Reading the irony in the picture-book

Leer la ironía en el libro álbum

José-Domingo Dueñas-Lorente[1,a] (iD)
[1] Universidad de Zaragoza, Spain

✉ [a]jduenas@unizar.es

Abstract

Picture-books, a format constituted by the conjunction of two expressive codes, words and images, represents the great novelty of children's literature in recent decades. Furthermore, its diffusion progressively expands to the adult public. The lack of definition of the receiver is one of its most outstanding characteristics, according to some authors. The combination of codes turns the picture-book into a propitious ground for irony. As it is well known, in the field of literary studies the concept of "irony" has been the object of a wide range of interpretations. From pragmatic foundations, we analyse here how irony affects the final meaning of different picture books. In all cases, similar interpretation guidelines can be established. With this, it is intended to help the child or adult receiver to extrapolate some of the reading guidelines outlined here to other ironic picture books.

Keywords: Picture book; irony; interpretation guidelines; reading comprehension; reading skills.

Resumen

El libro álbum, constituido por la conjunción de dos códigos expresivos, la palabra y la imagen, supone la gran novedad de la literatura infantil en las últimas décadas. Además, su difusión se expande progresivamente al público adulto. La indefinición del receptor es una de sus características más destacadas, según algunos autores. La combinación de códigos convierte al álbum en un terreno propicio para la ironía. Como es sabido, en el campo de los estudios literarios el concepto de *ironía* ha sido objeto de muy variadas interpretaciones. Desde fundamentos pragmáticos, analizamos aquí cómo la ironía incide en el sentido final de diferentes álbumes. En todos los casos, cabe establecer unas pautas similares de interpretación. Con ello, se pretende contribuir a que el receptor infantil o el adulto pueda extrapolar a otros álbumes irónicos algunas de las pautas de lectura aquí apuntadas.

Palabras clave: Álbum ilustrado; ironía; pautas de interpretación; comprensión lectora; habilidades de lectura.

INTRODUCTION

As it will be seen, the combination of expressive codes, words and images - consubstantial to picture books - favours the use of irony. However, the aim here is not to provide a panoramic view of picture books that stand out for their ironic procedures, but rather to point out and delimit some guidelines for the interpretation of irony in the picture book. It is therefore a matter of proposing some reflections that can guide the access of readers in training to the ironic picture book.

W. C. Booth (1986) recalled that irony was until the 18t. century a simple expressive device, even "the least important of all rhetorical tropes", but at the end of the Romantic period it became a Hegelian concept of unquestionable philosophical significance and later a feature of the best modern literature that was little less than essential, so that in our time we run the risk of identifying as irony most of the devices that invite a non-literal interpretation of texts. In this sense, the authors agree on the difficulty of delimiting a concept that has been widely modified over time, and which results in major disagreements even today.

IRONY IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF THE MEANING OF THE TEXT

Traditionally, irony has been understood as a figure that consists of expressing "the opposite" of what is literally said (Pozuelo-Yvancos, 1988; Albadalejo, 1989). According to Lázaro-Carreter (1990), irony is the ability to convey a mocking content under the guise of a serious statement. From the research of the GRIALE group (Grupo de la Ironía. Alicante: Lengua Española), it is concluded that "irony is saying the opposite of what the words say (prototypical irony)", but also "saying something different (non-prototypical irony)" from what is expressly stated (Ruiz-Gurillo, 2010, p. 2). Among the many meanings that have been given to the term, Beltrán (2017) identifies two that are particularly relevant: the ancient idea of irony as "concealment" and the modern one as "self-parody", which emerged after the rise of the self in Romanticism. From a pragmatic approach, Graciela Reyes (2018) understands that irony "is a use of language that consists of issuing a false, ridiculous or, in general, openly inappropriate statement to the situation in order to communicate an implicit meaning that the listener must infer" (p. 205); thus, the ironist concentrates several messages in a single statement, in order to question the language itself and hinder a naïve interpretation by the receiver (Reyes, 1990).

The ironic text provokes a reflexive distance from the obvious or literal message in the reader. In this sense, Zavala (2004) points out that modern literature cultivates irony to "express the paradoxes of the human condition and the limits of our perception of reality". Therefore, the reader must "recognise the different strategies of self-questioning that this same discourse brings into play" (p. 238). According to Marchese and Forradellas (2000), the recipient of the ironic text must perform "semantic manipulation" (p. 221) to correctly decipher the meaning, whether by virtue of context, intonation or other strategies. Following Sperber and Wilson, Reyes (2018) notes that the ironic sense of an utterance is triggered when the interlocutor perceives "an inconsistency" (p. 213), which usually arises from the mismatch between what is said and the reality commented on.

Different modes of irony have been identified (Torres, 1999; Zavala, 2004) within the framework of literary studies, according to the attitude of the ironist, the procedures followed or other criteria. Muecke (1986) distinguished two main modalities: verbal and situational irony. The first arises from the statement itself by means of procedures (hyperbole, antiphrasis, antiphrases, lithotes, *reductio ad absurdum*) which results in the reader's distrust if a literal interpretation is intended. The second one arises from the confrontation of the statement with its context of reference, so that the reader perceives a deviation or contradiction between the message and its referent; in this case, irony is manifested preferably in the attitude of the narrator, for example, if he or she appears excessively innocent or naïve. On the other hand, the text in dialogue with other texts, as well as the image in relation to others (remember the paradigmatic case of Anthony Browne), give rise to different modes of irony, in accordance with what Eco (2002) called "intertextual irony" and Graciela Reyes (1994), "ironic echoes".

However, certain indeterminacy in the meaning of discourse is inherent to irony. The ironist provides marks or indications for the correct understanding of the utterance, but the ambiguous nature of the message has to be made up for by the receiver through inferences or implicatures (Reyes, 2018). Thus, it has been insisted (Booth, 1986; Torres, 1999) that irony will only be interpreted if there is sufficient complicity between sender and receiver in terms of the code used and the cultural context of reference. It has therefore been pointed out that the children's literature author is unlikely to share with his hypothetical readers the set of references necessary to encourage ironic play. In this sense, Gemma Lluch (2008) spoke of "the impossible irony" (p. 92) in children's literature. However, it should not be forgotten that the act of reception of the child reader is generally guided. Children are introduced to literary reading by more experienced readers who provide them with guidelines for interpretation whether in the classroom or in their family environment. Here we will point out some reflections based on a guided reading of ironic texts, with the idea that an early approach to indirect or figurative discourses contributes to the construction of solid reading trajectories.

Irony in picture books

There is little need to insist on the aesthetic singularity of picture books in the framework of children's literature (Colomer, 1996). It has often been pointed out that the combination of word and image when constructing the meaning, its most characteristic feature, appeals decisively to the reader of our time, immersed from a very early age in contexts of multimodal communication (Doonan, 1993; Arizpe & Styles, 2004; Durán, 2005; Salisbury, 2007; Díaz-Armas, 2008; Salisbury & Styles, 2012; Colomer, 2012; L. Reyes, 2015; Van der Linden, 2015); it has also been pointed out that both their brevity and the variety of formats and topics allow for early and stimulating contact with literature for readers in training (Manresa & Reyes, 2014; L. Reyes, 2015). Many experts underline that the lack of definition of the target audience is one of its main features (Durán, 1999; Díaz-Armas, 2008; Turrión, 2012; Silva-Díaz, 2016; Tabernero, 2019; Nodelman, 2020). It has even been noted that adults are ultimately the main recipients of the product, either as mediators or as autonomous readers (Lonna, 2015; Marcus, 2017). In any case, no one doubts that picture books, which emerged as a product aimed specifically at children, has progressively widened its potential audience as it has incorporated new resources and expressive possibilities.

As Zavala (2004) recalled, if irony "is the result of the simultaneous presence of different perspectives (...), an explicit perspective, which appears to describe a situation, and an implicit perspective, which shows the true paradoxical, inconsistent or fragmentary sense of the situation under analysis" (p. 243), it can be inferred that in picture books the word affirms or says at the same time that the image shows other parts of reality, generally not captured in the text (Díaz-Armas, 2008, 2010); the word offers a subjective character; the illustration, an objective one (Durán, 2005, 2009). According to Nodelman (1988), in picture books one code permanently contradicts or contradicts the other, so that any form of interrelation between image and text can be understood as irony. Consequently, irony is consubstantial to picture books given the tension between two codes, word and image, which become two modes of enunciation, two discursive approaches in permanent confrontation (Nodelman, 1988, 2020).

From a more restrictive idea of the ironic, Kümmerling-Meibauer (1999) argued that in picture books words are equivalent to "what is said", while illustrations imply the "unsaid", that is, that which has to be inferred. This way, the link between texts and illustrations can be expressed according to three main models: redundancy, when both codes are equivalent in terms of content; complementarity, when, from a common expressive base, word and image expand each other; and counterpoint, in cases where the complementarity of the codes leads to a considerable autonomy of each of them; then we can speak of "ironic picture books". The author pointed out four main signs or markers of irony in picture books: the semantic distance between the codes, the contrast in the style or point of view of the narration and the differences in the development of the storyline between texts and illustrations.

Nikolajeva and Scott (2001) propose a more detailed development of the above classification. They distinguish five major modes of interrelation between text and illustration in picture books: a relationship of symmetry, when there is redundancy between one element and the other; of enhancement, when one of the codes expands the meaning of the other; of complementarity, when a high degree of conjunction is achieved between text and image in the construction of meaning; and finally, of counterpoint and contradiction, when both codes are nuanced or contradict each other. In the latter two cases, we can speak of ironic intent on the part of the author. Nikolajeva and Scott establish various possibilities of counterpoint between the codes: a counterpoint centred on the addressee, when the work deals with a double reception based on the contradictions between text and illustration; in style, if text and image differ notably; counterpoint in genre, in plot, in the characterisation of the characters; metafictional counterpoint, which occurs, for example, when the illustration literally deals with the metaphorical unfolding of the text, or counterpoint in the treatment of space and time. From this approach, any form of counterpoint impacts the whole reading process.

In cases where texts and illustrations acquire sufficient meaningful autonomy (Kümmerling-Meibauer, 1999; Nikolajeva & Scott, 2001), each of the two codes (words and images) acts in its own way as a context or reference for the other, and thus situational forms of irony may emerge within the work itself. The reading of irony in picture books must therefore focus on appreciating how and to what extent the discourse that emerges from the text and the discourse that emerges from the illustration are distanced or contradictory, and on delimiting the role played by each of them in the configuration of the general meaning of the work.

An added difficulty in delimiting irony in children's literature is to differentiate it from other procedures that also suggest figurative readings. For example, picture books generally include allegory as a strategy for the creation of meaning (good examples are the now classic titles by Leo Lionni, Iela Mari, Jutta Bauer, Arnold Lobel). Sarcasm and satire are less frequent. Sarcasm can be understood as an extreme form of irony, characterised by a marked aggressiveness or a clearly derogatory tone (Reyes, 2018). Satire is also expressed as criticism, although, unlike irony, it does not include simulation of another's discourse (Reyes, 2018). Parody, understood as burlesque imitation (Platas-Tasende, 2000), appears in picture books above all as a recreation of classic titles or characters. The expression of veiled criticism or covert mockery thus finds its most usual channel in irony. However, as Bakhtin (1989) made clear, irony is sometimes inextricably intertwined with other expressions of mockery, humour or the grotesque.

ANALYSIS OF IRONY IN PICTURE BOOKS

The selection of the works under analysis has taken into account the proven critical acceptance of the works and the variety of resources used in each of them. In our analysis, we have tried to highlight - based on narratological and pragmatic concepts - how, in ironic picture books, the overall meaning of the work emerges from the always conflicting relationships between text and illustration. Likewise, a relevant and reflective interpretation of the work has to limit the discourse that is denigrated through irony. As we have said, if the ironic utterance contributes to questioning certain areas of reality through criticism or humour, a careful reading must sufficiently delimit the object of irony in each case.

The irony generated in the point of view is obviously contagious throughout the story. Thus, in the French artist Gilles Bachelet's picture book *Mon chat le plus bête du monde (2005, 2016)*, the reader already notices on the cover an obvious contradiction between text and illustration. The author speaks of a cat as the main character of the story, but the illustrations depict an elephant. The mismatch between codes is maintained throughout the work, dedicated, moreover, to "À mon chat", a statement that anchors the story in reality.

MON CHAT LE PLUS BÊTE DU MONDE
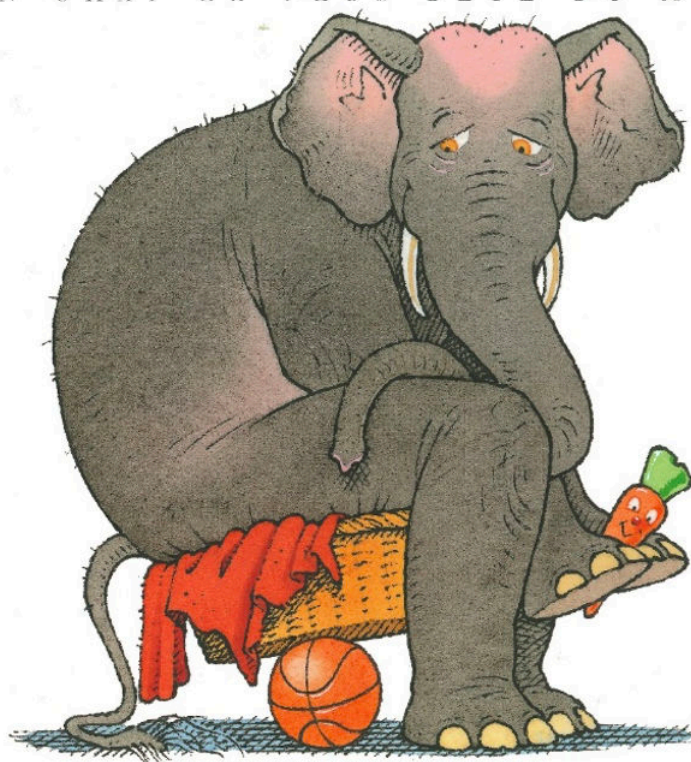
TEXTE ET ILLUSTRATIONS DE GILLES BACHELET
Seuil Jeunesse

Figure 1. Gilles Bachelet, *Mon chat le plus bête du monde*, 2004. Cover

As Marchese and Forradellas (2000) point out, irony requires "the ability to understand the deviation between the surface level and the deep level of an utterance" (p. 221); that is, it requires a process of reconstruction of meaning from the reader, as established by Booth (1986), who distinguished several moments: first, the reader rejects the literal meaning as mismatched, incomplete or too obvious; then he tries out possible alternative interpretations; then he holds on to the conviction that it is impossible for the author to propose the apparent or literal meaning of the utterance so that he infers non-explicit communicative intentions; and finally, he ventures an interpretation which he judges to be accurate even though he is often not sure that he has fully understood the utterance.

The reader necessarily wonders about the divergence between text and illustration when facing Bachelet's picture book. Throughout the story the elephant, always referred to as a *cat,* adopts cat-like poses and manners, but its behaviour is unbridled elephant-like. It rests in the most unexpected places in the house: in the sofa, the television or the drawing table, but at the same time the illustrations show the disproportion between the enormous size of the character and the spaces it occupies. The narrator, a homodiegetic character, presents himself as overwhelmed by living with his pet: the animal messes up the house with impunity, stains the documents, breaks objects, etc. Despite this, the character-narrator, an illustrator by profession, repeatedly chooses his companion as a model for his works, although he confesses that he has not managed to sell a single one featuring the animal. However, the reader infers that the narrator is really talking about a cat, even though it behaves like an elephant, i.e., a pet animal that invades his living space, invades his privacy and spoils his work as if it were a specimen of a wild species.

The divergence between perspectives (text and illustration) suggests the narrator's own contradictions and finally proposes a kind of satire towards those who, like him, have opted for the presence of a cat in the family home. Moreover, it should not be forgotten that the author dedicates the work "À mon chat", when the cultural connotations that this circumstance entails are well known. The dedication always denotes intellectual or affective complicity. Thus, through the discursive complexity of irony, the narrator questions his own paradoxical and contradictory behaviour.

The ironic counterpoint between illustration and text is also perceived in the point of view of Pat Hutchins'Rosie's Walk (2013) [1968]. As you may recall, Rosie is a hen who goes for a pleasant and carefree walk around the farm where it lives. On the cover, the reader - not the main character - can notice the menacing presence of a fox, which is never alluded to in the text. In the course of the book, the fox attacks the hen five times, but various chance circumstances intertwine between the two characters to invariably save the victim: a rake with which the fox collides, a pond into which it falls, a pile of straw into which it sinks, a sack of flour which hits it, a cart on which it unexpectedly collapses and with which he unintentionally strikes a group of beehives, from which the bees emerge and finally chase and drive the aggressor away. The reader is, therefore, witness to both the fox's stalking and the hen's ignorance of the danger, who concludes its journey unperturbed with a distracted and confident gesture.
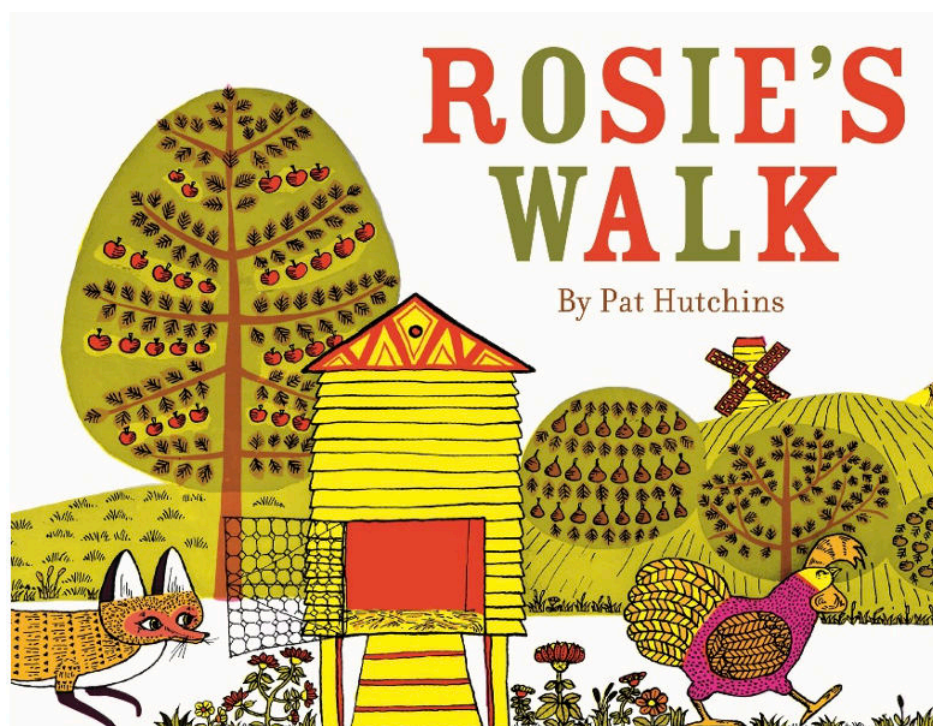

Figure 2. Pat Hutchins, *Rosie's walk*, 1968. Cover

In short, the story is constructed from two points of view: that of words and those illustrations (Nodelman, 1988). The text speaks only of Rosie, the illustration depicts the hen, but also incorporates the second character, the fox. The text, brief and enunciative, focuses on the main character; the illustration amplifies the fragmentary perception of reality offered by the first narrator. The illustration acts as an omniscient narrator, without completely disproving the textual narrator. This results in the reader's pleasant informational superiority over the main character. The use of luminous colours, with a

predominance of reds, greens and yellows on white backgrounds, reinforces the idea that the main character walks through a comfortable, harmonious, ordered world, as, indeed, she seems to understand herself. In fact, in the panoramic view of the farm that is initially offered, one can already perceive the circular route that the hen intends to follow. It is therefore a well-organised environment, where risk is easily ignored. Nevertheless, the story suggests a kind of protective design for the weak, hints at the existence of a beneficent destiny that not only punishes evil, but also makes it an object of ridicule, in a similar vein to that of many traditional tales that end with the triumph of the victims.

In the picture books by Marta Altés that we are analysing, the text expresses the perception of the narrator-main character, while the illustration expresses a broader vision of reality, so that the character acquires a meaning to the reader that is quite different from the one he himself proposes. Thus, in the picture book entitled *¡No!* (2013), starring a little dog who considers its work to be absolutely essential in the household, whether it be "tasting" the food before the others, "warming up" the bed, "tidying" the newspapers, etc. And since it invariably receives the adverb "no!" in response to every action, the dog is convinced that this is its name. Only at the end does it hesitate for a moment when it sees "Rufus" on its collar. The same procedure is developed by the author in *Soy un artista* (2014), where the main character is a child who gives a first-person account of his "artistic" performances in the house where he lives. The main character draws on the walls, gives new colours to the chairs, messes up the furniture to experiment with shapes and finally carries out a great artistic intervention that consists of drawing on all the walls of the house. Meanwhile, the mother remains absorbed in her meditation and relaxation work. This way, the reader is presented with two opposing stories, the one in the text and the one in the illustration, and undoubtedly perceives the latter as true. The objective dimension provided by the illustration as opposed to the subjectivity of the text, as Teresa Durán (2005) pointed out, means that the image version predominates. The reader's informational superiority over the characters allows him to enjoy the contrasts between word and image.

Slightly more aware of the fragility of his discourse is the cat that is the main character of the book *El rey de la casa* (2015), also by Marta Altés. The main character boasts of its status as "king of the house", although it is assailed by numerous doubts when a dog joins the family life and receives the attentions of all the members of the household. Finally, unlike in the previous cases, the cat, the main character and narrator, accepts the new situation and, although he proclaims itself "king of the house" until the end, the illustration informs us that its behaviour expresses a servile acceptance of the new tenant. There is irony here, then, between what the character says and what it does; contradiction arises not only from the confrontation between the character and its context, but also from the cat's own behaviour, in which we perceive a psychological complexity that was not present in the main characters of *¡No!* and *Soy un artista.* In all three cases, the implicit perspective of the narrative, expressed through illustrations, reveals and ridicules the incongruous behaviour of the characters and the overly self-satisfied attitude they portray.

The same whitewashing procedure was followed by Leo Lionni in *An extraordinary egg* (2014). Jessica, the most restless frog of the group, continually scours the island where it lives in an effort to satisfy its curiosity. One day it finds a huge egg that her classmates call a "chicken egg". Even when the animal is born it is referred to as a "chicken" by the frogs, although the reader sees a small crocodile represented, with whom the frogs coexist naturally and with whom Jessica strikes up a deep friendship. A bird later recognises the

crocodile's true identity and leads it to its mother, a huge animal that greets it as "my sweet little alligator". Jessica the Frog tells its classmates about this episode: - "It's incredible what happened to the chicken!" And it refers to the encounter with the mother, to which one of the frogs responds: - "Alligator! –Marilyn said- What a silly thing" And the three frogs couldn't stop laughing". The diegesis thus progresses on two different levels: the meaning that events acquire for the characters and the meaning that is revealed to the reader. The reader enjoys a panoramic view, while the frogs, as characters, express a superficial and erroneous perception of events.

In Eric Battut's *Little Mouse's Big Secret* (2014), the main character is a mouse that finds an apple and decides to hide it as its most precious secret. The other animals ask about it, but the mouse always refuses to answer. Finally, the tree under which the characters are talking bears fruit, i.e., numerous apples that fall to the ground and are picked up by the same animals that had tried to get information from the mouse. The illustration, as a situation or context, thus invalidates the mouse's behaviour and its secret becomes an open secret. The naivety of the main character is made clear to the rest of the characters by the very sequence of events. Now the characters gradually acquire a complete vision of the events narrated, equivalent to that of the reader.

In Anthony Browne's *Little Beauty* (2016), inconsistency arises from the complicity between two disparate characters, a small kitten and a huge gorilla. Differences in size, behaviour and habits between the two main characters hint at an impossible relationship. Everything indicates that a cat will be incapable of healing the gorilla's loneliness, so the reader understands the crazy solution adopted by the zoo officials when they decide that the two animals should live together in order to mitigate the gorilla's sadness. However, the relationship turns out to be idyllic, although there is a moment when the gorilla explodes in anger and smashes the television. The caretakers decide to separate the pair, so Linda, the cat, takes the blame and is able to resume living with the gorilla. The title, *Little Beauty* refers not only to the cat but to the story itself (Browne & Browne, 2011): the happy relationship between two very different beings against all odds. Another source of irony here is the description of the characters' habitat: they speak of a zoo, but the illustration depicts a domestic space, with wallpapered walls, armchairs and television. It is then easy to deduce that the author not only describes the strange relationship between a gorilla and a cat, but also refers to affective bonds that are properly human. The semantic mismatch between text and illustration helps to establish different levels of interpretation: a more playful level (which seems preferably aimed at the child reader) and a more reflective one (intended, one might think, for the adult reader). As Browne himself (2011) noted, the picture book is based on a true story that took place in a California zoo. The author then sought to highlight the often overlooked similarities between the behaviour of gorillas and that of humans. In doing so, the implicit meaning of picture books questions certain prejudices about human relationships, but it also suggests an unassuming perception of men and women in nature as a whole.
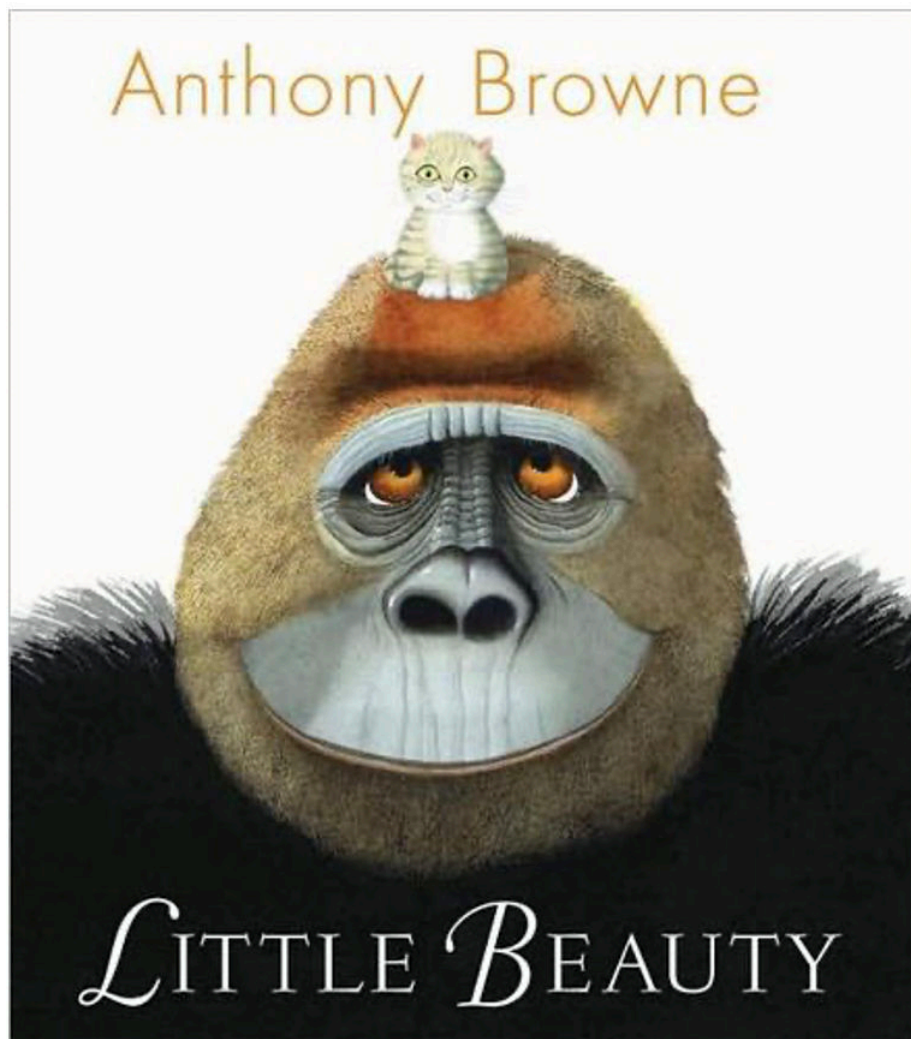
Figure 3. Anthony Browne, *Little Beauty*, 1988. Cover

A clear example of intertextual irony, in the sense Eco (2002) uses the concept, is the picture book *Et pourquoi?* by Michel Van Zeveren, a very free version of the story of *Little Red Riding Hood.* Van Zeveren plays with the well-known final dialogue between the little girl and the wolf, already disguised as a granny and about to eat her: "-What big ears you have...", etc. In *Et pourquoi?*, the girl's scrutinising eagerness, who invariably asks "Why?", exasperates the wolf to the point of driving it to suicide. The characters take on a new dimension through the inevitable contrast with traditional models. This way, the reader witnesses the transformation of the wolf and the girl until their roles of victim and perpetrator are reversed. The author thus invites us to reconsider the symbolic meaning traditionally embodied by both characters.

Eco (2002) insisted that texts propose reading mechanisms, that is, clues for their interpretation, by means of which they instruct the reader with the aim of bringing the empirical reader closer to the model reader. One of these strategies is "intertextual irony", i.e., any form of quote or dialogue between works. Through this strategy, any text offers "two levels of reading", that of the one who perceives the reference and that of the one who does not recognise it. Eco's approach infers that through references to other texts a

work triggers new processes of meaning creation, which the scholar understood as irony between discourses that contradict each other.

CONCLUSIONS

From the picture books under analysis, some patterns of interpretation emerge that are repeated: in principle, in all cases the author generates distrust in the reader in the face of a literal reading of the work. Mistrust usually stems from the discursive disagreement between text and illustration, which is expressed in the different points of view adopted by one code and the other, and which is transferred to the plot development of the events. This way, the recipient senses the need to reach a deeper meaning of the book and initiates (Marchese & Forradellas, 2000) a process of "semantic manipulation" (p. 221) until a coherent meaning can be glimpsed. As we can see, ironic messages demand open endings, which require a distant and reflective attitude from the recipient. Therefore, irony is finally translated into the questioning of prejudices or clichés, in the need to go beyond the apparent vision of reality. As Reyes (1990) pointed out, the ironist brings together different messages in a single statement and trusts the recipient's ability to interpret them correctly.

As we said, in the works under analysis, we have found that discursive inconsistency generally arises from mismatches between text and illustration. Only in *Et pourquoi?* there is no dissonance between the two codes. Here, the deep level of interpretation is demanded by the explicit reference to another work, the traditional tale of *Little Red Riding Hood.* Michael Van Zeveren0s version of *Little Red Riding Hood* takes on an ironic dimension in contrast to the canonical version of the story. For his part, Gilles Bachelet resorts in *Mon chat* to a clear contrast between text and illustration, as has already been pointed out. However, in contrast to what usually happens in these cases, the reader must now choose to give the text and not the illustration the value of truth. The profound meaning of the work refers to the very incoherence of the homodiegetic narrator, with whom the author can be identified: someone who lives with a domestic animal that alters his way of life, that spoils his work, but which, at the same time, serves him as a model in his illustrations or deserves the dedication of one of his books.

Pat Huchins' Rosie's walk offers a more traditional contrast between words and images. Illustrations complete the perspective offered by texts Images act as a heterodiegetic perception of events. The reader must now conclude that the final meaning of the story is conveyed by illustrations. The book highlights the naivety of the main character, but the author counterbalances the legendary cunning of the fox with a kind of cosmic justice that favours the weak. And since the main character is saved again and again by chance or chance, the empirical reader is confronted with an ending, of an evidently intentional nature, which will lead him to reflect on the ultimate message of the work, the fortune that invariably protects the trusting main character.

The three picture books by Marta Altés under analysis, *¡No!, Soy un artista* and *El rey de la casa,* as well as Leo Lionni's *An extraordinary egg* and Eric Battut's Little Mouse's Big Secret, base their ironic capacity on the contrast between an internal focus of the story and an external focus. In internal focus, the narrative perspective coincides with a character, who becomes the fictional subject of the perception of events. In the external focus, provided by illustrations, the perspective of the narrative is lies in a point in the diegetic universe outside of any character (Genette, 1983). The characters in the picture

books by Altés, Lionni or Battut reviewed thus maintain a biased view of the facts that contrasts with the omniscience provided by the illustration, the frame of reference of the text. These are therefore cases of situational irony. Irony arises from the characters' deficient understanding of reality. The reader knows the "true" story from the illustrations.

In sum, we have reviewed several prototypical examples of what can be called "situational irony" adapted to picture books. Each of the cases offers its own variants, although they are all based on the discursive dissociation between texts and illustrations. Van Zeveren's *Et pourquoi?* is a clear example of "intertextual irony", in Eco's sense of the term. Undoubtedly, there are cases where both models of irony are combined in the construction of meaning, a matter of great interest and complexity that would need to be addressed in other studies.

We said that irony is intended to generate humour and criticism above all. This way, the ironist conveys doubts about the relationship between the appearance and the background of things, and also about the possibilities of human knowledge and of language itself (verbal or iconic) as an instrument for categorising the world. The ways of expressing irony are very varied, but they all require reading beyond the obvious, trying to delve into what is suggested, since the ironist constructs uncertain discourses. Therefore, inducing readers in training to deal with ironic texts means getting them used to a reading, to understand literature or art as intentional recreations of life, through which an author provokes certain intellectual and affective processes in the reader.

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