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Visual Narrativity in the Picture Book: Heinrich Hoffmann's *Der Struwwelpeter*

*This article intervenes in the debate about the pedagogical import of Heinrich Hoffmann's *Der Struwwelpeter*. Should this book be regarded as a typical example of black pedagogy or as a form of subversive children's literature? I argue in favour of the latter point of view, on the basis of a close reading of the interaction between words and pictures in this classic children's book. Meanwhile, this article aims to further our theoretical insights into the narrative potential of images. Every picture tells a story, but how, exactly? I attempt to give an answer to this question through a detailed case study of *Der Struwwelpeter*.*

KEY WORDS: picture book; irony; visual narrativity; subversion.

The Autonomous Picture

The picture book has proved to be a fruitful field of study for inquiries into the narrative potential of the fixed image. It has generated a rather sophisticated body of theory over the last 20 years or so, which leaves the conventional view of the picture book as a basically verbal artifact supported by pictures far behind. Contemporary studies of the picture book approach its pictorial dimension as an independent semiotic system in its own right, which does not necessarily concur with the verbal component, rather than as a mere prop to the verbal story. Both words and images make their own relatively autonomous contribution to the overall semantic, aesthetic and emotional effect of the picture book. Therefore, it has often been observed that the picture book is closer to other mixed narrative forms such as drama or film than to verbal fiction.

Given the general consensus on the substantial weight of both pictorial and verbal narrative codes in the picture book, it is only logical

Perry Nodelman, 'The Eye and the I: Identification and first-person narratives in picture books.'

that many studies attempt to give an overview of the different types of interaction between words and images in this surprisingly complex art form. With this purpose in mind, scholarship on the picture book has devoted considerable attention to the issue of 'irony'. According to Perry Nodelman, words and pictures can never simply repeat or parallel each other, because of the inherent differences between verbal and visual modes of communication. Images cannot explicitly assert attitudes towards the phenomena they display, for example. They can, however, visually demonstrate attitudes, while words are incapable of directly expressing emotion through shape and color. Because visual and verbal modes of communication are subject to diverging sets of constraints, the images in a picture book can never simply illustrate the words, but will necessarily offer different types of information to the reader: "As a result, the relationships between pictures and texts in picture books tend to be ironic: each speaks about matters on which the other is silent" (p. 221). Nodelman even has it that every picture book tells at least three stories: a verbal one, a visual one, and a third one that "tends to emerge from ironies created by differences between the first two" (p. 2). In keeping with the contemporary emphasis on the theatrical aspects of the picture book, the kind of irony Nodelman has in mind here is in fact synonymous to dramatic irony, for the third storyline is only accessible to the reader, who therefore has an advantage over the characters within the picture book. Readers necessarily know more than the protagonists in the verbal and/or visual stories.

Perry Nodelman,
Words About Pictures

Perry Nodelman, *Words About Pictures*

Perry Nodelman, 'The Eye and the I'

Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott, 'The Dynamics of Picture Book Communication'

Others think Nodelman's thesis about the endemic nature of irony in the picture book is overstated, and that one would do better to draw up a taxonomy that could do justice to the whole spectrum of different word-image interactions in picture books, ranging from relatively harmonious concord to blatant contradiction. Thus, Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott have come up with the categories of *symmetrical*, *enhancing*, *complementary*, *counterpointing* and *contradictory* interaction. In opposition to Nodelman's view, the first three categories allow for the possibility that words and pictures may closely cooperate in the narration of one and the same story. In symmetrical interaction, words and pictures basically repeat each other. When they enlarge each other's semantic range, we are dealing with enhancing interaction, which may culminate in complementary interaction, when words and pictures make truly independent contributions to one and the same story line. Only the last two categories coincide with Nodelman's concept of the inherently ironical picture book. In the case of counterpointing interaction, words and images generate meanings "beyond the scope of either one alone" (p. 226), which may even go as far as downright contradiction.¹

In this article, I would like to go deeper into the potential of word-image combinations to generate stories, while contributing to the debate about irony in the picture book through a detailed analysis of Heinrich Hoffmann's *Der Struwwelpeter, oder lustige Geschichten und drollige Bilder* (1858(1845)).² This picture book makes a fascinating case, if only because Hoffmann was one of the very first authors to combine the literary conventions of the cautionary tale with illustrations in such a way that they both fulfil an essential function in propelling the story forward. Thus, the book provides us with the opportunity to study the word-image dynamic *in embryo*. It originated as a Christmas gift for his 4-year old son Carl in 1844. Hoffmann, who practised medicine in Frankfurt, wanted to buy his son a book, but he could not find anything to his liking in the Frankfurt bookstores. Books for young children were too moralistic and didactic, in his view, and he was displeased with their illustrations. These, he felt, were too smooth, too realistic, too unimaginative to interest young children. And so he set about creating a picture book of his own, which did not only turn him into one of the first, but also one of the most successful creators of a "pictorialized"³ narrative in the history of German literature. *Der Struwwelpeter* was not only a bestseller, but also a spectacular longseller. It has gone through some 600 editions and is still in print today. Certainly, this fact in itself is enough to make anyone wonder what the secret could be of the enduring appeal of this picture book. However, I do not want to use *Der Struwwelpeter* merely as an accessory to the semiotics of word-image combinations. I would also like to demonstrate that theories of word-image relations in mixed genres such as the comic strip and the photo-novel may clarify a controversy that has dogged the *Struwwelpeter* research industry for decades at a stretch, namely the question of whether Hoffmann's tales propagate or undermine a repressive pedagogical regime. Some have it that *Der Struwwelpeter* advocates the harsh and cruel subjection of naughty children, others argue on the contrary that he ridicules adult authority. Siding with the latter party, I hope to point out that contemporary insights into visual narrativity may help to shed new light on this issue.

Setting the Stage

Jens Thiele, *Das Bilderbuch*

Hoffmann's book opens with a frontispiece that functions as a "visual prologue", (p. 82) that is, a word-image combination that anticipates the story that is to follow, somewhat comparable to the trailer of a motion picture or the overture of an opera. The visual prologue offers important clues to the interpretation of what is to follow (Illustration 1). The page lay-out of the frontispiece has been composed out of three symmetrical sections. The top section



Illustration 1.

displays an angelic creature with wings and a crown who holds out a picture book and is sided by two illuminated Christmas trees. The middle/lower section shows a boy playing with toys on the left and a boy who is walking the streets with his mother on the right. The bottom section contains a picture of a boy who is eating his soup at the dinner table. Judging from their clothes and their size, these three boys are one and the same person. Where the left-right division of the page is concerned, we may observe that the angel is

positioned in the middle of the top section. This position is mirrored by the boy in the bottom section. The other figures in the middle/lower section have been moved to the margins of the page, while the text block occupies centerpage. These sections are suggestive of three semantic layers that will prove to be important throughout *Der Struwwelpeter*, the top section figuring the transcendental, spiritual or imaginary realm, the middle/lower section representing quotidian reality, just like the bottom section, with the difference that the latter places a stronger accent on basic bodily drives. The ethereal nature of the angelic creature is emphasized by the fact that its feet are hidden from view. It is not grounded in any sort of way, it simply floats, in contrast to the picture of the boy at the dinner table, which conspicuously displays the legs of both table and chair, firmly putting the boy on the ground. This chair is duplicated in miniature size in the toy which the boy on the left margin of the middle/lower section is holding in his hand. Thus, the frontispiece turns heaven and earth into contiguous domains. The angelic creature is surrounded by toys (a man on a horse, a miniature church, candy, some of which are duplicated in the toys the boy in the middle/lower section is playing with), while holding out the most desirable toy of all, the picture book, which will be given by “das Christkind” as a Christmas present to children who do as they are told, namely playing quietly, allowing themselves to be guided by their mother while out on the street, and finishing their dinner. In other words, there is a certain give-and-take between heaven and earth. Creatures from heaven will occasionally consent to descend, while there is a promise of upward mobility for those situated in the middle/lower and bottom sections. These connotations will prove to be important to the interpretation of the picture book as a whole, as I shall point out later on.⁴

Turning the page, we are confronted with the title story. It features the icon of a boy on an ornamental pedestal sporting exceedingly long hair and fingernails (Illustration 2). The pedestal is decorated by a comb and a scissors, which flank the inscription of the accompanying text as ornamental trophies. The words of the title story are uttered by the same “voice of authority” who produced the lines on the frontispiece, namely an external narrator who does not figure as a character in the scenes presented to us. The messages uttered on the frontispiece and the title story are complementary to each other. In the first case, juvenile readers are lured into identification with the obedient children in the pictures through the promise of a gift, while they are discouraged from identifying themselves with the filthy boy in the title story through the threat of physical discomfort. Shock-headed Peter is offered up to the juvenile reader as an object of ridicule and disgust. The public is supposed to scoff at him, in unison with the external narrator. The title story exhorts the audi-



Illustration 2.

ence to bond with the voice of authority at the expense of the young protagonist of the story, who is put in the pillory as a target of disidentification.

The word-image dynamic in the title story is theatrical rather than dramatic in the strict sense of the word.⁵ Contemporary picture books often feature an internal narrator (first-person narration) who is displayed in the pictures from an external point of view (third-person narration). The verbal story represents the events from the point of view of the child hero, but in the pictures the main characters

tend to figure as the object rather than the subject of focalization, that is, the picture represents the child, rather than the field of vision of the main character. In the case of *Der Struwwelpeter*, both words and pictures are external. Shock-headed Peter does not get to speak a single line, nor do the other children in the stories that are to follow, but for the one exception of “Suppen-Kaspar”. Just like the frontispiece, this already gives us a foretaste of the tight fit between the words and the pictures of *Der Struwwelpeter*. The pictures act out the words quite literally and vice versa. The juvenile reader is invited to cast a scornful glance upon this depraved child and therefore the accompanying picture puts him up for exposure. The frontispiece and the title story together set the stage for what is to follow. They suggest that we will be presented with a collection of cautionary tales which instil notions of appropriate behaviour into the audience by confronting readers with the consequences of certain deeds. These consequences function as so many rewards or punishments (mostly the latter).

At first glance, the subsequent stories seem to meet these expectations. They all demonstrate how childish peccadilloes such as sucking one’s thumb, playing with matches, or refusing nourishment have grave consequences that seriously endanger, mutilate and sometimes even kill the youthful transgressors. If we want to subsume the misdeeds in the Struwwelpeter stories under a common denominator, one could say that the various child protagonists are all guilty of being unable to control their spontaneous bodily impulses. As soon as they begin to move about while giving in to this or that urgent inclination, they are in for trouble. In other words, they all fail to conform to the quiet and subdued types of behaviour displayed by the frontispiece. The rather severe punishments of (near) death by drowning, burning, or starving are rarely meted out by authorities such as parents, nannies or schoolmasters, except for “Der Daumenlutscher,” whose thumbs are cut off by a tailor’s scissors. In general, there hardly seems to be any need for human intention or intervention here. Evil punishes itself in *Der Struwwelpeter* through merciless cause-and-effect chains that are forged by ineradicable natural laws.

Charles Frey, ‘Heinrich
Hoffmann:
Struwwelpeter’

Words and pictures closely cooperate to evoke the appearance of objectivity and inevitability in the Struwwelpeter stories. Charles Frey has remarked upon “the compulsive balance and symmetry of Hoffmann’s illustrations,” claiming that “formality and rigidity pervade even the silliest of his pictures” (p. 52). The pictures indeed obey rigid codes in certain respects. The critical moment at which a child decides to ignore an interdiction is always clearly indicated by visual signs. Except for “Suppen-Kaspar”, the child protagonists are

drawn *en face* as long as they stay in their proper place. They are drawn *en profil* as soon as they decide to follow their own impulses, which is always a sure sign that their lives will be at stake within a few moments. Furthermore, the pictures tend to represent the consequences of the deeds that are reported in the verbal text. In other words, the pictures usually depict phenomena that succeed the events recorded by the words. If the verbal text of "Die Geschichte vom bösen Friederich" informs us that Frederick, who is overly prone to anger, wrecks chairs and kills birds, the picture represents a boy who flourishes a broken chair over his head while dead birds are lying at his feet (Illustration 3). If we are told that "Suppen-Kas-

Die Geschichte vom bösen Friederich



Illustration 3.

Marie-Luise Konneker,
Dr Heinrich Hoff-
mann's "Struwwelp-
eter"

par" literally starves himself to death, the final picture does not show his corpse, but his tombstone. Marie-Luise Könneker infers from this temporal relationship between words and pictures that the pictures fulfil the function of forwarding evidence of the events recorded in the verbal text: 'These misdeeds were truly committed: here is the result'.

A rather humorless word-picture dynamic, or so it seems! Another possible argument to underscore the supposedly authoritative, repressive nature of this collection of stories could be derived from the 'choruses' and other devices for driving home the moralistic message and curbing the children's freedom to interpret the stories as they like. Choruses in a theatrical drama generally perform the function of moulding the audience's attitude towards the events represented. The two cats in "Die gar traurige Geschichte mit dem Feuerzeug" and the three fishes in "Die Geschichte vom Hans Guck-in-die-Luft" perform this task in *Der Struwwelpeter*. Other theatrical devices for telling children what they are to think of the sad fate befalling their fellow creatures are the face towering above "Der Daumenlutscher" as a part of the décor furnishing the stage on which he has been put up for display (Illustration 4). This face is 'making faces' in reaction to the events displayed: disapproval at disobedience, satisfaction at punishment. At this point, one may well wonder how the epithets "lustig" and "drollig" apply to the Struwwelpeter stories. What could possibly be so funny about all this? It is time for a second look.

Cracks in the Backdrop

If we subject the visual narrativity of *Der Struwwelpeter* to a closer analysis, we may chance upon a whole array of features that

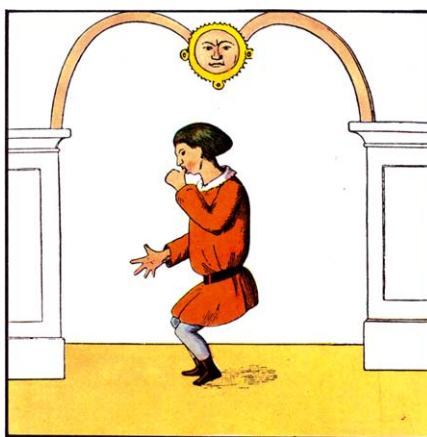


Illustration 4.

complicate the comments given in the above. Let us return to the title story for a moment. I have suggested that the child protagonist is presented to the juvenile reading audience as a target of scorn. However, the style in which Shock-headed Peter has been drawn invites us to reconsider this interpretation. Like all the other characters in *Der Struwwelpeter*, he has been drawn in an emphatically clumsy manner. This is how children draw puppets: facing the spectator, with stiff, slightly spread arms and legs. Although Hoffmann earned his living as a doctor and dabbled in the composition of picture books, this does not mean that he could not do any better than that. Hoffmann's extensive account of the origins of *Der Struwwelpeter* points out that he purposefully aimed at imitating childish doodles to make his book amenable to the very young audience he had in mind (3–6 year olds). The pictures are likely to give child readers the idea that they could easily achieve something like that as well, a first step towards overcoming dislike. Furthermore, although the verbal text indeed emphatically pillories this filthy child, the fact of the matter is that the picture (which literally incorporates the text) has not really put him in a pillory but on a monumental, decorated pedestal, which is a sign of honor rather than humiliation. Lastly, Shock-headed Peter does not betray even the faintest trace of shame or regret. He neither covers nor casts down his eyes. On the contrary, he stares back at the spectator in defiance.

True enough, words and pictures concur very closely indeed in *Der Struwwelpeter*, apparently leaving hardly any room for the ironical freedom of interpretation that picture books are appreciated for nowadays. But as a matter of fact, their fit is a little too close for comfort, and this is exactly the point at which irony comes into play. The words telling us that the cats in the story about the matches cried a river over Harriet's unfortunate death are illuminated by a picture which literally displays the cats shedding a veritable flood of tears (Illustration 5). This hyperbolic image evokes bathos rather than pathos. Moreover, it casts doubt upon the preceding sequence of events. If the cats are apparently able to call forth this much water, why did they not do so before in order to quench the flames consuming poor Harriet? Thus, this story not only exposes Harriet's naughtiness, but it also reveals the incompetence and unreliability of those who claim a position of authority over children.

Once doubt begins to creep in, we may notice another tell-tale detail in the final picture, namely the purple ribbons in the tails of the cats. Judging from their color, these are the same ribbons that decorated Harriet's braids in the previous pictures. How is it possible that these ribbons were salvaged from the flames, together with the girl's shoes? These details undermine the verisimilitude of Harriet's



Doch weh! die Flamme faßt das Kleid,
die Schürze brennt, es leuchtet weit.
Es brennt die Hand, es brennt das Haar,
es brennt das ganze Kind sogar.

Und Minz und Maunz, die schreien
gar jämmerlich zu zweien:
„Herbei! Herbei! Wer hilft geschwind?
In Feuer steht das ganze Kind!
Miau! Mio! Miau! Mio!
zu Hilf! das Kind brennt lichterloh!“

Verbrannt ist alles ganz und gar,
das arme Kind mit Haut und Haar;
ein Häuflein Asche bleibt allein
und beide Schuh, so hübsch und fein.

Und Minz und Maunz, die kleinen
die sitzen da und weinen:
Miau! Mio! Miau! Mio!
wo sind die armen Eltern? wo?“
Und ihre Tränen fließen
wie 's Bächlein auf den Wiesen.

Illustration 5.

gruesome punishment. In the case of the tearful cats, there is a strong congruence between words and pictures, because the picture takes the verbal metaphor literally. An even more salient example of this device is offered by the tailor in the story about the thumb-sucker. Although the punishment of the thumb-sucker is perhaps the most frightening episode of all, its cruelty is mitigated by the way in which the tailor has been drawn. The tailor wielding the scissors is really a big pair of scissors himself: his hair, his coat, his legs, and (in later editions) the tape measure hanging out of his pocket all

display the V-shape of the 'legs' of a pair of scissors (Illustration 6). The German word for tailor —'Schneider'—literally means 'cutter' and indeed, this man seems to have been tailored to cutting. One does not encounter such creatures in everyday life: they only show up on the pages of a picture book.

The World Turned Upside Down

Let us now reconsider the "compulsive balance and symmetry" of Hoffmann's illustrations noted (but not analyzed) by Charles Frey. He has it that the rigid codification of these images indicate that "'merriment' and 'funniness' are kept strictly within bounds of good child-rearing moral philosophy" (p. 52). A close reading of the illustrations reveals, however, that visual balance and symmetry undermine rather than uphold the hierarchy between adult authorities and disobedient children. Take, for instance, the symmetries in the top-bottom and left-right segmentation of the page. As I have already remarked in my analysis of the frontispiece, several pages in this picture book have a three-tiered lay-out. In the visual prologue, the top layer featuring "das Christkind" is suggestive of a spiritual realm, while the two layers below connote quotidian reality and the realm of our basic bodily drives. This order is disturbed by the second story in Hoffmann's tales, "Die Geschichte vom bösen Friederich". The three pages that make up this story have an identical tripartite segmentation, but it conflates the semantic connotations of higher and lower levels of being. Confusion arises immediately in the sense that the superior posi-

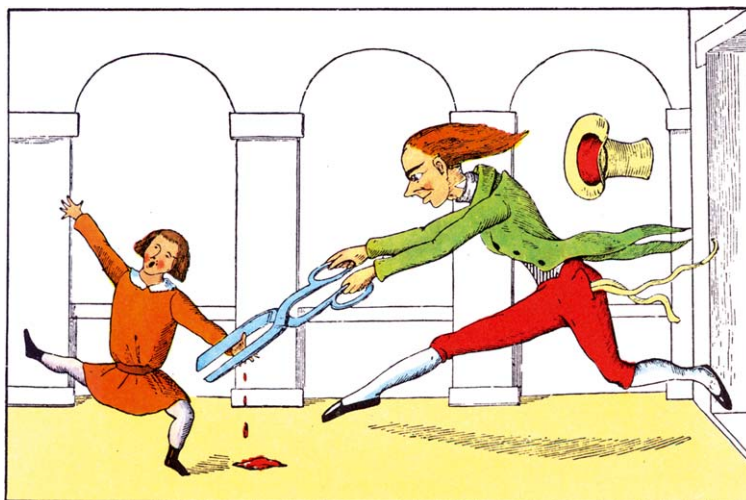


Illustration 6.

tion of the angel/Christ is now occupied by the evil Frederick, who triumphantly waves the token of his aggression above his head (see *Illustration 3*). The realm of quotidian reality which is capable of redemption through the descent of the heavenly creature in the visual prologue, has been downgraded to the bottom of the page, while the middle section pictures Frederick sadistically tearing off the wings of a fly, which are faintly reminiscent of the winged angel in the top section of the visual prologue. Obviously, there is no aspiration towards transcendence in this story. The conflation of higher and lower levels of being is aggravated on the second page, through the visual trickery with the stairway (*Illustration 7*). One would expect movement to proceed



Am Brunnen stand ein großer Hund,
trank Wasser dort mit seinem Mund.
Da mit der Peitsch herzu sich schlich
der bitterböse Friederich;
und schlug den Hund, der heulte sehr,
und trat und schlug ihn immer mehr.
Da biß der Hund ihn in das Bein,
recht tief bis in das Blut hinein.
Der bitterböse Friederich,
der schrie und weinte bitterlich.
Jedoch nach Hause lief der Hund
und trug die Peitsche in dem Mund.

Illustration 7.

from bottom to top, as we see Frederick climbing the stairs leading him from the bottom section to the top section of the page. However, the order of events as narrated by the words proceeds from top to bottom: first Frederick approaches a dog, then he threatens the animal with his whip, the dog finally retaliates by biting him in the foot. These events also reveal that the lower species (the animal) triumphs over the higher one (the human), an illegitimate victory which is consummated in the third and last page of the story. The top section displays a feverish Frederick who is confined to bed, while the dog has usurped his place at the dinner table and has gained possession of Frederick's whip. The chair and table are exactly identical to the pieces of furniture which occupied the bottom section of the frontispiece (Illustration 8). Here they have moved one place up. The realm of quotidian reality has made way for the realm of the instinctual. This is not as it should be.

This destabilization of the hierarchy between the spiritual, the quotidian and the instinctual is not unique to this story, as a comparison with "Die Geschichte von den schwarzen Buben" points out. This story also opens with the three-tiered set-up that we have grown familiar with by now (Illustration 9). This time, the lofty position of the angel is occupied by the 'black-a-moor', which is equally unsettling, as blacks were considered to be more animal-like than whites in 19th-century Germany. The middle section shows two boys with toys, while the bottom section represents a boy with food (a pretzel), appropriately enough. In the concluding page, the hierarchy between up and down (which was already in disarray to begin with) has disappeared entirely: the four boys have now been placed on a par, with the three formerly white boys now being even blacker than the black-a-moor (Illustration 10). Here, again, the higher has succumbed to the lower rather than the other way around. This inversion reaches a climax in "Die Geschichte vom wilden Jäger", where the hunted (a hare) literally triumphs over the hunter.

Where the left-right segmentation of the page is concerned, the *Struwwelpeter* stories also cause confusion. Within the Western pictorial tradition, convention has it that movement proceeds from the left to the right side of the picture. In *Der Struwwelpeter*, however, movement may proceed in both directions, which makes it difficult to infer priority from the visual information. On the first page of "Die Geschichte von den schwarzen Buben", the young black-a-moor is walking along from left to right. In the fourth and last page of the story, however, he is walking in the opposite direction, together with Kaspar, Ludwig and Wilhelm. But this is nothing compared to "Die Geschichte vom wilden Jäger", where movement

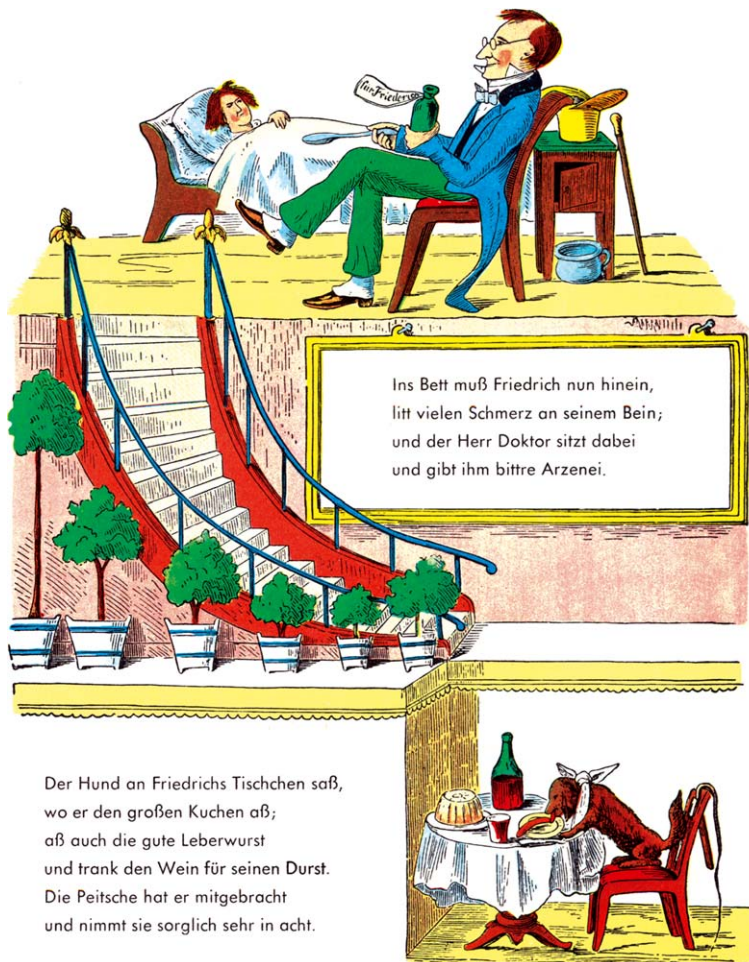


Illustration 8.

continually proceeds from right to left and vice versa on each and every page in a bedazzling zigzag pattern.

The continual confluences of the upper and lower levels and the left and right sides of the page graphically embody the instability of hierarchy in the Struwwelpeter stories. This instability is epitomized in a recurrent motif in both the visual and the verbal component of this picture book, namely the interchangeability of humans and animals. Frederick's place is usurped by a dog, adult authority is incorporated in a pair of cats in Harriet's story, the white boys Kaspar, Wilhelm and Ludwig become similar to the hardly civilized, animal-like black-a-moor, and the hunted hare turns into a hunter. The conventions of children's literature have familiarized us with the interchangeability

Die Geschichte von den schwarzen Buben



Illustration 9.

of children and animals. Like animals, children are considered to be prone to their instincts, contrary to adults, who have undergone a civilizing process. In *Der Struwwelpeter*, however, both children and adults give way to animals. Thus, authority may not be as firmly in place as the repressive pedagogical regime that is conventionally associated with Hoffmann's stories would require.

Visual Rhymes

As has already become apparent from my analysis of the page layout, there are strong resonances between the pictures of the various

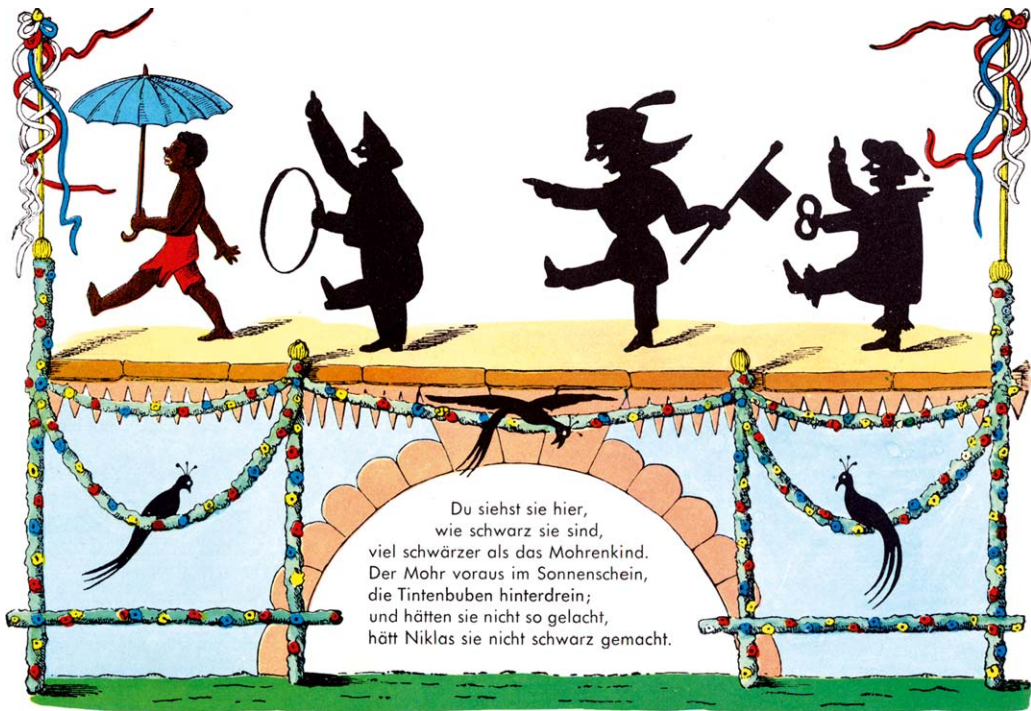


Illustration 10.

Struwwelpeter stories. They ‘rhyme’ in various ways and on different levels, in the sense that visual elements, motifs and structures are repeated from one story to another.⁶ Thus, the table and the chair with the red upholstery return in Frederick’s story, just like the whip carried by the little boy on the right side of the middle section of the frontispiece. The boy in the bottom section of the first page of the story about the inky boys holds the pretzel in his hand that is displayed in the top right corner of the frontispiece. The soup that the good boy in the bottom section of the frontispiece is eating returns in the story about “Suppen-Kaspar”. The black-a-moor is carrying an umbrella, just like Konrad’s mother in “Die Geschichte vom Daumenlutscher” and Robert in the final story, “Die Geschichte vom fliegenden Robert”. The toy church in the frontispiece returns in the ‘real’ church in the last story, etcetera.

It is not just visual structures and objects that recur from one story to another. On a slightly higher level of abstraction, we may also remark upon the recurrence of motifs or “functions” in Vladimir Propp’s sense of the word. The motif of submersion, for instance, figures quite prominently in *Der Struwwelpeter*. In the fourth

story, the three boys mocking the young black-a-moor are submerged in a well of ink by Saint Nicholas. The wild hunter seeks refuge in a well, while "Hans Guck-in-die-Luft" nearly drowns in a river. Once we have registered the recurrence of the element Water, we may grow sensitive towards the presence of the other three elements as well. The element Fire is introduced in the inflammation of Frederick's dog bite and his subsequent fever and then flares up again in the story about Harriet and the matches, while it makes its final appearance in the fiery shot of the hare in the story about the wild hunter. The element Earth is introduced in the fifth story, when the wild hunter lays down on the ground in order to take a nap, which is the beginning of his undoing. It is prominent in the story about "Suppen-Kaspar" who starves and is buried underground, while it returns in the story about "Zappel-Philipp", who undergoes a pseudo-burial as he falls down to the ground and is subsequently buried underneath the table-cloth and all the dishes it supported. The element Air, finally, is introduced in the frontispiece through the winged angel who dwells in heaven, it returns in the temptation of "Hans Guck-in-die-Luft" who cannot take his eyes from the sky above, while it dominates the story about flying Robert. There is indeed balance and symmetry in Hoffmann's treatment of the four elements, in that they all recur thrice, but not necessarily in the interest of furthering a repressive pedagogical regime. Rather, Hoffmann's play with the elements seems to tap archaic levels of meaning (which may at least partly explain *Struwwelpeter's* enduring appeal).

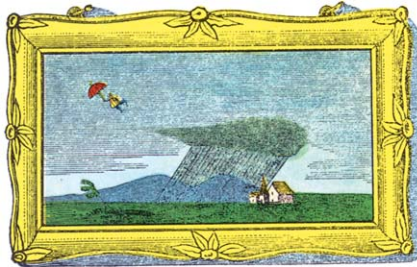
On a yet higher level of abstraction, one could point to rhymes between the ways in which the pages are structured, which I have already discussed to some extent. There is still a device that demands our attention within this context, namely the artful ways in which Hoffmann has framed the pages of his picture book. It is not just that the characters tend to be put up for view on pedestals, stages and placed against the background of theatrical backdrops, it is also that both words and pictures are unified into one visual whole by elaborate decorations that frame the page and thereby visually emphasize the fact that these narrative episodes are products of art, rather than slices of life. As these framing devices became more and more elaborate and emphatic when Hoffmann revised and expanded the collection of stories for the 1858 edition, we may legitimately suppose that he attached considerable importance to them. They are prominent to the extreme in the final story, whose scenes are literally surrounded by portrait frames. In other words, the three episodes constituting the story of flying Robert are presented to the reader as paintings that are hanging up on the wall (Illustration 11).



Die Geschichte vom fliegenden Robert

Wenn der Regen niederbraust,
wenn der Sturm das Feld durchsaust,
bleiben Mädchen oder Buben
hübsch daheim in ihren Stuben.
Robert aber dachte: Nein!
das muß draußen herrlich sein!
Und im Felde patschet er
mit dem Regenschirm umher.

Hui, wie pfeift der Sturm und keucht,
daß der Baum sich niederbeugt!
Seht! den Schirm erfaßt der Wind,
und der Robert fliegt geschwind
durch die Luft so hoch, so weit.
Niemand hört ihn, wenn er schreit.
An die Wolken stößt er schon,
und der Hut fliegt auch davon.



Schirm und Robert fliegen dort
durch die Wolken immerfort.
Und der Hut fliegt weit voran,
stößt zuletzt am Himmel an.
Wo der Wind sie hingetragen,
ja, das weiß kein Mensch zu sagen.

Illustration 11.

Thus, the framing of the page may open our eyes to another type of recurrent motif in *Der Struwwelpeter*, namely the metafictional or 'metapictorial' allusions to its own status as an artifact. The great Nicholas in the fourth story has command over a gigantic pen and an equally formidable ink-well. The boys emerging out of his ink-well look like silhouettes or papercuts. It is impossible to mistake them for real boys, if only because they maintain one and the same bodily posture throughout the story, no matter what happens to them. The Nicholas who wields the gigantic quill represents authorship, and as such, he reminds the audience of the fact that the

creatures they are presented with are really figments of the imagination. As this blatantly unrealistic episode is linked up with other episodes through the device of visual rhyme, it is suggested that the other protagonists are cardboard figures as well. Likewise, Konrad's mother warns him that if he indulges in thumb-sucking, his thumbs will be cut off "als ob Papier es wär" (as if they were made out of paper). This verbal threat is carried out by a figure ('the cutter') who emerges out of a literalization of a verbal expression, which may remind the reader of the fact that the tailor, Konrad, Kaspar, Ludwig and Wilhelm are all made out of paper rather than flesh and blood.

Series and Set

A close reading of the pictorial aspects of *Der Struwwelpeter* enables us to become somewhat more specific about the narrativity of pictures. If we want to go along with Nodelman's assertion that every picture book tells at least three stories, namely a verbal one, a visual one and a third one that is generated by the incongruities between the first two, let us now try to analyze more precisely how this third story line is generated. As I have remarked before, the verbal stories come across as cautionary tales in the first instance, which teach children that if you do *x*, *y* will inevitably happen. This collection of stories seems to feature a relatively arbitrary selection of ordinary German children, carrying ordinary German names such as "Friederich", "Kaspar" or "Konrad." Consequently, the order in which the various stories are presented to us does not seem to be very important. One feels as if the collection could be expanded at will, which is, in fact, what has actually happened, judging from the veritable avalanche of 'Struwwelpetriaden' that have been published in the wake of Hoffmann's classic.

Johannes Baumgartner,
*Der Struwwelpeter: Ein
Bilderbuch macht Kar-
riere* and Rainer Rühle,
"Böse Kinder"

However, this generic categorization becomes problematic when we are prepared to give equal weight to the visual aspects of the Struwwelpeter stories. Hoffmann's play with top-bottom and left-right symmetries, temporal order, the visual rhymes and the framing devices indeed seem to tell a different story. This story-line can be articulated with the help of the categories that Mireille Ribière has brought to bear upon the analysis of photo-narratives. Ribière has drawn up a distinction between a 'series' and a 'set'. The first term refers to the chronological and causal order of events which may be inferred from the contiguousness of photographs arranged within a host-medium (page/book/wall). In the case of a photo-narrative, a particular selection of shots has been arranged in such a way that a story emerges. Likewise, Hoffmann has arranged the pictures making up the various Struwwelpeter stories in such a way that a story

Mireille Ribière, 'Danny
Lyon's *Family Album*'

emerges even without the support of the verbal text. These visual stories are a lot more playful and subversive than their verbal counterparts. Furthermore, in the case of photo-narratives, any photograph in the series may be linked up with any other photograph on the basis of some resemblance between the scene depicted, the types of shot used, or the print characteristics. These resemblances (“visual rhymes”, as I have called them) constitute ‘sets’ that create correspondences between pictures scattered throughout a book. These translinear networks of comparable photographs may be suggestive of yet another storyline. Likewise, the visual rhymes in *Der Struwwelpeter* superimpose ‘sets’ of consonant elements on a linear ‘series’ of events. In other words, visual rhymes link up episodes which are not directly related through chronology or causality, which generates the third (or more) storyline(s).⁷

How would all this affect the interpretation of *Der Struwwelpeter*? The visual rhymes pertaining to, for instance, the play with the four elements, suggest that the various Struwwelpeter stories represent rites of passage. The protagonists are subject to archaic trials by fire, water, earth and air. These trials are all extremely dangerous, as any proper rite of passage should be. One may easily lose one’s life in the process. The protagonists gradually mature through their struggles with the four elements. The boy who carries a whip in the frontispiece is younger than the boy who whips his nanny in the second story. The filthy child in the title story is younger than flying Robert. The ageing process is visualized quite emphatically in the ninth story. The Hans who is dragged out of the river is significantly older than the Hans who has his eye on the swallows in the first picture. At the opening of the story, Hans is still a small, chubby boy with an open and innocent expression on his face. The boy who finally emerges from the water is considerably taller and thinner, and his introverted facial expression clearly indicates that he has grown sadder and wiser.

Thus, while the *series* of the various Struwwelpeter stories seems to deal with the adventures of an arbitrary selection of children that are unrelated to each other, the *set* evoked by the visual rhymes sketches the contours of a rudimentary *Bildungsroman*, which relates the coming-of-age of a young Everyman. While the individual stories all seem to work towards the ending of a cruel punishment that teaches submission and obedience, the *Bildungsroman* as a whole culminates in the ‘apotheosis’ of Robert. This climax has puzzled many a reader who argues in favour of the repressive nature of *Der Struwwelpeter*, as flying does not really seem to be much of a punishment. However, as a conclusion to a *set* which is suggestive of a *Bildungsroman*, it begins to make sense. Let me first point out that we have come full circle when Robert takes off. His flight refers back to the

frontispiece. The visual prologue depicts a heavenly creature who may descend to earth in order to distribute gifts, most notably, a picture book. This product of the imagination may lift the minds of those who are fortunate enough to receive it. The final scene depicts an earthly being who ascends to heaven. This scene is emphatically presented to us as another product of the imagination, that is, a painting. Thus, the promise of transcendence offered by the prologue is fulfilled in the final scene. Perhaps the order in which the stories are presented to us is not all that arbitrary after all.

Black or White Pedagogy?

Having come this far, we may now intervene in the perennial debate about the pedagogical implications of *Der Struwwelpeter* in an informed manner. Since the beginning of the twentieth century, both literary critics and educators have taken offence at the cruel child rearing methods that are supposedly propagated by Hoffmann's evergreen text. The view that *Der Struwwelpeter* is a typical example of *schwarze Pädagogik*⁸ (black pedagogy), that is, the disciplinary regime that bullies children into submission by systematically humiliating, threatening and even torturing them, has become firmly established. This point of view became truly dominant in the sixties and seventies, when anti-authoritarian approaches to child rearing became popular amongst the highly educated elite. This negative qualification of Hoffmann's classic has provoked a more nuanced approach, which comprehends the pedagogical message of *Der Struwwelpeter* as ambivalent. The moderates grant that Hoffmann was indeed intent on instilling the conventional Biedermeier catalogues of vices and virtues into the hearts and minds of his young audience, but they also have it that the stories contain subliminal messages that do not tally with established pedagogical lore. These critics note, for instance, that the child characters are never shown to bend or give in any sort of way, or that their misdeeds are described with a certain glee and an empathetic identification with the transgressor. However, the problem with most discussions of the pedagogical import of this picture book is that they hardly dwell on the fact that we are dealing with an aesthetic artifact here, which not only communicates through its explicit propositional contents, but also through the 'content of the form'. Strikingly enough, Hoffmann's contemporaries were more alert to the moral implications of matters of style and form. In fact, he was frequently taken to task for the ironical, playful aspects of his stories, which undermined their apparently pedagogical purposes. Critics particularly found fault with his illustrations, which, they felt, were too "fratzenhaft" (frolicsome) and as such, made fun of adult authorities.

See 'References' for:
Angela von Randow;
Elke Vogt and Jochen
Vogt; Jack Zipes; Otto
Gmelin; Thomas Free-
man; Charles Frey.

See 'References' for:
Marie-Luise Konneker;
Jurgen Jahn; Hans Ries;
Dieter Petzold; Eva-
Maria Metcalf.

Inka Friese, 'Ein Klassiker am Ausgang seiner Epoche: Heinrich Hoffmann's *Der Struwwelpeter*.'

They were dead right. *Der Struwwelpeter* does not teach established morality. Just like any other children's book, however, it does teach children certain things, for children's books are inescapably didactic, if only because of the fact they are produced by adults for children. If this is so, then what could be the message of Hoffmann's picture book? One could say that it teaches children certain things about the power of the imagination. If one tried to paraphrase the 'moral' of these stories, one could come up with lessons such as the following: 'Growing up involves many risks, but it is possible to escape unscathed'; 'Don't take the verbal threats of adult authorities too literally'; 'Try to transform your fears through your imagination: give them form, exaggerate them, blow them out of proportion, laugh at them'; 'It is possible to transcend the daily grind through the power of art'. In other words, one could regard *Der Struwwelpeter* as a form of aesthetic education, which gives children an idea of sublimation, which is something entirely different from repression. It is pedagogical, for sure, but its pedagogy is of the 'white' rather than the 'black' variety.

Irony Revisited

My case study of Hoffmann's classic seems to come down on Nodelman's side of the debate on irony in the picture book. A close reading of *Der Struwwelpeter* suggests that irony may even arise when words and pictures represent the exact same events and characters. However, this does not necessarily prove that irony is endemic in the picture book, as Nodelman would have it. It does point out that the basis of current taxonomies that attempt to draw up inventories of different types of interplay between words and pictures is not solid enough, for they imply that irony increases to the extent that pictures introduce events and/or characters that are absent from the verbal counterpart. In other words, the presence and degree of irony in a picture book is supposedly directly proportional to the discrepancies between the verbal and the visual story. But irony is not necessarily a case of divergence on the level of story components, as I have tried to point out. Maybe the taxonomical effort fails to reach its goal because critics still have not found an effective vocabulary for analyzing this genre. Critics trying to come to terms with "poly-systemy" in the picture book avail themselves of different types of metaphors: literary ('irony' is in fact, a literary trope), geological (the 'plate tectonics' of William Moebius), musical ('counterpoint'), physical science ('the interference' of different wave lengths of light which merge to create new patterns), etc.⁹ However, if we all agree on the fact that the picture book is much closer to mixed media such as drama, film, comic strips or photo-narratives than to literature, it would make more sense if taxonomies would employ the

David Lewis, 'Going Along with Mr Grumpy'

William Moebius, 'Introduction to Picturebook Codes'

critical vocabularies designed expressly for these art forms. In any case, one should always try to select those concepts that enable the critic to come to terms with the artifactual nature of the picture book, its inherent materiality, or, in other words, with the contents of the form.

Notes

1. Thiele (2000) has designed a comparable taxonomy of diverging 'dramaturgies' for combining words and picture by introducing the categories of *parallel* (doubling), *potenzierend* (enhancing), *modifizierend* (mutually constraining) and *divergierend* (the verbal and visual substrata cannot be subsumed under a single storyline anymore).
2. Hoffmann published the first edition of his picture book in 1845, which contained five stories in all. Hoffmann kept on adding elements to his picture book with later editions, until he drew up a drastically revised version in 1858, which is considered as the 'definitive' *Struwwelpeter*. My references are to this 1858 edition, which contains the following stories, besides the frontispiece and the title story:
 - Die Geschichte vom bösen Friederich—The Story of Cruel Frederick
 - Die gar traurige Geschichte mit dem Feuerzeug—The Dreadful Story of Harriet and the Matches
 - Die Geschichte von den schwarzen Buben—The Story of the Inky Boys
 - Die Geschichte vom wilden Jäger—The Story of the Wild Huntsman
 - Die Geschichte vom Daumenlutscher—The Story of Little Suck-a-Thumb
 - Die Geschichte vom Suppen-Kaspar—The Story of Augustus Who Would Not Have Any Soup
 - Die Geschichte vom Zappel-Philipp—The Story of Fidgety Philip.
 - Die Geschichte von Hans Guck-in-die-Luft—The Story of Johnny Look-in-the-Air
 - Die Geschichte vom fliegenden Robert—The Story of Flying Robert
 Readers may wish to consult the bilingual web edition of Hoffmann's classic: <http://www.fln.vcu.edu/struwwel.html>.
3. The term is used by Andrea Schwenke Wylie to refer to books "wherein the overall meaning of the text is achieved by the interplay between the words and the pictures" (Schwenke Wylie 2001: 192).
4. These observations are indebted to Anita Eckstaedt's psychoanalytic study of *Der Struwwelpeter* (Eckstaedt 1998). Although I do not go along with her overall interpretation of the *Struwwelpeter* stories as expressions of the ways in which a small boy reacts to the grief caused by the loss of his mother at an early age, the book is nevertheless highly recommendable because of its scrupulous and detailed analyses of both the verbal and the visual dimensions of Hoffmann's book.
5. The title story is not fully dramatic, in the sense that it lacks dialogue and it does not display 'men in action'. It is, however, strongly theatrical, in the sense that somebody is put up for display and the audience is explicitly invited to look at him.
6. The concept of 'visual rhyme' has been elaborated in inquiries into the comic strip, see, for instance Ribière (2001), Groensteen (2001).

7. This does not imply that sets always generate stories. Sets are not necessarily narrative. However, in this collection of stories, they certainly are.
8. This concept originated in the anti-authoritarian pedagogical climate of the seventies of the previous century. It was introduced by Katharina Rutschky's anthology of repressive pedagogical treatises of the 18th and 19th centuries (Rutschky, 1977) and became widely familiar through the popular psychology of Alice Miller, author of, amongst other books, *The Drama of the Gifted Child: The Search for the True Self* (1997), originally translated as *Prisoners of Childhood* (1981). The German original, *Das Drama des begabten Kindes und die Suche nach dem wahren Selbst*, appeared in 1979.
9. See Sipe (1998) for a survey of the various metaphors used to designate the word-image relation in the picture book.

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