens his eyes to the fact that his sister is his best friend and he simply loves her, "just because" (Elliott).

Clemmie's role is not only developed through the juxtaposition to her brother, but also through the comparison with other characters. For instance, on doublespread two Clemmie is compared to a princess - "She's a lot like a princess. They don't have to do much either. They can just sit and look pretty. Just because" (Elliott 2). This direct comparison and thus representation of Clemmie (see figure 6) as a physically disabled character is striking on various levels.



Fig. 6: Doublespread 2, Just Because (Elliott 2)

Considering the characterization from a feminist perspective, the belief that princesses are inactive and only need to care for their looks appears particularly critical, since both of these notions reflect common gender stereotypes: on the one hand, this assertion assumes that females are inactive and more passive individuals than men, and on the other hand, it reproduces the idea that one of women's main duties is to care for their outward appearance. From a disability studies point of view and in particular from the perspective of the social model, a further aspect of this characterization needs to be considered; particularly striking within this verbal description of her character is the notion that Clemmie does not have to do much and can merely sit around. Thereby the word choice is of particular relevance: from the description that princesses, with whom Clemmie is compared, "don't have to do" a lot and "can" only rest, the inference can be drawn that it is the girl's personal choice to sit calmly in a wheelchair and

to not bother much about anything. This assumption could then result in the belief that Clemmie is in a more advantageous position than her brother, who as an able-bodied individual appears to have more duties and obligations. The representation and thus characterization of Clemmie in those two, as can be argued, rather negative ways not only from the perspective of disability, but likewise from a feminist point of view, lead to the idea of a double discrimination and thus the concept of intersectionality. "Rooted in Black feminism and Critical Race Theory, intersectionality is a method and a disposition, a heuristic and analytic tool" (Carbado et al. 303) that was coined by the civil rights advocate and scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989. The basic accusation made by Crenshaw and other black feminists was the fact that "white, bourgeois feminism had only raised the issue of white middle-class women's experiences of oppression and made this the measure of feminist politics, and so had ignored the needs and the reality of the lives of all other women, including black women" (Supik, Viar and Lutz 2-3); in other words, feminism in itself was criticized as being discriminatory against a broad group of women. Bringing this concept into a wider discourse and the discrimination not only based on gender, but also on sexuality, race, class, or abilities, "a key aspect of intersectionality lies in its recognition that multiple oppressions are not each suffered separately but rather as a single, synthesized experience" (Smith). Crenshaw exemplifies this synthesis of oppression by referring to a traffic intersection, a crossroad:

Consider an analogy to traffic in an intersection, coming and going in all four directions. Discrimination, like traffic through an intersection, may flow in one direction, and it may flow in another. If an accident happens in an intersection, it can be caused by cars traveling from any number of directions and, sometimes, from all of them. Similarly, if a Black woman is harmed because she is in an intersection, her injury could result from sex discrimination or race discrimination. [...] But it is not always easy to reconstruct an accident: Sometimes the skid marks and the injuries simply indicate that they occurred simultaneously, frustrating efforts to determine which driver caused the harm. (Crenshaw 149)

Considering this idea of intersectionality, the representation and consequently the characterization of Clemmie on *doublespread two* can be argued to be made, *inter alia*, on the basis of multiple discriminatory assumptions. The formation of Clemmie's character, however, does not solely result from the comparison of the girl with other figures, but also from the representation of Clemmie's little brother; he, who throughout the whole book is constantly

depicted by his sister's side contributes to the implicit characterization of the girl. Concerning the depiction of the little boy within the book, it is noticeable that he is represented not only as more active, but also as stronger and more independent than his sister; this argument can be supported, on the one hand, by the verbal description of Clemmie as a pretty and inactive princess, and on the other hand, by the visual depiction of Clemmie's brother himself. On the verso of doublespread two the little boy is shown holding a shovel in his right hand while with his left hand he is gesturing proudly to his sister sitting on the sand castle which he presumably has constructed himself. Thus the two characters are clearly contrasted with each other verbally as well as visually; yet, the comparison between Clemmie and her brother is not drawn directly by setting the two children's abilities or characteristics against each other, but rather indirectly through the means of comparisons with other groups of people or stereotypes such as the figure of the beautiful and lazy princess. A further contrast of Clemmie's character with a certain category can be found on doublespread three; on this double page Clemmie is again directly matched against other females, namely sisters. Doublespread three reads: "Some sisters can be mean. They scream and shout, pull your hair, steal your chips, and won't play cowboys with you. [...] Clemmie is not like that" (Elliott 3). This comparison again draws on a particular stereotype, namely that of sisters as annoying and petulant young females. Even if Clemmie is not assigned to this category in the book, those role models are still reproduced. On this doublespread Clemmie is depicted wearing a cowboy hat, a flannel shirt and a sheriff's star, which for the first time within the book puts her into a slightly more active position. Even though it is still her brother who is riding a horse, Clemmie's smile and her plaited hair, which is swinging in the air, reveal some sort of agility on her side. When the little boy argues that Clemmie does not belong to the category of sisters who can be really annoying, he is indirectly also commenting on their own relationship, which thus appears to be an affectionate one. Additionally to this brief comment on doublespread two, their relationship is depicted as particularly harmonious throughout the whole book, which ends with the boy's final realization that "Clemmie's my best friend and I love her. And I know exactly why. Just because" (Elliott 12). The depiction of such a loving relationship between siblings or friends seems to be no isolated case. I would

argue that there generally appears to be a tendency to restrain from the depiction of conflict or challenges in books featuring disabled characters; none of the picturebooks under analysis, nor any other picturebook with disabled characters I have come across in my research, addresses conflicts within families, with friends or in the classroom. Since conflicts with oneself or with others are clearly common in a child's everyday life, the omission of disputes or differences in children's picturebooks might be argued to be inauthentic. In a review of *Just Because* a librarian similarly comments on the brother and sister relationship in the book and stresses the normality of conflict among siblings.

I know that somewhere out there there must be a pair of siblings with a relationship that is nothing but sweetness and love, but personally, I've yet to meet a pair of kids who DON'T bicker once in a while. The fact that Clemmie is in a wheelchair makes me even more eager to see them acting like real siblings--don't we want kids with physically/mentally challenged siblings to know that it's okay not to get along with them all the time? (Goodreads)

By raising this question, the author of this review clearly addresses the aspect of authenticity and calls upon the representation of relationships with disabled people that are, as they are in real life, disharmonious from time to time.

Apart from kinship relations, the characters' names are a further indication of their role within a story. However, naming is not only a crucial aspect in the formation of a character's role, but also of his or her relationship to others. According to Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 82) a name often conveys meaning and tells the reader about a character's features, especially when telling names such as "Princess Smartypants, Prince Rushforth, Prince Bonsehaker, or Prince Swimbladder" are used. At the same time, the deliberate omission of names and the reference to characters with kinship terms "underscores the importance of the relationship" and likewise assists in "making the characters more universal" (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* 85); when figures are presented as universal they are usually much easier to be replaced with others and thus much more likely for the readers to project themselves into such a position. Concerning the sample picturebooks in this analysis, the naming of the characters is particularly striking in *Susan Laughs*, *Just Because* as well as *Zoom!*; however, it is not the characters' names themselves that carry meaning, but the distribution of names among the figures

in the stories. In all three of these books merely the disabled child protagonists Susan, Clemmie and Laretta have names, whereas the other characters are nameless. This distinction is especially striking in *Just Because*, where both children, Clemmie and her brother, can be considered protagonists; yet, only one of them, the physically disabled child, is addressed and mentioned by her name within the book, while the little boy's name is only stated once in the blurb on the back cover; Clemmie's name, as already shown earlier is even visually highlighted through the application of a different font. Yet, this difference might as well result from the fact that the boy himself is the narrating voice of the story, which will be addressed in the following paragraph. Nevertheless, when in the book the little boy is simply defined by his kinship to Clemmie, his role within the story appears as more general and thus universal. Therefore, the little boy could be representative for all children who have a disabled sibling; any child can project himself or herself into the little boy's position. In contrast, the disabled child character that bears a name is individualized. Consequently, by solely naming the physically disabled character, disability itself is individualized and presented as a person's individual concern, whereas the non-disabled person is universalized and thus normalized. A similar case can be found in *Zoom!* as well as in *Susan Laughs*, where merely the physically disabled girl protagonists receive a name. In *Zoom!* this distinction is probably the most distinctive. While in *Just Because* Clemmie's brother is not directly referred to, since he narrates the story from his point of view and thus talks about himself in the third person, in *Zoom!* all other characters are merely named mother, father, and older brother. Additionally, it needs to be mentioned that in *Zoom!* as well as *Susan Laughs* all characters apart from the disabled children play a secondary role, which again puts the focus on their disability.

Another essential element in developing the roles of the characters and establishing their position within the story is that of the narrative perspective. While in the four sample picturebooks the disabled children are either the sole protagonist or one of the main characters, all of these stories present different views from or on the children. One of those perspectives is that of an "extradiegetic-heterodiegetic ('omniscient' and not participating in the story)" narrator (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* 119), who, as argued

earlier, provides the reader with a more distant perspective on the disabled child's experience. Quentin Blake's *The Five of Us* is one of the sample books which is told from the view of an omniscient and omnipresent third person narrator. In this book the narrator commences the narration by introducing the main characters, the five disabled children, with a short description of them and subsequently sets out to tell the children's experiences from an external point of view. At times the omniscient narrator explains what the characters see, hear or feel: "Angie could see a sheepdog sitting on a wall miles away. Ollie could hear it bark" (Blake 8). Furthermore, the narrator includes direct speech, which makes the narration more vivid and allows the reader to form a closer relationship with the characters. Additionally, and even more importantly, through the incorporation of direct speech, the disabled children receive a voice; the ability to express their own thoughts and feelings gives the children power. Another picturebook which makes an even more extensive use of direct discourse is *Zoom!*. Like *The Five of Us*, *Zoom!* features an extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator who continuously renders the characters' utterances through direct speech. The great majority of text is written in direct speech, reporting on what Laretta, her parents and brother or the police say. This direct attribution of uttered words to characters presents a lively and personal narration and contributes to the notion that it is the characters themselves who are telling the story. At the same time, the disabled girl Laretta, who constantly expresses her wishes through direct speech, appears independent and strong. *Susan Laughs*, even though also told from a third person perspective does not incorporate direct speech and thus lacks a connecting element between the reader and the child character. Generally, the story misses a clear story line, as it is solely built around the enumeration of the main character's abilities in order to finally climax in the insight that the child's disability does not make her any different from you and me. However, when considering not only the text, but the whole iconotext, one instance in which the child protagonist Susan appears to form a connection to the reader can be noted. According to Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 119) "pictures have their own expressive means. For instance, a character gazing from the picture straight at the reader/viewer may be apprehended as an 'intrusive' visual narrator". Such an instance of the child character Susan as "visual narrator" can be detected on the last page of

Susan Laughs. With this image, in which Susan has her view directed towards the reader, the girl forms a relationship with the reader. Her view thus reinforces the bond between the reader and the child character and likewise supports the text's underlying message that Susan and the reader are alike.

As Nikolajeva and Scott argue, it is normally assumed that the narrating voice in picturebooks is that of an adult, which ultimately creates distance between the narrator and the reader. Whereas in the previously discussed books featuring a extradiegetic-heterodiegetic narrator one could assume it to be an adult's perspective, in *Just Because*, the narrating voice is clearly that of a child. The story about Clemmie and her little brother is told from the point of view of the little boy, who provides an understanding of his relationship to his older sister. Through his function as narrating character, the boy seems to take on an even more important role within the story, making the disabled girl Clemmie receive a minor position. Telling the story from a first-person perspective, the little boy appears to aim at forming a closer relationship to the intended child audience. At the same time, the boy repeatedly expresses his lack of understanding by noting "I don't know why..." (Elliott); this infantile inexperience, which he probably shares with the readership, additionally strengthens the relationship between his character and the child viewers. Moreover, since he is not only narrating the story from the perspective of a disabled child's sibling, but is also making his sister's disability a subject of discussion, the intended readership is primarily other siblings of disabled children; those children can most likely identify with the narrator and his perspective. However, with this focus on the brother's perspective, the book does not confront its audience with the point of view of the disabled child; it simply shows the brother's care and consideration, but does not expose the reader to the disabled girl's state of mind.

A first person narration from the perspective of the disabled child, which none of the sample picturebooks features, would allow a much closer storytelling; being directly addressed by the disabled child character, the reader can form a more personal relationship with the protagonist. Interestingly enough, none of the four stories chosen for this analysis is told from the perspective of the disabled child himself or herself. Yet, one example of such a book, which presents the story

from the disabled child character's perspective is Ellen Senisi's *All Kinds of Friends, even Green*; in this book the disabled boy Moses tells how he tries to find a topic for a school essay; in his narration he compares his physical impairment to that of his neighbor's iguana, which misses several toes and therefore needs to find ways to get around in its everyday life; through this comparison the disabled first person narrator indirectly as well as directly addresses his disability. Such different ways of experiencing everyday life are, however, not addressed in any of the sample picturebooks.

Despite the narrative perspective on a verbal level, the visual point of view from which the story is narrated constitutes a further aspect that contributes to the meaning of the narration in picturebooks. Interestingly enough, the majority of picturebooks is presented from an omniscient perspective and the eye level of a grown up person, rather than from the perceptual point of view of the child protagonists (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* 137). However, some books, such as *Tickle, Tickle* by Helen Oxenbury, present the readers with the perception and view of a child character, for instance by only showing the adult character's legs; thereby such books put the focus on the experience of the child itself. At the same time, such a shift in perspective or likewise a discrepancy between the visual and verbal point of view can also create irony or humor, as Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 137) argue. As for the picturebooks with disabled child characters, an omniscient visual point of view, which also all of the four picturebooks under analysis have, give an external and most likely a grown up perspective on the disabled children. Thus, it is again an external perspective on disability that is presented. Another aspect that is directly linked to the visual point of view of the narration is the spatial environment and thus the setting of the story. This aspect is further elaborated in the following subsection.

4.2.4. Space and environment: The setting

The setting of a picturebook establishes the situation and the nature of the world in which the events of the story take place. At the simplest level, it communicates a sense of time and place for the actions depicted, but it can go far beyond this. (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* 61)

What Nikolajeva and Scott thereby imply is that the setting, the whole environment in which the characters are situated, can fulfill various purposes. It can create a certain atmosphere and thus evoke emotional responses from the readers or assist in developing the characters' features (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* 61). In the context of disability and its representation the setting can be considered relevant as it transmits information about the disabled characters' environment and living situation. While Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 61-62) explain that setting can be conveyed through both, the verbal and the visual, they stress that in picturebooks the textual description of setting is often minimized. In the four picturebooks under analysis this tendency is clearly noticeable. Yet, in *The Five of Us*, a specific reference to setting occurs; in this picturebook a particular kind of setting, established through the verbal text on the very first page, is provided by the third person narrator. Despite a narrator's function to facilitate the development of a relationship between the protagonist and the reader and to contribute to the establishment of the characters' roles within the story, a narrative voice can likewise set the scene (Nikolajeva and Scott, *How Picturebooks Work* 118). This function is clearly fulfilled by the narrator in *The Five of Us*. By starting the book with a typical fairy tale beginning - "Once, not very long ago, and not very far from here, there were five friends. Their names were [...]" (Blake 3) - the narrator sets the scene for something fantastic and probably even slightly romantic to happen. Such a fairy tale beginning thus reinforces the fantastic character of the story, which, as already discussed earlier, also results from the fact that all of the children have been assigned a certain superpower. A further reinforcement of the story's fictional and fantastic character and its romanticizing is added through the visual depiction of the setting. After an introductory illustration of the five friends sitting on a bus, leaving the urban area with its buildings and marketplace, the story continues in the countryside

featuring meadows, hills and mountains; in contrast to such a representation, a story set in a big city with crowds of people would much more likely address the difficulties experienced by disabled people in an environment that focuses primarily on its able-bodied citizens. The choice of a picturesque visual depiction such as Quentin Blake has made or also Michael Foreman has applied in the picturebook *Seal Surfer*, which is set by the sea, tends to show a romanticized representation of disability; while in *The Five of Us*, Mario is depicted driving around in his wheelchair on the hilly landscape between rocks and stones, in reality such an environment poses an immense challenge for physically disabled individuals in a wheelchair. Thus, the argument of a romanticized representation of disability is confirmed. This is also true for *Just Because*. While the book generally restrains from establishing a setting, by placing the characters on a single-colored background, on doublespread two, six and seven the children are depicted in natural surroundings, at the beach, in a meadow and in space, as already mentioned earlier. Such illustrations as can be found in *The Five of Us* and *Just Because* could likewise be argued to be a denial of the challenges disabled people generally face. This denial or the avoidance to address difficulties in general might as well go along with a tendency of not addressing conflict in picturebooks with disabled individuals. One explanation might be the authors' general prudence or even insecurity in dealing with disability in picturebooks, as Matthews (45) already argued. Lakshmi Dhushyanthakumar (in Gilmore and Howard 232) appears to consider the avoidance of discussing conflicts or obstacles disabled individuals might experience in their daily routine as positive for the young audience of picturebooks. When reviewing the picturebook *Susan Laughs*, which also restrains from depicting any conflict, she foregrounds the omission of barriers as a positive aspect of the book. "Susan Laughs sets out to promote positive images of disability, with an exclusive focus on encouraging the child reader to identify with Susan's abilities, personality and sense of humour rather than on making them aware of any barriers she might experience as a result of her disability" (Dhushyanthakumar in Gilmore and Howard 232). Even though it is definitely more challenging to represent problems or conflicts, I would be cautious with Dhushyanthakumar's argument. I rather agree with Myers and Bersani or Blaska who, in their criteria lists for children's literature with disability,

note that problems disabled people face in everyday life due to certain restrictions within our disabling society should likewise be addressed; according to them this would lead to a more realistic representation of disabled individuals' everyday life.

In general, authenticity, as the guidelines and checklists discussed earlier have shown, is considered a particularly crucial element in the depiction of disabled individuals in picturebooks. Additionally to those guidelines, Beckett et al. (380) stress the need for caution in the depiction of disabled characters in fictional stories. Thus one could assume that the setting of the stories, according to those criteria, should as well be realistic. As already discussed, Blake's *The Five of Us* clearly does not meet this criterion. While *Susan Laughs* and *Just Because* are set in a completely realistic setting, the latter includes an instance of a fantastic or fictional setting. On doublespread seven as well as on the title page, Clemmie and her little brother are depicted in space, surrounded by stars, a UFO and the moon. Even though this representation clearly adds a fictional aspect to the story, which according to the guidelines and criteria could be seen as undesirable or even negative for the representation of disabled characters, I would suggest the opposite. By showing the siblings on a little adventure to the moon, which is clearly a dream or fantasy of the two children, the characters' drive for exploration and discovery is communicated (Webb Joels 33). Thus the disabled girl Clemmie is characterized as curious and adventurous. The final image in *Zoom!* (see figure 5 on page 56), similarly accentuates the physically disabled child character's adventurousness. At the same time, this final illustration leaves an open end to Laretta's story and her search for a new wheelchair; such an ending thereby adds a further imaginary element to the story. When the girl is depicted sitting in a huge monster truck-like wheelchair without any verbal text guiding the viewer's interpretation, it is left open whether such a wheelchair simply exists in the girl's fantasy or not. Finally, the open end of the story gives authority to the disabled child character. Instead of forcing a traditional or logical ending on the girl's adventurous story, the book leaves space for Laretta's imaginations and creativity and uses them to create humor.

5. Conclusion

By the time children encounter people with disabilities in their communities, they may already have integrated negative stereotypes and prejudices [...]. Introducing young children to literature with diverse and textured depictions of people with disabilities can help to offset societal prejudices. (Anti-Defamation League)

The argumentation expressed in the above quote both motivated and encouraged me to investigate in the representation of disabled characters in the genre of children's picturebooks. Clemmie, Susan, Mario and Lauretta thereby present the physically disabled child heroes and heroines I have analyzed by examining their outward appearance and verbal description, their relationships to other characters as well as the environment in which they are depicted. With this analysis I intended to approach my initial research question: How are physically disabled child characters represented in picturebooks? Clearly, there is no simple or single answer to this question as even within the small sample of four picturebooks I have discovered a wide range of different representations of physically disabled characters. Yet, this spectrum of representations can be set along a continuum ranging from a focus on sameness to otherness, from the nullification of difference to the foregrounding of the disabled character's deviation from a perceived norm. Even though those strategies of representation, as I have found, can vary significantly within a single book, it is the latter part of the continuum and thus the foregrounding of difference, which has been found to slightly prevail in the four sample picturebooks.

The tendency of foregrounding the disabled characters' perceived difference or otherness has been displayed through the application of a variety of different representation strategies. Firstly, at a number of instances in the four books the character's disability has been applied as a literary device or narrative prosthesis, as Mitchell and Snyder have termed it. For instance, endowing disabled characters with superhuman abilities, which can clearly be regarded such a literary tool, is a basic story element in *The Five of Us*. The ascription of those superpowers is not only a compensation for the children's respective disability and a device to make the characters more peculiar, but with regard to

the little boy Eric, it also serves as a tool to render the story's climax. Similarly, Clemmie's disability in *Just Because* is used as a literary device to develop her brother's character; her disability makes the boy come to the final recognition that his love for Clemmie is not diminished through their difference. Secondly, difference is highlighted through accentuating a character's inabilities as can be seen in *Just Because*; this emphasis typecasts Clemmie as a dependent character whose passivity is in stark contrast to her brother's active role. However, the closing representation of Clemmie and her brother finally reverses those roles, which not only indicates that disability is used as a narrative prosthesis to develop her brother's character, but likewise as a moral element. The aspect of morality, which, as has been argued, is a controversial issue in the representation of disabled characters, can also be found in *Susan Laughs*. There, the final resolution that the girl is disabled appears to be a tool for addressing and raising the reader's consciousness. At the same time, this revelation of her resemblance to the reader rather foregrounds her differences and thereby works as inspiration porn in Stella Young's sense; it makes the readers put their problems into perspective. Moreover, by focusing solely on the disabled characters through the usage of external narrators as well as the impersonal naming of all other characters as in *Susan Laughs*, *Zoom!* and *Just Because*, disability is individualized. Considering the social model of disability such an individualization and thus foregrounding of disability indicates that it is not perceived as a social phenomenon but rather as something that needs to be solved on an individual basis.

On the other side of the spectrum of representations is the negation of the character's disability or the nullification of difference. Generally, due to the absence of any direct verbal references to disability such a tendency can be noticed in all of the books; this avoidance of addressing disability seems to reinforce the idea that disability is considered a delicate issue rather than a completely normal part of society. Similarly, the avoidance of mentioning conflicts or problems disabled individuals normally face in their everyday life indicates caution on part of the picturebook artists. On the contrary, disability is even romanticized through the usage of countryside settings or the allusion to the fairy tale in *The Five of Us*. A complete nullification of difference can be

observed in *Susan Laughs*. Denying the need for any mobility devices and finally comparing the disabled girl with the reader practically negates Susan's disability. While in *Zoom!* Laretta's disability is not nullified, it is extremely normalized through the representation of the wheelchair as any other vehicle. Another reinforcement of similarities, or maybe even a compensation for the children's disability is the girls' unbridled character. Both of these two girls, Laretta as well as Susan, are generally represented as particularly boisterous, which conveys the idea that disability does not limit the children's liveliness and friskiness.

Another striking tendency, even though not directly linked to the representation of disability, is connected to the distribution of gender roles. Within the sample picturebooks certain gender stereotypes are clearly reinforced. For instance, the disabled girl Clemmie in *Just Because* is, for the great majority of the book, represented as a dependent and passive female character while her able-bodied brother is depicted as an individual who takes the initiative and at the same time is in control of a situation. Similarly, Mario in *The Five of Us* is a character who, compared to his female companion Simona, always takes the lead even though she possesses the same superhuman ability as he does. While this observation can clearly not be considered a representative finding, it might pose a starting point for further research in the intersectional correlation between disability and gender.

Finally, I need to clarify that even though it might be tempting to use such an analysis to classify a picturebook featuring disabled characters as either good or bad, or as relevant or of little help, my argumentation is against such classifications. After reading a great variety of picturebooks featuring disabled characters and immersing myself in theoretical elaborations in picturebook research and disability studies I have come to the conclusion that there is probably no one best way of representation, one strategy of depicting a disabled child that is ultimately right. On the contrary, I believe that the importance lies in the fostering of critical awareness. Thus, developing adult as well as child readers' sensitivity for the representation of disabled characters and their lives by encouraging them to critically discuss those depictions

appears more valuable to me. Concerning the representation strategies set along the continuum, I have proposed it is probably only the diversity of representations that can make such discussions possible. While discriminatory representations should be clearly rejected, the variety of non-discriminatory depictions contributes to the diverse landscape of portrayals of disabled individuals in children's literature. It is this variety of representations that can help to make disability not only an inherent and crucial part of children's literature, but as a consequence also of the young readers' lives.

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Abstract (Deutsch)

Wo sind all die Helden und Heldinnen mit Behinderung in den Bilderbüchern unserer Kinder? Während bereits viel geforscht wurde zur Repräsentation von Geschlecht und Ethnizität in der Kinderliteratur, hat Behinderung bislang verhältnismäßig wenig Aufmerksamkeit bekommen. Mit der Entstehung eines relativ neuen akademischen Forschungsfeldes, der Behindertenforschung (Disability Studies) hat die Untersuchung der Repräsentation des behinderten Körpers in der Literatur jedoch langsam zugenommen. Aufgrund dessen findet man nun eine immer größer werdende Zahl an Studien zu Behinderung in Kinderbüchern. Die meisten dieser Studien kommen zu der Schlussfolgerung, dass trotz einer Steigerung in der Diversität der Charaktere, behinderte Protagonistinnen und Protagonisten immer noch einen unwesentlichen Teil darstellen.

In dieser Arbeit lege ich den Fokus auf bereits existierende Kinderbücher mit behinderten Hauptcharakteren. Ich untersuche eine Auswahl an vier Kinderbüchern, die seit den 1990er Jahren erschienen sind; dies ist die Zeit des Aufschwunges der Disability Studies und der Blütezeit der Bilderbuchforschung. In dieser Untersuchung liegt der Schwerpunkt auf der Repräsentation des körperlich behinderten Kindes, welches in allen Büchern eine Protagonistin oder einen Protagonisten darstellt. Nachdem sich die jungen Leserinnen und Leser von Kinderbüchern lange an ihre Helden und Heldinnen der Kindheit erinnern, ist deren visuelle als auch verbale Repräsentation von großer Bedeutung.

In einer Gesellschaft in der Normen und die Anpassung an solche sozialen Normen von großer Bedeutung sind, kommt die Frage auf, wie das körperlich behinderte Kind dargestellt werden soll und kann. Neben der Existenz einer großen Anzahl an Kontrolllisten und Richtlinien zur Evaluierung der Repräsentation von Behinderung in Bilderbüchern, fragt diese Arbeit, welche visuellen und verbalen Strategien Bilderbuchautorinnen und Autoren anwenden um körperlich behinderte Individuen darzustellen. Um die Bilder als auch den

Text der Bücher zu analysieren bediene ich mich methodisch zum Einen der Bilderbuchtheorie und zum Anderen den theoretischen Ansätzen vom Feld der Disability Studies. Die Analyse zeigt, dass die Repräsentationsstrategien entlang eines Kontinuums verlaufen; dieses reicht von der Hervorhebung von Gleichheit bis zur Akzentuierung von Andersheit und deshalb von der Aufhebung von Differenzen bis hin zur Betonung der Abweichung des behinderten Kindes von einer vermeintlichen Norm.

Abstract (English)

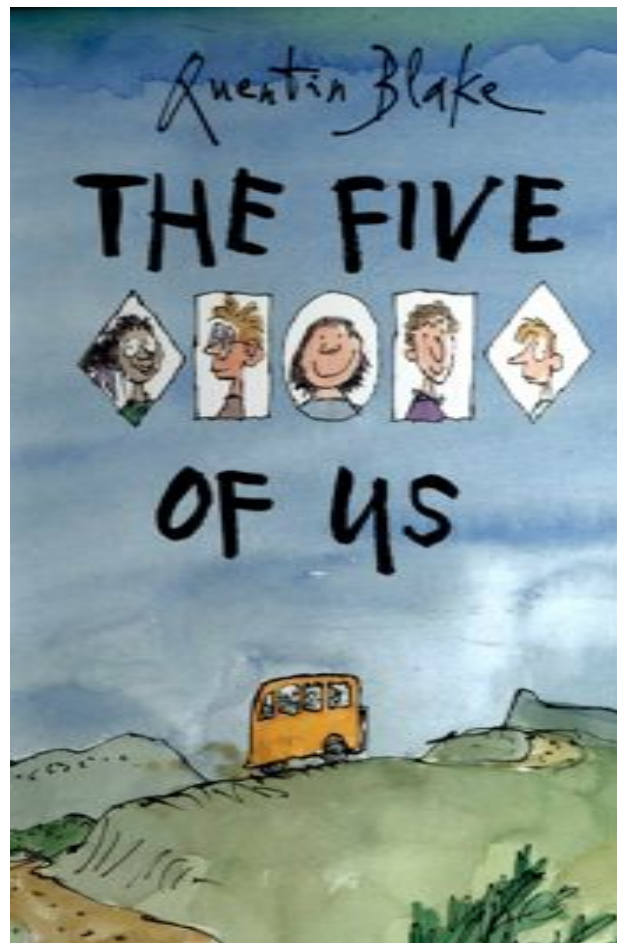
Where are all the disabled heroes and heroines in our children's picturebooks? While much research has already been conducted on the representation of gender and race in children's literature, disability has yet received comparatively little attention. However, with the emergence of a relatively new academic field, disability studies, investigation in the representation of the disabled body in literature is slowly on the rise. As a result, one can now find quite a number of studies on disability in children's books. Most of them come to the conclusion that despite an increase in the diversity of characters, disabled protagonists are still a negligible quantity.

In this thesis I lay the focus on the already existing body of picturebooks that do feature disabled main characters. Using a sample of four picturebooks published since the mid-90's, the time of the emergence of disability studies and the heyday of picturebook research, I investigate the depiction of the physically disabled child character. While all of the selected books cover different topics and tell unique stories, they all present at least one physically disabled child protagonist. Since young readers typically identify themselves with characters of their age and in most cases also remember their childhood heroes and heroines for a very long time, the visual and verbal representation of those individual figures appears crucial.

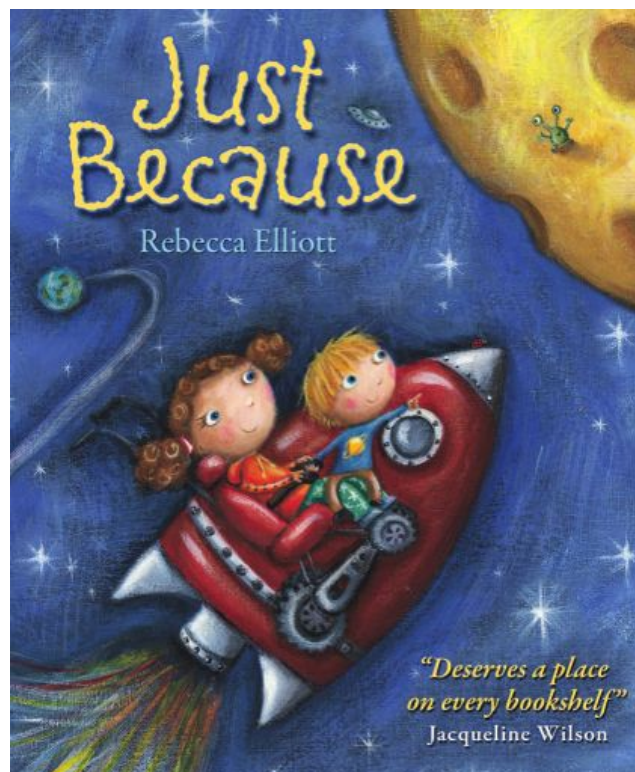
In a society where norms and conformity with societal norms play a prominent role, the question arises how the physically disabled child body can or should be represented. While various guidelines and checklists are offered on how a perfectly inclusive book should depict disability and disabled individuals, this thesis asks what strategies picturebook authors and illustrators currently adopt to portray physically disabled individuals. Methodologically, I employ picturebook theory as well as theoretical approaches from the field of disability studies to analyze the images as well as the language used to portray the physically disabled child bodies. This analysis shows that the strategies of representation can be set along a continuum ranging from the focus on

sameness to otherness, or from the nullification of difference to the foregrounding of the disabled character's deviation from a perceived norm.

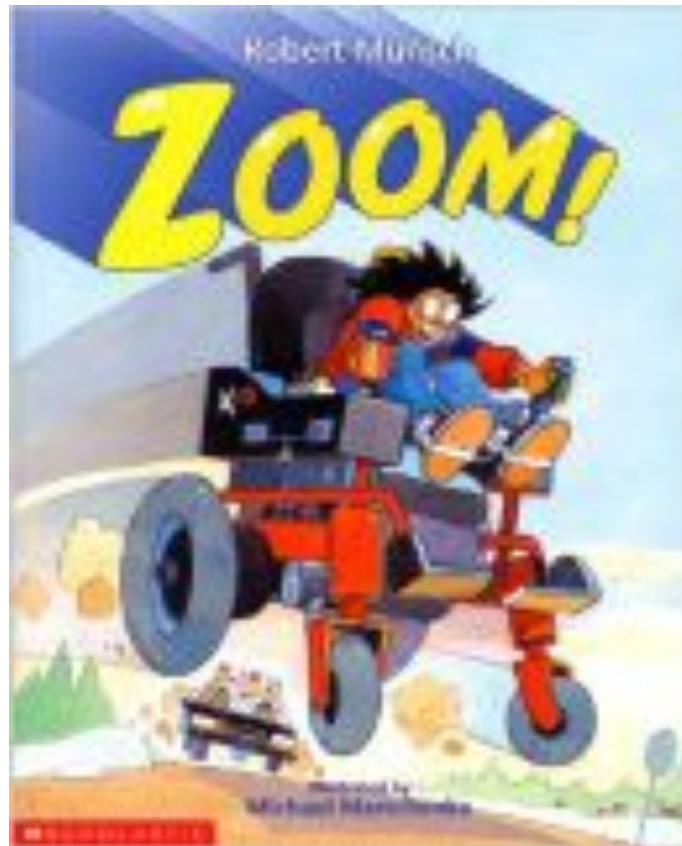
Appendix



Blake, Quentin. *The Five of Us*. (front cover)



Elliott, Rebecca. *Just Because*. (front cover)



Munsch, Robert and Michael Martchenko. *Zoom!.* (front cover)



Willis, Jeanne and Tony Ross. *Susan Laughs.* (front cover)