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ILLUSTRATION AS A DIDACTIC TOOL

ANALYSIS OF AESTHETIC AND NARRATIVE EVOLUTION IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE.
PERIOD FROM 2019 TO 2024.

Sara Bailén Martínez⁽¹⁾

Abstract. The main objective of this study is to identify the relationship between social themes and the aesthetics of illustrated children's literature and how this relationship has evolved in recent years, from 2019 to 2024. To this end, research was conducted using content analysis methodology, applying a qualitative approach through a categorical matrix of visual analysis, examining representation and narrative. The sample selection criteria comprised a variety of national and international competitions specializing in the sector—notably the Bologna Children's Book Fair, the Compostela Prize, and The New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Books. The results demonstrate a progressive transformation: from a naïve and communicative aesthetic to a more poetic and symbolic language, without losing its pedagogical function. It is also worth highlighting how the themes have evolved from diversity and equality towards more introspective issues such as sustainability, identity, and grief. Finally, the results confirm how the aesthetics of illustration function as a pedagogical and emotional resource, consolidating the children's book as an artistic medium capable of integrating art and education.

Keywords: Picture book, naïve aesthetics, social themes, visual analysis, narrative, pedagogy, education.

Resumen. El presente trabajo tiene como objetivo principal identificar la relación entre las temáticas sociales y la estética de la literatura infantil ilustrada y cómo ha evolucionado ésta en los últimos años, desde 2019 a 2024. Para ello se ha realizado una investigación basada en la metodología de análisis de contenido, aplicando un enfoque cualitativo mediante una matriz categorial de análisis visual, examinando la representación y narrativa. Los criterios de selección de la muestra han sido compuestos por una variedad nacional e internacional de certámenes especializados en el sector - destacando, la Feria del Libro Infantil de Bolonia, el Premio Compostela o The New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Books -. Los resultados evidencian una transformación progresiva: desde una estética naïf y comunicativa hasta un lenguaje más poético y simbólico, sin perder la función pedagógica. También cabe destacar cómo evolucionan las temáticas desde la diversidad y la igualdad hacia cuestiones como la sostenibilidad, la identidad o el duelo. Finalmente, los resultados confirman como la estética de la ilustración funciona como recurso pedagógico y emocional, consolidando el libro infantil como un medio artístico capaz de integrar arte y educación.

Palabras clave: Álbum ilustrado, estética naïf, temáticas sociales, análisis visual, narrativa, pedagogía, educación.

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1. INTRODUCTION. OBJECTIVES AND HYPOTHESES

Over the last decade, picture books have consolidated their role as one of the most influential formats in children's literature, not only as an aesthetic and narrative medium, but also as an educational tool capable of transmitting values and fostering social awareness from an early age. This evolution responds to a cultural and educational context in which visual and emotional literacy are becoming increasingly important, placing images on the same level as the written word in the construction of learning (Van der Linden, 2020).

Between 2019 and 2024, we have observed how publishing and artistic trends show a boom in works that address social and protest narratives, including diversity, gender equality, single-parent families and bullying, all in line with a change in collective sensitivity and in the pedagogical strategies of illustrated storytelling (Pascual, 2010). This phenomenon is accompanied by an aesthetic transformation characterised by the revival of the naïve style, notable for its expressive use of colour, formal simplicity and emotional spontaneity, which facilitates identification and understanding by young viewers. Far from being a decorative resource, the naïve aesthetic acts as a pedagogical visual language, capable of generating empathy, reinforcing the values conveyed and bringing the complexity of social issues closer to the perceptual level of children (Children's Book Illustration Trends, 2025).

1.1 OBJECTIVES

The main **objective** of this project is: To analyse the relationship between aesthetics and the representation of social themes in illustrated stories in recent years (2019-2024) in order to understand how the visual strategies used in this type of children's book function as pedagogical resources for values education.

1.1.1 SPECIFIC OBJECTIVES

- Identify the main social themes present in nationally and internationally recognised contemporary illustrated albums in the period from 2019 to 2024.

- Describe and categorise the aesthetic features associated with the naïve style (expressiveness in form, simplicity, use of colour, etc.) in the selected works.
- To compare the aesthetic and narrative evolution of illustrated stories over the last five years, in order to highlight changes in visual trends and values education strategies.

1.2 HYPOTHESES

The **hypothesis** guiding this research is:

Naïve aesthetics, by enhancing the clarity and emotionality of the image, become an effective pedagogical resource for the internalisation of social values, thus reinforcing the role of art as a tool for raising awareness and learning in childhood.

1.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Illustration is a technique that is very present in products aimed at children. There are three categories within this field: publishing, animation and video games. Illustration is, for example, among other things, a great resource for children's stories, in some cases complementing a text and in others existing only as an image, and ultimately, through them, important values can be communicated to new generations. It is important to note that graphic design is a very useful tool for transmitting and promoting positive values and good behaviour. In fact, there are inclusive illustrated albums that deal with issues of integration in a completely normal way, with which we can educate generations to be more tolerant, empathetic and culturally enriched, where there is no room for discrimination based on skin colour, gender, LGBTphobia or non-normative physical appearance. Furthermore, picture books are not only valuable because they convey educational values, but also because they encompass aesthetic beauty and artistic training (Aguado and Villalba, 2020).

1.4 ILLUSTRATION

According to the Royal Spanish Academy (RAE, 2025), illustration is defined as:

4.1. The action and effect of illustrating.

4.2. A print, engraving or drawing that adorns or documents a book.

4.3. A publication, usually a periodical, with plates and drawings in addition to the text it usually contains.

After understanding these first three definitions, we can see that they all have in common that they refer to drawings that help to visualise or decorate a text. But is this still the case today? Yes, although more areas outside of books could be added, today illustration is not only used in publishing, but has also entered homes, becoming part of the decoration without the need for text. On the other hand, the definition in E. Souriau's Akal Dictionary of Aesthetics (1998) goes into greater depth: 'to make clearer, more intelligible, to shed light on', and is related to the etymological meaning of the word, which comes from *lustrare*: to illuminate. Following this definition, we find what Isidro Ferrer (Puerta Leisse, 2006) said: "To illustrate is to illuminate (to shed light), to give meaning to a (foreign) text, but illustrating goes further, because illustrating is linked to the emotional. To illustrate is to signify. To illustrate is to investigate, communicate, express and use as testimony." According to this, it is not surprising that illustration is used as a learning process, not only for children but for people of all ages, as it complements the text and helps to develop visual reading, especially at an early age to encourage this ability.

In addition, it can be seen as a complement to the text, providing details or information that is not reflected in writing. Images aid comprehension by making the content of the text more concrete; words are abstract, while images have a more obvious meaning. However, text encourages the development of the imagination more, as it forces the reader to make an internal mental projection, while illustration does not allow as much room for creativity; it is as if 'everything is already done'.

It can also function as a resource for visual literacy, helping with the conception of visual codes such as shape and colour. Our society is full of images, so it is necessary to be able to understand the codes that form part of this visual reality. In childhood, illustrations help children to understand and identify these codes. This process is visual literacy and is a basic educational objective. It also promotes observation, concentration, concept recognition, memory development and retention, association of ideas, encourages creativity and imagination, and develops empathy through

the identification of emotions. According to Nikolajeva (2014), visual representations of feelings (facial expressions or body language) offer readers effective ways to interact with aspects of emotional literacy. She suggests that the interaction between words and images in picture books provides 'perfect training in mind reading even for very young, pre-literate children'. She indicates that reading images can develop readers' understanding of other people's emotions and feelings (Farrar, Arizpe, & Lees, 2024).

When it comes to narrative illustrations (picture books), they contribute to the development of notions of temporality, as this type of illustration implies sequence, rhythm, continuity and the ordering of past-present-future as categories of thought, as in the case of picture books and even poetry books (Aguado and Villalba, 2020).

In relation to illustration as a teaching resource, these same authors state that there are certain requirements for an illustration to work at a pedagogical level:

- **Appropriate use of codes:** Attention to colour (depending on the context of the image and the emotional effect it provokes), tone, formal elements, composition-relationship between elements and temporal rhythm.
- **Complementarity with the text:** Consider the environmental and social context of the narrative or content explained (time of year, characters involved, setting, etc.), determine points of view for each image, and see what the illustration can contribute to the content.
- **Suitability for the age of the children:** the way children process and, therefore, understand and interpret images varies with their age and cognitive maturity (as is the case with concepts). It is therefore essential to consider the reference age of the readers/students when creating educational illustrations. The use of codes and formal elements must be in line with what they need to develop their skills. Children begin by recognising, associating words with images; then they move on to identifying themselves through what the image represents: they attribute action to objects: movement, sequence, location, and even, later on, reason,

- to answer not only what they do but also why. In a third phase, they become capable of imagining, of projecting beyond what they see. They generate their own images from what they see, thus reaching maturity in visual reading.
- **Suitability for the type of content:** in order for children to effectively assimilate concepts, it is important that educational illustrations take into account the differences between the content of social sciences, experimental sciences, mathematics, literature, etc. To help understand nature, it may be more useful to illustrate the descriptive details of animals, plants and rocks (what identifies them), facilitating their recognition. Therefore, a naturalistic (objective) style would be interesting. In contrast, for mathematics, formalistic representation is less important: on the contrary, the ideal would be to conceptualise abstract concepts with simple, schematic images. Social sciences, for their part, require realistic details that aid in the analytical breakdown of the characteristics of objects, but they also require greater emphasis on contextualisation: recreating situations, spaces, and eras with additional details and action (characters using objects or interacting with each other in social groups). In illustrations of situations in which human beings interact, values and norms of behaviour come into play. These must be clearly stated so as not to incur unconscious projections of counter-values, anachronisms or the perpetuation of prejudices and stereotypes. (Aguado & Villalba, 2020).

In recent years, it has been shown that children who read children's stories with a moral increase their level of empathy (Chen H, Lyu D, Zhu L. 2025). Previous studies have also found that socially themed picture books are closely related to children's helping behaviour. Reading moral stories increased children's willingness to help others (Lopatovska et al., 2016). In addition, they confirmed that readers exhibited more helping behaviours and engaged in higher-quality social interactions after reading stories with morals and prosocial content.

2. METHODOLOGY

The chosen methodology is developed using a qualitative, descriptive and interpretative approach, based on the premise that image analysis requires a comprehensive rather than quantitative approach, given its symbolic, narrative and emotional nature. As Banks (2019) points out, images are not limited to accompanying text, but are cultural objects that carry meaning and therefore require specific qualitative methods of interpretation. This justifies the choice of cover and interior pages as units of visual analysis in this research.

2.1 SAMPLE SELECTION

The sample consists of a selection of national and international illustrated books that have been recognised in renowned competitions, including the Bologna Children's Book Fair, the Compostela Prize, The New York Times Best Illustrated Children's Books, and other related mentions in the field of children's literature.

The titles were chosen based on criteria of aesthetic quality and recognition in the narrative, with the aim of representing the main visual and discursive trends of the period 2019-2024. The materials examined for each work will be two fundamental elements: the cover, for its aesthetic and communicative value; and a representative inside page, where the style and relationship with the visual narrative can be observed.

2019:

- Nº1 Escarabajo de vacaciones (Bruno, P. 2019) Ediciones Ekaré. Ilustrado por: Martínez, R.
- Nº2 Amables (Green, A. 2019) Editorial Bruño. Ilustrado por: Varios autores
- Nº3 Cosas que no hacen los mayores. (Cali, D 2019) Editorial Nubeocho. Ilustrado por: Chaud, B.
- Nº4 El circo de las nubes. (Ortiz, E. 2019) Ediciones Jaguar. Ilustrado por: Borlasca, H.
- Nº5 El Perro de Milu. (Máray, M. 2019) Editorial Kalandraka
- Nº6 The Lost Cousins. (Cronin, B. 2019) Viking Books
- Nº7 Un mono suelto en la ciudad (Timmers, L. 2019) Editorial unaLuna

- Nº8 The Farmer (Abadia, X. 2019) Editorial Penguin
- Nº9 Me aburro (Yoshitake, S. 2019) Editorial Pastel de Luna
- Nº10 Child of Glass (Alemagna, B. 2019) Enchanted Lion Books
- Nº11 I miss my grandpa (Xiaojing, J. 2019) Hachette Book Group
- Nº12 Just Because (Barnett, M. 2019) Editorial Walker. Ilustrado por: Arsenault, I.
- Nº13 Another (Robison, C. 2019) Athe-neum Books
- Nº14 The Wanderer (Van Den Ende, P. 2020) Levine Querido

Figure 1

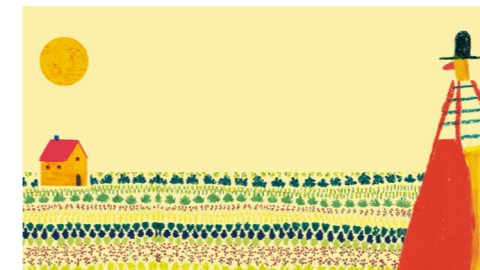
El perro de Milu.



Note. By Máray, M. (2019)

Figure 2

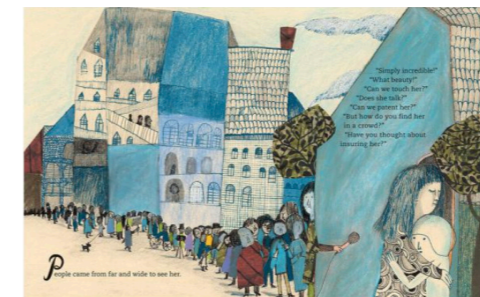
The Farmer.



Note. By Abadia, X. (2019)

Figure 3

Child of Glass.



Note. By Alemagna, B. (2019)

2020:

- Nº15 ¡No me llames Cuchi Puchi! (Taylor, S. 2020) Editorial Edelvives. Ilustradora: Hindley, K.
- Nº16 Tú y yo, hermanos (Roca, E. 2020) Combel Editorial
- Nº17 Mi Vecino Paco (Sanz, I. 2020) Editorial Cuento de Luz. Ilustrado por: Poyato, E.
- Nº18 La vida secreta de los virus (Colectivo Ellas Educan, 2020) Zahorí Books. Tolosa, M.
- Nº19 Lucilla (Mazzetti, S. 2020) Premio Bolonia
- Nº20 Desde 1880 (Gottuso, P. 2020) Editorial Kalandraka
- Nº21 You Matter (Robinson, C. 2020) Libros del Zorro Rojo
- Nº22 Los Carpinchos (Soderguit, A. 2020) Ediciones Ekaré
- Nº23 There Must Be More Than That! (Yoshitake, S. 2020) Chronicle Books
- Nº24 The Strange Birds of Flannery O'Connor A Life (Alznauer, A. 2020) Enchanted Lion Books. Ilustrado por: Zhu, P.
- Nº25 A Story About Afiya (Berry, J. 2020) Lantana Publishing. Ilustrado por: Cunha, A.
- Nº26 Outside In. (Underwood, D. 2020) Houghton Mifflin Harcourt. Ilustrado por: Derby, C.
- Nº27 Our Little Kitchen (Tamaki, J. 2020) Abrams Books
- Nº28 The Little Mermaid (Pinkney, J. 2020) Brown Books
- Nº29 If You Come To Earth (Blackall, S. 2020) Chronicle Books
- Nº30 I talk like a river (Scott, J. 2020) Neal Porter Books. Ilustrado por: Smith, S.

Figure 4

Lucilla.



Note. By Mazzetti, S. (2020)

Figure 5
Tú y yo.



Note. By Roca, E. (2020)

Figure 6
The Strange Birds of Flannery O'Connor A Life.



Note. By Alznauer, A. (2020)

2021:

- Nº31 En busca de la isla de los loros (Misslin, S. 2021) Koala Ediciones. Ilustrado por: Piu, A.
- Nº32 Quizás (Haughton, C. 2021) Editorial Nubeocho
- Nº33 ¡Tengo un hambre de dragón! (Bene-gas, M. 2021) Combel Editorial. Ilustrado por: Sübbauer, A.
- Nº34 Dos ositos (Ylla, 2021) Editorial Kalandraka
- Nº35 La gran aventura de Nara (Pintor, D. 2021) Editorial Degomagom
- Nº36 Selva (Gibert, M. 2021) Editorial Kalandraka
- Nº37 While you're sleeping (Jackson, M. 2021) Librería Sendak. Ilustrado por: Broadley, J.
- Nº38 Más allá del bosque (Robert, N. 2021) Editorial Pipala. Ilustrado por: Dubois, G.
- Nº39 El tiempo es una flor (Morstad, J. 2021) Editorial Juventud
- Nº40 I Am the subway (Hyo-eun, K. 2021) Scribble UK
- Nº41 The night walk (Dorléans, M. 2021) Floris Books

- Nº42 Keeping the city going (Floca, B. 2021) Dreamscape Media Llc
- Nº43 The little wooden robot and the log princess (Gauld, T. 2021) Neal Porter Books
- Nº44 ¡Vamos! Vamos a cruzar el puente (Tercero, R. 2021) Bookshop Santa Cruz.
- Nº45 Cayó del cielo (Fan, E. 2021) Editorial Leetra. Ilustrado por: Fan, T.
- Nº46 Unspeakable The Tulsa Race Massacre (Weatherford, C.B. 2021) Carolrhoda Books. Ilustrado por: Cooper, F.

Figure 7
El tiempo es una flor.



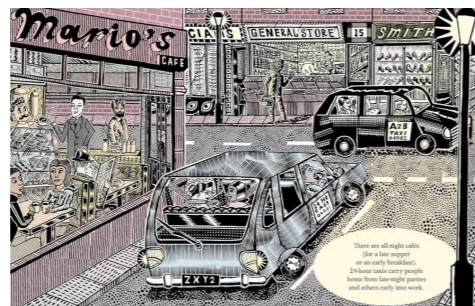
Note. By Morstad, J (2021)

Figure 8
Selva.



Note. By Gibert, M. (2021)

Figure 9
While You're Sleeping.



Note. By Jackson, M. (2021)

2022:

- Nº47 Embolic a la biblioselva (Verdú, I. 2022) La Galera Catalan
- Nº48 De papel (Novarro, C. 2022) Editorial Kalandraka. Ilustrado por: Fonseca, A.
- Nº49 Un par de ojos nuevos (Duthie, E. 2022) Editorial Wonder Ponder. Ilustrado por: Sáez, J. & Marsol, M.
- Nº50 La Roca del Cielo (Klaseen, J. 2022) Editorial Nubeocho
- Nº51 Volver a mirar (López, A. 2022) Ediciones SM
- Nº52 Esperando el amanecer (Anchorena, F. 2022) Editorial Kalandraka
- Nº53 The Upside Down Hat (Barr, S. 2022) Chronicle Books. Ilustrado por: Zhang, G.
- Nº54 The New Rooster (Alexander, R. 2022) Simon & Schuster Books
- Nº55 The Writer (Cali, D. 2022) William B Eerdmans Publishing Co. Ilustrado por: Baren-gio, M.
- Nº56 Telling Stories Wrong (Rodari, G. 2022) Enchanted Lion Books. Ilustrado por: Ale-magna, B.
- Nº57 Bedtime for Bo (Skomsvold, K.A. 2022) Enchanted Lion Books. Ilustrado por: Johnsen M. K.
- Nº58 Night Lunch (Fan, E. 2022) Tundra Books. Ilustrado por: Seiferling, D.
- Nº59 Where Butterflies fill the sky (Marwan, Z. 2022) Bloomsbury Children's Books
- Nº60 Still this love goes on (Sainte-Marie, B. 2022) Greystone Kids. Ilustrado por: Flett, J.
- Nº61 Yellow Dog Blues (Duncan, A.F. 2022) Eerdmans Books. Ilustrado por: Raschka, C.
- Nº62 Farmhouse (Blackall, S. 2022) Little, Brown & Company

Figure 10
Telling Stories Wrong.



Note. By Rodari, G. (2022)

Figure 11
Yellow Dog Blues.



Note. By Duncan, A.F. (2022)

Figure 12
Farmhouse.



Note. By Blackall, S. (2022)

2023:

- Nº63 Mi gato Orlando (Dapena, B. 2023) Editorial Bruño. Ilustrado por: Meléndez, A.
- Nº64 Solo una noche (Antinori, A. 2023) Ediciones SM
- Nº65 La visita (Figueras, N. 2022) Editorial Kalandraka. Ilustrado por: Font, A.
- Nº66 Gato y pingüino (Molsosa, O. G. 2023) Editorial La Galera S.A. Ilustrado por: Serrano, L.
- Nº67 El Caballo Naranja (Hsu-Kung, L. 2023) Editorial Thule
- Nº68 Bear is never alone (Veerkamp, M. 2023) Eerdmans Books. Ilustrado por: Verstegen, J.
- Nº69 Bunny y Tree (Zsako, B. 2023) Enchanted Lion Books
- Nº70 Before, now (Salmieri, D. 2023) Rocky Pond Books
- Nº71 As night falls: Creatures that go wild after dark (Jo Napoli, D. 2023) Ilustrado por: Sala, F.
- Nº72 At the Drop of a Cat (Fontenaille, E. 2023) Ingram Publisher Services. Ilustrado por: López, V.
- Nº73 La joven maestra y la gran serpiente (Vasco, I. 2023) Editorial Juventud. Ilustrado por: Palomino, J.C.

- Nº74 We are starlings: Inside the Mesmerizing Magic of a Murmuration (Furrow, R. & Jo Napoli, D. 2023) Random House Studio. Ilustrado por: Martin, M.
- Nº75 Mary's Idea (Raschka, C. 2023) Greenwillow Books
- Nº76 Rock, Rosetta, Rock! Roll, Rosetta, Roll! (Bolden, T. 2023) Harper Collins. Ilustrado por: Christie, R.G.
- Nº77 How to write a poem (Alexander, K. 2023) Quill Tree Books. Ilustrado por: Nikaido, D.

Figure 13
El Caballo Naranja.



Note. By Hsu-Kung, L. (2023)

Figure 14
La joven maestra y la gran serpiente.



Note. By Vasco, I. (2023)

Figure 15
How to write a poem.



Note. By Alexander, K. (2023)

- 2024:**
- Nº78 Kintsugi (Watanabe, I. 2024) Libros del Zorro Rojo
 - Nº79 Bim Bam Bum (Girón, M. 2024) Editorial Kalandraka
 - Nº80 Los mapas del agua (Gómez, R. 2024) Editorial Anaya Infantil y Juvenil. Ilustrado por: Pàmpols, L.
 - Nº81 The Cat Way (Lundberg, S. 2024) Eerdmans Books. Woodstein B.J.
 - Nº82 There's a Ghost in the Garden (Maclear, K. 2024) Enchanted Lion Books. Ilustrado por: Maurey, K.
 - Nº83 Yaya and the sea (Marable, K.G. 2024) Denene Millner Books. Ilustrado por: Engel, T.
 - Nº84 Here and There (Lu, T.2024) Eerdmans Books
 - Nº85 Planting Hope: A Portrait of Photographer Sebastião Salgado (Hoelzel, P. 2024) Atheneum Books Ilustrado por: Alarcão, R.
 - Nº86 Little Shrew (Miyakoshi, A. 2024) Kids Can Press
 - Nº87 As Edward Imagined (Burgess, M. 2024) Knopf Books. Ilustrado por: Majewski, M.
 - Nº88 Animal Albums from A to Z (Bell, C. 2024) Walker Books US
 - Nº89 Up, Up, Ever Up! Junko Tabai: A Life in the Mountains (Yasuda, A. 2024) Clarion Books. Ilustrado por: Shimizu, Y.
 - Nº90 The Man Who Didn't Like Animals (Underwood, D. 2024) Clarion Books. Ilustrado por: Pham, L.

Figure 16
As Edward Imagined.



Note. By Burgess, M. (2024)

Figure 17
Kintsugi.



Note. By Watanabe, I. (2024)

In order to systematically organise the children's picture books analysed, a **categorical matrix** has been developed that integrates variables such as technique, colour, composition and narrative. This tool allows the qualitative data obtained to be organised, classified and compared, facilitating a structured reading of the visual elements (Moreno, 2017). The selection of variables is based on the visual design grammar of Kress and Van Leeuwen (2006),

ILLUSTRATION

TECHNIQUES:

- Watercolour
- Gouache
- Ink
- Graphite
- Collage
- Digital
- Mixed media
- Engraving
- Photorealism

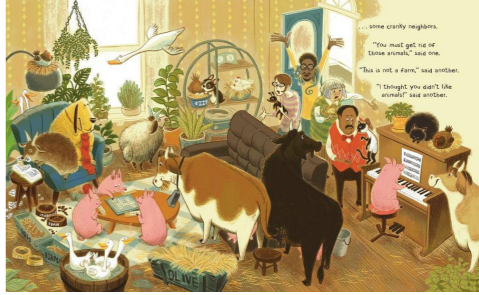
COLOUR:

- Lively planes
- Neutral ranges
- Nocturnes
- Warm/cool palettes
- Chromaticism

REPRESENTATION:

- Racialised characters
- Diverse families
- Intergenerational bonds
- Bodily diversity
- Animals

Figure 18
The Man Who Didn't Like Animals.



Note. By Underwood, D. (2024)

who highlight the structural role of colour, perspective and composition in the reading of images. In this way, the matrix acts as a methodological tool that translates aesthetic elements into categories of meaning, facilitating the interpretation of visual and pedagogical trends in current illustrated albums.

STYLES:

- Styles
- Naïve
- Realistic-poetic
- Conceptual
- Expressionist
- Minimalist
- Experimental

COMPOSITION:

- Figurative
- Linear sequential
- Open
- Use of negative space
- Silent album

NARRATIVE

THEMES:

- Diversity and inclusion
- Gender equality
- Environmental awareness
- Migration
- Grief
- Emotional education

PEDAGOGICAL FUNCTION:

- Transmission of values
- Emotion management
- Social relationships
- Empathy education
- Social sensitivity
- Aesthetics as a cognitive medium
- Visibility of cultures and histories

3. RESULTS

The analysis reveals a significant aesthetic and narrative evolution in the treatment of social themes in contemporary children's books. Based on the matrix developed, recurring patterns can be observed that show a progressive aesthetic evolution, greater representative diversity, and a consolidation of the album as a medium for emotional and values education.

In terms of illustration, the research shows a predominance of traditional techniques (watercolour, gouache, graphite and collage), especially between 2019 and 2021, providing texture and sensory proximity. From 2022 onwards, the presence of mixed and digital techniques is consolidated, although with a clear attempt to resemble the traditional without losing artistic expressiveness.

Colour is established as a central narrative and affective resource. During the early years, vivid and contrasting palettes prevail, fitting in with the naïve style and facilitating communication with young audiences. In the following years, the colour ranges tend towards the natural and symbolic, using colour as a means of expressing emotions, narrative or atmospheres.

In terms of composition, there is a clear evolution from centred and figurative struc-

VISUAL NARRATIVE:

- Linear
- Poetic
- Visual metaphors
- Child's point of view
- Observer narrator
- Silent illustrated narrative (no text)

INNOVATION:

- Mix of techniques
- Breaking frames
- Emerging iconography
- Book as object

tures towards more open, experimental and rhythmic formats. In terms of composition, there is a clear evolution from centred and figurative structures towards more open, experimental and rhythmic formats. The use of negative space, non-linear visual sequences and the prominence of visual silence are consolidated as elements of a more established style.

The style has come a long way, moving from a naïve aesthetic towards more poetic or symbolic languages, bringing greater conceptual depth to the image. Authors such as Beatrice Alemagna, Julie Morstad, Jon Klassen and Issa Watanabe represent this diversity of approaches, from the narrative to the contemplative. On the other hand, in narrative we can find a boom in the integration of text and image, where illustration takes on a discursive role equal to or even superior to that of the word. In various cases, such as *Bunny and Tree*, *The Wanderer*, and *The Rock in the Sky*, we can see how the image completely takes over the narrative. We can appreciate how narrative structures evolve from linear and descriptive stories to poetic and symbolic compositions, in which rhythm, pause, and silence take on an expressive function.

It is worth noting that the most recurring social themes are diversity, equality, sustainability, empathy, grief and self-identity. These can be represented both explicitly and metaphorically, integrated into stories of personal growth, discovery or reconciliation. We find some visual symbols such as water, travel, flight or light, which reinforce the pedagogical meaning of the stories.

We can affirm that the contemporary illustrated album is not limited to entertainment, but is configured as an integral artistic language, capable of combining aesthetics, ethics and learning in a single reading.

4. CONCLUSIONS

Throughout the project, the initial hypothesis has been confirmed: there is a significant relationship between social themes and naïve and expressionist aesthetics in contemporary children's picture books, with visual narrative being an educational resource that facilitates understanding of the values to be conveyed. During the period 2019-2021, naïve aesthetics prevailed as the dominant visual language, notable for its simplicity of form, use of flat colours and expressive lines. This style acts as an affective mediator, promoting an immediate connection between the reader and the story, becoming an effective tool for addressing issues such as diversity, equality and inclusion. However, from 2022 onwards, the visual discourse evolves towards poetic and symbolic aesthetics, in which the educational function is maintained, although it is reflected through more conceptual resources. At the same time, we can also observe a progressive change in the narratives represented. In the early years, the themes addressed focused more on coexistence, inclusion and cultural diversity, while in recent years they have focused more on issues of sustainability, grief, identity and overcoming adversity. This change is due to a growing interest in delving deeper into emotional experiences and contemporary challenges, reflecting a maturity in the discourse of children's literature, which acts as a tool for thought and reflection.

In general, the results show that aesthetics, technique and visual narrative work together to create a visual pedagogy of today's values. The contemporary illustrated album is establishing itself as an artistic and social medium

capable of integrating art, ethics and learning, helping to shape a perspective that reflects today's principles.

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