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RESEARCH CONFERENCES

ESF-LiU Conference

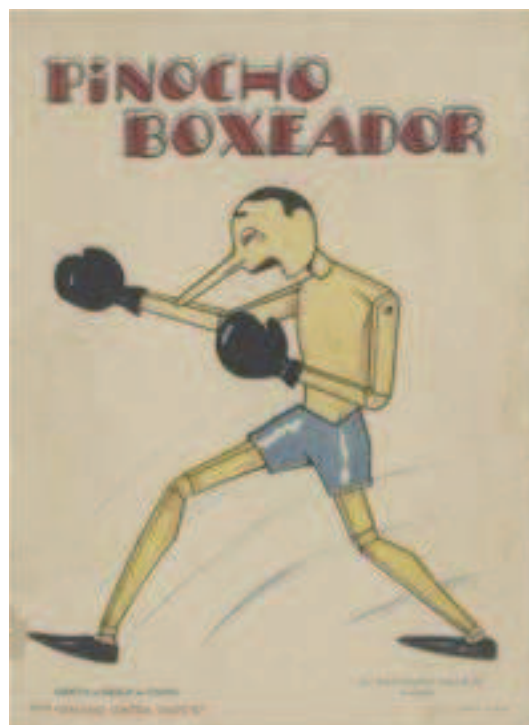
Children's Literature and European Avant-Garde

Norrköping • Sweden
26-30 September 2012

Chair: **Prof. Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer**, Eberhard Karls University Tübingen, DE

Co-Chaired by: **Dr. Elina Druker**, University of Stockholm, SE
Prof. Maria Nikolajeva, University of Cambridge, UK

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Conference Highlights

Please provide a brief summary of the conference and its highlights in non-specialist terms (especially for highly technical subjects) for communication and publicity purposes. (ca. 400-500 words)

"Children's Literature and European Avant-Garde" (University of Norrköping, September 2012) was the first international conference that dealt with this broad and innovative topic. Covering a huge geographical and historical range, this conference gathered the largest group of scholars investigating this subject. The participants came from 25 countries, working in different disciplines, such as literary studies, art history, children's literature research, pedagogy, cultural studies, and intermedial studies. The 28 lectures given by scholars from European (Czechoslovakia, Denmark, Finland, Montenegro, Norway, Russia, Sweden, The Netherlands, UK, among others) and Non-European countries (Australia, Brazil, Canada, Israel, USA) presented the unique opportunity to discuss the mutual impact of Avant-garde movements, ranging from Expressionism, Dadaism, Cubism, Modernism and the Bauhaus to Surrealism and Pop Art, on the development of children's literature in different countries. Moreover, some presentations evidently showed the influence of Avant-garde artists on Non-European children's book authors and illustrators, for example in Brazil and the USA, thus emphasizing the cross-cultural encounters between children's literature and Avant-garde movements. Another important issue disputed at the conference was the afterlife of Avant-garde art and literature in modern children's literature published after the Second World War. Since there is very little written on children's literature and the Avant-garde, a lot of uncovered material, hidden in archives and libraries and for a long time forgotten was disposed to the audience, therefore proving that the investigation of this subject is not only fruitful and promising, but opens up new insights in the tight relationship between literature for children and adults. A particularly striking result of the inspiring lectures was the finding that the development of Avant-garde children's books went hand in hand with a broader awareness of contemporary political, cultural, and social constraints, leading to re-visions of traditional concepts of childhood.

Noticeably, all presentations demonstrated that Avant-garde works for children paved the way for the modernization of children's literature since the turn of the century until the present. They introduced new aesthetic and narrative concepts into children's books, therefore regarded as milestones in the history of European children's literature.

A selection of the most innovative and original papers will be published with an international publisher in order to show the topic's overarching relevance, thus encouraging further research in this newly arisen field.



I hereby authorize ESF – and the conference partners to use the information contained in the above section on 'Conference Highlights' in their communication on the scheme.

Scientific Report

Executive Summary

(2 pages max)

There is scant research on the relationship between children's literature and Avant-garde as of yet. Even after the foundation of the society "European Avant-Garde and Modernism" in 2007 children's literature is hardly represented by this network which covers more than 400 members. In addition, there has not been organized an international conference on this issue until the present. Since the ESF-program presents the perfect academic frame for such an enterprise, the chairs submitted a proposal for an ESF-Lui-Conference in autumn 2010. After the acceptance by the ESF reading committee, the chairs have been invited to take part in an official meeting in Brussels in March 2011 which was attended by the chair Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer. During this one-day meeting in the ESF-office, the chairs were instructed about the conference scheme, the guidelines for chairs, and the role of the rapporteur. The chairs had the opportunity to meet their conference officers and to discuss open questions and practical matters with regard to the organization of the conference. In addition, a quality level agreement contract was signed that underlines the commitments of the chairs and the ESF-management.

A Call for Papers was launched in September 2011 on the ESF-website and other relevant websites and mailing lists, for instance International Research Society of Children's Literature; Children's Literature Association of America, European Network for Avantgarde and Modernism, and H-Germanistik. The deadline for the submission of abstracts for short talks and posters was March 1, 2012 (later extended to May 1, 2012). 85 applications have been submitted by then. 18 renowned scholars who have published seminal studies on the relationship between children's literature and European Avant-Garde have been invited in autumn 2011 as keynote speakers (three of them have withdrawn their participation for different reasons). The keynote speakers were asked to submit an extended abstract (approx. 300-400 words, including a bibliography of 3-5 seminal references) and a short bio by March 1, 2012. After a meticulous selection process the chairs have chosen 15 proposals for a short talk and twelve for the poster session on the second day (three poster presenters have withdrawn their participation for different reasons). The competition was very high and only the best and most innovative abstracts has been selected, whereat the chairs were attentive to promising proposals submitted by early stage researchers. Criteria for the selection were a) innovative topic that has not been thoroughly investigated so far; b) clear structure and argumentation; c) knowledge of current research situation; and d) coverage of different genres, countries, and Avant-garde movements.

After the selection process, the chairs were requested to decide about the distribution of funding in three categories: full grant, partial grant, and travel allowance. Since a considerable part of the funding was already reserved for the invited speakers, it was not possible to allocate full grants to all short talk and poster presenters. Nevertheless, the chairs succeed – in co-operation with the conference officer – to allocate every presenter at least a partial grant that covers the conference fees. A full grant was allocated to all early stage researchers and to some researchers from East European countries. Moreover, all early stage researchers also received a travel allowance, ranging from 200 up to 500 Euro, to cover a considerable part of their travel expenses. The conference officer officially invited the invited speakers and short talk/poster presenters, informing them about their grants and asking to register online.

Moreover, the chairs were responsible for the compilation of the conference program, i.e. arranging the papers into twelve sessions (with 2-4 presentations per session), choosing chairs for the respective sessions, and collocating the abstracts into a booklet (and also deciding about the menu for the conference dinner). The arrangement of the sessions considers both historical and theoretical approaches, beginning with children's literature from the turn of the century and finishing with contemporary children's books that show the impact of Avant-garde.

During the conference, the chairs had different tasks: presenting an opening speech and their own papers, chairing two sessions and the forward look discussion at the end of the conference, and being attentive to the time schedule (in this regard it should be particularly mentioned that all presenters were very disciplined and kept to the time slots).

Scientific Content of the Conference

(1 page min.)

- *Summary of the conference sessions focusing on the scientific highlights*
- *Assessment of the results and their potential impact on future research or applications*

The conference consisted of 11 sessions with 2-5 paper presentations and one poster session (nine posters). The sequence of sessions was arranged according to historical and theoretical issues, starting with papers focusing on the impact of 19th century and turn-of-the-century Avant-garde art on the development in children's literature and finishing with several thought-provoking essays that focus on the question whether Avant-garde art is still prevalent in contemporary children's literature and whether it is reasonable to continue labeling these respective artworks as "Avant-garde" or not. The first session (Avant-Garde and Modernism) explored ideas that mutually influenced children's literature and culture and the early Avant-garde movements, showing the impact of the works of Picasso, Chagall and Modersohn-Becker on children's books created in the first half of the twentieth century (Marilynn Olson), and the influence of diverse Dutch Avant-garde movements, such as De Stijl, constructivism, and COBRA, on the emergence of modernist picturebooks in the Netherlands (Saskia de Bodt).

The second session (The Impact of Bauhaus and the Semana de 22) focused on the overarching importance of the Bauhaus in Weimar during the 1920s on the development of a new concept of children's culture and art that clearly indicates the underlying concept of total design (Michael Siebenbrodt). Bauhaus and other European Avant-garde movements were disseminated during the Modern Art Week ("Semana de 22") in 1922 in Brazil, leading to the creation of modernist Brazilian children's books over several decades (Luiz Antonio Coelho). Session 3 (Children's Literature and Avant-Garde before 1945, part I) consists of three short talks that presented the Swedish picturebook artist Einar Nerman whose minimalist style was apparently influenced by Plakatstil (Elina Druker), the movable books created by the German-Jewish illustrator Tom Seidmann-Freud that shift between expressionism and Neue Sachlichkeit (Eva Lezzi), and the seminal role of the Zionist politics on the development of Hebrew children's literature in pre-state Israel (Yael Darr). Although the Russian Avant-garde and its impact on early Soviet picturebooks in the 1920s and 1930s has been investigated in several monographs, the three papers presented in session 4 (Soviet Children's Literature and the Avant-Garde) served as an eye-opener insofar they revealed new perspectives concerning the underlying concept of childhood and the cross-national reception of Soviet children's literature. It was shown that the infantile primitivism of the Russian Avant-garde crucially manipulated the emergence of aesthetically radical Soviet picturebooks (Sara Pankenier Weld) and that several exhibitions of Soviet children's books in Western countries (Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands, France) in 1929 had an exceeding effect on the changed evaluation of Russian Avant-garde and children's literature (Albert Lemmens & Serge Stommels). A comparative analysis of Soviet and Western (West European and US-American) children's books of the 1920s and 1930s revealed the similar role of children's books in left artists' circles

and among progressive educators as far as the concept of the “New Man” (Russia) and the “New Generation” (USA) is concerned (Evgeny Steiner).

Session 5 focused on the mutual relationship between modernism and Avant-garde in Scandinavian children's literature. While Ellen Key's visions of a new society was taken up by several female artists in Sweden, thus leading to the development of modernist picturebooks for children (Lena Kåreland), Danish picturebook art was mainly influenced by Russian Avant-garde art – due to a number of exhibitions of Soviet children's books, posters, and design at the end of the 1920s, beginning of the 1930s - and the political and social demands of the welfare state in the 1930s and 1940s (Nina Christensen). By contrast, Avant-garde art was a marginal phenomenon in Norwegian art until the end of the 1960s, therefore the impact of Avant-garde movements on Norwegian picturebooks is evident not before the 1970s, leading to an impetuous discussion of the role of modernist art in children's literature (Tone Birkeland). The breakthrough of Avant-garde art in East European countries was on the fore of session 6 (Children's Literature and the Avant-Garde before 1945, II), highlighting the influence of Hungarian modernism on Sandor Bortnyik children's books (Samuel Albert), the crossover effects of Avant-garde literature for adults on the children's novels written by Vítězslav Nezval and Vladislav Vancura (Bohuslav Mánek), and the impact of Surrealism on Serbian children's literature, exemplified in Aleksandar Vuco's surrealist children's poems (Svetlana Kalezic-Radonjic). Session 7 (Avant-Garde and (Educational) Illustration) was dedicated to the investigation of pedagogical approaches that are strongly guided by Avant-garde concepts. The new objectivity's ideals in educational illustrations dispersed by the international ISOTYPE collective between the 1920s and 1970s in the Netherlands, the UK, and the USA, influenced the development of school books and nonfiction books for children which are distinguished by functional design (Hanna Melse). The impact of the COBRA artist Karel Appel on Dick Bruna's picturebooks for small children is not only evident in Bruna's aesthetic nuances, but also in the underlying pedagogical concepts that critically question the dominant illustrative conventions and emphasize anti-authoritarian attitudes instead (Kris Nauwelaerts). The subsequent session (Challenges of the Avant-Garde) was tied to the pedagogical and political discussion of session 7, stressing the input of diverse and controversially discussed pedagogical concepts on Avant-garde picturebooks from the 1930s until the 1970s in France (Sandra Beckett). A case in point is the emergence of Pop Art picturebooks at the end of the 1960s in several European countries that provoked contradictory reactions among educators and critics, but paved the way for postmodernist picturebook art on the long run (Bettina Kümmerling-Meibauer). Session 9 (The Avant-Garde in the United Kingdom) was devoted to the inspection of British Avant-garde artists and their creation of children's books. Although Britain has always been ambivalent about Avant-garde developments, especially in relation to children, Avant-garde themes were reshaped and moderated by ideas about the British landscape and past, encouraging the publication of innovative and experimental children's books (Kimberley Reynolds). The nursery rhymes by Dorothea Tanning present a special case in British children's literature insofar they display an sophisticated intertextual and intervisual play with different genres and artistic Avant-garde styles, culminating in a hybrid mixture of nostalgic references and radically political approaches (Catriona McAra). William Heath Robinson, a British cartoonist and illustrator best known for his comic drawings inspired by Art Deco, played a significant part in the establishment of the comic impact of Latin textbooks in the UK (Elizabeth Hale).

The last two sessions focused on the impact of Avant-garde movements on contemporary children's literature in different countries. Session 10 (Avant-Garde Today?) started with a thought-provoking lecture on the possibilities and paradoxes of surrealism for children, based on an analysis of picturebooks that deploy Avant-garde strategies from the 1970s until the present (Philip Nel). The limitations and development of printing technologies on the creation of Avant-garde picturebooks, with a focus on the artistic books created by the Finnish artist Tove Jansson, shaped

the reception of experimental children's literature (Sirke Happonen). The last four papers (Children's Literature and European Avant-Garde after 1945) investigated the influence of Avant-garde movements on Icelandic children's books since the 1950s, especially in relation to concept art that evidently cropped up in the experimental children's books by Dieter Rot and his wife Sigridur Björnsdóttir (Olga Holownia); the intermedial and multimodal character of contemporary radical children's books that combine image, text, and sound (Katia E. Strode); the visual codes in recently published Brazilian picturebooks, strongly determined by Avant-garde movements, such as Fauvism, Cubism, and Surrealism (Claudia Mendes); and the intermedial art forms created by the US-American author Shel Silverstein, whose unique method of blurring the line between image and text has its roots in visual poetry and revolutionary Avant-garde poetry (Joseph T. Thomas, Jr.).

The topics of the poster session covered diverse aspects, highlighting the Avant-garde impact on Polish picturebooks from the early 20th century until the present (Malgorzata Cackowska & Grazka Lange), Hungarian children's literature (Sarolta Lipóczy), and Spanish children's books from the 1930s and 1940s (Emilio Quintana). Other posters focus on the tight connection between artists' books and picturebooks created by Avant-garde artists since 1945 (Maria Linsmann) and the Avant-garde works by single artists, such as Gertrude Stein (Hyonbin Choi), Gellu Naum (Gabriela Glavan), Kurt Schwitters (Hadassah Stichnothe), Lou Scheper-Berkenkamp (Madelaine Neumayr) and the Bloomsbury group (Yolanda Morató).

The best short talk and the best poster presented by an early stage researcher have been granted an award of 250 Euro each, funded by the Stiftung Illustration (Picturebook museum, Troisdorf, Germany). The best short talk dealt with the influence of the Avant-garde on Icelandic children's literature (Olga Holownia), while the best poster focused on a picturebook by the German artist Lou Scheper-Berkenkamp that was evidently influenced by Bauhaus art and Johannes Itten's color theory (Madelaine Neumayr).

The papers and posters covered multifaceted aspects of the relationship between children's literature and European Avant-garde. While several lectures were distinguished by their broad encyclopedic knowledge, giving a fascinating overview over the development of Avant-garde children's books in different countries, other lectures focused on the major contributions of single artists in this realm, thus creating quite complementary views on the conference's topic. Although all contributions were characterized by a historical perspective, they differed concerning the underlying theoretical framework and the discussion of political, pedagogical, and social issues, thus emphasizing that the complex relationship between Avant-garde movements and children's literature cannot be understood without the consideration of the respective historical and cultural background.

As the discussions after the lectures and during the breaks have shown, the conference revealed many new and fascinating insights which stimulated the participants to build up connections to their own research. In this regard it became clear that only a comparative perspective might succeed in analyzing the multifaceted and complex relationships between (national) children's literatures and diverse Avant-garde movements.

Forward Look

(1 page min.)

- *Assessment of the results*
- *Contribution to the future direction of the field – identification of issues in the 5-10 years & timeframe*
- *Identification of emerging topics*

The main result of the Avant-garde conference was the insight that the topic "Children's Literature and European Avant-Garde" is a very promising issue that opens up new perspectives for children's literature research in several respects:

- a) Close connection between children's literature and literature/art for adults, thus referring to the crossover aspect of Avant-garde children's books.
- b) Experimental aspects of Avant-garde children's books which paved and still pave the way for the development of new genres, narrative and aesthetic strategies
- c) Further investigations in this realm will certainly profit from comparative studies, since Avant-garde movements cross national borders and therefore influenced children's literature in different countries. In addition, by means of translations and exhibitions, Avant-garde children's books exert a great impact on the further development of children's books in diverse regions, and countries.
- d) An in-depth analysis of Avant-garde children's literature demands an interdisciplinary approach, at least referring to literary studies, art history, pedagogy, cultural studies, and intermedial studies.
- e) The investigation of Avant-garde children's literature cannot be separated from the consideration of the underlying concepts of the childhood which often reject the anticipated and traditional image of the Romantic child.
- f) The investigation of Avant-garde children's literature demands consideration of children's culture in general, since several Avant-garde artists refer to other cultural products achieved for children as well, thus encompassing a broader view on design and children's culture.

During the forward look discussion at the end of the conference, the participants suggested several questions and topics that should be investigated in the near future. The following aspects were mentioned:

1. Closer and theoretically more focused discussion of the notion "Avant-Garde" in the realm of international children's literature. Are there national differences concerning the terminology used in this realm?
2. Consideration of the context of Avant-garde children's literature and culture, i.e. investigation of art development, printing technology, social, political and historical events, theoretical frameworks in the field of child education and child psychology.
3. Analysis of different genres, for instance poetry for children, children's theatre (the conference mainly focused on picturebooks, stories and novels for children)
4. Examination of the relationship between Avant-garde children's literature and related products for children, i.e. toys, furniture, design, etc.
5. Importance of Avant-garde children's books in the canonization process
6. Reception of Avant-garde children's books among critics, educators, scholars, parents, children, etc.
7. Interplay between images and text in Avant-garde children's books with illustrations: are text and images influenced by Avant-garde movements, or is the innovative approach only expressed in the text or the images?

Different strategies has been suggested to continue research in this realm:

1. International conferences or small workshops every two years (for example ESF-Exploratory Workshops)
2. Publication of papers presented at the conference
3. Constitution of an electronic network (JISCMail or similar networks)
4. Foundation of a database with information about relevant archives, libraries, and collections of Avant-garde children's literature, giving access to rare books.

The chairs have decided to publish an edited volume with selected papers with an international publisher. The book proposal will be submitted by end of November.

Some colleagues already expressed their wish to continue the co-operation, suggesting building up a network of researchers working in this realm.

Since the conference clearly indicated the significance of the topic, the many visible gaps in the investigation of children's literature and Avant-garde demonstrated that this fruitful topic needs more specific research. In the long run, a handbook that would give an overview on the development of Avant-garde children's books in different European and Non-European countries would be a high-demanded contribution to the field of literary studies and Avant-garde studies. The current state of art evidently shows that some scholars are working on this topic, focusing on one country or a restricted time period. Nevertheless, a broad and concise study that covers all aspects indicated during the conference and the forward look discussion is a long-lasting project that could only be undertaken by a network of scholars working in different disciplines and covering different languages.

▪ Is there a need for a foresight-type initiative?

This conference was just a start concerning the investigation of the topic "Children's Literature and European Avant-Garde". It became clear from the forward look discussion that more focused workshops and conferences might be useful in order to proceed with research in this area. Since the Avant-garde impact on specific countries has not been well investigated as of yet, more specific and in-depth studies are needed. For this reason exploratory workshops with smaller groups of 20-30 participants might be tremendously important for the further development of research in this realm. In the long run it might be possible then to establish a network or international research project focusing on the comparative and intercultural aspects of children's literature and Avant-garde.

Atmosphere and Infrastructure

▪ *The reaction of the participants to the location and the organization, including networking, and any other relevant comments*

The location was convenient in many respects: Norrköping is not far from Stockholm and the airports at Linköping and Arlanda; the restored industrial factories as cultural meeting place (conference venue and working museum) established a perfect frame for the conference's topic on Avant-garde. All meeting places and the hotel were in walking distance. The conference room was perfectly equipped with all necessary technical facilities. The working museum, where the participants had the reception on the first evening, lunches and the conference dinner on Saturday, could be reached within five minutes, so that the participants must not hurry and had time enough to get in contact with each other (two hours were reserved for lunch). The supporting program (reception in the working museum, reception in the town hall, conference dinner) was multifaceted; nevertheless, the participants had enough time to meet in smaller groups for networking.

The organization on-site was well-considered; the conference officer was always accessible and supported the participants in all means (including the solution of technical problems).

The reaction of the participants to the location and the organization was exceedingly positive; the atmosphere during the whole conference was friendly and stimulating. Many participants, especially the young researchers, confirmed several times that they were really excited to participate in this conference and to have the opportunity to meet recognized scholars from different countries. The discussions were lively and demonstrated that the audience had a deep interest in the overarching topic.

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