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Cuteness and aggression in military picturebooks

Summary

As a subspecies of ideologically loaded picturebooks, this chapter focuses on military picturebooks. This term encompasses picturebooks dealing with war and the roles of soldiers. In the first part, a taxonomy of military picturebooks is created which is exemplified by telling examples. The second part focuses on a particular narrative problem of military picturebooks that is of interest to a cognitive theory of picturebooks (as pursued by Kümmerling-Meibauer & Meibauer 2013). On the one hand, it is not possible to represent war as a good thing across the board; on the other hand, war is depicted with respect to certain scenarios of self-defence. The narrative solution seems to be that “cute” characters (that is, anthropomorphic animals and vehicles) are introduced who serve as positive military protagonists that have to fight against aggressive characters representing the enemy. In military picturebooks, there is a contrast between cuteness and aggression that is astonishing when regarding the typical pedagogical demands on the accommodation of picturebooks to the child’s cognitive abilities.

Key words: character, cognitive theory of picturebooks, cuteness, military picturebook, propaganda war in children’s literature

Słowa kluczowe: postać literacka, poznawcza teoria książki obrazkowej, estetyka “cutness”, militarna książka obrazkowa, wojenna propaganda w literaturze dla dzieci

Children’s literature and propaganda

Since children are the targets of adult propaganda, children’s literature is a place where propaganda can be exerted. By propaganda directed to children, we understand every attempt at influencing the attitudes of children in a nonrational way.¹ There are numerous kinds of propaganda, e.g. religious propaganda, advertising propaganda, and political propaganda.

¹ See also Abate (2010) and Mickenberg (2006) on the propagandistic effects of American children’s literature written by authors who belong to right-wing or left-wing parties.

This chapter focuses on political propaganda in three picturebooks that exemplify what Stanley (2015) calls supporting propaganda: “a contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment of certain ideals, yet is of a kind that tends to increase the realization of those very ideals by either emotional or other nonrational means” (53).² The ideals that are presented in the picturebooks in question are the ideals of liberal democracy. In particular, what is supported by propaganda is the fight of the Allied Forces against Nazi Germany in the context of the Second World War. The picturebooks were published in 1942, 1943, and 1944, that is, in a period of war when most children were directly or indirectly confronted with the war and its effects (cf. Gardiner 2005). Stanley (2015) also makes perfectly clear that propaganda is deceptive: “Insofar as a form of propaganda is a kind of manipulation of rational beings toward an end without engaging their rational will, it is a kind of deception” (58). Yet, contra Immanuel Kant and his moral absolutism, this deception may be directed to “worthy goals” (53), and “there is a kind of unproblematic and indeed necessary form of propaganda” (58).

Most people would agree that fighting against the Nazis was such a worthy goal. If this is accepted, the question is then which narrative and pictorial strategies were used in persuading children to accept the necessity of war? Since the picturebooks we investigated deal with war and the roles soldiers play in this war, we suggest calling this type ‘military picturebooks.’ These picturebooks prefer a narrative strategy that relies on characters which show traces of ‘cuteness,’ thus inviting the child reader to have empathy with them. The necessary violence that accompanies any war action is not the focus of these picturebooks, since it could undermine their overall propagandistic goals. Yet we find more or less explicit hints toward the violent aspects of war.

The outline of this chapter is as follows: In section 2, we define our concept of the military picturebook by presenting a taxonomy. In section 3, we show – based on our general cognitive-narratological approach to picturebooks (Kümmerling-Meibauer, Meibauer 2013) – how cuteness and aggression are balanced in the three picturebooks under investigation. Finally, we present some preliminary conclusions and ideas for further research.

Taxonomy of military picturebooks

In contrast to illustrated educational textbooks that inculcate military and political ideologies by means of instructional devices and are typically used within an institutional context, such as kindergarten and school (Johnson 2008: 60), military picturebooks are usually not bound to such institutional frames but are intended to be read by children and adult mediators in their leisure time.

² Supporting propaganda is opposed to undermining propaganda as “a contribution to public discourse that is presented as an embodiment to certain ideals, yet is of a kind that tends to erode those very ideals” (53). A case in point is the coloring book for children *We shall never forget 9/11. The Kid’s Book of Freedom* (2011) by N. Wayne Bell that fuels hatred for Muslim people, since they are presented as supporters of Osama Bin Laden.

We distinguish between three types of military picturebooks: descriptive military picturebooks, autobiographical military picturebooks, and narrative military picturebooks. Descriptive (or non-fiction) military picturebooks contain information about war, e.g. about the weapons used or the roles of soldiers. They can also offer reasons for war or an explanation of war ethics. A case in point is *An Alphabet of the Army* (1943) by Edward Shenton. Its content is described as follows in the inside flap:

The present Army of the United States is a vast and complex organization. Planned and trained for modern total warfare, its units are highly specialized, its weapons are the finest and most efficient that can be devised. AN ALPHABET OF THE ARMY shows this development in concise text and pictures. It describes each unit and tells how the various commands operate in battle and explains what their weapons can do. (n. pag.)

Hence, this book is engaged in knowledge transmission. Yet it is supporting propaganda since it aims at generating children's respect for the Army of the United States, by fostering admiration for its complex organization and high-tech weapons.

In autobiographical military picturebooks, an adult author remembers his or her war experiences, thus constructing a picture of war oscillating between subjective and more representative aspects of war. A case in point is Michael Foreman's *War Boy* (1989). The propagandistic aspect of this type of military picturebook is connected with the many emotional overtones integrated into the narrative. For instance, one picture displays a Morrison shelter. Morrison shelters were massive steel constructions to be placed inside houses or in gardens in order to protect the inhabitants from (German) bombs. The respective illustration shows a garden scene where the top of the shelter is used as a table for playing table tennis, while inside the shelter a young child is comfortably reading a book. Foreman's *War Boy* is a good example for supporting propaganda that typically works "indirectly by seeking to overload various affective capacities, such as nostalgia, sentiment, or fear" (Stanley 2015: 53). This does not exclude information about the war like those typically given in descriptive military picturebooks. In addition, narratives about the author's life as a "war boy" are integrated.

Finally, narrative military picturebooks are picturebooks that present a story whose main protagonists are usually children or animals. Surprisingly, even vehicles and toys assume the role of literary characters in these books, as in Helen Ferris' "*Watch me*" *said the Jeep* (1944) and Albert Friend's *War in Dollyland* (1915). In this regard it should be noted that there are picturebooks dealing with war that cannot be classified as military picturebooks, simply because war is not the central topic. For instance, in *Le voyage de Babar* (The Travels of Babar, 1932) by Jean de Brunhoff, a war breaks out between the elephants and the rhinos, but this episode does not dominate the picturebook story. More generally, we argue that narratives are a privileged means of propaganda because emotional and non-rational aspects can easily be integrated, as will be shown by an analysis of three narrative military picturebooks: *Kwik and Kwak* (1942) by Oscar Fabrès, *Yussuf the Ostrich* (1943) by Emery Kelen, and *Jenny the Jeep* (1944) by Jack Townend. Although the stories are

purely fictional, propagating the war of the American army and the Allied Forces against Nazi Germany, they refer to different war strategies and historical events. *Kwik and Kwak* interpolates the invasion of German troops in The Netherlands in 1940 with the topic of forced immigration to the USA as a safe country. *Jenny the Jeep* focuses on the entry of the Allied Forces into Italy. Interestingly, this picturebook refers to the end of the Second World War, although it was published in 1944. One explanation might be that the US army invaded Sicily in 1943, joined forces with the British army, occupied the South of Italy in the following months, and entered Rome in June 1944. Although the fighting with the German army in Northern Italy lasted until April 1945, the events of the war and the failures of the German armies in Europe in 1943 and 1944 obviously stimulated the author to anticipate the end of the war.

Finally, *Yussuf the Ostrich* refers to the British-American invasion of Morocco, Tunisia, and Algeria in 1942, known as “Operation Torch.” Under the guidance of General Dwight Eisenhower, the American troops defeated the German army that had occupied major parts of this North African region. After suffering from very large losses, the Germans agreed to an armistice and left North Africa in spring 1943. The picturebook narrative singles out the fierce battles between the US army and the German army, complementing this factual event by the fantastic story of the fabulous fast-running ostrich. In order to connect the ‘real’ and the fictional level, the illustrator equipped the US general with the looks of Eisenhower. If one compares the illustrations of the general with contemporary photographs of Eisenhower, the resemblance is evident: the facial expression, the brown uniform jacket with the four stars on the shoulder, the innumerable decorations, the letters “US” embroidered on the reverse, and the peaked cap with the golden winged eagle badge are a close copy of the historical character. Moreover, the first image of the meeting between the general and Yussuf shows a map of North Africa with flags that indicate the positions of the Nazi army and the Allied forces, thus providing the child reader with certain knowledge about the geographical places and the military situation in 1942.

Literary characters in military picturebooks

Nikolajeva and Scott (2001: 81–115) and Nikolajeva (2002: 125–127) proposed a taxonomy of literary characters in picturebooks by distinguishing human and nonhuman characters. Concerning the nonhuman characters, Nikolajeva (2002) suggested a further distinction between animals, supernatural creatures, objects, such as toys and machines, and abstract entities, such as colors and letters. This raises the question about the specific narrative and aesthetic potential of these nonhuman characters. Nikolajeva claimed that “children’s novels and especially picturebooks abound in clothed and humanized animals, living toys, supernatural creatures (witches, ghosts), as well as personified objects and machines, such as cars or trains” (125). It can be assumed that these narrative characters are related to the human reader in some way, for instance, reflecting the reader’s social, emotional, and ecological situation (Jannidis 2009). However, one might also suspect that

these different characters have their own and very specific narrative and aesthetic capabilities. Nonhuman characters presuppose some concepts of the “normal” world in order to recognize in which way their world is different from the real world children usually experience, thus introducing the concept of fictional space. In this respect, it is noticeable that picturebooks apparently display more nonhuman characters than children’s novels. One explanation has been given by Nikolajeva who maintains that “animals, toys, baby witches, and animated objects are always disguises for a child” (125). However, we argue that the characters in the picturebooks under consideration are not “disguises for the child” but cute characters that share traits of cuteness with young children.

Cuteness, as standardly defined, relates to the baby schema, that is, a well-defined proportion of human and animal faces and bodies that evoke certain emotions in adults, which propel them to protect human and animal babies and to take care of them. Consequently, the baby schema plays a significant role in evolution, as Konrad Lorenz famously speculated. Moreover, cuteness is associated with innocence. As a minor aesthetic concept, it is fundamentally associated with smallness, softness, and the infantile (Ngai 2012). This is the reason why cuteness is associated with children and products designed for children, including children’s books (Cross 2004).

The notion of aggression relates to a violation of norms of politeness as well as aggressive behavior and violence. Aggression runs against the expectation that people should act in a polite and peaceful manner. Intuitively, we do not want cute characters to get involved in the atrocities of war. Cute characters that are involved in rude and aggressive situations certainly engage the reader in the story, all the more so when the child reader has first-hand experience of war.

In the following, we discuss the cuteness and aggressive behavior of the literary characters in the three picturebooks and the cute and aggressive scenes these characters are involved in.

Cuteness and aggressive behavior of literary characters

The main characters in the three picturebooks are either animals or vehicles. While *Kwik and Kwak* plays in a setting populated by ducks only, *Jenny the Jeep* presents jeeps as well as humans, mostly soldiers. *Yussuf the Ostrich* displays a broader range of characters, consisting of diverse animals, such as ostriches, donkeys, monkeys, cats, and dogs, and humans. It is not surprising that these people are mostly soldiers, but *Yussuf the Ostrich* also shows the inhabitants of Arab settlements in the Sahara desert. The only civilian in *Jenny the Jeep* is the Italian gentleman who buys Jenny. While the two picturebooks *Kwik and Kwak* and *Yussuf the Ostrich* show illustrations of the enemy soldiers whose aggression is distinctly marked by their brutal behavior, *Jenny the Jeep* does not have any illustrations of the enemies against whom the US soldiers have to fight in Europe. Here aggression determines the relationship between Jenny and the other jeeps.

The main characters, that is the duck couple Kwik and Kwak, the ostrich Yussuf, and the jeep Jenny, clearly display typical traits of cuteness. The illustrations rely on the baby

schema by stressing childlike bodily proportions, round faces, and huge eyes. This is particularly evident in the illustrations that depict Yussuf as a baby ostrich with a plump body and head, inflected legs, and thick feathers. As for Yussuf and the ducks in *Kwik and Kwak*, the huge eyes and the enlarged beaks that function as mouths emphasize the infantile nature of the characters. The headdresses of the ducks and the ostrich also underline the effects of cuteness. Yussuf wears either a fez or a military helmet, while Kwik always wears a white bonnet and Kwak a black hat. In contrast to Yussuf, the two ducks also wear clothes. In the case of *Jenny the Jeep*, the illustrator evokes the baby schema by softening the straight lines of the vehicle. The bulges of the hood, the slanted cartwheels, and the oblique car roof stress the childlike character of Jenny. The jeep is mostly shown in front view, with the headlights functioning as eyes, the radiator grill as a nose, and the bumper with the crank handle as a mouth.

Although these anthropomorphized characters are evidently depicted as cute, this cuteness does not imply that they should be interpreted as a “disguise for a child.” Kwik and Kwak are adult ducks who later have six ducklings; Yussuf is an overgrown ostrich – even though the picturebook story briefly depicts his development from baby ostrich to an adult ostrich – and Jenny is the same size as the other jeeps in her military unit.

Besides these main characters, other characters also share the typical features of cuteness. The other ducks in *Kwik and Kwak* are depicted in the same manner as the main characters. Moreover, they wear headdresses and clothes that display their social status and professions, that is, the illustrations show ducks as sailors, soldiers, fishermen, market sellers, reporters, photographers, and so on.

An interesting case in point is the two dachshunds that belong to the Nazi general in *Yussuf the Ostrich*. Although they wear red bandages with a swastika fastened to their bodies and necklaces with another swastika around their necks, they are kindhearted and help Yussuf escape his imprisonment. While the dachshund’s owner, the dogs’ breed, and the swastika symbols tempt the reader to mistrust the dogs at first glance, the depiction of their body and facial expressions use typical features of cuteness.

In contrast to these cute characters some characters are depicted as rude or nasty, which happens on the textual and/or visual level. This is above all evident in *Yussuf the Ostrich* where the Nazi general, the Nazi soldiers, and some Arabs, like the boy Murzuk who mistreats the little ostrich and those people who call him names and suspect him of being a Nazi spy, are caricatures, which stresses their brutal and mindless behavior. Their postures, facial expressions, and bodily proportions also appear threatening, thus supporting the information given in the text.

The distinction between cute and aggressive characters is not as evident in *Kwik and Kwak*. On the pictorial level, all the ducks are depicted as cute, even the enemy ducks that invade the peaceful country. Their unique feature is their green uniform and helmet, and unfriendly facial expression, marked by black lines beside the beak that look like the corners of a turned down mouth. Therefore, the aggressive attitude of the enemy

ducks is less evident in their threatening appearance than in their damage-causing and destructive conduct.

As for *Jenny the Jeep*, the question arises whether the other jeeps can also be regarded as cute characters, since they show the same properties as Jenny. Nevertheless, there are some significant differences between Jenny and the other jeeps. From the beginning, Jenny is distinguished by her pink color, while the other jeeps are painted in a brownish green, which contribute to their gloomy and unfriendly character. The final image of Jenny additionally highlights her cuteness: a blue ribbon is attached onto her handle and a new rooftop is installed, whose form is reminiscent of a circus tent and – as the text states – “looked just like a crown” (n.pag.). Moreover, the other jeeps are nasty towards Jenny, making cross remarks about her unusual color, aggressively pushing her to the back, and not letting her into the hull of a ship they must enter. One doublespread particularly highlights the nastiness of the jeeps towards Jenny. Amidst an assembly of brown and grey jeeps, Jenny is standing in a fenced compound. All the jeeps have turned their eyes on Jenny, staring at her, while Jenny is feeling embarrassed, indicated by her downcast eyes. Although the jeeps share the same goal, envy and narrow-mindedness turn Jenny into an outsider.

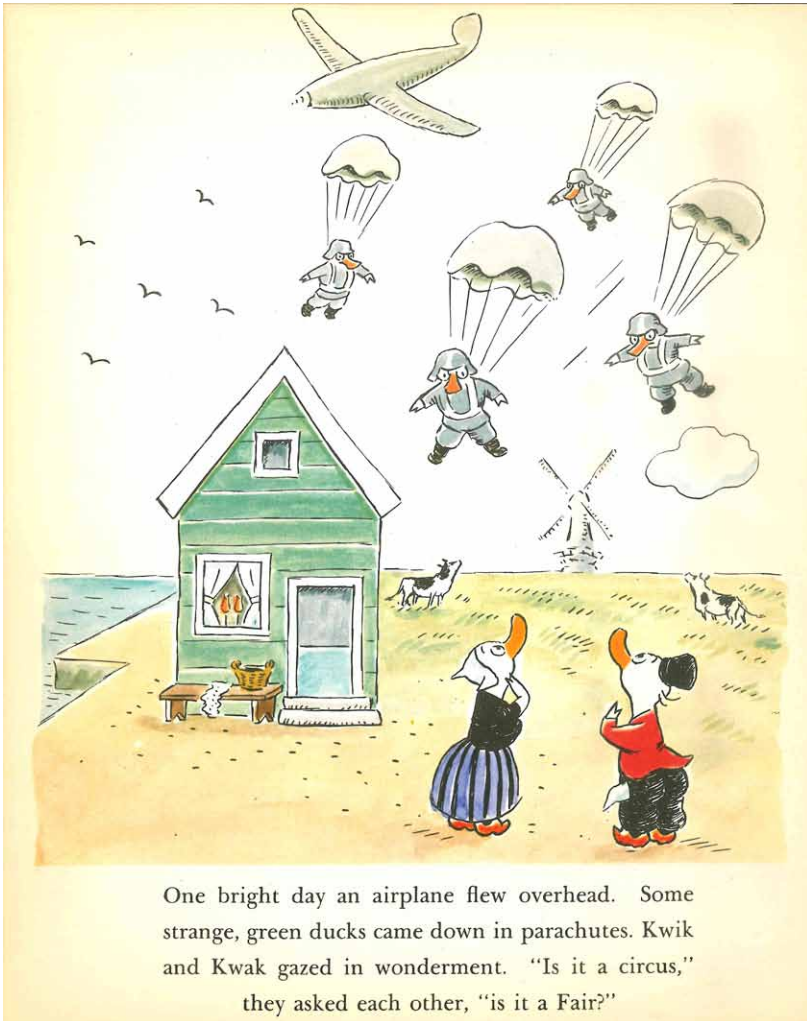
The other characters in *Yussuf the Ostrich*, that is, the American soldiers, the US general, and some Arab inhabitants, cannot be described as cute or aggressive. On the contrary, they are portrayed as friendly and pleasant people who fight against injustice and the Nazis and defend the ostrich, which is falsely suspected of being a Nazi spy. The same applies to the American soldiers and lieutenant as well as the Italian gentleman in *Jenny the Jeep*.

Depiction of cuteness and aggression in literary scenes

Although the main characters are not depicted as children in disguise, their cuteness stimulates the child reader to sympathize with them, while simultaneously dissociating from the aggressive characters. Feeling empathy with cute literary characters increases when these are placed in different situations (see also Vermeule 2010). In this respect, we distinguish between cute and aggressive scenes. Cute scenes display (cute) characters in situations, which are characterized by cosiness, joy, and a peaceful and childlike atmosphere, often complemented by a feeling of nostalgia. Aggressive scenes, by contrast, show literary characters, whether cute or aggressive, in situations in which brutality, nastiness, and a feeling of unease is to the fore. Military picturebooks that focus on the depiction of war necessarily contain aggressive scenes, which could be complemented by cute scenes. One might ask, then, how the embedding of cute characters in cute and aggressive scenes affects the reader's empathy.

Kwik and Kwak abounds in cute scenes, which are interspersed with scenes dominated by aggression. The setting is in a small village on the coast of Holland, where Kwik and Kwak are living together. Kwik is knitting stockings, while Kwak is a fisherman and sells fish. The illustrations show nostalgic Holland with tulip fields, windmills, meadows with cows, cheese markets, ice-skating on the frozen sea, cities with canals and bridges, and

people buying herrings at street stands, dancing to the music of a barrel organ, and enjoying a country fair. This picture sequence introduces the reader to the jolly and peaceful atmosphere in Holland, which comes to an abrupt end when the green ducks suddenly descend using parachutes. Although this scene marks the beginning of the invasion, the accompanying text as well as the illustration are ambivalent and demonstrate the naivety of Kwik and Kwak. They ponder whether the green ducks belong to a circus or a fair.



One bright day an airplane flew overhead. Some strange, green ducks came down in parachutes. Kwik and Kwak gazed in wonderment. "Is it a circus," they asked each other, "is it a Fair?"

Fig. 1. The green ducks invade the country. Illustration in *Kwik and Kwak* by Oscar Fabrès. New York: Crown Publishers, 1942

The threat does not become evident until the next illustrations that clearly depict the destructive power of the green ducks, which burn houses, destroy the fields, and carry off the properties of the Dutch ducks. As a result Kwik and Kwak leave the country in their little fishing boat. The subsequent pictures focus on Kwik and Kwak's fate on the open sea, where their boat sinks during a storm. The shipwrecked ducks are on the verge of drowning when they are rescued by a big American ship. This picture sequence which is dominated by aggressive scenes smoothly turns into a cute scene on the ship where Kwik and Kwak are sitting on a bench, wrapped in blankets, while the sailors bring them hot soup and some brandy and hang up their soaked clothes on a clothesline. The peaceful atmosphere onboard is interrupted when Kwik and Kwak notice the appearance of a submarine that belongs to the green ducks. The alert Kwak fires the ship's big gun, which strikes the submarine. This episode presents the peak of the story and visualizes that fighting back against the enemy is morally correct, especially when the latter is an aggressor who threatens other people's lives.

The pictures that follow consist of a series of cute scenes, beginning with a dinner by the ship's crew in order to honor Kwak's courage and presence of mind. Sitting around a big table on which a giant cake with Kwak's initial "K" is placed, the captain, the crew members as well as Kwik and Kwak wave little flags (of Holland and the USA), wear funny hats, and raise their glasses. Two zealous waiters who bring food and drinks complement the symmetrical arrangement of the figures and items. They are the only black ducks in this book, although the setting of the subsequent illustrations is the USA. Celebrating an important event, such as a victory, a successful battle, a holiday, and a birthday, even under restricted circumstances, is an established topic in stories about the war.³

When Kwik and Kwak arrive in the harbor, they are welcomed by reporters and then cheered in a parade on Fifth Avenue. This welcome ceremony culminates in a celebration in Central Park where a general attaches a gold medal to Kwak's jacket in order to reward his courage. The final image is linked to the first one as it shows the happy family sitting in front of their new house beside the sea, while one of their little children pulls up the US flag on a flagpole. This picture mirrors the peaceful situation of the first illustration and demonstrates that the fugitives Kwik and Kwak could successfully settle in the USA. Although the text states "They are very happy and love America where the green ducks will not come," a slight objection follows, "But – they think with joy that someday they will return to another little green house, with tulips, in Volendam" (n.pag.).

Although *Yussuf the Ostrich* also intermingles cute and aggressive scenes, cuteness is not predominant in this picturebook. Yussuf as the cute character is only embedded in three cute scenes, which belong to his childhood, that is, Yussuf as an ostrich chicken inside his egg shell, Yussuf as a baby ostrich guided by his mother, and Yussuf as an eager student who learns to read and write, mocked by the other animals and some Arab

³ It is no wonder, then, that such scenes also crop up in other children's books, as for instance, the birthday party in Michael Foreman's *War Boy* (1989), whose design is comparable to the illustration in Fabrès' picturebook.

boys. The aggressive scenes Yussuf is involved in as a child present the nasty behavior of the Arab boy Murzuk and his gang towards Yussuf. They capture him and chain him like a guard dog to a hut. This episode is a forecast of the war where Yussuf is captured and imprisoned by German soldiers. *Yussuf the Ostrich* definitely displays more aggressive scenes in comparison to *Kwik and Kwak* and *Jenny the Jeep*. Moreover, it depicts weapons, tanks, mine fields, and military camps in quite a realistic manner, and visualizes burning houses, gunfights, and bombings on the battlefield. Yussuf is always amongst these perilous situations, running errands for the US army. Meanwhile, Yussuf's imprisonment by two German soldiers who put him in chains convincingly illustrates the ostrich's helplessness, thus arousing the child reader's empathy.



Fig. 2. Yussuf captured by two German soldiers. Illustration in *Yussuf the Ostrich* by Emery Kelen. New York: Hyperion Press, 1943

After being sentenced to death, Yussuf is saved due to the intercession of the two dachshunds, which feel sympathy for the ostrich and persuade the general to take Yussuf as his personal aide. Despite his minor position, Yussuf keeps his ears wide open as is evident in an illustration that shows the general and four high-ranking soldiers sitting around a table and discussing a military strategy in order to overpower the Allied forces. Yussuf can be seen polishing boots in the background. When Yussuf finally outsmarts the hostile sentry and reaches the American lines, he is captured once again and suspected of being a traitor and deserter. A trial conducted by the general reveals that Yussuf has saved the US army by disclosing the secret plans of the German army. The last doublespread shows the happy ending: the left-hand image shows the general who shakes Yussuf's wings, while the Arab people cheer loudly. The right-hand image illustrates the reunion of Yussuf and his mother, observed by the general, some soldiers, and Arab people who wave small US flags. The final illustration of Yussuf and his mother leaving the Arab village in order to return to the desert mirrors the beginning of the picturebook when Yussuf is living happily together with his mother in the desert before he goes to the Arab settlement. Although it is evident that the war is still going on, Yussuf has played a major part in it but is now released from his job as a messenger.

Jenny the Jeep does not depict any aggressive scenes as the war is only mentioned in the text but not visualized in the illustrations. Apart from that, the other jeeps' nasty behavior towards Jenny is expressed multiple times in the text. The major efforts of warfare are only indirectly referred to, for instance, the long voyage aboard a ship from the USA to Italy and the tiring route on muddy roads. It is evident that the jeeps participate in the war but what they experience and in which way they are employed on the battlefield is never explained. The story focuses on the relationship between Jenny and her companions, whereby the situation of war proves Jenny's physical strength and reliability. Two events in this picturebook stand out as they depict cute scenes. The first one applies to the row of jeeps that plunge into a pond on their trip to the battlefield. While they cross the pond, a flock of ducks circle around them. The second image presents Jenny as an ice cart, polished and decorated with ribbons and a new canopy.

These three military picturebooks deal with the topic of war (in this case the Second World War) by addressing a younger audience. This might be one reason why the authors and illustrators decided to combine the violence of war with cute characters with whom the child reader might empathize. By the connection of cute and aggressive characters as well as cute and aggressive scenes these picturebooks become quite complex as they exemplify the clash between peaceful situations that evoke a feeling of nostalgia and situations that are distinguished by aggressiveness and violence. Albeit the picturebook stories present a happy ending for the main characters, which are even awarded with medals and decorations for their courage and commitment, the war still goes on (despite the anticipation of the end of the war in *Jenny the Jeep*).

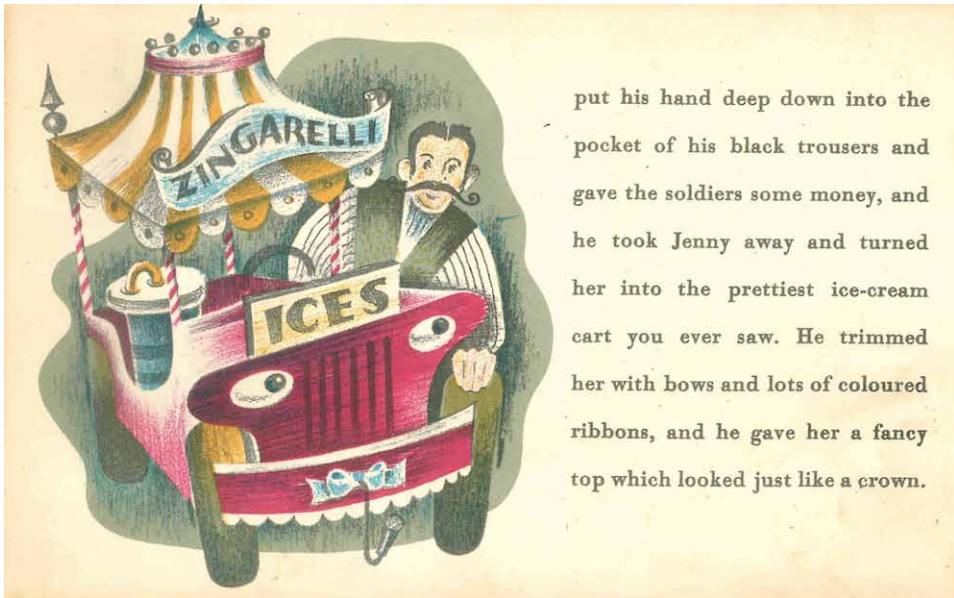


Fig. 3. Jenny the Jeep as an ice cart. Illustration from *Jenny the Jeep* by Jack Townend. London: Faber and Faber, 1944

What these picturebooks also have in common is that they connect historical facts – the invasion of the Allied Forces in Italy and North Africa as well as the occupation of The Netherlands by the Nazis – with propagandistic effects. Since the picturebook stories and the accompanying illustrations highlight the ideals of freedom, peace, and justice, the fight against the intruders is morally justified. Hence, these picturebooks exemplify what has been termed “supporting propaganda” at the beginning of this text. They focus on the idealistic aims that propel the US army and the American people to fight against the Nazis by stressing three different issues: *Kwik and Kwak* emphasizes that the USA is a safe country for all refugees from Europe, *Yussuf the Ostrich* underlines the moral duties of the Allied Forces to combat the Nazi army, and *Jenny the Jeep* requires respect for everybody, including outsiders, and expresses, by the anticipation of the end of the war, the hope for peace.

Conclusion

Our general assumption is that military picturebooks are a means of (adult) propaganda. Propaganda, as we conceive it, are actions aimed at influencing the attitudes of their addressees. The general question, then, is how picturebooks manage, by way of picture-text combinations, to shape these attitudes. Thus, while propaganda certainly is a socio-cultural mechanism, it is also a cognitive mechanism that influences the arrangement and rearrangement of cognitive attitudes.

Needless to say, a strict generalization about these processes on the basis of three military picturebooks is not possible, all the more so as we do not know anything about the reactions of children to their contents. Yet the authors of these picturebooks had certain narrative strategies at hand that can be systematically reconstructed. While we have focused on the dialectics of cuteness and aggression in three military picturebooks by analyzing the depiction of characters that are confronted with aggressive and even life-threatening situations caused by war, we could mention at least three other factors that play an important role in the success of propaganda: the age of the child audience which is closely related to the concepts of simplicity and complexity, humor, and knowledge transmission.

It is obvious that *Jenny the Jeep* addresses young children aged 4–6 years, whereas *Kwik and Kwak* is targeted at children who are slightly older. The most complex story told is in *Yussuf the Ostrich* which aims at children aged 8 onwards.⁴ Whereas *Jenny the Jeep* strikes us as a simple picturebook because of its plain pictures (wood engravings with a repetitive structure) and short text, the picture-text relation in *Kwik and Kwak* is more elaborate with a longer text and images that show more details. In contrast, the illustrations in *Yussuf the Ostrich* are quite complex, since they are more differentiated and even depict various events that happen at the same time in the same image. Moreover, this picturebook has an extended text, which demands a higher degree of linguistic and encyclopaedic knowledge. Simplicity and complexity are important notions in children's literature research because they are related to the accommodation of children's literature to the children's ecology. When reflecting on the possible audiences, therefore, we presuppose that complex picturebooks are directed to older children and simple picturebooks to younger children. This follows from general knowledge about the linguistic and cognitive development of children and has far-reaching consequences for the comprehension of the effects of propaganda in children's books.

An important and widely underrated property of picturebooks (and children's literature) is humor. Humor, in general, has to do with the incongruence of what is expected and what really is the case. Thus, it is humorous that a military jeep is painted pink and it is humorous that German swastika-marked dachshunds are the kind-hearted comrades of Yussuf. *Kwik and Kwak* abounds in humorous episodes, which build up a contrast to the aggressive war scenes. Since humor is a cognitive ability that develops over the years, it is a worthwhile enterprise asking how humor in military picturebooks is accommodated to children's abilities and supports propagandistic effects.⁵

While the three picturebooks we have studied here are narrative, they are nevertheless engaged in knowledge transmission (Siegal 2008). Studies have shown that children tend to trust in what they are told (Harris 2012). This is a mechanism propaganda exploits. The military picturebooks presented in this chapter give children different types of information about the war, for instance, that war forces people to leave their country, to engage in fight-

⁴ Another important aspect is also the sex of the child audience. It is not quite clear whether these picturebooks target different sexes; maybe the character Jenny is aimed at girls.

⁵ It should be noted here that military picturebooks must not include humorous characters and scenes per se.

ing the enemy, and so on. In *Yussuf the Ostrich*, the reader can even learn something about certain historical events and military leaders. Therefore, the question arises as to how military picturebooks provide information about war, thus shaping children's cognitive frames and scripts of the war. Finally, we would like to point out the need for fostering the 'epistemic vigilance' of children (Vanderbilt et al. 2011). Propaganda may be supportive in that it conveys the ideals of liberal democracy. Yet propaganda can also be used to suppress these ideals. Hence it remains an important task to teach children to be epistemically vigilant with respect to the knowledge adults try to transmit to them.

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