

REMEDICATION OF CRIME FICTION IN NARRATIVE PICTUREBOOKS

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Abstract: The paper¹ examines the established conventions of the crime genre and the changes introduced by its remediation in narrative picturebooks for young readers. The aim is to develop an analytical framework that enables the systematic study of crime and detective narrative picturebooks and the strategies employed by authors and illustrators to adapt the genre to children's reception.

The proposed framework examines two levels – thematic-motivic and structural. At the first level, crime mitigation strategies were identified by choosing the motives of the crime or replacing the crimes with mystery, humourising, cumulation, and accumulation. At the second level, the key element was shown to be the conceptual pair of *crime – punishment*, with the balance most often restored with mitigated, poetic, or humorous punishment. In addition, accumulation and retardation strategies have been recognised that dynamise the narrative and connect picturebooks with the logic of oral stories and fairy-tale patterns. Strategies that create tension and engage the young reader in the investigative process are also identified, including verbal paralipsis, visual hinting, and information accumulation strategies. Special attention is paid to the role of the characters, and it is suggested that one observe them through the functions they play in the narrative – victim, criminal, investigator/pursuer, and resolver.

In conclusion, the paper demonstrates that detective and crime picturebooks operate at the intersection of the crime genre and fairy-tale logic,

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confirming the need to expand the concept of crime and detective picturebooks beyond the framework of adult crime fiction theory. This affirms the picturebook's status as an autonomous children's literary form, with its own rules, strategies, and innovations.

Keywords: crime fiction, detective fiction, detective picturebooks, crime fiction picturebooks, remediation, strategies of remediation

1. Introduction

The criminal genre, as Mandić observes, is "a tenacious sort" (2015, p. 11).² Throughout history, it has undergone continuous shifts and transformations, with change itself as its constitutive feature. From crime as cautionary tales (Scaggs 2005), to Poe's seminal literarisations of the genre (Cawelti 1976; Franks 2011), through the tightly rule-governed whodunnit narratives of the 1930s (Van Dine 1928), American hard-boiled stories (Cawelti 1976; Scaggs 2005), and British cosy mysteries (Betz 2021), to mass-media adaptations (Silver & Ursini 2010) – the genre has evolved through constant re-examination of its codes. Such transformations – the abandonment of earlier constraints and the establishment of new codes (Todorov 2010) – exemplify the process of remediation essential to its survival.

The criminal act lies at the very core of crime fiction (Cawelti 1976; Priestman 2003; Scaggs 2005; Knight 2010), which is why the genre was long deemed unsuitable for children. Indeed, crime enters children's literature relatively late (Veldhuizen 2023; McGee 2025). Its adaptation can be understood as a process of transformation, or more precisely remediation (see Bolter & Grusin 2000): in order to become readable and acceptable to young audiences, the genre had to be reshaped – from the mitigation of crimes, to shifts in the typology of characters and motifs, and the introduction of a didactic dimension not necessarily present in adult crime fiction.

The classic detective genre has been one of the most popular for decades (Veldhuizen 2023, p. 162) and "most resilient" in children's literature (Boone 2001, p. 46). Its popularity confirms the genre's flexibility, which allows it to retain conventions while adapting to new audiences. Detective stories are "among the genres that capture readers' interest the most" (Yakar & Yatar 2024, p. 72), partly due to features appealing to young readers: links with adventure and play, simple structure, child-friendly style, and discreet educational messages

² Our translation.

(Hranjec 1998). Although the plots of children's crime novels may not always be convincing, the characters are compelling (Crnković 1990, p. 133). Children often gather in groups – a topos of the children's novel (Zalar 1983, p. 11) – while the investigation's tension and confusion allow them to prove themselves to peers and adults (Hranjec 1998). This ludic dimension, compared to play, is inherent to the genre (Veldhuizen 2023, p. 167) and reflects what Hranjec (1998, p. 219) calls a "child's thirst for experience, discovery, and confirmation".³

Because of their specific narrative structure, crime texts require active participation. The whodunnit implies a question mark, "encouraging the reader to imitate the detective, and to retrace the causative steps from effects back to causes" (Scaggs 2005, p. 34). Readers must fill narrative gaps (cf. Iser 1987), distinguish between the relevant and the irrelevant, and draw conclusions; they play a crucial role in meaning-making (Eco 1979). This is why some consider the genre more suitable for older children, while those under seven are less prepared (Veldhuizen 2023, p. 163). Although popular in novels for older children, detective picturebooks remain rare (Veldhuizen 2022).

However, we could argue that the picturebook format presents unique challenges and opportunities for both the crime and detective fiction genres. As the first children's book, a book *par excellence* (Crnković & Težak 2002, p. 15), it targets younger readers, so authors adapt crime motifs through specific strategies. Being a multimodal narrative where the story is conveyed through verbal and visual discourses (see Narančić Kovač 2015), the picturebook shows how a genre tied initially to the novel structure adjusts to this dual code. The crime genre itself is fabulaic, which aligns well with the pictorial form and the reception abilities of young readers. Additionally, one of the key features of crime fiction is the economy of storytelling, essential for maintaining tension (Pavličić 2008), which is highly compatible with the brevity of the picturebook (Crnković & Težak 2002, p. 15). This form also suits younger audiences, who prefer straightforward plots without chronological dislocations, associative monologues, or other complexities that might impede comprehension (Diklić et al. 1996, p. 151).

The purpose of this study is twofold, with both parts centred on remediation. First, it examines the conventions of the crime genre and their transformation into picturebook form. Second, it identifies strategies used by authors and illustrators to adapt the genre to the medium's specificities and its young audience. From these insights, an

³ Our translation.

analytical framework for studying narrative crime and detective picturebooks will be developed, grounded in genre conventions.

The initial analysed corpus comprises seventeen narrative picturebooks in English, originating within the Anglo-Saxon cultural tradition, one of which is a wordless picturebook. All works contain familiar signals of crime fiction – crime or a suspicion thereof, detectives, or investigators. The analysis highlights differences between the narrower detective genre and the broader framework of crime fiction. This distinction is, however, sometimes difficult to draw clearly; as Rzepka states: "If the term crime fiction is a bit vague, detective fiction is downright slippery" (2010, p. 2). In children's literature, the term *detective picturebooks* is usually preferred over *crime picturebooks* to avoid directly linking young readers with crime motifs. Since this study explores remediation strategies, the corpus includes both detective picturebooks and those that utilise related genre formulas.

In crime fiction, the central feature is the crime (Knight 2010, p. 221). In detective fiction, the process of detection is the focus (ibid.). The primary narrative difference lies in temporal distance: detective picturebooks reconstruct events through investigation (McGee 2025, p. 4), whereas crime picturebooks present the act and its resolution directly. Both, however, place the young reader as a witness to an enigma and its resolution. However, the corpus excludes generic discovery stories only conditionally labelled as mysteries (cf. McGee 2025), as well as problem picturebooks whose structures do not align with crime fiction.

2. Theoretical framework

As the basic elements of detective fiction in literature, the quadriad of the crime, the culprit, the victim, and the investigator occurs most frequently. In children's literature, this motivic chain is adopted, but with necessary adjustments due to the child's age and experiences. In both crime and detective fiction, the crime must exist – it is central to the plot – in both adult and children's literature (Veldhuizen 2023, p. 164). Nevertheless, children's literature seldom uses capital offences (such as murder), but rather, somewhat softened versions thereof. McGee (2025, p. 3) points out that "watering down the severity of the crime" is necessary for the work to be child-friendly, although it sometimes leads to sillier versions of adult crime fiction, where both the crime and its solution are extremely simplistic, e.g. "missing marbles and dogs, stolen candy".

In the broader sense of crime or detective picturebooks, rather than the crime itself, it is possible to discuss the influence of motifs

motives on the story's structure. In this sense, we will use the term enigma (Solar 1997; Lasić 1973), which disturbs the balance and produces "a shift from certainty to hesitation" (Gavin & Routledge 2001, p. 2). The enigma functions not only as a motive, but also as a structural element that shapes the plot; the storytelling begins with the enigma and ends with its resolution, which emphasises the solid linear-feedback framework of crime fiction (Lasić 1973).

In addition, in the crime narrative structure, especially in children's literature, we might say that a good crime story does not necessarily require a major crime, but rather the use of contrast. Mandić (2015) expands the quadriad (crime, culprit, victim, and investigator) to *conceptual pairs*, such as crime and justice, truth and lie, puzzle and answer, law and lawlessness, criminal and detective, etc. (ibid., p. 20). Conceptual pairings indicate the duality of the enigma: the disruption and the reestablishment of equilibrium. This structure coincides with what Todorov calls *the two stories in detective fiction*: the first is the story of the crime, recounting what really happened, where the second – the story of the investigation – "explains how the reader (or the narrator) has come to know about it" (2010, p. 140).

In children's crime and detective picturebooks, the second story – the investigation – is central. It involves gathering evidence, drawing conclusions, and the processes of trial and error; the competition between detectives and criminals evolves into a competition between authors and readers (Mandić 2015, p. 10). The understanding of the crime – what happened or *whodunnit* – is based on a series of associations and conclusions in the process of retrograde analysis, where we "begin with the end result and work backwards" (Scaggs 2005, p. 33).

Since children's works do not focus on serious crimes, and the crimes therein are mitigated or justified by misunderstanding, many works are classified as adventure or mystery stories (Veldhuizen 2023; McGee 2025; Gavin and Routledge 2001). Just as the enigma occurs in detective fiction, the wondrous, or *the uncanny*, occurs in the genre of fantasy (see Todorov 1987). An indiscriminate inclusion of all works containing elements of crime fiction within the mystery genre may lead to a blurring of boundaries between the genres. For example, Gavin and Routledge (2001) view both rational and supernatural elements as a *mystery*. The authors point out the difference: "the key difference between fantasy and mystery is that a mystery has a question mark in it" (2001, p. 3). However, as McGee emphasises (2025, p. 2), "that question mark can hover over any experiences", further complicating the demarcation. This study accepts McGee's position: picturebooks in

which fantastic elements explain enigmatic events are excluded from the corpus.

Based on literature from literary theory, especially crime and detective fiction theory and picturebook theory, the following chapters will present the results of the analysis of the selected corpus. When analysing the picturebooks, we shall attempt to establish how much was taken from the tradition of detective and crime fiction, and how many elements had to be changed or transformed. Special attention is paid to the strategies by which the genre is transformed to suit the formal features of the picturebook and the expectations of the children's audience.

3. Establishing an analytical framework – picturebook analysis

3. 1. The crime motif and mitigation strategies

Children's literature rarely uses capital crimes; the motifs are softened, most often associated with possession or property (burglary, theft), less often espionage or sabotage, and mostly stylised with humour. If murder does happen to occur, it is "almost always offstage and is never addressed directly" (McGee 2025, p. 3). More serious forms of crime are depicted in novels for older children, whereas picturebooks generally steer clear of such motifs due to pedagogical and emotional protectionism (Veldhuizen 2023, p. 165).

Two basic scenarios can be distinguished in crime-themed picturebooks: the reader is confronted with an already committed act that needs to be resolved, or they witness the act itself as it unfolds. In the first case, it is a reconstruction of the event, which suggests a detective picturebook. However, if the reader follows the crime while it is taking place (e.g., *Cops and Robbers*, *The Big Cheese Robbery*, *How to Catch a Clover Thief*), then we are talking about a narrative with features of a heist story, i.e., picturebooks with a crime theme.

In all the analysed picturebooks, we find mitigated forms of crime. The most common are thefts and mysterious disappearances of items, such as food (*How to Catch a Clover Thief*, *The Great Pie Robbery*, *The Great Cheese Robbery*, *Detective Zebra*, *Where is the Cake?*), books (*The Detective Dog*), and toys (*Cops and Robbers*). Although most often referred to as theft, the term is sometimes softened and replaced in picturebooks with the term *missing* or *something is gone*. Another common motif is the disappearance of a person – birds or pets (*Pigeon P.I.*), a baby mouse (*Sherlock Chick*), cats (*Detective LaRue*), or a teacher (*Miss Nelson is Missing!*). The disappearance of a person can, in principle, be a serious crime, but in picturebooks it is always mitigated. Usually, what occurs is a logical explanation – e.g., the baby mouse saw

a cat and ran away (*Sherlock Chick*) or the missing cats went out of their own accord (*Detective LaRue*). In addition to these motifs, others that occur are playful and almost nonsensical, such as the absence of capital letters (*The Upper Case*) or numbers (*7 Ate 9*).

In cases where the reader witnesses a crime, humour regularly facilitates coping with it. In *Cops and Robbers*, criminals are humorously stylised through funny descriptive names (Grabber Dan, Fingers Maurice, Grandma Swagg, etc.), caricature-like depictions, and a series of comical theft scenes. *The Great Cheese Robbery* follows a similar pattern: thieving mice are humorously named (cheese inspectors, Mascarpone and Manchego), and humour builds through the accumulation of stolen items – from cheese, sausages, and Grandma's pickled onions to the refrigerator and finally the rest of the furniture. It is also heightened by the contrast between the little elephant's naivete and the mice's cunning, as they convince him that the cheese is dangerous, and they are helping him. We can observe a similar effect of cumulation in the picturebook *Baby Monkey, Private Eye*, where, through a series of cases, the seriousness of crimes gradually decreases: from stolen jewels to pizza, clown noses, and a spaceship. Such simplification and humourising help create a sense of the fictionality of the story, that is, distance the act of crime from the young readers' reality.

Therefore, the motif of crime in picturebooks is always stylised. Adaptation strategies include mitigation, humour (primarily in visual discourse), cumulation and accumulation, or replacement of the crime with a mystery in which it is revealed that the crime never occurred. Such *softening* makes it challenging to delineate what can be considered a criminal act in children's literature. For example, in the picturebook *Miss Nelson is Missing!*, the teacher did not actually disappear; instead, she disguised herself to teach her pupils a valuable lesson. Since the case of the missing teacher turns out to be a crimeless incident, we should exclude it from the corpus. Still, a *suspicion of crime* arises, which equally disrupts the story's balance.

At the motivic level, it is not possible to reliably distinguish crime from detective picturebooks. Insisting on a *real crime* would exclude many works, since events are often merely "misunderstood as a crime" (van Nahl 2019, in Veldhuizen 2023, p. 165). Such misunderstandings can be read as allusions to the genre – crime fiction as a feature rather than the dominant element.

Thus, picturebooks with crime or detective themes can be defined in two ways: narrowly, as pure crime or detective picturebooks, or more broadly, where the genre is only one property of the narrative.

Nevertheless, this broader approach remains problematic due to the milder types of crime discussed earlier. Hence, other elements of crime and detective fiction must also be taken into consideration.

3. 2. Conceptual pairs of *crime* – *punishment*: didacticisation strategy and emotional protectionism

In the early beginnings of crime fiction, the stories worked as cautionary tales in which the perpetrator had to be caught, tried, and punished – as a warning, but also a confirmation that order could be restored (Scaggs 2005, pp. 13–14). Even though the crime is mitigated, it is integral to the detective picturebook because it is necessary to disrupt the balance in the story; its final reestablishment also requires its counterpart, an element that restores the balance. This can only be achieved if the enigma is solved, but also if the criminal is punished. This is precisely what Mandić (2015) refers to as logical pairs, in which punishment always follows the crime, truth always follows a lie, and so on. We can therefore conclude that the punishment, just like the crime, is an integral part of the detective narrative in picturebooks.

In addition to serving to rebalance the narrative, punishment for criminals also has a clear *didactic function* – its purpose is to teach the child about the difference between good and evil, or right and wrong behaviour. Simultaneously, punishment also acts as a form of emotional protectionism (Veldhuizen 2023), providing the young reader with the assurance that the world operates according to certain rules and that disturbed order can always be restored.

Historically, children's literature often emphasised the didactic role of literature, i.e., moral didacticism (Mills 2016), even through severe and disproportionate punishments, as seen in the works of so-called *black pedagogy* (Rutschky 2001). However, with the development of reform pedagogy, punishments in literature have become milder, focusing on understanding errors and the possibility of correcting them.

On the other hand, punishment for a crime can also be seen as an integral part of *catharsis* – it creates a sense of justice in young readers and strengthens the belief that the world has an internal logic and a moral order (cf. Bettelheim 2000). Punishment of the villain as a form of poetic justice is interpreted as a key element of the fairy tale narrative structure: characters are not punished by accident, but as a result of disrupting the universal order of the fairy tale (cf. Propp 2012).

In detective picturebooks, where the very crime itself is mitigated, the criminal's behaviour is often justified by misunderstanding or human weakness, and punishments range from didactic to humorous. In picturebooks with a more profiled crime or detective narrative,

punishment is most often expressed as *the criminal is caught* – the reader can only assume that the culprits will be sent to prison. We find the prison sentence announcements in only two humorous picturebooks. In *The Upper Case*, where, after a didactic message, the Grammar Police arrives at the scene and makes the criminal *serve a short sentence*, illustrating a clever play on words. In another picturebook by the same author, *Time Flies*, the Book Police tells the culprit that the punishment for stealing clocks is to *serve hard time*.

In some works, punishment assumes an almost poetic character: for example, in *The Great Pie Robbery*, the criminals who stole the pie are sentenced to do the dishes in the kitchen. If it turns out that there was no crime committed at all – whether due to a complete absence of a crime or a misunderstanding – the punishment is absent. In some cases, the culprits themselves admit the mistake and apologise, so a moral lesson follows instead of punishment. For example, in the *Detective Dog* picturebook, in the case of missing books, the culprit is a thief who actually only wanted to read the books and planned to return them to the library the next day. Instead of punishment, the children and the teacher teach him that he can join the library and thus have access to thousands of books, which is a clear didactic moment.

Apart from didactic punishments or moral lessons, punishments are also often presented humorously. If the crime itself is humorous, then the conclusion of the investigation is almost as humorous. Sometimes authors also use humorous hyperbolised punishments similar to those in animated films – for example, in *How to Catch a Clover Thief*, a wild boar discovers that a mole is eating his clover, so he ties it to a rocket and sends it to the Moon.

3. 3. Character functions in the narrative

Characters with specific functions in the narrative – victim, culprit, and investigator (detective) – form the foundations of the detective picturebook. In crime picturebooks, the investigator's role is sometimes taken over by the pursuer – the one who chases the criminals. In picturebooks, we add another function – the resolver, the one who helps restore the disturbed balance in the story.

The victim can be an individual or a group, i.e., those harmed by the culprit's actions. In children's crime literature, crime often poses a threat to the community as a whole (Hopster 2005, p. 518). Regardless of severity, picturebooks emphasise emotional consequences for victims: fear (*The Great Cheese Robbery*; *7 Ate 9*), worry (*The Upper Case*; *The 13th Clue*; *Miss Nelson is Missing!*), or frustration (*How to Catch a Clover Thief*). These emotional states disturb balance and drive the narrative,

showing that the victim is not only a character but also a narrative function.

The culprit causes an imbalance – whether by conscious act (e.g., theft) or by ignorance or chance. The punishment depends on intent: premeditated theft leads to arrest, while crimes out of ignorance may be forgiven.

The investigator – or pursuer – mediates between victim and culprit. The investigator collects clues and resolves the enigma, while the pursuer ensures justice through direct action. Both serve to restore order disrupted by the crime. In most picturebooks, the detective is explicit in the title or name (e.g., *Baby Monkey*, *Private Eye*; *Sherlock Chick*). Tara Lazar adds playful wordplay by depicting *private eye* as the capital letter I. Still, the mere presence of a detective or police officer does not guarantee a crime narrative. For example, in *Officer Buckle and Gloria*, there are characters – a police officer and his dog – who teach children about safety. However, since the work lacks characters with specific functions or any crimes or investigative processes, we can exclude this picturebook from the analysis.

Detective fiction can also exist without an explicitly named detective, "as long as that character performs the role of successful inquirer" (Cawelti 1976: 132). In picturebooks for young children, this role often belongs to animals or children (Veldhuizen 2023). Amateur investigators strengthen the well-known trope also present in adult crime fiction.

The resolver's function is to ensure justice. Sometimes this role belongs to the detective, victim, or pursuer, and sometimes to a separate figure. In Lazar's books, the Grammar Police appear as a resolver, delivering punishment after the detective identifies the culprit. In *The Great Cheese Robbery*, the mother elephant appears and chases away the robber mice, thus protecting her husband and their little elephant son.

The function of the resolver can be further expanded into sub-functions: the enforcer, who enforces the law or rules; the guardian, who protects the victim or the community; and even the avenger, who punishes in the form of retaliation. This last form rarely appears in picturebooks, but we encounter it, for example, in *How to Catch a Clover Thief*, where the punishment of the culprit turns into excessive revenge.

In *Miss Nelson is Missing!*, the dual victim function is evident (the children and the missing teacher), but no investigator or resolver appears. Detective McSmogg merely observes, "Miss Nelson is missing", which "would not be of much help to children looking for their teacher". The children in the story are only guessing about the possible reasons

for the teacher's disappearance, but they do not engage in the investigative process. For this reason, this picturebook is excluded from further analysis.

Detective picturebooks, like adult crime stories, allow playful twists. Sometimes the victim becomes the investigator (*Detective LaRue*), or the victim turns out to be the culprit, as in *The Upper Case: Trouble in Capital City*, where the number 6 reports the disappearance of the number 9, but it turns out that he is the number 9 – just turned upside down. Such role reversals confirm that the victim is not merely a character, but a narrative function, defined by loss and imbalance.

No analysed example revealed a detective as a culprit – likely unsuitable for younger readers, for whom the detective is a trusted figure. An exception is *Pigeon P.I.*, where the villain is the detective's former associate Stanley. This is a specific twist that is possible precisely because this picturebook is intended for a slightly older audience and visually, linguistically, and stylistically flirts with the hard-boiled/noir tradition of detective fiction. Of course, the character of the pigeon Stanley does not appear in the narrative as the main hero with whom the children would have the opportunity to develop empathy, but is only mentioned incidentally at the beginning as the partner of the detective who "skipped town".

A peculiarity of crime and detective picturebooks is that the victim – detective/pursuer – culprit triad is always clearly defined, enabling the doctrine of fair play (Veldhuizen 2024, p. 163). Readers thus have access to the same information as the detective and can attempt to solve the puzzle themselves. The resolver, however, often appears only at the very end, as a form of poetic justice.

3. 4. Two stories in *whodunnit* – strategies for creating a ludic text

The classic genre of detective fiction is attractive to young readers primarily because of its pronounced ludic dimension, manifested not only in the thematic and motivic dimension, but also in the internal organisation of the story itself.

According to Todorov (2010), detective fiction always consists of two stories – the first being the story of the crime and the second the story of the investigation. In the context of Mandić's (2015) theory on conceptual pairs, the first story is realised through contrasting motives, i.e., conceptual crime–punishment pairs. The first story begins with the enigma – the disturbance of the balance – and ends with its resolution, i.e., the reestablishment of the balance by solving the crime (cf. Lasić 1973). In the first story in detective picturebooks, the primary function

is to distinguish between the victim and the culprit – the one who warns of the crime and the one who commits it and is eventually caught.

However, it is precisely the second story – the process of the investigation or pursuit – that forms the bulk of the narrative. It encompasses the detective's function, including gathering evidence, drawing conclusions, and the processes of trial and error, culminating in the moment of the enigma's final resolution.

In literature for adults, the severity of the crime often fosters the creation of wonder, tension (or suspense), discomfort, and certain anxieties, thereby reinforcing the reader's desire to solve the crime or unravel the enigma (cf. Cawelti 1976). In contrast, children's literature lacks more serious or complex forms of crime, so tension must be built by different narrative means. The dramatic does not rely on the shock caused by the crime, but on patterns such as a scavenger hunt (McGee 2025), where dynamics are based on searching, discovering clues, and gradual unravelling.

Both detective and crime fiction are based on *suspense*, that is, the tension that arises from the questions the reader asks themselves while reading. In detective stories, the entire second story relies on the so-called *what suspense* (Ryan 2015, p. 103), as the investigation is aimed at determining who committed the crime. In a broader understanding of crime picturebooks, in which the reader follows the course of the crime itself and there is no investigation, the so-called *what suspense* (ibid., p. 102) occurs, which is usually a feature of thrillers: the reader wonders *what will happen next* and is anxiously awaiting developments. In this way, such crime picturebooks keep the reader in a state of tension, encouraging them to decipher the crime and identify the perpetrators, and to search for ways to prevent or resolve the crime.

The first story of the crime, however, remains important: it must be engaging, fascinating, and wondrous enough to trigger a desire for further reading. The focus shifts to creating curiosity – either through unusual or humorous enigmas and crimes, or through other elements that motivate children to actively participate in solving them. A special role is played by narrative hooks such as sympathetic, peculiar, and often humorous characters, which further tie the reader to the story. It is precisely because of this specific characterisation that serials are especially common in children's detective literature (cf. Brendel-Perpina & Kretzschmar 2021).

3. 5. The structure of the story

As a fundamental structure of children's crime novels, some authors list the following elements: exposition, rising action, story

development, misleading clues, retardation, resolution, and denouement (cf. Hranjec 1998, pp. 127–128). In simplified form, this structure also appears in detective picturebooks.

a) Exposition

Exposition not only sets the plot in space and time and introduces characters, but also prepares the reader for investigation, directing attention early to what will become the central narrative tension. It introduces the detective and their crucial traits: the dog's keen sense of smell in *The Detective Dog*, or the humorous contrast between infantile traits and a professional role in *Baby Monkey*, *Private Eye*, creating anticipation for detective engagement.

Exposition often visually sets the context: spaces such as police stations or detective offices contain details key to later investigation. In *Cops and Robbers*, cross-sections of houses – one for the police, one for the thieves – immerse the reader in the characters' everyday lives. Further illustrations expand on this, showing portraits of criminals and Officer Pugh's skills, which signal his importance.

Exposition also signals genre. For example, in *Pigeon P.I.*, the crime is announced already in the exposition: the illustration shows a carton of milk with the image and the inscription "Missing pet cockatoo Curly". In this way, the reader learns how to read a picturebook, that is, to recognise important clues that are sometimes hidden in the illustrations. Additionally, several intertextual cues reference the specific functions of the characters in the narrative: detectives often wear distinctive hats or carry magnifying glasses, while villains typically wear striped suits and masks over their eyes.

b) The announcement of the crime

The announcement of the crime introduces imbalance – something stolen or someone missing – often via the victim's arrival. Emotional states such as fear or worry highlight this disruption. This moment of initial tension (Todorov 2010) acts as the trigger for investigation. Sometimes the investigation begins immediately: in *Cops and Robbers*, the reader studies a large city map on the facing page, from which they learn what has been stolen and where it was taken from. This procedure encourages the reader to organise the information and directs them towards an initial consideration of how the crime might be solved.

c) Story development (investigation/pursuit)

The second story – the story of the investigation or the pursuit – is at the core of all stories. It is a learning-based process (the process of

gathering evidence, questioning witnesses, and reaching conclusions) – which is why Todorov refers to it as a process of slow apprenticeship (2010, p. 295).

In picturebooks, the visual discourse regularly provides more information, creating space for the reader to explore the clues independently and actively participate in drawing possible conclusions. Through analysis, it can be observed that the picturebooks intended for the youngest children generally have a simpler second story structure. In contrast, the picturebooks for slightly older readers (e.g., *Pigeon P.I.*, *The Upper Case*) involve a greater number of peripeteias and side events – such as questioning witnesses or following misleading clues.

Although, in principle, there is no retardation in the form of side actions that would divert the reader from the main course of the story, in picturebooks aimed at the youngest readers, we find interesting narrative procedures, among which the repetition, cumulation and accumulation of story segments and language patterns are particularly prominent. In *Baby Monkey, Private Eye*, the process of the monkey's preparation for investigation is especially prominent, with several pages regularly devoted to it. Baby Monkey always goes through the same sequence of actions: looking for clues, taking notes, eating a healthy snack, and finally putting on his big pants. It is this last action that is constantly repeated – in the visual discourse, we find that the pants are too big, which further emphasises the humour. This connects the phrase *to put one's big boy/girl pants on* to the visual display and alludes to Baby Monkey's readiness for a serious task in a humorous way.

Cumulative narration also structures searches: in *Sherlock Chick*, encounters with animals repeat with the refrain "he went on his way". *The Great Cheese Robbery* escalates theft from cheese to all household items, while *Cops and Robbers* shows toys vanishing vignette by vignette, supported by a recurring rhyme. Such procedures of repetition, cumulation, and accumulation often function as organisational principles of the story in detective or crime picturebooks. Repetition and cumulation occur as narrative patterns that enable "young readers to develop a scheme for making sense of the stories they hear" (Nodelman & Reimer 2003, p. 205), while accumulation creates peripety and contributes to stronger emotional engagement and excitement of the reader.

d) Resolution

The resolution concludes the investigation or pursuit, usually briefly, as most evidence has already been gathered. Sometimes it involves further action, e.g., a chase after the culprits try to escape (*The*

Great Pie Robbery), but in most picturebooks more attention is given to the denouement.

e) Denouement

Here, the crime–punishment pairs restore balance, closing the linear-feedback narrative arc (Lasić 1973). The resolver's function dominates: criminals are punished proportionately, often through symbolic, humorous, or didactic sanctions. The denouement nearly always conveys a moral or educational message, even if it is implicit. Open-ended endings are rare but notable: in *Cops and Robbers*, all the culprits are imprisoned except their leader, Grandma Swagg, who remains on a *Wanted poster* – a narrative device that invites further interpretation by the reader.

3. 6. Narrative strategies in picturebooks

3. 6. 1. Narrator

In detective picturebooks, the story is most often told by a heterodiegetic-extradiegetic narrator, occasionally interspersed with character dialogues in verbal discourse. This is a typical narrative structure in picturebooks for the youngest readers. Visual discourse is dominated by objective frames that cannot be attributed to any of the characters, because they offer the most information and allow for neutral observation. Children of a younger age find it more difficult to discern the focalisation and direction of storytelling from the character's perspective. Of course, there are exceptions. In *Pigeon P.I.*, the pigeon narrates in the first person, while *The 13th Clue* employs a subjective visual view.

Although most picturebooks are narrated in the third person and objective frames, a noticeable discrepancy exists in the temporal distance, which is manifested in different focalisation procedures (cf. Genette 1980; Bal 1986). In verbal discourse, this is evident in verb tenses: while exposition sometimes employs the present tense (e.g., *Cops and Robbers*), the investigation is most often recounted in the past tense, suggesting that the investigation has already been completed. By contrast, visuals create a *here and now effect*. Nodelman (2017, p. 158) points out that stories "necessarily take place in time, where most pictures report only how things look at one moment". Thus, multiple narrative voices and focalisations (cf. Narančić Kovač 2015) occur in detective and crime picturebooks: the verbal narrator retains a retrospective perspective, while the visual layer creates immediacy. This tension heightens narrative dynamics and prompts readers to integrate both layers of meaning.

Visual discourse often fragments action into vignettes – crimes (*The Great Cheese Robbery, Cops and Robbers*) or investigations (*Pigeon P.I.*) – producing a sense of continued action (Nodelman 2017, p. 159). In *Pigeon P.I.*, the first-person, past-tense narration recounts events as they are remembered, while visuals show them unfolding in real time. Such present-tense immediacy is "the closest approximation to an explicit 'here and now' experience" (Nikolajeva 2014, p. 88), drawing the reader into the investigation and confirming their role as model reader (Eco 1979).

3. 6. 2. The visual discourse: strategies of omission or accumulation of information, intertextuality, and intermediality

We have established that the functions of victim, culprit, investigator/pursuer, and resolver are key to identifying detective or crime picturebooks. Another crucial element is the process of investigation or pursuit – the so-called second story. This element raises the problem of classification: books that involve actual crimes versus those built on mystery. For example, in *The 13th Clue*, the process of investigation is highly emphasised, although the crime itself is absent. The story tells of a little girl who is having a birthday, and everyone seems to have forgotten about it. Although this is not a typical detective picturebook, the entire book is permeated with visual cues that the little girl must follow to finally discover the solution: finding her friends at a surprise birthday party. It is a visually rich picturebook in which the reader will participate in the process of solving the mystery. This approach is prevalent in picturebooks aimed at the youngest readers. For example, the wordless picturebook *Where is the Cake?* entirely relies on the visual discourse: readers follow the theft of the cake, the pursuit itself, and finally, the resolution and denouement of the story, when the perpetrators are caught.

Here, we can distinguish between the detective character's investigation and the investigation carried out by the reader. As Veldhuizen notes, children "approach the crime like a serious game, with set rules, roles, and expectations. The act of detection is framed as exciting, occasionally dangerous, but generally fun" (2023, p. 167). Detective picturebooks often rely on paralipsis – "the omission of essential information that is either hidden from the character, or the reader, or both" (Nikolajeva 2014, p. 100). Reading thus mirrors a detective's search for clues: a dance of riddles (Lasić 1973, p. 70),⁴ or putting together a puzzle (Nikolajeva 2014, p. 100). Within the

⁴ Our translation.

whodunnit frame, readers analyse evidence, consider suspects, and form hypotheses – highlighting the ludic nature of the genre. They must continually fill gaps in the narrative (cf. Iser 1987), discern relevant from irrelevant information, and draw conclusions.

Lasić (1973, p. 9) stresses that the reader and the detective must have equal chances of solving the mystery. In picturebooks, this is achieved by inserting clues into the narrative. As multimodal texts, they combine verbal and visual codes, but since they target younger readers, the visual discourse carries special weight. While verbal narration often omits information, visual discourse relies on two key strategies: hinting and accumulating information.

a) Hinting – visual clues

The visual discourse in detective picturebooks provides more information than the text. Images and other graphic elements can have an exclusively aesthetic and enriching function – for example, allowing the child to observe the character, their environment, and everyday actions in detail – but in the genre context of a detective story, visual clues often become key. By examining the picture in more detail, the reader can discern clues that foreshadow the future development of the plot.

For example, in *Pigeon P.I.*, the disappearance of the canary is announced by the feather on the pavement; in *Baby Monkey, Private Eye*, fingerprints on the floor point to the culprit; in *Detective Zebra*, crumbs of cake lead to the mouse hole, suggesting the identity of the perpetrator, etc. Such visual clues allow for fair play because they enable the reader to participate in the discovery of the solution themselves before the narrative explicitly presents it.

b) Accumulation of information – information noise

Detective picturebooks sometimes employ over-accumulation of clues, making it harder to identify the relevant ones. In *The Great Pie Robbery*, detectives search for criminals marked by cherry pie stains, yet the reader faces a large illustration of dozens of animals, all smeared with red sauce. Similarly, *Where is the Cake?*, told entirely through images, clutters every page with details the reader must sift through.

Such techniques act as narrative retardation, slowing resolution, prolonging the enigma, and heightening reader engagement. The accumulation strategy also appears in other works, where illustrations are often overwhelmed with unnecessary details of space, characters, and actions.

Visual discourse in detective picturebooks also abounds with intertextual references to genre classics (Veldhuizen 2023, p. 170): detectives in hats and coats, holding magnifying glasses, or sitting in offices. These signals primarily serve to mark the genre, though it is uncertain to what extent younger readers recognise them. Intermedial strategies, such as hypermediation (see Bolter & Grusin, 2000), are also frequently employed: *Wanted* posters, letters, postcards, and other second-media devices. A notable example is *Detective LaRue*, structured entirely through newspaper clippings and letters the dog writes to its owner, first from prison and later on release. These serve as recollections of completed events, while the press fragments allow readers to reconstruct the crime and its resolution.

4. Conclusion

Works of crime and detective fiction rest on established conventions recognisable across media, from literature to film and games. At the same time, the genre can function as both a pure form and as a property of other genres (Moody 2003, p. 227). This duality is especially relevant for picturebooks, where crime features are often borrowed, reshaped, and combined with other conventions.

In the process of adapting the criminal and detective genre into picturebooks, it is possible to recognise two degrees of remediation (cf. Bolter & Grusin, 2000).

The first refers to the thematic-motivic and structural levels of the genre, where motives and patterns taken from the crime fiction tradition are necessarily adapted for a younger audience. This is precisely what constitutes the first challenge of genre classification: due to stylisation and softening, the boundaries between detective fiction, the broader framework of crime fiction, and mystery stories often become indistinct. Structurally, the central element is not always crime itself, but conceptual pairs – above all, crime vs. punishment and the resolution of the enigma. Punishment is usually mitigated, often humorous or poetic, yet still affirms order. Many works end with a lesson: earlier texts are didactic, while newer ones are more subtly educational. Strategies of accumulation and retardation in both verbal and visual discourse are also recognised, which act as mechanisms of dynamising the narrative and connect detective picturebooks with the tradition of oral stories and fairy-tale patterns. Characters are best understood as carriers of narrative functions (cf. Propp 2012): the victim signals disorder, the culprit disrupts balance, the investigator or the pursuer acts to restore it, and the resolver ensures final closure –

whether as enforcer, guardian, or avenger. Their roles in the story, more than their professions, define the genre.

The second degree of remediation concerns the specific nature of the picturebook in which the story always functions in a twofold code – verbal and visual. Most picturebooks employ a heterodiegetic-extradiegetic (third-person) narrator, with objective visual frames, though first-person or subjective perspectives occasionally appear both in verbal and visual discourse. The contrast between retrospective verbal narration and the immediacy of visual frames creates narrative tension and fosters reader participation. Paralipsis in verbal discourse and two visual strategies – hinting and accumulation – actively engage the young reader in the process of detection.

It should be noted that the process of genre remediation is by no means new – crime fiction itself has undergone numerous changes and redesigns of codes over the decades. As Todorov points out, "Every change implies a sort of getting rid of the constraints of the genre in order to constitute a new code" (2010, p. 300). In this paper, the new code becomes the subject of research: the remediation process of the crime and detective genre in picturebook form, considering the specifics of the young recipient and the peculiarities of the picturebook as a literary form.

Our analysis reveals that detective picturebooks operate at the intersection of two traditions: on the one hand, they draw on the patterns of the crime genre, and on the other, they inherit the fairy-tale logic of disrupted and restored balance, accompanied by the necessary (and sometimes poetic) justice. This explains how the genre, although rare in picturebooks, can be successfully adapted to children's reception.

This is also the reason why it is necessary to broaden our understanding of what can be encompassed in the concept of crime or detective picturebooks. Although the theoretical starting point is primarily designed within the framework of adult crime fiction theory, children's literature deserves to be viewed as a distinct system, with its own rules, narrative strategies, and ways of engaging with the young reader. This is especially important in the case of the picturebook, a true autochthonous children's literary type (Crnković & Težak 2002, p. 15). Therefore, following genre conventions is just as important as recognising transformations and deviations – because they confirm the vitality, flexibility, and innovation, as well as the autonomy of children's literature.

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REMEDIJACIJA KRIMINALISTIČKOG ŽANRA U NARATIVNIM SLIKOVNICAMA

Rad istražuje etablirane konvencije kriminalističkog žanra i promjene koje nastaju njegovom remedijacijom u narativnim slikovnicama za mlađe čitatelje. Cilj je oblikovati analitički okvir koji omogućuje sustavno proučavanje kriminalističkih i detektivskih narativnih slikovnica te strategija kojima se autori i ilustratori služe kako bi žanr prilagodili dječjoj recepciji.

Predloženi okvir sagledava dvije razine – tematsko-motivsku i strukturalnu. Na prvoj razini identificirane su strategije ublažavanja zločina izborom motiva zločina, zamjenom zločina misterijem, humorizacijom, kumulacijom i nagomilavanjem. Na drugoj razini, ključni element pokazao se konceptualni par zločin – kazna, pri čemu se ravnoteža najčešće obnavlja ublaženom, poetičnom ili humorističnom kaznom. Uz to, prepoznate su strategije kumulacije i retardacije koje dinamiziraju narativ i povezuju slikovnice s logikom usmenih priča i bajkovitih obrazaca. Dodatno su identificirane pripovjedne strategije koje oblikuju napetost i uključuju mladog čitatelja u proces istrage: paralipsom na verbalnoj razini te vizualne strategije nagoviještanja ili aludiranja i akumulacije informacija. Posebna se pažnja posvećuje ulozi likova te se predlaže sagledavanje likova kroz funkcije koje imaju u narativu – žrtve, zločinca, istražitelja/progonitelja – i razrješitelja.

Zaključno, rad pokazuje da kriminalističke i detektivske slikovnice funkcioniraju na sjecištu kriminalističkog žanra i bajkovite logike te potvrđuje potrebu da se pojam kriminalističkih i detektivskih slikovnica proširi izvan okvira teorije kriminalističke fikcije za odrasle. Time se slikovnici priznaje status autonomne dječje književne vrste, s vlastitim pravilima, strategijama i inovacijama.

Ključne riječi: kriminalistička fikcija, detektivska fikcija, detektivske slikovnice, kriminalističke slikovnice, remedijacija, strategije remedijacije