

Granpa and the polyphonic teddy bear in Mr
Magritte's multidimensional gorilla park:
complexity and sophistication in children's
picture books

by

Bonnie Kneen

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Magister Artium (English)

in the Faculty of Humanities
University of Pretoria
Pretoria

January 2003

Supervisor: Molly Brown

Acknowledgements

The financial assistance of the National Research Foundation (NRF) towards this research is hereby acknowledged. Opinions expressed and conclusions arrived at, are those of the author and are not necessarily to be attributed to the National Research Foundation.

I would like to acknowledge the financial assistance of the University of Pretoria, which awarded me an achievement bursary in 1999, and renewed it in 2000.

I would also like to acknowledge the financial assistance of the South African Association of Women Graduates, which awarded me the Jean McWilliam Scholarship in 1999.

I would like to thank my supervisor, Molly, for all her help and kindness, and for taking me on half way through my work.

I would like to thank Idette for proofreading my dissertation and translating my abstract into Afrikaans.

And I would like to thank Mom, Dad and Marinus for all their help, support, advice and encouragement.

Contents

Acknowledgements	ii
Contents	iii
Figures	iv
Abstract	v
Key terms	vii
Opsomming	viii
Sleutelwoorde	xi
1 Playing grown-up: complexity, sophistication and children's (picture) books	1
2 My counterpoint just jumped out of the frame: how to read picture books	19
3 Mr Magritte and the multidimensional gorillas: <i>Voices in the Park</i>	61
4 Into the park with the polyphonic teddy: <i>I Hate My Teddy Bear</i>	93
5 The amazing ambivalent adventures of Granpa: <i>Granpa</i>	116
6 I spy a toad bathing the pirate captain's leg: complexity, sophistication and the children's book world	145
Bibliography	154

Figures

	Opposite page
Figure 1: Mummy	66
Figure 2: Dad	71
Figure 3: Charles	74
Figure 4: Smudge	79
Figure 5: Bizarre world of <i>I Hate My Teddy Bear</i>	93
Figure 6: More of the bizarre	93
Figure 7: John's first sitting room	98
Figure 8: John's second sitting room	98
Figure 9: Standard <i>Granpa</i> opening with text and sepia verso and coloured recto	117
Figure 10: Granpa and the little girl's fight	122
Figure 11: Dolls' teaparty	123

Abstract

Contemporary children's books, particularly picture books, show an increasing tendency towards complexity and sophistication. There is, however, some resistance to this tendency in the children's book world. This thesis therefore critically analyses complexity and sophistication in three picture books – chosen because they represent particularly high numbers of the most common complexities and sophistications – in order to determine whether or not such resistance is appropriate.

The study defines picture books as fictional, illustrated books in which pictures and design are vehicles for meaning, where text and art are integral aspects of an interdependent relationship. It thus examines words, the roles of words and pictures and their interactions, linear progression, time and page-breaks, rhythm, design, colour, medium, style, line, regularity, balance, framing, shot, point of view, gaze, visual weight, position, shape, size, light, background, symbol, pictorial analogy, visual games, nonsense, intervisuality, intravisuality, leitmotif and counterpoint.

The sophisticated structure, polyphony, visual nonsense and allusion of Anthony Browne's *Voices in the Park* allow deep, complex examinations of its characters' psychologies, making marginalized groups visible and critiquing stereotypes of class, gender, family structure and unemployment. Its sophistications and complexities thus enable Browne's book to satisfy significant priorities in the children's book world, because it avoids overt didacticism, respects "literary" values and is socially aware.

The sophisticated structure, visual nonsense, multidimensionality and multivoicedness of David McKee's *I Hate My Teddy Bear* raise problems of narrative and focalizer, overtly inscribe inconsistency, vagueness and uncertainty, and determinedly resist resolution. McKee's book thus refuses to imply a clear reader role, and situates readers firmly outside itself, where subjection to any one interaction with, response to or idea within it becomes impossible. This stimulates child readers' creative thought, and distributes power between adult writers and child readers unusually equitably, thus offering children the respect and power of literary and ideological self-determination in a safe, restricted area of fiction.

John Burningham's *Granpa* neglects many of the conventions of writing and storytelling, so that readers face the multiplexity of its form and structure, the emergence of its linear narrative from apparent stasis into irresolution and ambiguity, and its difficult themes and psychological content, with very little guidance in their reading beyond frequently confusing formal signals. This is difficult for adult readers, who have learnt to expect certain conventions from stories, and to use them to interpret and predict what they read. It may, however, be particularly easy for child readers, because it does not force them to read in ways that are still foreign to and thus possibly difficult for them. It may even be less threatening to children and antagonistic to children's culture than most children's books, because it does not socialize children into the alien adult culture concomitant with conventional reading.

Together, these analyses reveal that complex, sophisticated children's books may function in a variety of ways. The children's book world should thus rather evaluate them individually than reject the entire genre.

Key terms

Voices in the Park

I Hate My Teddy Bear

Granpa

Anthony Browne

David McKee

John Burningham

Complexity

Sophistication

Children's literature

Picture books

Opsomming

In hedendaagse kinderboeke, veral prenteboeke, is daar 'n toenemende tendens tot kompleksiteit en gesofistikeerdheid. Daar is egter 'n mate van weerstand teen hierdie neiging in die kinderboekwêreld. Hierdie tesis ontleed derhalwe kompleksiteit en gesofistikeerdheid krities in drie prenteboeke – gekies omdat hulle 'n besonder hoë aantal van die mees algemene kompleksiteite en gesofistikeerdhede verteenwoordig – om te bepaal of sodanige weerstand aangewese is.

Die studie omskryf prenteboeke as fiktiewe geïllustreerde boeke waarin die prente en die ontwerp betekenisdraers is, met die teks en kuns albei integrale aspekte van 'n interafhanklike verhouding. Dit ondersoek woorde, die rolle van woorde en prente en hulle interaksies, lineêre progressie, tyd en waar 'n nuwe bladsy begin, ritme, ontwerp, kleur, medium, styl, lyn, reëlmatigheid, balans, raam, 'skoot', verteller, gesigspunt, blik, visuele gewig, posisie, vorm, grootte, lig, agtergrond, simbool, beeldanalogie, visuele speletjies, onsin, intervisualiteit, intravisualiteit, leitmotif en kontrapunt.

Die gesofistikeerde struktuur, polifonie, visuele onsin en allusie van Anthony Browne se *Voices in the Park* laat diep, komplekse ondersoeke van die karakters se psigologie toe, maak gemarginaliseerde groepe sigbaar en beoordeel klas-, geslags-, familiestruktuur- en werkloosheidstereotipes. Die boek se gesofistikeerdhede en kompleksiteite maak dit dus moontlik vir Browne om betekenisvolle prioriteite in die

kinderboekwêreld te bevredig, omdat dit openlike didaktisisme vermy, “literêre” waardes respekteer en sosiale bewustheid toon.

Gesofistikeerde struktuur, visuele onsin, multidimensionaliteit en veelstemmigheid in David McKee se *I Hate My Teddy Bear* gee aanleiding tot probleme van vertelling en fokaliseerder, sluit openlik inkonsekwentheid, vaagheid en onsekerheid in, en weerstaan ontknoping hardnekkig. McKee se boek weier dus om ‘n duidelike rol vir die leser te impliseer, en plaas lesers buite die teks, waar onderwerping aan enige spesifieke interaksie met, respons tot of idee binne die teks onmoontlik is. Dit stimuleer kinders as lesers se kreatiewe denke, en verdeel mag tussen volwasse skrywers en kinders as lesers buitengewoon eweredig, wat kinders die respek en mag van literêre en ideologiese selfbepaling binne ‘n veilige, beperkte veld van fiksie bied.

John Burningham se *Granpa* laat baie skryf- en storievertellingskonvensies na, sodat lesers oorgelaat word aan die veelvuldigheid van sy vorm en struktuur, die ontwikkeling van sy lineêre narratief vanaf oënskynlike stasis na onoplosbaarheid en dubbelsinnigheid, en sy moeilike temas en psigologiese inhoud, met baie min leiding buiten dikwels verwarrende formele tekens. Dit maak dit moeilik vir volwasse lesers wat geleer het om sekere storiekonvensies te verwag en om hulle te gebruik om te interpreteer en te voorspel wat hulle lees. Dit mag dit egter besonder maklik maak vir kinders as lesers, want dit dwing hulle nie om te lees op maniere wat nog vreemd aan hulle en dus moontlik moeilik vir hulle is nie. Dit mag selfs minder bedreigend en minder antagonisties teenoor kinders se kultuur wees as baie ander kinderboeke, omdat dit kinders nie sosialiseer in die anderssoortige volwasse kultuur waarmee konvensionele lees gepaardgaan.

Hierdie ontledings toon dat komplekse, gesofistikeerde kinderboeke op 'n verskeidenheid maniere funksioneer. Die kinderboekwêreld behoort hulle dus eerder individueel te beoordeel as om die hele genre te verwerp.

Sleutelwoorde

Voices in the Park

I Hate My Teddy Bear

Granpa

Anthony Browne

David McKee

John Burningham

Kompleksiteit

Gesofistikeerdheid

Kinderletterkunde

Prenteboeke