

Proceedings

Representing the Reading Experience. The Reader's Education through Picture Books [†]

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Abstract: Today metaliterature encompasses the picture book but there are not specific studies about it. This paper explores picture-book publishing in Italy and analyses the work by Oliver Jeffers and Sam Winston *A Child of Books* (2016), recipient of the 2017 Bologna Ragazzi Award. This picture book epitomises the aesthetic and literary features of the various types of picture book. Metaphorically speaking, the book's multi-layering recalls the *bildungsroman* as well as the distinction between imagination and the creative power of invention. The iconic code accompanies readers on their journey into the imagination that is at the heart of the reading process. The use of the calligram is both an integral part of the picture and a metatext referring to a multiplicity of other literary works sometimes only touched upon. The paper explains that the best metaliterary pictures enable readers to access the polysemous world evoked by pictures and images while also nurturing the spirit and assisting in the formation of the self. Although their intended audience is children, who are shown how pictures and images are able to generate new thoughts, these books also address adult educators, inviting them to think critically about reading and develop new educational paths to help future readers to grow.

Keywords: picture books; iconic representation; metaliterature; reading and literacy education

1. Introduction

Literature was born when written language was first used to tell stories about the world. But when literature became associated with books, the creative/reading process—or, more generally, when books talked about other books, endlessly referencing other stories—literature became metaliterature. The art of narrating or visually representing the world is a means and an end that helps readers to decipher the hidden meanings of words and the lazy mechanisms of verbal and visual texts.

Published in Italy in 1979, Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* [1] paved the way for postmodern literature and even today stands as a template for the multiplication of other stories that any given book can refer to. Moreover, it is a wonderful example of how books cooperate with readers, as Umberto Eco argued in *Lector in fabula* (1979) [2]. The peculiarity of a metaliterary text is that forges a powerful bond between the idea of the implied reader in the literary narrative, and real readers located outside the book who are driven to reflect critically on their identity as readers. It is in this crucial intersection of representation and reader identity that the humanising self-education of the real reader can begin. The educational potential of reading can be an activity, but a book is also a content object which the reader can either identify with or keep at a distance. Thus, reading is not only a process that readers can choose to be involved in, but also a literary metaphor that spurs and challenges the imagination of readers. Aidan Chambers (2011) [3] (p. 68) rightfully emphasises that literary texts have both a conciliatory and a subversive function. Encountering a specific kind of

narrative provokes a response in real readers, who may either identify with the characters, thereby validating their own beliefs, or experience the kind of estrangement that forces them to revise their fundamental beliefs. Nevertheless, this process is not the exclusive property of literary texts. Quite the opposite: the process is evoked, suggested, but never made explicit in the cooperation between verbal and visual codes typical of picture books. Therefore, the interpretative skills of readers are crucial. Charlotte Huck's (2010) [4] (p. 156) defines picture books as:

"Those books in which images and ideas join to form a unique whole. In the best picture books, the illustrations are as much a part of our experience with the book as the written text".

Despite their apparent simplicity, picture books have a complexity of structure and strategy that the reader is expected to activate through the visual reading process. Along the same lines, Nodelman (2008) [5], (p. 257) states that

"Pictures operate as a system of signs. Every aspect of them helps to convey specific meaning to knowledgeable viewers".

Thus, readers need to be taught visual skills but the meaning and significance of the book itself are also key issues: in picture books they are to be found in the imaginative density generated by the interactions of words and pictures.

From these theoretical and educational premises, academic research into picture books that refer to existing books in the canon of children's literature is an interesting topic that has yet to be carried out in depth. It will help to determine which educational ideas about books and literature are conveyed by the literary quality of texts and pictures, and also, therefore, which cultural horizons young readers are pushed towards when they encounter picture books. Such studies may provide the information needed to reconstruct a history of reading education for the young, given that metaphors in words and pictures have often been the creative forerunners of approaches to reading that have been codified only later in academic research. Such research can offer us the tools we need not only to decipher past and present, but also assistance in identifying and determining the feasibility of new critical issues in tomorrow's education.

2. The Picture Book as Object and Process

The first category of picture books is those that present books as objects to be touched, handled and used, irrespective of their narrative content. However, their minimal, essential language can also be highly evocative. Their most important feature is the pictures—realistic line drawings enhanced by bright, characterful colours. Of particular interest in Italian children's publishing is a book called *Libro!* (2006) [6], written by Kristine O'Connell George and illustrated by Maggie Smith. There is no verbal narration as such; instead, it offers a sequence of possible activities that a child, the narrating "I" in the story, can carry out with the physical book, the book as object. The evocative power of words is conveyed by attractive rhyme schemes (translated into Italian by Rita Valentino Merletti) which, in terms of meaning, conjure up the emotional power of books that can be read in secret or shared with mum while being cuddled (Figure A1). This image brings to mind Luigi Santucci's (1994) reference to being "accovacciato", or curled up [7] (pp. 38–40), the typical feeling that children experience when they hide in a secret, private place that only they know about to relish the pleasure of having a book in their hands and flipping through the pages before reading it in full. Page after page, Maggie Smith uses bright colours and delicate chiaroscuro to convey the changeability of children's emotions and attachments.

The idea of a picture book that shows how such books are conceived and made has already been explored in *Books!* [8] Written as early as 1962 by Murray McCain and illustrated by John Alcorn, it was published in Italy only in 2012 by Topipittori (Figure A2) and may well have been the inspiration behind more recent picture books. Although today's literary commentators have criticised some of the book's perhaps over-precise terminology (borrowed mainly from the publishing world) as probably being too far removed from the world of children [9] (p. 74), and the use of now redundant critical concepts (for example, the idea that a book without words does not exist), *Books!* remains a powerful source of inspiration in recent picture book production on account

of its graphic inventiveness, playful calligrams, intertwined drawings and writing, psychedelic colours like yellow and magenta, and its combinations of surreal images like a dog with a human head.

The transformative power of books is explored in Jane Blatt's *Books Always Everywhere* (2013; Italian translation *Evviva i libri!* 2014) illustrated by Sarah Massini [10]. The verbal text is not a narrative. Instead it rings countless changes on the uses of the book as an object: house book and doormat book, shared book and gift book (Figure A3). Here, the liveliness and complexity of the images take the place of text, supporting the view of Torben Gregersen [11], (p. 6) who early on in the history of picture book research had already differentiated picture books by typology and recognised the existence of picture books almost exclusively based on the narrative power of pictures. The reader is left to imagine a different situation for every page, where changing characters and contexts accompany a boy and a girl (never named in the text) who happily take their 'book-friend' with them everywhere. But the extent to which these pictures are genuinely narrative remains an open question. By and large, they encourage the recognition of denotative rather than connotative meaning, i.e., they have no intrinsic power to generate new thoughts and therefore new words in an attentive reader (Dallari, 2013) [12] (p. 35). On the other hand, this process seems much more present in *Castelli di libri* (2014) [13] in which refined pictorial language accompanies the metaphorical verbal language chosen by author-illustrator Alessandro Sanna. While the fact that the book was written and illustrated by one person resolves interpretative issues, when they are not the same person, an illustrator's interpretation of the verbal text may not coincide with the author's; when they are the same person there is a tendency to assign different roles to verbal and visual language. In Sanna's picture book, words move in an abstract register built around metaphorical meanings. For preschool readers, the notion of books that allow readers to travel with their minds, or enable them to know and rediscover themselves, is too complex to be grasped immediately. However, the pictures do help readers to grasp such meanings in an amusing and immediate way, regardless of Sanna's characteristically pared-down graphic style. And while the book begins with the question "What are books for?" it ends with the conciliatory if somewhat didactic "Now I understand ..." (Figure A4). The openness of the book, which leaves the imagination free to roam, jars with the predictable ending and, most importantly, imposes boundaries to thought. A prime example of the book as object is Hervé Tullet's *Un livre* (2010) [14] in which the author performs the unique task of helping readers to carry out activities that involve touching the book as an object. The text provides the rules, inviting readers to push a coloured dot to find out the consequence of this action on the next page. Each time readers turn the page, they are called upon to interact with the coloured dots located in different positions on each page, making them feel that they are responsible for the dynamic visible effect of the following picture. The process of reading becomes a game which a single yellow dot on the last page invites readers to start all over again. This is a circular book whose end is also its beginning. The cyclical movement is potentially endless, thus satisfying the need of children to read the same story over and over again (Figure A5). The picture book *Che differenza c'è tra un libro e un bambino?* (2015) written by Anna Sarfatti and illustrated by Sara Benecino [15], explores possible similarities and differences between distant yet comparable worlds (all translation in square brackets are mine, unless otherwise stated).

[“Some children are thin, others are fat ... as are books; all children have their own character ... as do books; children don't like washing their ears ... books don't like being dog-eared; books have an index ... children have two index fingers; books must be read attentively ... children likewise”.] (Figure A6).

Books and children need one another: the child needs the book to grow and the book needs the child to be read. In short, the text forms a virtuous circle that unites participants using witty narration and brightly-coloured illustrations with complex groupings of figures that distract and confuse the eye to the point that it is difficult to perceive the individual elements as part of a whole. According to Nodelman's theories (1990) [16] (pp. 91–92) and then to Colomer, Kümmerling-Meibauer, Silva Diaz (Eds.) (2010) [17] the picture is unbalanced: the fragmented view does not enable the logic of the picture sequences to be understood. And here, too, the defect of the text is its rather banal ending.

[“Children love colourful books ... and books love colourful children. And so? Books and children stick together”.] (Figure A6).

Picture books that treat books as objects or processes tend to lack sound endings. Moreover, their narrative structures juxtapose situations that have no real plot capable of producing a real ending.

3. Stories within Stories

The second category includes picture books with complex, polysemous structures in which narration in words and pictures recalls other stories whose vocabulary and visual referencing call for interpretation on a variety of levels. One example is Gianni Rodari's *Alice nelle figure* (2005) in the picture-book edition illustrated by Anna Laura Cantone [18]. Written in the 1960s, Rodari's text was included some time later in the collection *Le favolette di Alice* [19] (p. 272). In the more recent edition of the picture book, the pictures themselves also reveal the freshness and wit of the text itself.

Alice is very small and keeps falling into things, including a picture book of Perrault's fables which seems much more interesting than television. Thus, Rodari's Alice has an experience denied to Lewis Carroll's Alice: the possibility of fantasising freely and independently about pictures in books, which was not possible in the Victorian era. Rodari uses the fantasy character to build a narrative plot around the whims of Alice's curious intelligence, embedding it in modern everyday life where, despite some initial hesitation, she rejects television in favour of a large, weighty book. Little by little she discovers that she can't put it down—she becomes so carried away that she is eventually incorporated into its pictures. Thus, it is the pictures of fairy tales that tell the story rather than the text, symbolising Rodari's realisation that pictures play a crucial role in guiding Alice through her adventures. Once immersed in the colours and shapes and of the fairy-tale world, she confidently negotiates its labyrinthine pathways. She is not simply carried away: she tries to control how stories unfold by talking to the other characters.

As she wanders from tale to tale, picture to picture, Alice eventually comes face to face with Puss in Boots, who is famous, smart and dishonest. In vain he tries to enmesh her in his propensity to tell lies: Alice can tell the difference between good and evil, what is real and what is imaginary.

[“If they ask you questions”, a voice whispered in her ear, “You should say that you are the Marquis of Carabas' housekeeper.” “Who, me? The Marquis' housekeeper? ... “Yes, you.” [...].

It was Puss in Boots, of course. A sly grin spread below his moustache, swifter than a bee. “But that's a lie!” argued Alice. “I can't lie.” “In fairy tales you can do whatever you want”, said Puss. “But I don't belong in fairy tales: I come from the real world!” “Then go back there!” snapped Puss. Grabbing her ponytail, he deposited her outside the book.] [18].

The plain narrative style forms a backdrop to the clash between the presumed inner logic of fantasy where “everything is possible”—where the law of non-contradiction does not apply—and the rational logic of reality that steers ethical actions. Rodari's cultural manipulation of the fantasy text unfailingly alerts child readers to the moral integrity of characters, and his alterations to the plot are made precisely for this reason. Fairy-tale contradictions and gory content are transformed into something that children will find tolerable. Alice exemplifies an independent reader who can embrace fantasy while at the same time distancing herself from it, thereby keeping her identity intact. When she leaves the fantasy world she is neither nostalgic, nor passively accepting of it, nor disappointed by its magic. Rodari's ironic language helps this distancing process, aided by the distinctive humour of Anna Laura Cantone's illustrations. Her caricatures of fairy-tale characters—their distorted features are oddly amusing—implicitly lend support to Alice's proud independence. Cantone characterises Alice: her body is tiny but her huge head with goggling eyes points to the intelligent curiosity that fuels her exploration of the fantasy fairy-tale world. Similarly, Alice cleverly avoids being devoured by a protean nose-shaped wolf, and is proud of having outmanoeuvred a cat with a sardonic grin. Carefully drawn characters—the material their clothes are made of is plain to see—seem to float against plain watercolour backgrounds that create the sense of surreal estrangement characteristic of Joan Mirò paintings (Figure A7). In this close alliance of pictures and words, Alice invites readers to learn how to distinguish between reality and fantasy so that they can

fully appreciate not only the richness of both, but also what makes them different from each other. This enables readers to experience wonder as a creative rather than irrational component of reality so that they can exercise their freedom of choice to the full.

Rodari's unique ability to establish a truly meaningful correspondence between Alice's narrative and the fantasy world she inhabits is less evident in more recent publications. In today's multiplicity of metaliterary books, reference to other stories is often simply a way to juxtapose plots; the book is merely a container, nothing more than an excuse to expand on other topics. The 'lazy mechanism' of literary texts is present at all levels of a story's narrative complexity, and the picture book is no exception. On the contrary, careful deployment of words and pictures makes authors' choices of form all the more important in terms of narrative effectiveness and the relationship between signifier and signified.

It is worth remembering that Italo Calvino recommended working by subtraction rather than addition or redundancy (1993²) [20], (p. 7). Books like *Il mostro che amava le storie*, (2005) [21], *Attenti ai lupi delle fiabe*, (2007) [22] and *Chi ha paura del lupo cattivo*, (2009) [23] repeatedly suggest that while books are treasure chests of traditionally monstrous characters from fables, their narrative procedures are neither new nor significantly original (Figures A8 and A9). On the other hand, *Indovina chi viene a cena?* (2013) [24] and *La nonna addormentata*, (2015) [25] provide an unusual point of view. In their different ways they explore the idea of reading within an inter-generational teaching relationship where situations and roles may be reversed. Traditional grandparents who tell stories are replaced by grandchildren who assume responsibility for their ageing grandparents and the illnesses that often afflict them, offering instead the power of fantasy which is both imaginary and consoling. Reading and telling stories becomes an act of love that accompanies grandparents through their final journey in life. In the grandmother-grandchild relationship, the heritage that the child has received from the adult can be given back because fantasy can help elderly people to feel less alone and face life with a smile.

The pictures in *Indovina chi viene a cena?* are powerful because they make it more probable that the reader will recognise characters not mentioned in the text and perceive their essential alienation. Consider the Little Mermaid fishing in her plate, Aladdin as a tightrope walker on a flying carpet hovering above a laid table, or fairy-tale characters sitting on the edge of a brimming plate, each tasting the delicious soup in a completely different way (Figure A10). As Walter Fochesato (2013) rightly argues:

[The pictures are incredibly fascinating and [...] utterly convincing in their rare ability to create daring perspective and compositional angles, unexpected lines of vision and wonderfully balanced composition. And all of this achieved with lines of a clarity and elegance verging on the surreal.] [26].

In *La nonna addormentata*, Vaz de Carvalho's drawing of the smiling grandmother's strong facial features is surprisingly intense. Her white bushy hair looks like a cotton cloud perched on her head. Although the book's theme is the slow onset of death, its truly symphonic "doppia voce" or double voice (2012) [27] of words and pictures elegantly conveys serene and full acceptance of what will soon take place. While words mark the passing of time, the pictures broaden to include plain, linear backdrops against which lively, affectionate characters move. As explain Evan's theories [28] the sequence of grammatically repetitive sentences gradually adds more and more detail, furthering the interpretation of the message: "La mia nonna dorme. La mia nonna dorme tutto il giorno. La mia nonna dorme tutto il giorno, da un mese" [My grandma is asleep. My grandma has been asleep all day. My grandma has been asleep all day for a whole month.] (Figure A11).

In turn, the pictures mark the slow passing of time replete with memories of stories told in the past. The eye turns to the horizon where the changing position of the sun throughout the day marks the inexorable passing of time. The sun accompanies the text in the past tense: "La mia nonna dormiva. La mia nonna dormiva tutto il giorno. La mia nonna dormiva tutto il giorno, da un mese". [My grandma slept. My grandma slept all day. My grandma slept all day for a whole month.] Little by little, the reader realises that grandma is dead, and the narrative comes full circle. At this point, words are superfluous. They are emblematically replaced by the image of the grandchild staring through the window at the sky where his grandma is shining brightly (Figure A11).

4. A Child of Books: An Original Synthesis

Having explored a number of trends in the varied panorama of metaliterary picture books, this paper now focuses on Oliver Jeffers and Sam Winston's *A Child of Books* (2016) [29,30], which won the 2017 Bologna Ragazzi Award and was subsequently translated into Italian. The reason for choosing this book is that it offers an admirable synthesis of the various types of picture books examined so far. However, this is not the first of Jeffers' essays in metaliterature. In *L'incredibile bimbo mangia libri*, (2015; *The Incredible Book Eating Boy*) [31] the metaphor "to devour books" is taken literally: the main character has an attack of indigestion that affects his reasoning. The underlying message is that reading means above all to respect, love, share but certainly not to gobble up books. We may conclude that *The Incredible Book Eating Boy* provided both writer and illustrator with food for thought; a few months later Jeffers published *A Child of Books*, again with illustrations by Sam Winston.

Who is the child of books? The author intentionally does no more than give her a name and draw her sitting on a raft, her legs immersed in a sea of words, holding and reading a book (Figure A12). Her downward gaze suggests that she may not only be reading but also imagining stories: the choice is up to the reader. The sentence "I am a child of books. I come from a world of stories" leaves the reader free to believe that the girl may be an embodiment not only of reading but also of literary invention, i.e., writing. The creative process comes into play when she says: "upon my imagination I float" (Figure A13). She navigates among words that have already been written and, as she reads, words are reinterpreted to carry her thinking forward. Neuroscience research has confirmed that proficient readers are those who are able to interpret the text and carry thought beyond its limits—an intellectual and creative process in which giving shape to new stories is indeed both justifiable and possible. (2007) [32], (p. 158).

Reading and writing also means sharing a path that leads to the discovery of the infinite worlds enshrined in stories. For this reason, the girl sails until she reaches the house of a boy "to ask if you will come away with me" (Figure A14). The pictures show a boy reluctant to plunge into the world of stories. The girl holds out her hand and guides him along a downhill road, which may result in a fall, and then along an uphill road which has to be climbed (Figure A15). The boy's journey symbolises the efforts of a beginner whose efforts to become a reader can be both risky and tiring: a book is like the sides of a mountain of words that has to be climbed. Up to this point, the only hint of colour is the sail of the raft, which resembles a yellowish page of a book, and the two light-blue borders of the girl's dress. Later other colours are gradually introduced, turning the pages into feasts of colour. The reader's entry into the world of books is slow and laborious, but perseverance enables him to "discover treasure in the darkness" (Figure A16). After the darkness, everything is delightfully coloured. So anyone can hide in the wood of stories where every tree trunk is the spine of a book and branches are fragments of traditional fairy-tales like *Hansel and Gretel* and *Little Red Riding Hood* who, as we all know, lose their way in a wood (Figure A17). Alternatively, one can sleep on a cloud, lulled by the music of poems (Figure A18). Infinite spaces and possibilities are waiting to be discovered, so it makes sense to say "we're made from stories" (Figure A19). The imaginative power of books shapes readers' thinking, makes them truly human, free to fantasise at will.

In this picture book the simplicity of its words and the complexity of its images—two children standing on the Earth's globe with the characters of countless stories orbiting them like satellites—are an ideal introduction to the educational potential of the reading process. Joseph Epstein argues that encountering a literary text helps to increase self-awareness by activating a process of indeterminate duration and depth of inner space (1985) [33], (p. 395). This notion of the 'fullness' of reading and the fantasising that stories make possible is well expounded by the use of colour *A Child of Books*. The double-page spread is the liveliest because the numerous characters dressed in bright colours are set against a background that really does look like the yellowed page of a book. Moreover, as Salisbury, M. Styles, M. (2012) [34] explain the deliberate attention given to the countless details which a reader's eyes may alight on hints at the creative process that pushes fantasy yet another step further.

The end of picture book is packed with a whole variety of meanings. The little girl found a boy to be her travelling companion and shows him how to appreciate the world of stories. Significantly, the boy alters the story by becoming a part of it: as the girl narrator says, “our house is a home of invention where anyone at all can come” (Figures A20 and A21) because the key to accessing it is “imagination is free” (Figure A22). This means participation is free, devoid of external constraints; anyone can access the world of stories, although the pictures hint at something that may contradict this idea. As the story proceeds, the girl gradually turns light-blue while the boy retains his pencil-stroke appearance throughout. Thus, the pictures suggest that the two characters are neither identical nor on the same level in narrative terms. If anything, the girl seems more important because she seems to confirm and clarify her ambiguous identity at the beginning of the story. In her, writing and reading are fully integrated and become her core characteristics. She stands on the threshold of the red door of the house, which is surrealistically painted with natural landscapes. The boy is walking away, carrying under his arm the same book that the girl was reading at the beginning. This time, however, the book is red and cradles inside it the meaning of the journey they took, i.e., the growth of a reader. It is a free, endless journey which the boy can resume at any moment precisely because the key to fantasy, which enables the book to be opened, is accessible to anyone. There is no mention in the story that the girl and boy protagonists are children of books. Indeed, on the page where the girl looks at the boy walking away, a calligram marks the way forward saying: “I am a child of books. I come from a world of stories”. But the narrative is circular and open-ended, encouraging the reader to start reading all over again.

However, the meaning hidden behind the metaphorical image of the house and “our house is a home of invention” still needs to be clarified. Here the verbal and figurative levels are in harmony with each other [11], (pp. 175–176) Unsworth, L., Meneses, A., Gonzales, Castillo, G. (2014) [35] (pp. 117–135) and in Zbaracki, D. Geringer, J. (2014). [36] (pp. 284–296). “The home of invention” (Figures A20–A21) is represented stereotypically as single-storey house with a sloping roof, flanked by tower blocks. Everything is grey, while the house is drawn in colour. Colour marks the boundary between the real world and the world of fantasy, a reference to the concept of “invention” given in the text. Given the conciseness of the text and the care lavished on every detail in the drawings, it seems impossible that the author deliberately conflates “invention” with “imagination” (which is what happens in Italian translation, where both are rendered as “fantasy”) at the beginning and the end of the story respectively. Two different processes seem to be at work here: “imagination” is a visual process involving the notion of fantasy, while “invention” is the process by which fantasy is produced (Munari, 1977) [37], (pp. 12–19); Giandebiaggi, (2016), [38], (p. 837). Thus, the home of invention is a metaphorical place where fantasy comes alive so that it can be imagined by the reader. Extremely profound concepts of literary creation are being vividly juxtaposed here. The image of the home evoked in many of Giusy Quarenghi’s poems (2007) [39] may be helpful here. She sees the home as an expression of the generative power of a word that becomes a story. As in a house where rooms are connected by corridors and may be distributed on several floors, ideas in a literary text need to be linked, structured and organised on different levels. Returning to Jeffers, the house of invention is an author’s creative workshop where thought is structured in layers of words and pictures to form a story. But the house of invention is also a place which any reader can enter to encounter stories made of words chosen to trigger their own powers of “imagination”.

The metaliterary finesse of *A Child of Books* is knowingly and intelligently built around the reading process, in which the power of imagination and freedom are delicately paired with a meeting of reader, text and writer. However, the metaliterary dimension is created by bringing together a large number of extracts from classics of children’s literature. This is achieved—delicately and innovatively—using the calligram created by Sam Winston; a clever choice because the calligram is an integral part of both the image and the text, depending on how the narrative develops. For example, on the pages showing the sailing boat on the sea the calligrams refer to *Robinson Crusoe*, *Gulliver’s Travels* and *Twenty Thousand Leagues Under the Sea* (Figure A13), whereas the moment when the risk of beginning the journey into reading (and the unknown) is taken, the reference is to *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*—the protagonist steps into the White Rabbit’s

burrow (Figure A15). At the end, the calligrams refer to Alice’s awakening, Dorothy’s return to the real world (in *The Wizard of Oz*), and even to the ending of *Peter Pan* (Figure A19). This strategy activates an increasingly difficult multi-levelled reading that opens up new pathways of exploration. Calligrams can be integrated into the picture book as drawings. In such cases, comprehension focuses on the multiple meanings of the relationship between narrative and illustrations: readers are invited to let themselves be carried away by the beauty of the texts, or even to connect the meaning of calligrams to the main narrative level of the text.

This survey of metaliterary picture books has drawn attention to the wealth of narrative and illustrative content they so often contain. In particular, this meta-textual dimension makes possible the kind of multi-level interpretation that targets child and adult readers in different ways. The most innovative and original picture books show children that reading is a feasible path to follow: its passionate, motivating beauty are a source of rapture and joy. To adult teachers a picture book suggests a multiplicity of layers that invite a critical analysis of reading that begins with examples, metaphors and symbols before moving on to theoretical considerations. Many picture books contain seeds of thought that need to be cultivated with confidence so that adults are encouraged to ask new questions about how reading should be taught, and in which directions tomorrow’s readers should be pointed. Picture books are indeed a viable way of investing in the education of tomorrow’s readers.

Conflicts of Interest: The author declares no conflict of interest.

Appendix A

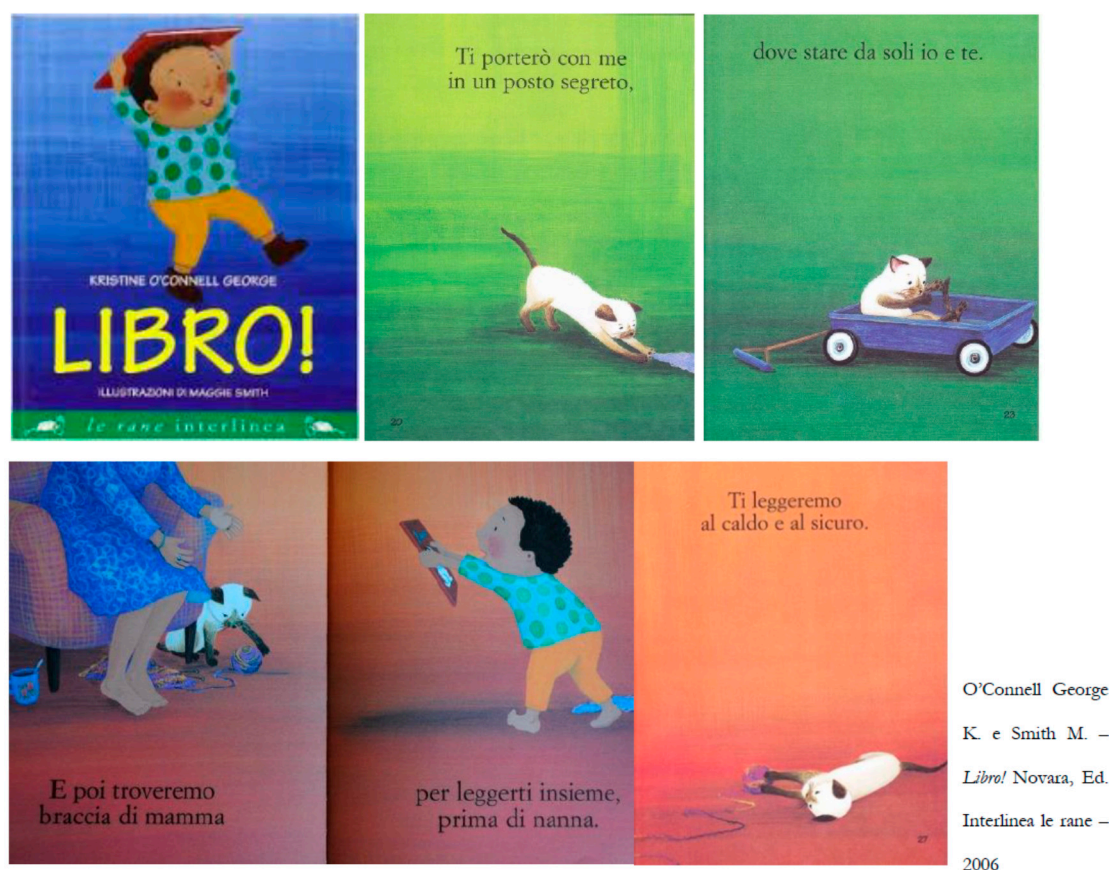


Figure A1.O’ Connell George, Smith M., *Libro!*, Novara, Interlinea, 2006



Figure A2. McCain M., Alcorn J., *Libri*, Milano, Topipittori, 2012



Blatt J. – *Evviva i libri*. Milano, Ed. Gribaudo – 2014

Figure A3. Blatt J. – *Evviva i libri*. Milano, Ed. Gribaudo – 2014.

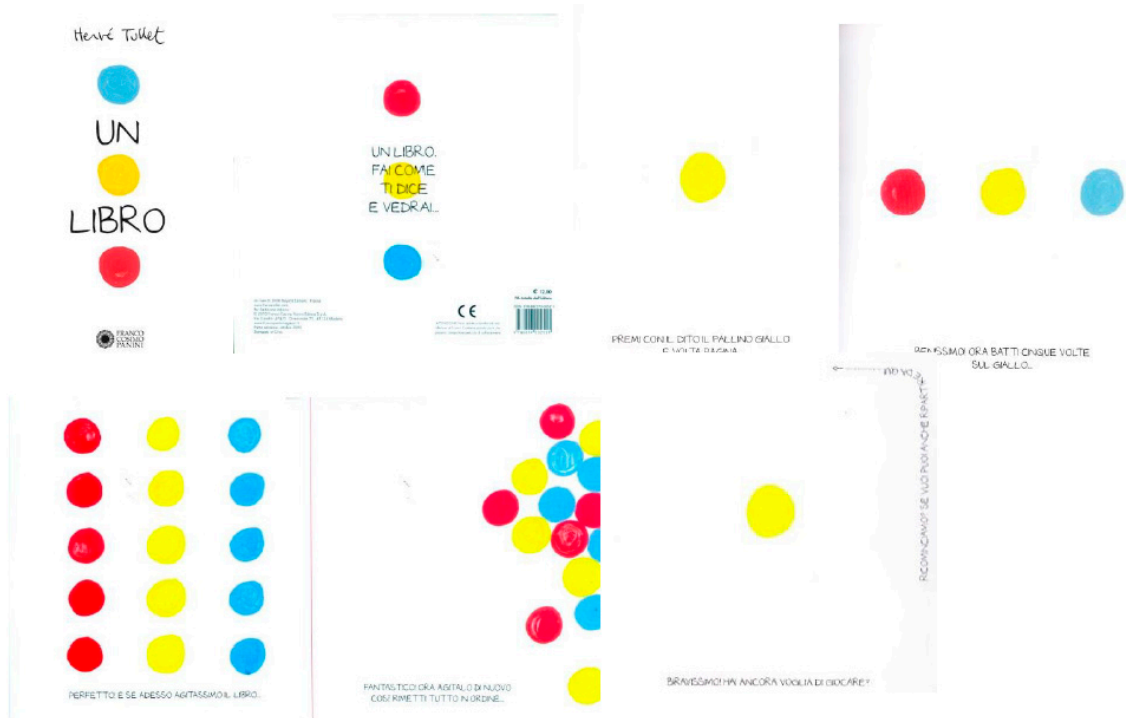


Sanna A. – *Castelli di Libri*, Modena, Ed. Franco Cosimo Panini - 2014



Sanna A. – *Castelli di Libri*, Modena, Ed. Franco Cosimo Panini - 2014

Figure A4. Sanna A. – *Castelli di Libri*, Modena, Ed. Franco Cosimo Panini—2014.



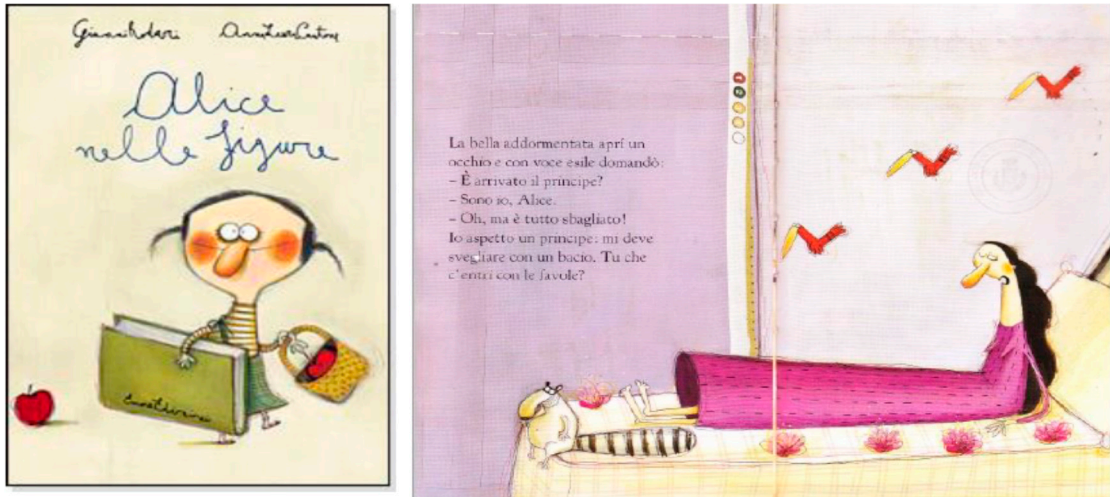
Tullet H. – *Un libro*. Modena, Ed. Franco Cosimo Panini – 2010

Figure A5. Tullet H. – *Un libro*. Modena, Ed. Franco Cosimo Panini – 2010



Sarfatti A. - *Che differenza c'è tra un libro e un bambino?* Milano, Nord – Sud Edizioni – 2015

Figure A6. Sarfatti A. – *Che differenza c'è tra un libro e un bambino?* Milano, Nord-Sud Edizioni – 2015.



Rodari G. – *Alice nelle figure*. San Dorligo della Valle, Emme ed. – 2005

Figure A7. Rodari G.—*Alice nelle figure*. San Dorligo della valle, Emme ed.—2005.



De Greef S. – *Il mostro che amava le storie*. Milano, Ed. Babalibri – 2005

Figure A8. De Greef S.—*Il mostro che amava le storie*. Milano, Ed. Babalibri—2005.



Child L. – *Attenti ai lupi delle fiabe*. Roma, Ed. Lapis – 2007



Child L. – *Chi ha paura del libro cattivo?* Roma, Ed. Lapis – 2009

Figure A9.



Figure A11. Parmeggiani, R. *La nonna addormentata*. ill. Vaz de Carvalho J. Firenze, Kalandraka, 2015.



Figure A12. Jeffers, O.; Winston, S. *A child of books*, Walker Books, London, 2016.

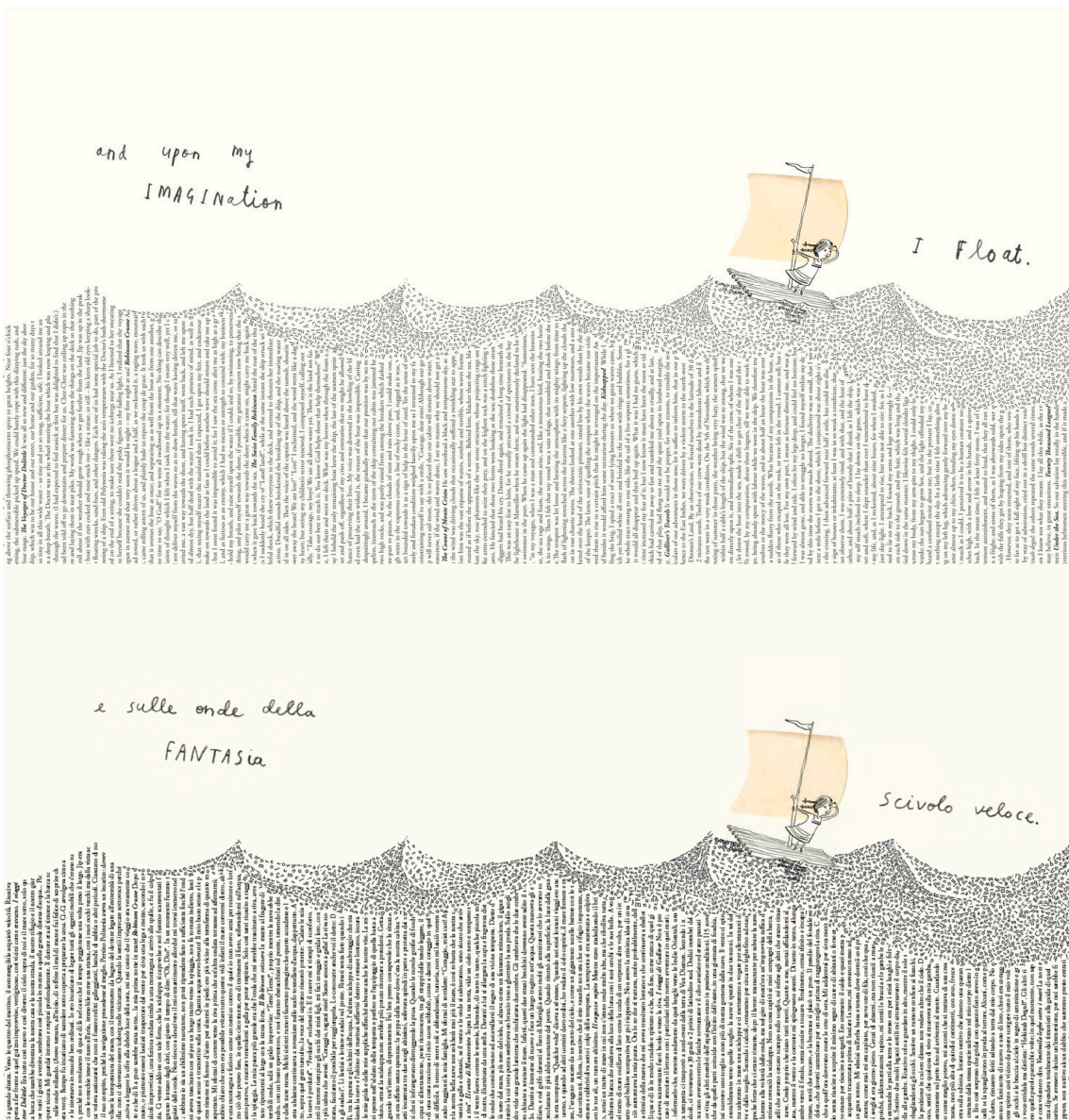


Figure A13. Jeffers O.; Winston S. *A child of books*, Walker Books, London, 2016; Jeffers O.; Winston S. *La bambina dei libri*, Lapis, Roma, 2017.



Figure A14. Jeffers O.; Winston S. *A child of books*, Walker Books, London, 2016.

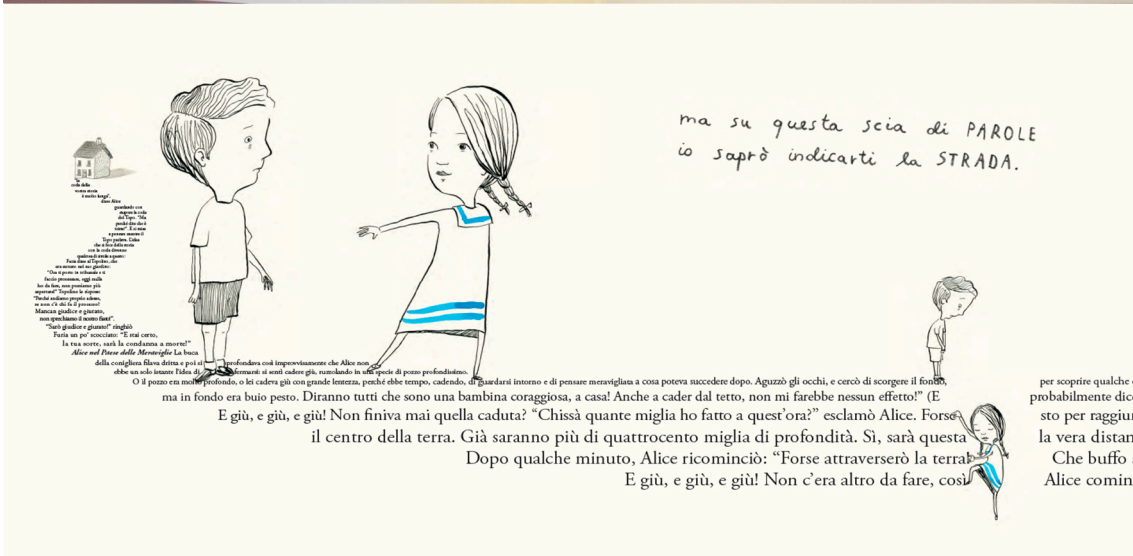
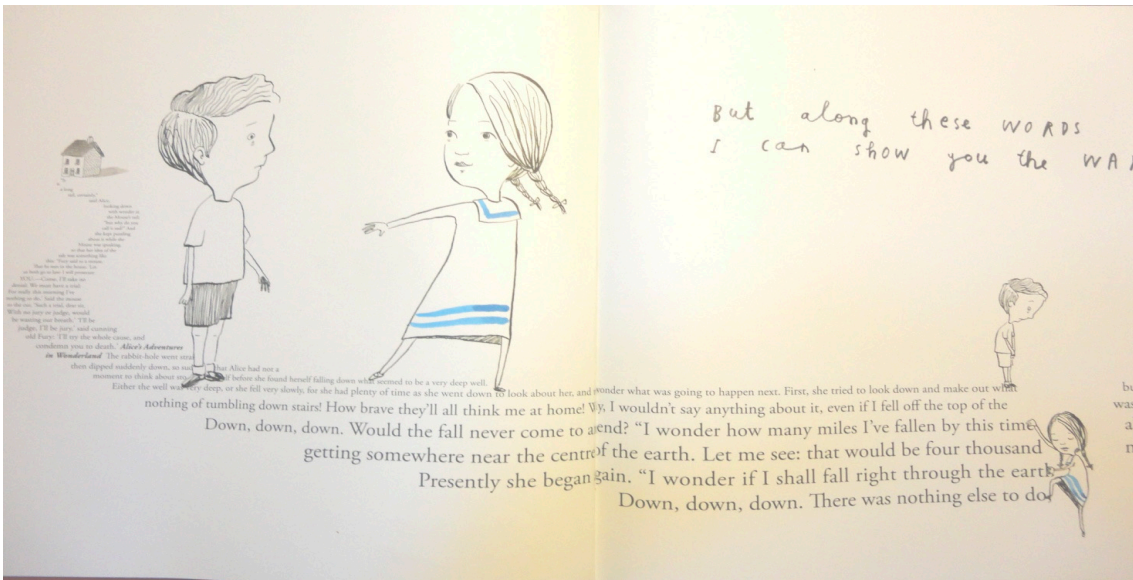


Figure A15. Jeffers O.; Winston S. *A child of books*, Walker Books, London, 2016; Jeffers O.; Winston S. *La bambina dei libri*, Lapis, Roma, 2017.



Figure A16. Jeffers O.; Winston S. *A child of books*, Walker Books, London, 2016.



Figure A17. Jeffers O.; Winston S. *A child of books*, Walker Books, London, 2016; Jeffers O.; Winston S. *La bambina dei libri*, Lapis, Roma, 2017.

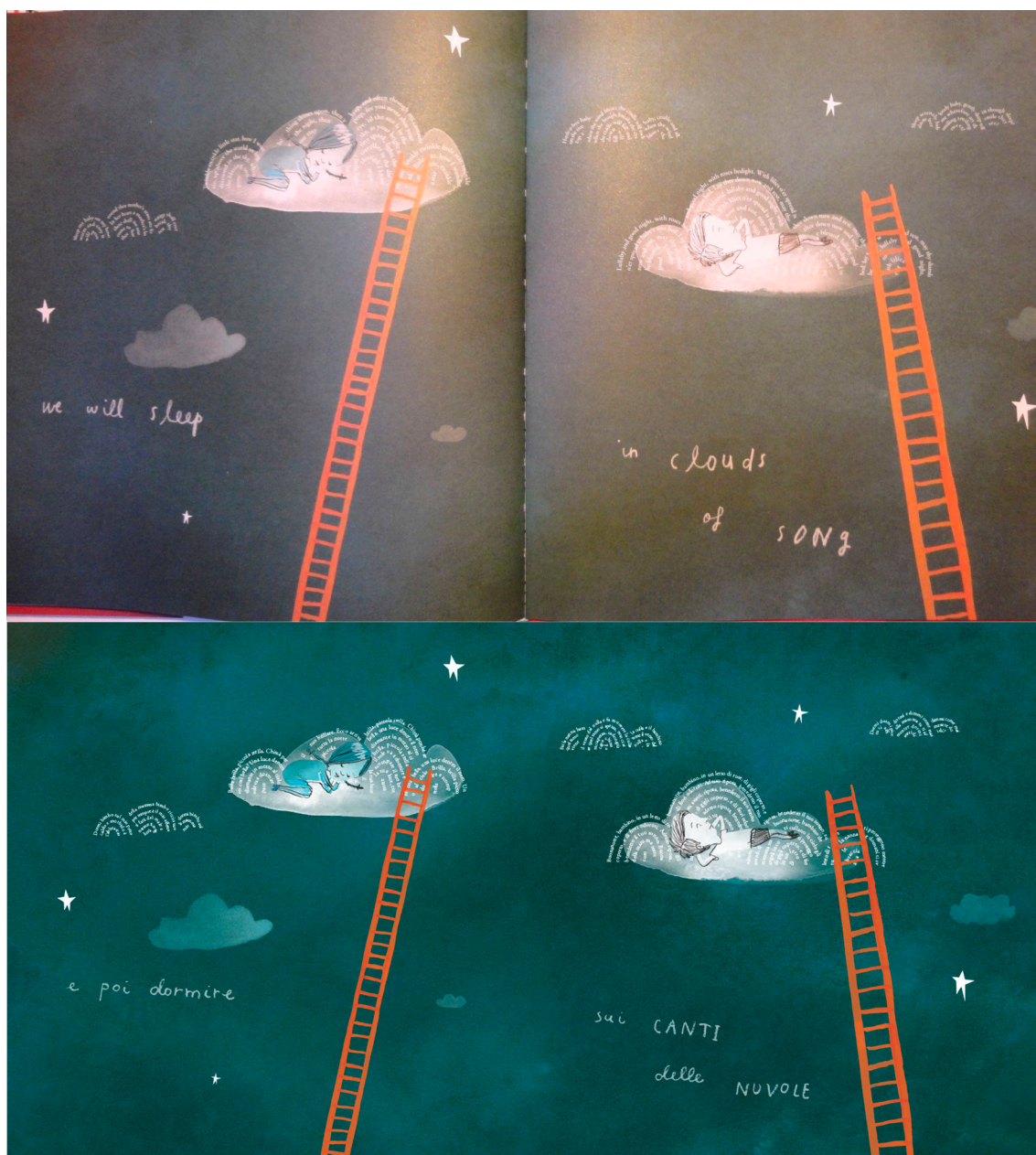


Figure A18. Jeffers O.; Winston S. *A child of books*, Walker Books, London, 2016; Jeffers O.; Winston S. *La bambina dei libri*, Lapis, Roma, 2017.

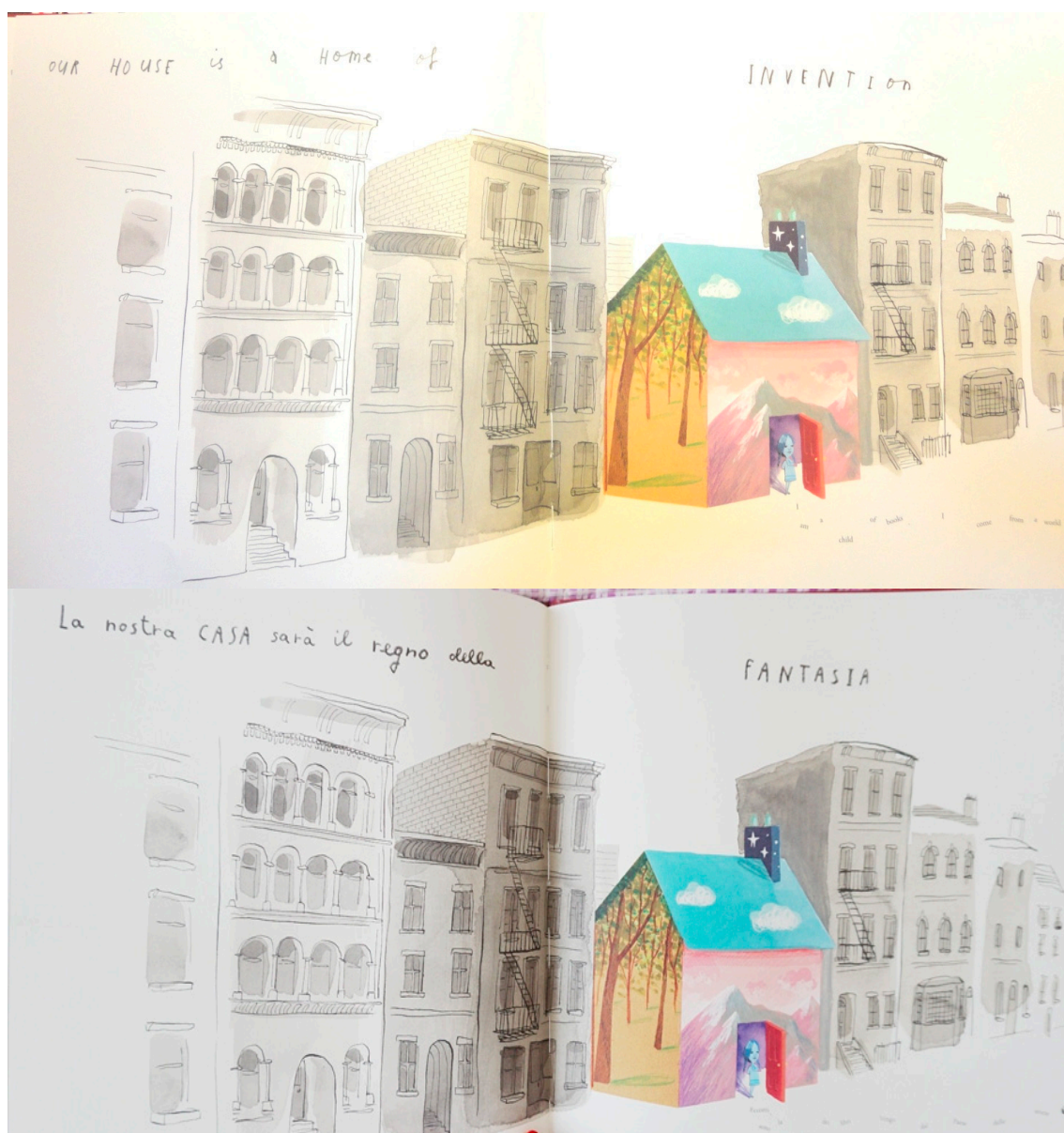


Figure A20. Jeffers O.; Winston S. *A child of books*, Walker Books, London, 2016; Jeffers O.; Winston S. *La bambina dei libri*, Lapis, Roma, 2017.



Figure A21. Jeffers O.; Winston S. *A child of books*, Walker Books, London, 2016; Jeffers O.; Winston S. *La bambina dei libri*, Lapis, Roma, 2017.



Figure A22. Jeffers O.; Winston S. *A child of books*, Walker Books, London, 2016; Jeffers O.; Winston S. *La bambina dei libri*, Lapis, Roma, 2017.

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