

# Aesthetics without Pictures?

## (Literary) Book Illustration between High and Low Culture

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In Rafik Schami's fairy tale *Der Wunderkasten* (1990)<sup>1</sup> an old man from Damascus tells children a story that they can follow by viewing pictures in a peep box. Over time, the pictures become worn out, and the man fills the missing spots with his own collages of colourful advertisements. However, the illustrations no longer match the story, so gradually both the images and the text become unappealing to the children, and the old man loses his audience. After two years, the storyteller returns and shows the children his magic box once again. The children's enthusiasm is reignited – although the box now contains no pictures at all. Without the incongruous pictures, the children use their own imagination, which supposedly means that they now experience the story more intensely (cf. Schami 1990). The moral of the story seems to be that no pictures are better than bad pictures. The reader or listener's own productive imagination triumphs.

This question of the illustration of literary texts was especially topical in the nineteenth century. The French writer Stéphane Mallarmé stated definitively: »Je suis pour – aucune illustration. Tout ce qu'évoque un livre devant se passer dans l'esprit du lecteur« (Mallarmé 2003 [1898]: 668).<sup>2</sup> Everything that a book evokes – as in Schami's fairy tale – must take place in the reader's head. This desire for an ideal literary reception without accompanying pictures is in contrast to – or perhaps the result of – the widespread assumption that the vast majority of readers lack the ability to visualize what they are reading, and that this explains the great popularity of book illustrations (see for example du Maurier 1890: 349f.). At the end of the nineteenth century, then, the illustrated book was already seen as a popular form of literature which targeted broad audiences and had a problematic relationship with high culture.

The title of this article is a reference to the central concept of this edited volume: Pictorial Aesthetics. Rather than investigating the specific aesthetics of Fantasy illustrations, I examine the historical assessment of images in literary texts and its

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1 An English version was edited in 2018, titled *The Storyteller of Damascus* (cf. Schami 2018).

2 As quoted in Miller 1992: 67.

impact on the evaluation of those documents. I will begin by outlining the popularity of literary book illustrations from the nineteenth century, and will then consider individual judgements about illustrations from Europe and North America. These can be divided into the categories of quantity, infantilization, and fantasy/imagination.

## 1. Illustration as Fashion

Thanks to the development of modern methods of image reproduction, illustrations became omnipresent in the nineteenth century. Books and magazines were decorated with wood engravings and later with photomechanical reproductions, based on the technology available and the evident appeal of the images. Wood engravings and halftones, produced by relief printing, made it possible to combine image and text on one page. They also made the process of image distribution faster and cheaper. In 1850 the famous German encyclopedia by J. M. Meyer, *Das große Conversations-Lexikon für die gebildeten Stände* (Great Encyclopedia for the Educated Classes), noted: »Illustrated editions have become, amazingly and almost unavoidably, [...] commonplace fashion« (vol. 16: 450; quoted in Plünnecke 1940: 2).<sup>3</sup> This »unavoidably« implicitly refers to the huge appeal pictures were thought to have and to the powerlessness of texts in comparison. The term »commonplace fashion« (*Allerwelts-Mode*) is clearly pejorative, since it not only implies short-term, anti-classic popularity, but also a random and indiscriminating audience. Other authors similarly appeared to hope that this trend for illustration would be fleeting. The US journalist Charles T. Congdon prophesied: »It may as well be said plainly that this system of illustration is a fashion, and cannot last« (Congdon 1884: 489). Yet the illustrations seem to have been in demand among the general populace, and the »rage for pictures« (ibid.: 488) also extended to writers. Illustrations, or the illustrators themselves, were seen as critical for the (commercial) success of literature (ibid.). The popularity of illustrations among the general public and the economic influence of illustrations on the literary scene provoked critical voices, which will be discussed in more detail later. One of the reactions to this trend was the refined design of books by William Morris and his associates, emphasizing their distance from the huge print runs of cheaply produced popular books (cf. Döring 1996: 33).

Before and after the First World War, especially in the 1920s, the illustrated artist's book displaced the popular illustrated book as a more exclusive art object, created by recognized artists (cf. ibid.: 35). The rise of cinema also seems to have partially replaced the need for book illustrations. In his 1940 dissertation on the *Grundformen der Illustrationen* (Basic Forms of Illustration), Wilhelm Plünnecke

3 This and all following translations from the German, M.B.

noted that illustrations had nearly disappeared, particularly from »books of high literary quality«, and now only appeared on the covers (Plünnecke 1940: 44). The crucial element here is the absence of illustrations in books of »high literary quality«, indicating the presumed incompatibility between illustrations and »highbrow« literature.

As an additional cost factor, the quantity of illustrations used was, and still is, also influenced by the economic situation. At the beginning of the 1960s, the West German *Wirtschaftswunder* contributed to an increase in the production of illustrated books, lasting until around 1972 (Bosch-Abele 1996: 133). One series worth mentioning in this context is Klett-Cotta's *Hobbit Presse*, which was initially illustrated by Heinz Edelmann. It differs from other illustrated publications in that all the pictures were placed before the text, at least in the early editions. Susanne Bosch-Abele suggests that this may have been intended to counter the argument that direct juxtaposition of text and image excessively influenced the reader's imagination – a frequently cited criticism of literary illustrations (ibid.: 140, 142).

In the 1990s the illustrated book was upgraded to the status of collector's item. This was, however, primarily in the form of special editions of old and classic literature, generally purchased as gifts or collectibles. This form seemed to be attractive not just because of the established popularity of the works in question, but also because illustrators could benefit from the author's recognized literary status.<sup>4</sup> The combination of newly published literature and illustration, on the other hand, seems to have been less marketable in recent times (cf. Visel 1996: 184). In 1996 Jürgen Döring wrote: »The widely distributed, popular and nonetheless high-quality illustrated book seems to have been consigned to history«, not least because of other visual media (Döring 1996: 36). The conflict between popularity and quality continued to resonate in the 1990s.

Today book illustrations seem to be becoming more popular again. In 2021, the news website tagesschau.de ran the title: »Trend towards illustrations: Books are becoming more and more beautiful« (Hoh 2021). The picture accompanying the article is the elaborately illustrated German luxury edition of the *Lord of the Rings*, with around thirty illustrations by the author (Tolkien 2021). Book illustrations, however, still seem to be largely restricted to editions of the classics. The article quotes Kat Menschik, probably today's best-known German illustrator, who has also noticed this trend. Ten or fifteen years ago, she was told that »no one needs illustrations for

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4 We can assume that this reflects a trend that increased after 1950, the »reversal of the burden of proof« (see the research programme of CRC 1472 Transformations of the Popular: Döring et al. 2021: 7). Classics have to justify themselves if they are not also popular. A »popcultural ›remaking‹ or ›remodelling« (ibid.: 8), in this case an illustrated special edition, can help canonized classics to attract new attention.

adults« (Hoh 2021). According to Menschik, one reason for the high level of investment in book design and illustration is the lower cost of printing. She also suggests that higher-priced illustrated books are financially attractive for the industry (Hoh 2021) – the 2021 edition of the *Lord of the Rings* costs 88 euros.

Criticisms of the illustration of literature are mainly based on the idea that the illustrator's input will lead to misinterpretations of the author's intentions, or a disagreeable divergence between the reader's own interpretation of the text and that of the illustrator. Today's prevailing views on the opposition between pictures and texts were already in evidence at the end of the nineteenth century. The denigration of »harmful« images seems to arise from the following factors: quantity, infantilization, and the loss or endangering of fantasy and imagination. The loss of fantasy in particular will be discussed in more detail in the context of Fantasy literature.

## 2. *Quantity: Pictures en masse*

When we consider the historical evaluation of book illustrations – this goes for both literary works and non-fiction – it becomes clear that what various late-nineteenth-century critics perceived as a particular danger for the general populace was the sheer number of supposedly inferior pictures. In his essay with the telling title *Over-Illustration* (1884), quoted above, Congdon criticized contemporary book design. He argued that instead of offering illustrations with an explanatory function (which he favoured), the publications of his time were more concerned with increasing the book's typographical elegance and bibliographical value. According to Congdon, reading should be an intellectual process and not a source of entertainment. Yet, the vast majority of readers, in his view, actually wanted to be entertained by the pictures: »Those who like a plenty of pictures do not much care to read« (Congdon 1884: 490). The abundance of pictures now available was criticized as massification. Congdon had this to say about single-sheet coloured lithographs: »Chromo-lithography was carried to such an extent that at last the popular stomach revolted. The same fate awaits over-illustrated, tawdry, and bright-looking books. People will come back to good plain letterpress, to quiet binding, and to mere frontispieces, with a portrait or so to gratify a reasonable curiosity« (Congdon 1884: 489). The perceived proliferation of pictures is described here as something genuinely popular, using the metaphor of voracious appetite. Congdon was not opposed to pictures in general – a picture as a frontispiece was acceptable – but to their excessive proliferation. The German art scholar Bruno Meyer also lamented the quantity of illustrations in books, speaking of »vast masses of utterly insignificant illustrative additions« (Meyer 1901: 154) and of the »rampant growth [...] of illustrated literature« (ibid.). Meyer concluded: »Illustration has degenerated into meaninglessness, and the only reason for illustration is to have pictures in the text« (ibid.).

Overall, the critical public only accepted what it saw as high-quality illustrations. This is reflected in a quote attributed to the British illustrator Lynton Lamb: »Illustrations can only be justified if they add to the book something that literature cannot encompass« (cf. Behrendt 1988: 35; Bland 1958: 16). In contrast to the work of art, book illustration is diminished in value because of its status as a made-to-order artisanal product, which is supposedly dependent on the literary work and involves no independent creativity. The mass replication of the illustrations further diminishes their status. A double devaluation takes place: the illustration itself is perceived as inferior to »pure art«, while the ordinary, mediocre illustration diminishes the text – or the book as a whole – from the perspective of high culture.

The quotations above offer early evidence of a concern that would be expressed repeatedly in the twentieth century, the fear of a supposed flood of pictures. »From the perspective of the notion of a ›flood of pictures‹, images appear as a quantity that must be kept under control by qualitative means to prevent any harmful effects« (Ruchatz 2012: 13). Critics warned against this flood, always referring back to the classical book – which was actually reproduced in vast quantities itself (cf. *ibid.*). Meanwhile, there are hints here that the literary elite feared it might lose its interpretive authority. Karl Pawek expressed this in exaggerated form in 1963: »One would prefer to have few people thinking more than to have everyone seeing everything!« (Pawek 1963: 17). The undesirable, supposedly populist popularity of pictures is particularly apparent in the example of the *Bild* newspaper, which was originally intended to contain only pictures and their captions. Thomas Hecken (1997: 87) compares this to the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, which has very few pictures: »We can read this difference as one of event vs. background, sensational and emotional vs. serious and respectable, but also as one of absolute market leadership vs. relatively low circulation. Pictures continue to be associated with the negative values of superficiality and emotion-mongering, but (tellingly) this proves popular nonetheless.«

In his text about the »pictorial turn«, which he sees as taking place at the end of the twentieth century, W. J. T. Mitchell writes: »This anxiety, this need to defend ›our speech‹ against ›the visual‹, is, I want to suggest, a sure sign that a pictorial turn really is taking place« (Mitchell 1992: 89). This fear of the impact of pictures on language and this resistance towards the widespread popularity of pictures can already be detected in the late nineteenth century.

### 3. *Infantilization: the Immature Audience*

The attraction of pictures (in comparison to texts) is associated with assumptions about the immaturity of the general public, and thus with an infantilization of the illustrated book in general. The view that it is easier to communicate with the »common people« visually rather than intellectually most likely goes back to the days of

general illiteracy, but seems to have been widespread in Western cultural history for centuries.<sup>5</sup> In 1895, the well-known German art historian Wilhelm Bode was certain that the general public »would much rather look at pictures than read essays or poems« (Bode 1895: 33). Critics understood the childish, »innocent pleasure that cheap pictures give« (Congdon 1884: 491), but argued for the need to counteract this »superficial inclination« (Bode 1895: 33), for example (in Bode's case) with the refined and tasteful design of the art magazine *Pan*. So the naïve book-buying public, for want of any faculty of judgement of its own, had to be protected from itself. This assessment of the general populace and its relationship of ›guilty pleasure‹ towards pictures seems to have stood the test of time: even in 1940 Plünnecke still stated about the illustrations on book covers: »This reveals the reader's subterranean receptivity to illustration – even and especially in serious literature. Evidently the book cover, that is, the visual interpretation or the symbolic encapsulation of the literary work, has more power to seize the reader's attention than the name of the author« (Plünnecke 1940: 44).

At the same time, critics deplored the commercialization of illustration by publishing houses. They were, it was argued, motivated by purely mercantile interests, and used pictures solely as a lure for unsophisticated readers (cf. Vodoz 2020: 53). Many sources emphasize the alleged exploitation of immature customers for publishers' own economic interests. The real evil, it was felt, was the adaptation of the publications to the presumed needs of a broader audience: the publishers, according to their critics, were trying »to always deliver something new, something more colourful and more tasteless [...] – most of them admittedly in good faith, thanks to the miseducation that this illustration industry has already caused« (Bode 1899: 186). The publishers, it was argued, »are more likely to find buyers for a book, magazine or newspaper with pictures than if they try to attract and retain them with mere texts – and they act on this principle. Because they want to do as much business as possible!« (Meyer 1901: 154). The preference for illustrations is perceived as the distinction between childish, immature and uneducated readers and the emancipated and educated part of the population. Concrete evidence of the harm caused by this *Bilderlust* (desire for or pleasure in pictures) was the discontinuation of the pictureless magazine *Unterhaltungen am häuslichen Herd*. Joachim Schöberl quotes the editors in the

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5 There was, however, a position that was decidedly critical of language and verbalism within (early) debates on educational philosophy. Hans-Christoph Koller (2020: 273) shows this with reference to Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi: »Like Rousseau, he considered the world of books as a danger, because it put words in the place of natural moral feeling or intuition (*innere Anschauung*). The task of moral education was therefore to ensure that moral teachings on virtue were preceded by ›living feelings‹ (*belebte Gefühle*) [...]. Thus Pestalozzi contrasts the verbal naming of moral matters with the direct sensing – or the prelinguistic ›feeling‹ – of moral relations. This immediacy seems to be threatened by words, as ›dangerous signs‹.«

final issue in 1864: »Given the extraordinary boom in illustrated magazines in recent years, it is becoming harder every day for a publication ›without pictures‹ to win and retain the favour of the public. The masses no longer wish to read, they only want something nice to look at« (Schöberl 1996: 235). Schöberl himself constructs a parallel to the cultural critics of his time, who condemned television consumption as pure *Schaulust* (visual pleasure or voyeurism).

In a not particularly serious but nonetheless revealing online guide on book illustration, published in 2021, a clear distinction is still made: »If you are considering book illustrations for your book or e-book, you should think about whether your target group actually needs illustrations. If you are writing for children who cannot yet read themselves, pictures are important. For older children, a small number of well-placed images help to break up the text. Adolescents and adults could be distracted by pictures in novels« (Sevecke-Pohlen 2021). What is striking here is the ongoing assumption that adult readers are immature and must be protected from distractions.

The main genre in which illustrations are found today is books for children and young people. Here we can trace a link to Fantasy fiction, which has its roots in child and youth literature and is subject to the widespread preconception that non-realistic genres are generally meant for children and teens (cf. Ewers 2013: 256). The question is: how does the infantilization of the Fantasy genre relate to the infantilization of illustrations?

#### 4. *Fantasy*: Endangering the Power of the Imagination

While pictures in children's books are seen as fostering the imagination, since their audience is not yet able to read, this no longer seems to be the case for adults. Since the dawn of modernity, imagination has been synonymous with creativity and closely linked to the cult of genius and the autonomous subject (cf. e.g. Reckwitz 2012). One topos in the criticism of illustrated literary texts is the loss of the imaginative faculties, which should ideally be stimulated by the written narrative. Congdon wrote: »A scene, an action, an event vividly described by the writer ought of itself to make a picture in the mind of the reader, and each ought to make his own. [...] But here the illustrator steps in and makes originality of impression impossible. He takes the work out of the hands of the writer, and dictates to the reader what he shall see« (Congdon 1884: 486f.). However, producing »pictures in the mind« requires a certain ability. The book illustrator George du Maurier noted, fairly neutrally:

The greater number, I fancy, do not possess this gift, and it is for their greater happiness that the illustrator exists and plies his trade. To have the authors [*sic*] con-

ceptions adequately embodied for them in a concrete form is a boon, an enhancement of their pleasure. Their greatest pleasure of all, of course, is to see it all acted on the stage. In this way the story unfolds itself to them without any effort on their part; nothin' is left to the imagination, which they may not possess, or, possessing, may not care to exert. (Du Maurier 1890: 350)

Thus, the capacity to imagine, or the conscious exercise and activation of the imagination, is not something ascribed to the vast majority of society. In du Maurier's view illustration, which presents a kind of interpretation of the text, allows effortless reading. Meyer also argued – in much more pessimistic tones than du Maurier – that the public had no interest in reading that required exertion: »It can be assumed that the sort of so-called ›readers‹ at whom such ›beautification‹ (›*Verschönerungen*‹) of the book design is targeted will not strain their pretty eyes with the reading of texts« (Meyer 1901: 156). The publisher Ferdinand Avenarius made similar observations in his essay *Über das Illustrieren* (On Illustration, 1883). This increasingly widespread lack of imagination fitted into a pessimistic diagnosis of contemporary culture: »Our ›age of clarity‹, which would love to embroider the sign ›towel‹ on every towel, needs illustration simply as a crutch for its paralysed imagination, enabling it to at least limp towards an opinion« (Avenarius 1883: 84). Thus, the growth of illustration was perceived as a vicious circle.

The art historian Anton Kisa confirmed this ›decline of the imagination‹ – supposedly caused by the mass proliferation of pictures – and quoted the French writer Anatole France (1844–1924), who had argued against the theatre. Theatre, France claimed, freed the audience »from the need to imagine anything. This is why it satisfies the majority. This is why it only has moderate appeal for dreamy and thoughtful minds. Such minds love ideas only for the sake of the continuation they themselves give them, and because of the euphonious echo they awaken in them« (Kisa 1905: 495). In contrast, when »uneducated minds« read texts without pictures they usually only experience »a smaller and weaker enjoyment« (ibid.). Similar views would be expressed shortly after this about the early cinema,<sup>6</sup> but Kisa was concerned with the slides used in popular lectures:

Instead of reading a book at home, one spends the evening sitting in a comfortable chair among beautiful ladies, seeing and being seen, and enjoying the obligatory slides, which demand no thought but have now become the main attraction. The

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6 Peter Sloterdijk, in his text *Weltanschauungssessayistik und Zeitdiagnostik* (Essays on worldviews and diagnoses of the times) draws attention to Frank Thiess's *Das Gesicht des Jahrhunderts* (The face of the century, 1923). Thiess criticizes, according to Sloterdijk (1995: 314), the »unproductive fantasy« that is becoming prevalent as the result of cinema, in contrast to the coproductivity that occurs during reading. Film, according to Thiess, is »the expropriation of the imagination and the enthronement of receptive laziness«.

lecturer knows perfectly well that hardly anyone is listening to him, and that it is the selection and sequence of the pictures that counts. A correspondent of the *Frankfurter Zeitung* claims that of a dozen lectures he attended in his clubs in one season, only two were without slides, and only these deserved to be ›described as good‹. (ibid.: 498)

Although Kisa was describing lectures on popular science here, this makes it clear how strongly pictures were perceived as a trivializing hindrance to the imagination around 1900. Quality content only seemed possible without pictures. Ironically, Kisa's essay itself is interrupted by illustrations after artworks by Gotthardt Kuehl – the essay preceding Kisa's is about this artist, and the illustrations spill over into Kisa's essay.<sup>7</sup>

Despite the unavoidable use of ›new media‹ in school lessons, attempts were made to counteract the dulling of the imagination, for example with the following recommendation: »To train the active imagination, we recommend occasional exercises where the film is stopped and the students are asked: ›What might happen now?‹ This stimulates an abundance of conjectures and calculations; demands imagination; and encourages students to make comparisons and to dig around in the treasure trove of ideas that lie below the threshold of consciousness« (Lampe 1921: 25).

Negative assessments of the effects of film, television and comics<sup>8</sup> on children's reading motivation have continued into the present. Critics argue that the consumption of »prefabricated images« (Singer 1995: 119) obstructs the imaginative faculties. According to Stephen C. Behrendt (1988: 29), illustrations of texts facilitate and emphasize the act of seeing, but at the same time they transform the intended active, imaginative act into a passive, sensory one, thus limiting the reader's own creative and imaginative options (ibid.: 30, 35).<sup>9</sup> In his critique of capitalism and contemporary culture, *Capitalist Realism*, Mark Fisher discusses how the consumption of pop culture in capitalism affects adolescent development, which is characterized by illiteracy and an abundance of pictures: »Teenagers process capital's image-dense data very effectively without any need to read – slogan-recognition is sufficient to navigate the net-mobile-magazine informational

7 This kind of spillover is discussed in Madleen Podewski's essay *Blätter und Blüten und Bilder: Zur medien-spezifischen Regulierung von Text-Bild-Beziehungen in der Gartenlaube. Illustriertes Familienblatt*, where she foregrounds this decoupling and intertwining, and points out the complex organization of magazines (Podewski 2016).

8 For comics, see also the prominent example of Fredric Wertham (1955).

9 Even J. R. R. Tolkien was sceptical about illustrations: »However good in themselves, illustrations do little good to fairy-stories. The radical distinction between all art (including drama) that offers a visible presentation and true literature is that it imposes one visible form. Literature works from mind to mind and is thus more progenitive« (Tolkien 1983 [1939]: 159).

plane« (Fisher 2009: 25). The assumption of passivity in the consumption of images, which eventually leads to the loss of reading ability (see e.g. Straßner 2002: 1) has persisted stubbornly and is still implicitly present in research discourses today.<sup>10</sup> The increasing dominance of visual elements in culture has always been equated with trivialization (see e.g. Barthold 2021: 25). On the other hand, the actual visual dimension of ›high literature‹ from the nineteenth century onwards has often been ignored in research (cf. Sillars 1995: 2).

An article from 2008 about the illustration of works by Karl May strikes a different note: »[Illustration] gives visual form to what the text describes, helps to concretize our own imagination (though it can sometimes contradict it), and helps us to apprehend more clearly what we cannot fully visualize for ourselves« (Grünewald 2008: 176). Grünewald's article refers to a survey of 50- to 60-year-old men on the subject of Karl May illustrations. The majority of the respondents were not in favour of illustrated editions, because they saw their own imagination as an essential part of the reading process. Nonetheless, notes Grünewald, illustrations continue to appear in these works because it is still assumed, in this context, that they will promote sales (ibid.: 176f.).

This seems to suggest that illustrations are used mainly in contexts where they can be understood and offered as aids to the imagination. In European illustrated magazines around 1900, we find a plethora of representations of cultures and countries that are largely unfamiliar to the audience (cf. Barthold 2021: 24). Book illustrations are especially popular in Fantasy and Sci-Fi literature, or in the Karl May stories, whose setting is far removed from their Central European audience. The crucial similarity between these genres is that the stories take place in a kind of ›secondary world‹ which readers might struggle to visualize. This coincides with Plünnecke's (1940: 35) concept of ›illustratable genres‹, in which he includes the epic genres, that is, »all those that, in narrating, construct a world for us, or require it as a background«. The representation of this world, especially of the landscapes and places of action, is seen as stimulating the imagination (Grünewald 2008: 190). When Tolkien was creating images for *The Hobbit*, he was also reportedly told that illustrations »with a geographical or landscape content were the most suitable« for the book (Hammond/Scull 2011: 16).

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Today it is unlikely that anyone would see illustrations as a serious danger, yet they do still seem to be evaluated as markers of ›lowbrow‹ literature. This view appears to be particularly prevalent in the German-speaking countries, as Deborah Feldman,

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10 See for example a study published in 2020 on the influence of screen time on the power of the imagination (Suggate/Martzog 2020).

author of the bestseller *Unorthodox*, reported in an interview. The original edition and most of the translations of the book contain photos of Feldman's childhood and youth. According to Feldman, however, the Swiss publisher Secession Verlag, which produced the German edition in 2016, refused to include pictures either on the cover or inside the book. Its justification was that literature did not need pictures, but created pictures in the reader's mind (Feldman 2021: 3:00:36-3:01:08).<sup>11</sup>

In the book *The Art of the Hobbit*, which brings together Tolkien's illustrations, Wayne G. Hammond and Christina Scull take a conciliatory tone: »In truth, literature as engaging as *The Hobbit* does not need illustrations« (Hammond/Scull 2011: 16). However, they see the author's own illustrations – as opposed to those of third parties – as adding »new dimensions to an already excellent story« (ibid.). This reveals the persistent need to justify the use of illustrations. The text's autonomy is emphasized to distance it from supposedly non-autonomous ›lowbrow‹ literature. This argument seems symptomatic of the consistent denigration of illustrated literature through history.

Kat Menschik's illustrations – for example her illustrated Icelandic sagas – show the same focus on landscapes that can be observed in Tolkien's work. In an interview with the *taz* newspaper, the illustrator says that she largely decides for herself, in consultation with the publisher, which works of classic authors she will illustrate, and that she chooses authors such as Kafka, Poe and E. T. A. Hoffmann, with an interest in fairy-tale, surreal, and dreamlike elements (Menschik 2018). So the idea that the non-real offers more inspiration for illustration still seems to be reflected in the literature selected for illustration today. Images from a foreign, mythological, or even medieval world seem legitimate because they diverge from tangible reality. The endangering of the imagination – one of the main arguments against the illustration of literature – is assumed to be less acute in the case of an imaginative genre like Fantasy literature. This might explain why pictures seem to be more acceptable here. Nonetheless, there are prejudices against illustrated literature for adults even today. The popular picture continues to »form a point of peculiar friction and discomfort across a broad range of intellectual inquiry« (Mitchell 1992: 90).

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11 Given that *Unorthodox* was first published in the USA in the category of women's literature (›chick lit‹), it seems likely that the Swiss publisher saw it as desirable to – in his opinion – ›upgrade‹ the book's status by omitting the pictures (cf. Specht, in this volume: 121).

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