Eyes on the prize-winners
– a descriptive study of radical change in five contemporary award-winning Arabic picturebooks

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Abstract

Radical change theory (RCT) was conceived in a North American context in the mid-1990s, in order to explain changes in contemporary literature for youth related to the digitization of society. This study uses directed qualitative content analysis (DQCA) to look at a select sample of contemporary award-winning Arabic picturebooks through the lens of radical change theory. The aim of the study is to ascertain whether and to what extent these acclaimed and promoted books display radical change characteristics (Dresang 1999). Children’s books that embody many such characteristics may be seen as products of an underlying ideology of childhood that is arguably gaining traction in contemporary societies—one in which children are seen as capable and seeking connection rather than innocent and in need of protection or depraved and needing to be controlled. All books in the present study were found to contain radical change. This can be viewed as revealing of larger trends affecting and perhaps changing the societies in which these books were published, distributed and promoted. In addition, radical change books are thought to be especially attractive to digital age children (by creating more interest and an elevated understanding), which is of special interest in the context of Arabic children’s literature because of the hurdles to accessibility that the use of literary Arabic creates.

Keywords

children’s literature / picturebooks, Arabic, radical change theory, directed qualitative content analysis
Transcription table*

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</tbody>
</table>
# Table of contents

1. Introduction 5
   1.1 Background 5
      1.1.1 Children’s literature and picturebooks 5
      1.1.2 Arabic children’s literature 6
      1.1.3 Books, reading and internet access in the Arabic-speaking world 8
   1.2 Previous research 9
      1.2.1 Research on children’s literature 9
      1.2.2 Research on Arabic children’s literature 10
   1.3 Purpose of the study 11
   1.3 Research questions 11

2. Theory 11
   2.1 Radical change theory 11
   2.2 The origins and influences of radical change theory 13
   2.3 The impact of radical change theory 14
   2.4 Discussion: Is radical change theory relevant to these Arabic picturebooks? 15

3. Method 16
   3.2 Reading the picturebooks 17
   3.3 Identifying radical change 17
   3.4 What is directed qualitative content analysis? 18
   3.5 The process of DQICA according to Kibiswa (2019) 19

4. Data 21
   4.1 Primary sources and delimitations 21
   4.2 The data collection process and its limitations 22

5. Analysis 23
   5.1 Book 1: .. أنت أحب anā uḥībbu.. ‘I Love..’ 23
      5.1.1 Summary 23
      5.1.2 Radical change in form and format: interactivity, synergy and graphics 24
      5.1.2 Radical change in perspectives: multiple perspectives 25
   5.2 Book 2: القطرة السوداء al-nuqṭa al-sawdā’ ‘The Black Spot’ 25
      5.2.1 Summary 25
      5.2.2 Radical change in form and format: graphics, multiple layers of meaning, interactivity and synergy 26
      5.2.2 Radical change in perspectives: youth speaking for themselves and multiple perspectives 28
      5.2.3 Radical change in boundaries: unresolved ending 28
   5.3 Book 3: الطيري يا طيارة تيّري yā tayāra ”Fly, Oh, Kite” 28
      5.3.1 Summary 28
      5.3.2 Radical change in form and format: multiple layers of meaning, synergy,
graphics and interactivity

5.3.3 Radical change in perspectives: youth who speak for themselves, previously unheard voices and multiple perspectives

5.3.4 Radical change in boundaries: subjects, characters and communities

5.4 Book 4: کائنات سقف الغرفة ‘Creatures in the Ceiling of the Room’

5.4.1 Summary

5.4.2 Radical change in form and format: interactivity and multiple layers of meaning

5.4.3 Radical change in perspectives: multiple perspectives and youth who speak for themselves

5.5 Book 5: بغلة القاضي ‘The Judge’s Mule’

5.5.1 Summary

5.5.2 Radical change in form and format: synergy, graphics and multiple layers of meaning

5.5.3 Radical change in perspectives: multiple perspectives

5.5.4 Radical change in boundaries: unresolved ending

6. Discussion

6.1 Visual sophistication

6.2 Different kinds of interactivity

6.3 Right and wrong – didactic or not?

6.4 No radical change settings?

6.5 “Radical” and “change” – a matter of context/intertext

6.6 How can an old tale represent radical change?

7. Conclusions

8. Reference list

8.1 Primary sources

8.2 Secondary sources

8.2.1 Books, chapters and articles

8.2.2 Web-based sources

8.3 Dictionaries & guides

9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1: Coding frame

9.2 Appendix 2: Comparative table of radical change types and characteristics in dataset

9.3 Appendix 3: Example of coding

9.4 Appendix 4: Example of reading summary form
1. Introduction

1.1 Background

1.1.1 Children’s literature and picturebooks
The only consistently uniting factor of children’s literature is that it is intended for a child; the term may span everything from oral literature like stories, myths and fables to e-books and book apps. Most often, however, it describes *books written for children by adults*. (Andersson & Druker 2013, p. 7) Arguably, children’s literature is not a genre; it is an umbrella term containing many different genres, each with their own distinct aesthetic. (Nikolajeva 2017, p. 34-39)

Some children’s literature comes in the form of picturebooks (although all picturebooks are not for children!). It is instructive to look at the history of the picturebook, in order to appreciate how the available technology, reigning ideas about childhood and economic markets have affected the types of books that were made. The modern picturebook is the product of European development, but its origins can be traced back through various contexts in which texts and pictures have been paired up for thousands of years: from the illustrated papyrus rolls of Ancient Egypt, to the birth of the book in China, its arrival to Europe via the Arab world in the 1st century A.D. and its subsequent development through various trends and innovations, with the invention of the printing press in the 15th century becoming the springboard to a more accessible book culture. The Reformation of 16th century Europe brought about a growing call for literacy, which was first addressed in Germany and England through the publication of alphabet books (abecedarians) and readers for children. Picturebooks and other children’s books were made chiefly with a didactic and moralizing intention. (Rhedin 2001, pp. 26–32, 57 & Kiefer 2008, p. 13, 15)

A market for children’s literature arose with the appearance of a new bourgeoisie in 18th century Europe. The literature of this time still had a didactic emphasis, but sought to entertain at the same time; it was educational rather than purely moralizing. Folktales and folksongs were a taboo with the upper classes of society until the advent of the Romantic era in the 19th century which embraced the “pristine” and “natural”. The 19th century also saw the development of new genres and texts intended for specific age groups. An idealization of childhood, the family and “the good old days” were common themes–concurrently, though, a reverse trend emerged, which sought to go beyond sentimental and moralizing tendencies through the use of satire (in text) and caricature (in pictures). (Rhedin 2001, pp. 40–50)

The 20th century saw an immense expansion of children’s books, including picturebooks, in almost every way: genres, themes, form, aesthetics and geographical reach. All the while, technological advancements in printing techniques—from etchings to lithography to offset printing to today’s laser printing–have impacted the types of books that have been possible for large-scale distribution. Today, there are few technological limits when it comes to reproducing original artwork. (Kiefer 2008, p. 11-19)
What, then, is a modern-day picturebook? Researcher Barbara Kiefer (2008, p. 9) cites a famous definition by Barbara Bader, which I re-cite here:

“A picturebook is text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and foremost an experience for a child.

As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page.

Barbara Kiefer adds that the picturebook, like other art forms, has “a unique potential to express meaning that discursive language is not capable of on its own”. (2008, p. 10)

1.1.2 Arabic children’s literature
Arabic children’s literature—says Leyla Youmna al-Batran', in her contribution to a Swedish anthology of children’s books from around the world—is only in the rudimentary stages of its mission “to conquer the hearts of the region’s millions of children”. (al-Batran 2008, p. 151) Arabic picturebooks for children are even newer. Due to the religious strictures of Islam discouraging imagery, the Middle East has traditionally seen a focus on the arts of calligraphy and decoration, whereas European cultural and societal norms worked in favor of pictorial storytelling.

The first publications of children’s literature in Arabic date back to early 19th century Egypt, with the translations of *Mother Goose Tales* by the *Nahda*'-pioneer Rifā‘a al-Ṭahṭāwī (1801–1873). These were followed by poetry books for children by Aḥmed Shawqī (1868–1932). Kāmil al-Kīlānī (1897–1959) has been called “the pioneer of Arabic children’s literature”. In his mission to preserve and cultivate the Standard Arabic language, he published more than two hundred stories for children–creating adaptations from ancient Arabic sources, Indian epics, Greek mythology, Shakespeare plays, tales by Hans Christian Andersen and the Grimm brothers, as well as some original works. (al-Batran 2008, p. 156 & Baheyyya 2010)

The bulk of Arabic children’s literature seems to consist of translations—and, with author Faṭīma Šaraf al-Dīn’s words, “bad translations”—of Western literature. (Fatima Sharafeddine i Stockholm 2011) In her doctoral thesis, French researcher Mathilde Chèvre nonetheless noted upsurges in both quantity and quality of original Arabic children’s books during two distinct historical periods: the 1970s and the 2000s up until today. According to Chèvre, whose focus is on picture books, the actors involved in these recent “movements” of children’s literary view their role similarly to the scholars that were involved the 19th century movement referred to as *al-Nahda* or the Arab Awakening. They are taking it upon themselves, says Chèvre, to “question the societies in which they live, and act as their mirrors and prophets”.

Famous names from the generation of children’s literary actors in the 1970’s are authors such as Zakaria Tāmir och Ǧassān Kanafānī and artists such as ʿAdlī Rizqāllāh and Ǧilmī Al-Tūnī.

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1 This is how her name is transcribed in the anthology.

2 *Al-nahda*, meaning “the Awakening”, was a cultural movement that flourished in Arab-populated regions of the Ottoman Empire, notably in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Tunisia, during the second half of the 19th century and the early 20th century.

3 My translation from the French.
Amongst the creators of children’s literature crucial to the current movement, are authors Samāḥ Idrīs and Faṭīma Šaraf al-Dīn, author and publisher Taǧrid al-Najjār and artist Julnār Hājū. (Chèvre 2015)

According to Swedish scholar Torsten Janson, however, “the idea that children’s literature needs to foster moral and religious development remains strong […] in the Arab world.” He quotes the Tunisian scholar Sabeur Mdallel’s description of Arab children’s literature, saying “it is morality presented within a story”. (Janson 2017, p. 131–132)

The language situation in the Arabic-speaking world, with a “high variety”–Standard Arabic or fuṣḥā, associated with the literary and official spheres–and a ”low variety”—referred to as colloquial, dialect or ‘āmmiyya, and used for informal speech–has been described using the term ‘diglossia’. (Versteegh, pp. 189–190) Since children’s literature belongs to the literary sphere, publishing books in anything other than Standard Arabic is highly controversial. Thus, with very few exceptions, Arabic children’s literature–like adult literature–is written in Standard Arabic and not in the language that children use in their everyday lives and which is their mother tongue.

Another factor that affects the language in children’s books is the market. Many of the publishers of Arabic children’s literature are Lebanon-based, and with their national market being relatively small, they are dependent on sales to the affluent Gulf states. This affects the language in the books: they take on a careful, controlled form of Standard Arabic void of all dialectal influences and borrowed words from Western languages. (Bizri 2015) Also, the most important market for Arabic children’s book publishers are–as they have always been–schools. This fact encourages formal language in children’s literature, as well as a didactic focus rather than entertainment. (Chèvre 2015, p. 150)

There does exist one small-scale initiative for children’s books in dialect. The project Ossas–Stories, headed by the USA-based Palestinian journalist Reem Makhoul and her husband, has published two original works in Egyptian and Shami (Levantine) dialect. It is an initiative that seems mostly to target an Arabic-speaking diaspora and their children. (Ossas–Stories 2017)

There are several relatively new literary awards for Arabic children’s literature in the region. The Abdul Hameed Shoman Prize for Children’s Literature, based in Jordan, launched in 2006 and is sponsored by the Arab Bank through a foundation. (Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation, no date) The Sheikh Zayed Book Award, founded in the same year, has a subcategory for children’s literature. (Sheikh Zayed Book Award, 2023) The Arab Children’s Book Publisher’s Forum Prize has been around since 2014. (Emirate News Agency, 2014) The Etisalat Award is considered the most prestigious award for children’s and young adult literature in the Arab world. (Arab Children’s Book Publishers Forum 2016) The last three awards are all based in the United Arab Emirates.
1.1.3 Books, reading and internet access in the Arabic-speaking world

Literacy rates, as well as access to books and other information sources including digital ones, go hand-in-hand with economic status in general. In the Arab world, there is a divide which is seen within countries, but also across countries. Civil war and unrest, as well as politically-motivated censorship and blockages, are other factors which impact information access. (Raz 2020)

While illiteracy in the adult population is high in much of the Arab region (more than 25 percent in many countries), the Gulf countries have a near 90 percent literacy rate. (Lindsey 2016) According to the Arab Barometer, Internet usage in 2020⁴ was in the 50th percentile in Tunisia, Egypt and Yemen, in the 60th in Morocco and Algeria, in the 70th in Sudan, Libya and Iraq, and in the 80th in the Levantine countries of Palestine, Jordan and Lebanon. At the same time, Gulf states have some of the highest internet penetration rates in the world, eclipsing the United States and many Western European countries. The digital divide within countries follows common markers of inequality such as gender, age, education and income level–with women, the elderly, the less educated, and lower income individuals less likely to use the internet than their counterparts. (Raz 2020)

The Arab region also suffers from a lack of local public libraries, as well as children’s and school libraries. Where they do exist, they are often lacking in digital resources and sometimes function more as archives than places hospitable to reading and borrowing books. At the same time, countries like Qatar and the United Arab Emirates (young, small, oil-rich nations) are heavily investing in libraries as part of their ambitions to be leading hubs of education and innovation⁵. (Lindsey 2017)

When it comes to readership and publishing in the Arab region there are no reliable figures, but one report stated that in 2012, the entirety of the region (with a population of 362 million people at the time), produced about the same amount of books (17,000 titles) as were published in the same year in Romania (with 21.3 million people). (Lindsey 2016)

Reading in the Arab world “is closely associated with practical pursuits, such as reading manuals; with formal education (and the tedium and rigidity of many students’ experience in school); and with religion (an estimated 17 percent of books published in the region are religious books)”. Although literacy rates on a regional level have been going up, and reading is increasing in certain demographics–specifically, women in the Gulf states–the following observation is made in an article by the independent news organization Al-Fanar Media, tellingly entitled “Why Don’t Arabs Read?”:

In households where television reigns supreme, where an older generation may well be illiterate or barely literate, and where one encounters books in school as material to be memorized, is it any surprise that reading is viewed as a chore? The region has a deep historic relationship with the written word and a rich literary heritage.

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⁴ Individuals were asked if they used the Internet at any frequency, even as seldom as once a month.
⁵ The children’s literary prizes from the UAE (of which the Etisalat Award for Children’s Literature is the largest/most prestigious) are of course also in line with this aim.
Books are respected, but what is missing from the reading experience may be something very simple: joy. (Lindsey 2016)

1.2 Previous research

1.2.1 Research on children’s literature

Children’s literature was first studied within the fields of Education and Library and Information Sciences, but in the 1960s and 70s, researchers of Literature and Culture studies also started to take an interest. (Svedjedal 2011, p. 95; Westin 2002, p. 131) Early researchers concerned themselves with defining children’s literature, creating a typology of children’s literature and analyzing the didactic aspects. (Westin 2002, p. 132-137) The first studies were often normative in that they sought to pinpoint certain uniting criteria for children’s literature, whereas studies of a later date are usually discursive. Today, children’s literature is studied from various narratological, aesthetic, cultural, intertextual, ideological and sociological perspectives. (Westin 2002, p. 130, 139) The study of children’s literature now includes comics (although comic studies is its own field, too), graphic novels, e-book versions, picturebook apps, etc. Still, the vast majority of research is of Western origin and concerns itself with American and British books. Experiences other than white and middle-class are also underexplored, and children’s picturebooks have been much less studied than books for older children and youth. (Nodelman 2017, p. 14)

When it comes to picturebook studies, researchers frequently use the term “text” in its broadest definition (stemming from the field of semiotics), referring to “the verbal and visual text” to indicate the words and the pictures, respectively. The way that words and pictures collaborate in meaning-making in modern picturebooks has been described as “a relationship between the verbal and the visual text”, a “counterpoint”, “duet”, “polysystemy”, “iconotext”, “synergy”, and more. (Sipe 1998)

Starting in the 1990s, some scholars noted that “something was happening” when it came to literature for young people. The Swedish-Russian scholar Maria Nikolajeva focused on narrative techniques in describing how children’s books were evolving to become more complex and sophisticated, while Perry Nodelman asserted that these changes were rather “variations” on what he saw as basic patterns of children’s literature. (Dresang 1999, p. 40) Another explanatory model was postmodernism, a term denoting developments in philosophy, literature, art, architecture and music in the second half of the 20th century. (Pantaleo & Sipe 2008, p. 1) Radical change theory, a framework devised in the mid-1990s by American librarian and scholar Eliza Dresang, can be used to locate many of the same or similar changes in children’s literature as postmodernism. However, radical change theory links these changes to the digitization of society. (Dresang 2008, p. 41) Radical change is the theory used in the current study, and it is described in detail below.

Besides Maria Nikolajeva, Perry Nodelman (and to a lesser extent Eliza Dresang), some well-known researchers of children’s literature include Peter Hunt, Zohar Shavit, Bruno
Bettelheim, Jack Zipes, as well as Swedish Vivi Edström and Ulla Rhedin. (Nikolajeva 2017, p. 8; Westin 2002, p. 132-137)

When it comes to international academic journals focused on children’s literature, the Modern Language Association Division on Children's Literature and the Children's Literature Association (ChLA) publish an annual journal called, simply, *Children’s Literature. The Lion and the Unicorn* is another journal, centered specifically on themes and genres of children’s literature. *Bookbird: A Journal of International Children’s Literature* is published by the International Board on Books for Young People (IBBY). Other journals in the field include *The Children’s Literature Association Quarterly* and the *New Review of Children’s Literature and Librarianship*. (University of Michigan Library 2017; Taylor & Francis Online no date)

1.2.2 Research on Arabic children’s literature
The Tunisian scholar Sabeur Mdallel has written about the sociology of Arabic children’s literature and translations of children’s literature in the Arab world. (ResearchGate 2023) The American anthropologist Gregory Starrett has explored the values embedded in textbooks used in the Egyptian school system. (Janson 2017, p. 131) Other than that, the bulk of research articles about children’s literature in the Arab world—which I was able to find and read—appear to deal with linguistic aspects. Possibly tangentially related to Arabic children’s literature, is the work of Swedish scholar Torsten Janson who studies the religio-pedagogic functions of Islamic children’s literature. His focus, however, is on works written in English and aimed at diasporic Muslim populations. (Janson 2017, p. 127-154)

French researcher Mathilde Chèvre’s doctoral thesis from 2015, *Le poussin n’est pas un chien – Quarante ans de creation arabe en littérature pour la jeunesse, reflet et projet des sociétés (Égypte, Syrie, Liban)*, is an exposé of Arabic children’s picturebooks focusing on Egypt, Syria and Lebanon during the past 40 years. It is also a sociological study of the authors, illustrators and publishers of children’s literature and their motivations and choices—during two distinct periods, the 1970s and the 2000s. Chèvre places the creators of Arabic picturebooks in the same intellectual tradition as the ‘Arab Awakening’ *al-Nahda* of the 19th century. The two defining trends or tendencies that came out of *al-Nahda*, were “renaissance” (of Arabic heritage and tradition) and “renewal” (taking inspiration from the West, especially). Chèvre tracks these tendencies in the production of Arabic children’s literature in the 1970’s–dominated by “renaissance”–and the movement of today–dominated by “renewal”. (Chèvre 2015)

Chèvre’s findings indicate that the books of the 2000s are “new” in multiple ways: they redefine the relationship between children and adults (such that children are depicted as “real people” and adults are role models rather than enforcers of rules), girls are more often the protagonists, people with physical and mental functional variations are more visible, and children’s experiences of difficult feelings are explored. (Chèvre 2015, p. 109-110) There is a parallel, here, to Dresang’s observations which were the impetus for radical change theory. Chèvre, however, does not link the changes to the digitization of society.
All in all, Arabic children’s literature seems to be a hugely under-researched area of study.

I have not found any research which applies radical change theory to Arabic children’s literature (or any literature from outside of North America, for that matter), nor which looks specifically at prize-winning Arabic children’s books.

1.3 Purpose of the study
The purpose of this study is to describe five of the first winners of the Etisalat Award for Arabic Children’s Literature using the framework of radical change theory. The study is of interest to anyone with a stake in Arabic children’s literature, or that perhaps works with Arabic-speaking children and families and sees the importance of encouraging and supporting a culture of reading in Arabic.

1.3 Research questions

Main question: Do digital characteristics, as defined by radical change theory (RCT), exist within a select sample of contemporary, award-winning Arabic picturebooks for children (consisting of 5 books first published between 2009 and 2015, all of them winners of the Etisalat Award for Arabic Children’s Literature)?

Subquestion: Which digital characteristics are most frequent within the sample?

2. Theory

2.1 Radical change theory
Radical change theory (RCT) was conceived in the mid-1990s by the American librarian and scholar Eliza T. Dresang (1941-2014), as a way of understanding the changes that she and others had observed in contemporary literature for youth—changes which she related to the “connectivity, interactivity, and access of the digital world” (Dresang 1999, p. 12, 14).

Dresang’s book Radical Change: Books for Youth in a Digital Age (1999) is the pivotal work that presents the theory and its underpinnings in an in-depth manner. It also contains extensive analyses of books that exhibit radical change characteristics—or, put in a different way, digital characteristics (Koh 2015, p. 3).

“The digital age” referred to by RCT is “the age of digitized media, often in multimedia format” that was “clearly emerging in the 1990s”. People and society were being impacted by digital media—and so, too, was traditional media. (Dresang 1999, p. 8) The idea that this theory captures is that children’s books constitute one of those traditional media types which became (or, is still becoming) dramatically affected—or, radically changed—by the digital age.

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4 Dresang states that she uses the terms “children” and “youth” interchangeably to refer to ages ranging from preschool through adolescence (1999, p. 6). However, she seems partial to the term “youth”, which is why I sometimes use it when referring to her ideas. Otherwise, because this study treats picture books (which tend to focus on a younger audience), I mostly use “children”.

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Connectivity, interactivity and access are conceptualized by RCT as key principles which define the digital environment—see Table 1.

Table 1. Digital Age Principles (Dresang & Koh 2009, p. 27)

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<th>Principles</th>
<th>Definitions</th>
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<tr>
<td>Interactivity</td>
<td>Refers to dynamic, nonlinear, and nonsequential learning and information behavior with an increasing sense of control by end-users</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Connectivity</td>
<td>Refers to sense of community or construction of social worlds that emerge from changing perspectives and expanded associations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access</td>
<td>Refers to breaking of longstanding information barriers, bringing entrée to a wide diversity of formerly largely inaccessible opinion</td>
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The digital age principles manifest in certain print materials for children/youth—those referred to as “radical change books”. Dresang conceptualized three types of radical change books, each containing particular characteristics—see Table 2. The fact that there are three principles and three types is coincidental. The digital age principles explain all radical change types. (Dresang & Koh 2009, p. 28). It is important to note that the types are not mutually exclusive; one book may belong to more than one radical change type. (Dresang 1999, p. 41)

Table 2. Radical Change Typology: Digital Age Youth Literature
(slightly adapted from Dresang & Koh 2009, p. 28)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Radical Change Types</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<tr>
<td>Type One: Changing Forms and Formats</td>
<td>Graphics in new forms and formats</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonlinear organization and format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Nonsequential organization and format</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Multiple layers of meaning</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Interactive formats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type Two: Changing Perspectives</td>
<td>Multiple perspectives, visual and verbal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Previously unheard voices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Youth who speak for themselves</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type Three: Changing Boundaries</td>
<td>Subjects previously forbidden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Settings previously overlooked</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Characters portrayed in new, complex ways</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unresolved endings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

One illustrative example of Dresang’s reasoning is captured in her descriptions of the increasing importance of “the visual” in the digital age. Books with narratives that rely heavily on pictures are “evolving in tune with the increased depth of visual experience available on the World Wide Web and in video and film media.” (Dresang 1999, p. 93) She goes on to say:

"Children of the digital age are graphically sophisticated. One of the first things they learn to do with a word processor is change the size and appearance of words, so the presence of large and small type in their reading does not surprise them. Colorful graphics in advertisements, newspapers, television, and on the World Wide Web prepare them to expect the same visual excitement in their reading.” (Ibid., p. 94)
Dresang emphasized that radical change characteristics in children’s books are not completely limited to the digital age. However, their “number, variety and sophistication” has grown in correlation with the advancement of the digital age. (Dresang 1999, p. 38) In Radical Change (1999, p. 28-38), Dresang identifies radical change books published in an era spanning the mid-1960s through the 1980s, what she calls “the developing digital age”, as well as prior to 1965–although in that era she finds only isolated examples. In the words of Dresang: “radical describes ‘fundamental’ change but does not have to imply an abrupt or sudden departure from the past” (ibid., p. 29).

2.2 The origins and influences of radical change theory

Radical change theory was inspired by Dresang’s direct experiences with children’s literature and her discussions with fellow librarians and educators, but it also draws upon media theorist Marshall McLuhan’s ideas from the 1950s-1970s7 and the educational philosophy of John Dewey from the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries that envisioned a learning environment based on “interactivity, self-direction, structure, and social connectivity, as well as access to ideas” (Dresang 1999, p. 61). Dresang also cited the ideas of some of her contemporaries, including Nicholas Negroponte, Douglas Rushkoff and Seymour Papert8, who were writing about the emerging digital age in the 1990s and the opportunities for learning that were made possible by computers and the internet. In Radical Change (1999), Dresang coupled these technology-positive ideas with ideas from the field of childhood studies in making the case that the ways in which digital culture was changing society, so too was it changing society’s dominant ideas about childhood. In the past, the major “ideologies of childhood” viewed the child either as “innocent and in need of protection” or “depraved and in need of redemption”. These ideologies still very much abound, and often translate into ways that adults try to limit, shield and control children. They also continue to affect the content of cultural products created by adults for children. But in the burgeoning digital age, youth were demonstrating proficiency with new technology that many adults found to be difficult. They were also able to access information, make connections with people of all ages and around the world, and make their own voices heard–on a grander scale than perhaps ever before. Dresang argued that these features made the digital age fertile breeding grounds for another perception of childhood, one in which children are seen as “capable and seeking connection”. (Dresang 1999, p. 54-58)

This new ideology of childhood and young adulthood is radical, just as the literature it fosters. It no longer looks to the limitations of childhood, but to its capabilities. It no longer focuses on mainstream, middle-class, every-one-alike children, but on diverse children in a diverse society. It no longer shields, but arms by informing. (Dresang 1999, p. 73)

Viewing children as “capable and seeking connection” also translates into seeing them as active readers and collaborators in meaning-making, rather than passive recipients or subjects

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7 McLuhan wrote extensively about the changes brought about by the electronic environment. Relevant to radical change theory are his ideas about “the global village”, interactivity and his opinion on books—“Our job is not to wreck the book but save it by teaching grammars of new media” (quoted in Dresang 1999, p. 9)—as well as his experimental writing which displayed digital age characteristics well before the digital age. (Ibid., p. 8-12)

8 Papert traces his student-centered pedagogical philosophy to Jean Piaget and Jean-Jacques Rousseau. (Dresang 1999, p. 60)
of manipulation. Dresang proposes that, although all reading may be viewed as “active” to a certain extent, some texts (notably texts with many digital characteristics) require more co-creation and deep thinking than others—and that those types of texts may lead to more valuable reading experiences. (Dresang 1999, 238-241)

I have shown how Dresang’s theory of radical change in children’s literature is linked to a philosophy of child-centered learning, a view of children as capable and an optimism about the opportunities and influences that digital technology can provide. At times, Dresang’s 1999 book reads like a manifesto—and indeed it became quite influential.

2.3 The impact of radical change theory
Radical change theory has been recognized for having had a great impact on the understanding of children’s literature in the United States. Dresang conceptualized RCT as a scholarly theory, but also as a practical tool for professionals working with youth. Throughout Radical Change (1999), Dresang provided ideas and practical inspiration for librarians and teachers on how to identify radical change books and use them in their work. RCT is cited as having “helped shape the way people look at new literature” (School Library Journal/Lau Whelan 2007, p. 36). The theory is also said to have affected the types of books that are selected and considered for the most prestigious children’s literature awards in the United States. (Ibid.) Also, a search on Google Scholar will show that Dresang’s work is frequently cited (work which, since the 1990s, has mostly focused on applying and further developing RCT).

Still, the theory of radical change in children’s literature is probably not widely known outside of certain academic disciplines—notably, library and information sciences (LIS) and children’s literature studies. Even within these disciplines, it may be little known outside of North America. Through Dresang’s accounts of the origins of RCT (Dresang 1999, p. 3-4), as well as the books that she uses to exemplify radical change characteristics (ibid., p. 28-38, 275-315), it is clear that the theory was first developed and applied in a purely USA-centric context. Likewise, based on my searches, RCT seems to overwhelmingly have been utilized by scholars in North America (the United States and Canada). However, if the theory has had an impact on the types of children’s books that win American literary awards, and we consider the heavy cultural impact that the United States tends to have on the world, then we might speculate that RCT has had indirect effects on how contemporary children’s literature is understood and valued, far beyond North America.

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8 Children’s literature as manipulation was famously theorized by Jacqueline Rose in The Case of Peter Pan, first published in 1984 (Dresang 1999, p. 239).
9 Fellow scholars and top librarians testified to the importance of RCT in an article devoted to Dresang’s work in the School Library Journal (Lau Whelan, 2007). In a posthumous tribute to Dresang, one colleague called her impact “immeasurable” (Mills et al, 2015, p. 2).
10 Presumably, RCT affected professionals who then, in turn, have influenced the public.
11 The Newbery and Caldecott medals. Sidenote: Dresang herself served on several award committees, including the Newbery, Caldecott, Batchelder, Pura Belpré, and Odyssey. (Mills et al, 2015, p. 4)
12 Search term “ET Dresang” on https://scholar.google.com. Search conducted on 10-07-2023. The most cited article had 205 citations at this time.
13 With a few isolated exceptions, all of the books listed and used as examples are of US origin, which goes uncommented by Dresang.
Since its development in the LIS field, radical change theory has been applied in scholarly research within that field as well as education and English. (Koh 2013, p. 34; Koh 2015, p. 5-6) Radical change theory has informed such work as audience studies/reader response studies, studies that analyze specific literary works, and studies that survey trends and patterns in children’s book publishing.

RCT was expanded by Dresang and Kyonwong (2009) to encompass a typology of youth information behavior in the digital age. The theory grazed the territory of information behavior from the very start, in its supposition that both information resources and people are changing in a changing media environment. It is consequently presumed in RCT that radical change books, i.e. books with so-called digital characteristics, are especially appealing to digital age youth.

2.4 Discussion: Is radical change theory relevant to these Arabic picturebooks?

In the quarter century since radical change theory was devised, the digital era has evolved beyond the imaginations of, I think it is safe to say, anyone in 1999. Is it, then, still a relevant framework? Or are the characteristics that Dresang locates perhaps ubiquitous in children’s literature by now—not so radical anymore? If the digital environment was changing children’s books so much, wouldn’t all newly published specimens be “changed” at this point?

Well, for one, this study scrutinizes a sample of children’s books published between 2008 and 2015—the first one, within a decade of Dresang’s Radical Change. But even in that decade, the speed and sophistication with which digitization swept the world was staggering—with Facebook, Youtube and iPhones seeing the light of day. Certain radical change characteristics did also become a lot more common. For instance, the graphic novel (i.e. comics in book form) has become hugely popular as literature for adults and children since the turn of the 21st century (Murray 2023)—and just by its form, it meets the criteria of at least two radical change characteristics: “graphics in new forms and formats” and “words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy”.

The totality of contemporary children’s literature, however, is probably not bursting with radical change characteristics. In a discussion on postmodernism in picturebooks (as stated earlier—see 1.2.1—postmodernism, when applied to the study of children’s literature, has many commonalities with RCT), the children’s literary scholar Maria Nikolajeva underscores that it is “an infinitesimal part of the global picturebook production” that “has any postmodern traits whatsoever”. (Nikolajeva 2008, p. 55) In other words, even if there is a current of change in children’s literature, that current may not have reached everyone everywhere. What’s more, everyone everywhere may not want to be reached by it, because inevitably, there will always

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17 Several Canadian studies by Beverly Brenna and others use qualitative content analysis to this end.
be other, competing currents which also affect the kinds of books that are written and published for children.

Nikolajeva goes on to say that the types of innovative children’s books that tend to gain attention in critical studies, almost always are of Western European and North American origin. (Nikolajeva 2008, p. 55) This, of course, does not mean that postmodernism–or radical change–is nonexistent in books for children in other parts of the world. So, what about Arabic children’s literature? If we are to believe Mdallel’s assessment of Arabic children’s books as “morality presented in a story” (see 1.1.2), it would seem that radical change characteristics, which promote co-creation in the reading experience, are rare.

This study cannot answer whether or not they actually are rare, however. Neither can it assess the legitimacy of Mdallel’s claim or find out if the identifiers of radical change are less common in Arabic than Western European or North American children’s books. What it can do, is to see if there are any “radical change books” within a sample of lauded and promoted Arabic books for children. This is interesting to know for several reasons. For one, we can expect prize-winning books to have a larger reach than just “any old book”. Also, chances are that they serve as inspiration to other children’s book creators to a larger extent than other books. In this respect, they can point us to what we might expect to see more of in the future.

But the most distinctive strength of radical change theory, in my opinion, is its emphasis on characteristics in books that are likely to attract contemporary, so-called digital age children. As noted earlier (see 1.1.3), there are many obstacles that stand between Arabic children’s literature and its potential audiences. Access to books is first and foremost affected by poverty and illiteracy. That, however, does not negate the positive effects of the existence of original-language books that are relevant and interesting to Arabic children–we can just hope that they will actually reach everyone.

3. Method

3.1. Text examples, translations and transcriptions
In the Arabic text examples of this study, short vowels and case endings are written out in the way that they appear in the original text.

All translations are my own. As an aid in translating from Arabic to English, I have used the database of The Oxford Dictionary of Arabic.

In the translations, I have strived to achieve the highest possible degree of equivalence on the semantic, syntactic, textual and socio-cultural levels. This has often meant settling for connotative equivalence between the source language, Arabic, and the target language, English, rather than full equivalence or one-to-one equivalence. (Wardini 2013) It must be noted that all translation is interpretation.
Translations of citations from my secondary sources—from Swedish and French to English—are my own, and have been conducted using the same principles of translation as the Arabic-to-English citations.

For transcriptions, I have followed the system of transcription put forth by Professor Elie Wardini at Stockholm University (Wardini 2020). I do not use this system of transcription for words that have standard names or spellings in English, such as the city of Alexandria (iskandarīa) and the Emirati telecom company Etisalat (itiṣālāt) which sponsors the Etisalat Award for Arabic Children’s Literature. In the list of primary sources in the reference list, however, all names of authors, illustrators and publishing houses are transcribed using the system cited above.

3.2 Reading the picturebooks
As we have seen, picturebooks consist of verbal and visual text which collaborate in meaning-making. Dresang declared: “Reading in relation to Radical Change, means ‘decoding’ words and pictures to arrive at meaning.” (1999, p. 6) When it comes to Arabic picturebooks, I am an outsider looking in. I have not grown up reading in Arabic, and I have spent limited amounts of time in Arab countries, and this may affect my readings of both the verbal and visual texts. However, I have done my best to understand the books, including culturally specific cues, as they pertain to the analysis. Of course, any one reader and reading of a text (any interpretation) is limited. By focusing on certain aspects of the texts using the lens of radical change theory, other aspects will necessarily fall out of focus.

3.3 Identifying radical change
Dresang originally proposed using radical change theory along with an examination of literary elements as a method to “identify and scrutinize literature that displays digital-age characteristics”. (Dresang 1999, p. 253) Coming out of the library and information sciences, however, the end-goal of that method was a practical one: to provide a means for librarians, educators and others to evaluate books (to inform their selection processes) and to help them answer the question “what is a good book in the digital age?”. (Dresang 1999, p. 251-268) This study does not evaluate. It aims only to identify digital age/radical change characteristics in the selected sample of books, as a means to understand those books more deeply. The question that I faced in creating the research design for this study, was how to do that, considering that digital characteristics span over narrative, thematic, stylistic aspects, and more. Some combination of semiotic and narrative analysis could, perhaps, have worked. Semiology and narratology, however, constitute complex theories with terminologies of their own, which might create confusion alongside the quite extensive terminology of radical change theory itself. In the interest of limiting and focusing the study, I instead opted for a directed approach to content analysis, which allows the researcher to “try” a chosen theoretical framework by creating a coding frame using the terminology and definitions of that theory. In other words, this study employs qualitative content analysis directed by radical change theory.
3.4 What is directed qualitative content analysis?
In order to understand directed qualitative content analysis (DQlCA), it is helpful to know something about qualitative content analysis (QICA). QICA is a research methodology or procedure for systematically examining and interpreting the contents of any chosen data. (Kibiswa 2019, p. 2059) Unlike quantitative content analysis, QICA does not involve frequency counts or statistics, but focuses instead on constructs, concepts and implicit meaning. (Schreier 2012, p. 54) The researcher creates a ‘coding frame’ of categories, and then ‘codes’ the data as a way of describing and making sense of it. The data for QICA is conventionally referred to as ‘text’, no matter if it is verbal or visual. (Schreier 2012, p. 1-17) The typical approach of QICA is inductive, meaning that the researcher draws categories or themes from the data, i.e. the research is data-driven. (Kibiswa 2019, p. 2059; Schreier 2012, p. 5)

By contrast, directed qualitative content analysis (DQlCA) is a deductive or theory-driven approach, in which the researcher draws the categories or themes from one or more existing theories. The coding frame, in other words, is guided by existing theory. Another way of thinking about this, is that the deductive approach—since it is based on an earlier model—“moves from the general to the specific”. (Kibiswa 2019, p. 2061)

In the abstract to her 2019 article outlining this methodology, Kibiswa writes:

The deductive or directed qualitative content analysis (DQICA) is used to test, to corroborate the pertinence of the theory/ies guiding the study or to extend the application of the theory/ies to contexts/cultures other than those in which that/those theory/ies was/were developed. (Kibiswa 2019, Abstract)

The directed or deductive approach is more frequently used by quantitative researchers, but with her article, Kibiswa (a conflict analyst researcher) is attempting to reduce what she refers to as the “holes in the qualitative research tradition”. (Kibiswa 2019, Abstract) She proposes an 8-step DQICA within three phases, which she calls Study Preparation, Data Analysis, and Results’ Reporting. Qualitative researchers often create their own data (through interviews, mostly), but the methodology proposed by Kibiswa is designed for testing an already existing theory on already existing text. (Kibiswa 2019)

The present study aims to extend the use of a theory (radical change theory) into a different context (that of contemporary, award-winning Arabic picture books) than the one in which it was developed (the context of American children's literature in the digital age). For the purposes of the study, then, Kibiswa’s approach to DQICA is a fitting choice of methodology. It provides the means to investigate the dataset—the verbal and visual text of the picture books under study—in a systematic way, through the lens of radical change theory, using the theory’s own categories and definitions.

18 Quantitative and qualitative methods are not mutually exclusive, however. It is very common to combine both types of methodologies to some extent—for instance, to not completely disregard the extent to which one type of qualitative information is more frequent, i.e. “counting”... Since one of my research questions is “which digital characteristics are most frequent within the sample?”, this demands counting and thus incorporates into the study an aspect normally thought of as quantitative.
3.5 The process of DQlCA according to Kibiswa (2019)
As previously mentioned, Kibiswa proposes an eight-step process of DQlCA divided into three phases—an schema of textual analysis that unfolds in iterative and non-linear way[s]. (Kibiswa 2019, p. 2062) The following table demonstrates the schema.

Table 3. Schema of DQlCA according to Kibiswa (2019)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase One: Study Preparation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 1: Developing the study’s framework and operational definitions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 2: Determining the unit of analysis and sampling materials to be analyzed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 3: Getting a sense of the data</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase Two: Data Analysis</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 4: Data coding and organizing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 5: Making connections, interpreting them, and drawing conclusions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 6: Verifying interpretations’ plausibility and ensuring trustworthiness</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase Three: Results’ Reporting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Step 7: Making an appropriate outline for a detailed presentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Step 8: Thick description of the research process and findings</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 3 summarizes the methodology used in this study. My research process has covered these eight steps, but not in a linear fashion. Similarly, my presentation of the process and results—although covering all the steps—is not presented in the same order as listed above.

In the presentation of my study, the framework of radical change theory is described under the heading 2. Theory. This is the framework used for the coding frame. The coding frame, or coding agenda, is “the study’s structured analysis matrix” (Kibiswa 2019, 2062)—a diagram with columns listing codes divided into subcodes with operational definitions, and flags that represent each subcode.19

For the codes, I use the three radical change types, i.e. changing forms and formats (type one), changing perspectives (type two), and changing boundaries (type three). The subcodes are the digital-age/radical change characteristics that belong to each type. So far, I merely put Dresang’s radical change typology into the diagram of the coding frame. Defining the meanings of subcodes, i.e. creating the operational definitions, was less straight-forward. I have attempted to follow the definitions of radical change characteristics in the way that they are set forth in Radical Change: Books for Youth in the Digital Age (1999). Dresang, however, describes the characteristics in varying detail. For instance, whereas she provides checklists of criteria for the type one characteristics graphics in new forms and formats (Dresang 1999, p. 82) and words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy (ibid, p. 91), the type three characteristic settings previously overlooked is only treated adjacently to subjects previously forbidden, in passing under the heading “Other barriers broken”. (Ibid, p. 193) In the former case, I use Dresang’s checklists almost verbatim for the operational definitions,

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19 Codes may also be referred to as categories. Subcodes would consequently be called subcategories. This study uses the terms codes and subcodes in order to avoid confusion with the digital categories in RCT.
while in the latter case, the wording is my own, based on examples of boundary-breaking settings (ibid., p. 261) provided in the book’s methodology chapter. For each operational definition in the coding frame, page references have been provided.20 The resulting coding frame is provided as Appendix 1.

The unit of analysis in DQ1CA is defined by Kibiswa (2019, p. 2063) as “a whole text which is large enough to be considered as a whole and small enough to be kept in mind as a context for the meaning unit during the analysis process”. In this study, each picture book is a unit of analysis. The coding process is about locating, in each unit of analysis, contents or features that match codes and subcodes from the coding frame—and which, in turn, match themes or subthemes from the theory directing the study. The first step is to progressively highlight all meaning units, i.e. “chunks” of verbal or visual text “whose latent or manifest contents are identical, close or similar to theory-based themes and/or subthemes listed in the coding scheme of the study”. (Ibid, p. 2064) Kibiswa advises using a different color for each code or subcode. Next, the researcher re-reads the materials and assigns a “flag” or alphanumeric symbol, representing a code or subcode, to each highlighted chunk. (Kibiswa 2019, p. 2064) I chose to use a unique color for each radical change type (i.e. code) and a unique flag for each digital characteristic (i.e. subcode). For each unit of analysis, the researcher now creates a reading summary form wherein all highlighted, coded chunks are transcribed and listed, alongside one column indicating the exact location of each coded passage and another column providing its “associated context”. The “associated context” is the researcher’s interpretation of the coded passage, its relation to the code and to the text as a whole. (Ibid, p. 2064-2065) In the present study, one coding example is provided as Appendix 2 and one reading summary form is provided as Appendix 3.

Next, Kibiswa suggests grouping all meanings units from the same unit of analysis that have been coded with the same code in documents called thematically clustered matrices, then marking and listing “negative cases”, i.e. text passages that challenge the theory directing the study. The researcher “makes inferences from dispersed data at her disposal, and goes deeper in what data are suggesting, including by building logical chain of evidences, contrasting/comparing text passages with theory-based themes/subthemes and between them at both manifest and latent content levels, and offering explanations consistent with settings from which data were derived” (Kibiswa 2019, p. 2065). As a part of this process, the researcher may determine new themes or subthemes that don’t fit any predetermined codes—thus suggesting additions or refinements of the original theory.

I have used a somewhat simplified process. I did create a reading summary form for each unit of analysis. I did not, however, create thematically clustered matrices or mark and list negative cases. The reasons for this are the scope and nature of the present study. My five reading summary forms contained on average less than ten meaning units each, so I was able to get an overview without creating “sub-clusters” of material in other matrices. Listing

20 Note that, in opting for this methodology of describing the data through the lens of radical change theory, I cannot go “deeper” or “wider” theory-wise than radical change theory does. Insofar as radical change theory may be criticized for being reiterative, vague or incomplete, my analysis will be prone to the same criticisms. It is beyond the scope of this study to refine the theory.
negative cases was also not relevant to this study, since I am not testing the validity of radical change theory here; I could not do so using five Arabic picture books. Whether or not the books under study contain radical change characteristics does not prove or disprove radical change theory, nor does it say anything about the quality or merit of the books. It simply says that they do or do not contain radical change characteristics—which, either way, has interesting implications, upon which I will go into greater detail later. For now, however, suffice to say that Kibiswa’s paper on DQlCA (like other methodological research articles), seems intended for doctoral research and other studies with vast amounts of data–most likely using some type of coding software. My project is less extensive, it is descriptive rather than comparative–and I did not use any coding software, which means that additional matrices would have taken a long time to make, without actually aiding my analysis.

The next step is to take the meaning units and adjacent interpretations out of the table format, in order to create “narratives in the form of prose”. The researcher “gives her interpretations and understandings of the data she presented in the display and connects them to others elsewhere, especially in order to make explicit latent content and to make sense out of the data”. (Kibiswa 2019, p. 2065) Trustworthiness, in the context of qualitative studies, is up to the judgment of the reader. As a researcher, then, you must explain your study’s process and findings, including limitations and strengths, in a convincing way—a way which “supports the interpretations made and conclusions drawn”. (Ibid, p. 2065)

The sampling materials of the current study (the picturebooks) are detailed under the heading 4. Data. The focus of this study is the content of each book, as it relates to radical change theory. Because each book constitutes a unique context in relation to its content (a context that needs to be kept in mind while contemplating the content), I chose to structure my analysis “by book” rather than, for instance, “by radical change characteristic”. At large, then, I have based the prose form text found under 5. Analysis on each of the reading summary forms—which in turn, are based on the coding process described above using the coding frame found in Appendix 1. I discuss the results and implications of my analysis, and attempt to answer my research questions, under heading 6. Discussion. The research findings are summarized under the heading 7. Conclusions.

The end result of the DQlCA process is a descriptive account of the research as a whole, including embedded quotes, displays/matrices/tables, appendices etc. where needed (Kibiswa 2019, p. 2065-66). The paper that you are currently reading is this end result.

4. Data

4.1 Primary sources and delimitations
The picturebooks used for this study are the first five winners of the Etisalat Award for Arabic Children’s Literature that I was able to get ahold of within the time constraints of the writing process. These books won the Etisalat Award in 2009, 2010, 2011, 2012 and 2015, respectively. The first four editions of the Etisalat Award (from 2009 to 2012), had only one
award category. Starting in 2013, the award was divided into several categories: “Best Text”, “Best Illustration”, “Best Production”, “Best Children’s Book of the Year” and “Best Young Adult Book of the Year”. The last book in this study (Book 5, the winner of 2015) won the category “Best Children’s Book of the Year”.

Because they are Etisalat Award winners, my sample “came with” a whole set of delimitations to do with the award criteria. To start, the Etisalat Award accepts submissions from Arab and international publishing houses, as long as they are original-language Arabic works. Translations and adaptations are not accepted, neither are self-published books, works of non-fiction, school books, scientific books, books of poetry, short stories or books that are a part of a series. Books eligible for “Best Children’s Book of the Year” must not be more than three years old, must not previously have received any kind of award and must target children in the age range 0–12. (Etisalat Award 2015) Although I haven’t been able to verify whether or not award criteria were exactly the same during the first years of the award, these last points seem to apply to the first four books of the sample, as well.

The books in my sample were all first published by Arabic publishing houses, sometime between 2009 and 2015. They represent quite a variety of books when it comes to subject matter, artistic execution, the age range of intended readers, etc. Book 1 is a board book, apparently intended for babies and toddlers (but its form makes it suitable for beginning readers, as well). Book 2 and 3 are probably intended for the upper spectrum of the age range, perhaps 9–12. Books 4 and 5 are likely meant for younger children, perhaps 6–9. All of the books are picturebooks in the sense that they combine visual and verbal text.

4.2 The data collection process and its limitations
Because radical change theory looks at semiotic, narrative, stylistic and even intertextual aspects of verbal and visual texts, applying the theory necessitates in-depth study. Therefore I needed to limit my sample size. The study is about testing the North American theory of radical change in children’s literature in a new context, i.e. contemporary Arabic children’s literature—specifically picturebooks, because that is where my personal interest lies.

The sample that I came up with is not representative of Arabic picturebooks in general. There is limited generalizability here. However, because the books of the sample are award-winning books, they receive more attention and are likely to have a greater reach and influence relative to randomly chosen books. They are relevant to understanding the current landscape of Arabic picturebooks and the direction that Arabic picturebook production might be heading in.

Another option for data collection would have been to go by statistics from a web-based Arabic bookstore to choose the most frequently purchased picturebooks. Alternatively, I could have used the five most frequently checked out Arabic picturebooks at a specific library in Sweden or an Arab country. These are compelling ideas, considering that radical change in books may be linked to their popularity amongst digital age children. One might then expect popular books to contain a lot of radical change characteristics. (On the other
hand, books are often selected by adults like teachers, parents and grandparents.) One might also expect more radical change characteristics in books chosen for awards, however. At least, as we have seen, this has been the case with children’s book prizes in the United States (see 2.3). Whether or not there is a parallel tendency in the most distinguished children’s literature prize in the Arab world, i.e. the Etisalat Award, is an intriguing question. Is there a world-wide trend toward radical change in picturebooks—or at least one that encompasses the Arab world? This study does not provide the answer, but it may provide the impetus for further exploration.

It must be noted that although the books under study are contemporary, they are not new: they were published around a decade ago. They were some of the first winners of the Etisalat Award for Arabic Children's Literature. There have been 14 winners up to date (looking only at the category "Best Children’s Book of the Year"). I could just as well have chosen the last five winners. But these older books—still situated squarely in the digital age—may have already had some influence on the output of subsequent Arabic picturebook production. This is not to the study’s disadvantage. Anyone with an interest in contemporary Arabic picturebooks may use this study as a starting point to compare and draw links to see if radical change characteristics and digital age principles seem to increase or decrease with time in award-winning books, or perhaps in the output of a specific publisher, author or illustrator.

5. Analysis

In this section, I present each book along with some basic reference information as well as the type(s) of radical change that the book exhibits. I then provide a short summary of the narrative, including relevant details about the book form and my estimation of the intended audience age-range, for enhanced context. This is followed by my interpretation of the work through the lens of radical change theory. As we have seen, picturebooks are highly visual objects, and in order to better explain my interpretation, I include photos of example book-spreads.

5.1. Book 1: .. أنا أحب .. anā uḥibbu.. ‘I Love..’

EACL winner in year: 2009
Author/Illustrator: Nabīha Mḥaydalī/Nādīn Ṣaydānī
Publishing House: Dār al-Hadāiq/Lebanon
Radical change type/s: 1, 2

5.1.1 Summary

In this small-format board book apparently intended for toddlers and very young children, a rooster, a bird, a goose and a star declare their love of a specific color in short, repetitive sentences. On the subsequent page-spread, we find out the reason for each of their preferences. Their colors of choice simultaneously walk us through the times of the day: al-fījr ‘dawn’, al-nahār ‘midday’, al-ʾaṣīl ‘late afternoon’, and al-layl ‘night’. The book ends with a boy, Māzin, proclaiming his love for all of the colors—because without any one of
them, the world would not look the same. The book reads like a short and repetitive, unrhymed poem rather than a narrative in the traditional sense.

5.1.2 Radical change in form and format: interactivity, synergy and graphics

Keywords of each sentence of the book are juxtaposed by images; in a stark example of “words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy”, visual text is literally a part of the verbal text—and vice versa, in one instance (see Image 2). Along the bottom edge of each page-spread except the last, runs a “symbols bar” containing all of these images along with the words that they signify. These features provide many possibilities for interactivity, whether it is a child reading the book alone or together with an adult or another child. An adult reader might, for instance, point to the pictures and encourage the child to help say the words for “rooster” and “blue” and “night” and so on. The child might also look for the corresponding picture in the symbols bar. The bar looks the same on every page-spread, meaning that, even as the text progresses with every spread, a constant overview of the entire content is actually present throughout the whole book. This helps the readers/viewers to memorize the story, as young children (pre reading age) often like to do. It can empower them to retell the book in their own words after or alongside the adult reading—or perhaps as anticipatory interjections into it. In other words, the verbal/visual text “draws readers into a storytelling partnership with the author” (Dresang 1999, p. 239).

Images 1-2. Graphics in new forms and formats: The handwritten text illustrates the sounds of the rooster’s crowing. Words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy: Visual text is literally part of the verbal text and vice versa. Interactive formats: The verbal/visual text draws readers into a storytelling partnership with the author.

‘I Love…’ is an example of a highly didactic book in an interactive format. Words and pictures reach new levels of synergy when images stand in for words in a sentence. These key images aid a young child’s understanding of the fiṣḥā text, and make it closer at hand for the child to speak the words (pointing at the images), to memorize the story and retell it, to “read the pictures”, and finally, to read the text.

The book could be referred to as graphic—but it is a stretch. Color is used to convey meaning, but in a narrow/prescriptive sense; the verbal text tells us how the colors have meaning to each character’s existence. This does not quite fit the radical change definition of “color is generously used to convey meaning”, however. The book tells us that color has meaning, rather than making symbolic use of color (to convey an emotional state, for instance). Nonetheless, there is one little detail which is indisputably graphic in the radical change
sense: the handwritten text showing the crowing of the rooster at dawn. The placement of the words illustrate that the sounds are coming from the rooster. Differing text sizes illustrate different volumes, or the way that the sound of the crowing travels in the air (see Image 1).

Understanding where to draw the lines between “nonlinear organization and format”, “nonsequential organization and format”, and “interactive formats” is somewhat difficult in general—and this book is no exception. “Nonlinear” has to do with the lack of a prescribed order in which to read. ‘I Love…’ has a prescribed order, although the symbols bar makes other readings more likely. (Readers might, for instance, interrupt the “main reading” to look at the symbols bar and talk about what comes before and after.) However, the principal reason for the symbols bar is to aid in reading the main text in a linear fashion. “Nonsequential” pertains to text where “what comes next” is not clearly related to “what came before”. ‘I Love…’ does not have a narrative in the traditional sense, and might thus be thought of as nonsequential upon first glance. Yet, there is a sequential progression from dawn to night. Consequently, there are aspects of ‘I Love…’ which are interactive, but not nonlinear or nonsequential.

5.1.2 Radical change in perspectives: multiple perspectives
This book also contains multiple perspectives—the perspective of the rooster, the bird, the goose, etc. The verbal text tells us what they find enjoyable and beautiful about their lives and the world. It is a basic form of differing perspectives—and, admittedly, the reason given for why a rooster crows in the dawn is totally human-centric. Yet, these thoughts might still be challenging to the very young target audience of a board book; it requires them to consider existences that differ completely from their own.

5.2 Book 2: al-nuqṭa al-sawdā’ ‘The Black Spot’
EACL winner in year: 2010
Author/Illustrator: Walid Ṭāhir
Publishing House: Dār al-Šurūq/Egypt
Radical change type/s: 1, 2, 3

5.2.1 Summary
One day in the care-free lives of the stick-man children that populate this book, an enormous black spot or dot (nuqṭa) appears on their playing grounds, darkening their lives and diminishing their maneuvering space. Initially, they ask themselves what the spot is, in a process of collective brainstorming that may engage readers to come up with their own ideas. Since none of their suggestions appear satisfactory, the children turn, instead, to the question of how to get rid of the black spot. Since they cannot scare it away and it doesn’t explode when pierced with a needle or float away when sprayed with a hose, they start thinking instead about how to make use of it. After an array of failed attempts, they resort to using it in their games of hide-and-seek, as “home base”—in Arabic called, significantly, ‘umma, ‘nation’ or ‘community’. However, one of the children, Marwān, does not give up on finding a

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21 The page-spreads shown in Images 1-2 read, in translation: ‘The [rooster] said: I love the color…[deep blue] / Indeed it is the color of [daybreak] that I call out to, to wake the people from their sleep.’
solution. He thinks long and hard for days, until, in his anger and frustration, he kicks the spot—and notices that little, tiny pieces crumble off. When he is not able to convince his comrades to help (yā salām. ‘oh, goodness…’, lā ṭab ‘an. ‘surely not…’, mustaḥīl ‘impossible’, māḍa. ‘what…’ they interject), he gets to work by himself. After months, having achieved only a tiny little chip in the towering spot, his friends start to notice his progress and come to join him, demonstrating—as they achieve their goal of crumbling the spot—the power of collective action. On the thought-provoking last page, displaying a pyramid-shaped mound of crumbs, another character ponders “Now how will we manage the crumbles?”. At the same time, tiny stick-people, to whom a little crumble appears large, ask themselves “What is this faction of the black spot?”. ‘Faction’, šīʿa, also means ‘party’ or ‘sect’.

5.2.2 Radical change in form and format: graphics, multiple layers of meaning, interactivity and synergy
In this book like the previous one, color conveys meaning in a very specific way, albeit not quite in the characteristic radical change way. However, in any allegorical reading of the book, the fact that the spot is black is crucial—black stands for darkness. Beyond that, many different interpretations are possible.

‘The Black Spot’ can be read literally, as a creative fantasy about the little line-drawing people populating the pages of a book, and the strange thing that happens in their world—perhaps as a result of the carelessness of the artist that drew them, as one of the characters suggests. In this case, it is a funny and entertaining tale about the importance of working together. To older readers, however, it is close at hand to see the black spot as a metaphor for the way a dark force of choice (an occupying force, a religion, an authoritarian regime?) limits children’s lives, or people’s lives in general.

The verbal text—in the usage of ambiguous words like ʿumma (referencing the spot), and šīʿa (referencing the crumbs that have chipped from the spot)—invites connections to real-life historical and socio-political events. Elements in the visual text reinforce this reading: the black spot fills a television screen (is it dominating/controlling the media qua authoritarian leader, or is it being reported on?) as it simultaneously towers outside the window of the room containing the television, obscuring the view to the outside world (significant?) and wilting a young plant (symbol of life, health and growth?). Beyond these separate verbal/visual elements, however, the narrative as a whole offers layers of meaning to unpack; the black spot’s sudden arrival and the children’s different reactions and actions in relation to it, climaxing with the slow “picking apart” of the spot, first thanks to one diligent person—and then the ensuing success, thanks to collective action. The mound of crumbs on the last page may be interpreted in different ways, as well.

‘The Black Spot’ also contains many examples of radical change graphics and words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy. We find the main narrative written out in machine-typed verbal text, but there is also a second type of verbal text on almost every page
consisting of handwritten words, letter-combinations (signifying noises) and verbal textual symbols (such as exclamation points and “dot-dot-dots”) that are part and parcel of the illustrations. In the typed text, certain words and phrases are enlarged, giving them extra weight and emphasis—they guide the reading and meaning-making process through their design. The handwritten text transmits meaning through design in even more intricate ways: through size, color and placement of the text. One example is found on the 17th page-spread, where Marwān—after having pondered what to do about the black spot for days and nights without results—finally kicks it out of anger. His exclamations of “go away” (imši), are repeated seven times and rendered in big, bold orange text in the vicinity of Marwān, as well as above and under the black spot. The size and color of the words emphasize the anger (which the machine-typed narrative also tells us of), and the positioning of the words make it clear that Marwān is uttering (or perhaps thinking) them about the black spot. In a couple of instances in the book, little birds add contextual information—one bird on the 14th page-spread tells the reader (through a speech bubble) the meaning of a word, and a bird on the last page holds a sign reading al-nihāya ‘the end’. Such elements, as well as the handwritten words that convey what different children are saying or thinking, provide a more interactive experience than do most traditional picturebooks, in that readers have to make choices about which order to read in. The utterances by different characters also invite theatrical readings when reading out loud—creating voices for the different characters, based on verbal and visual cues.

Image 3 Graphics in new forms and formats: The black color of the spot conveys allegorical meaning—a dark force. Certain words are enlarged for emphasis—’umma ('nation', 'community' or 'home base' in hide-n-seek) and Marwān (the name of the avant-garde character). Words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy: Numbers, integrated into the picture, help illustrate that the children are playing hide-n-seek. Multiple layers of meaning: The black spot is conceptualized by the children as ’umma. Multiple perspectives: The verbal and visual texts describe the majority of the characters as relieved/happy/care-free vs. Marwān who is skeptical/concerned.

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This book is unenumerated.
5.2.2 Radical change in perspectives: youth speaking for themselves and multiple perspectives

Children appear to be the only ones present in ‘The Black Spot’. There isn’t much that identifies them as children, however, except their urgent inclination towards play. As a collective, they speak up, take up space and problem-solve together raucously, conveying an uncensored animation that might be inspirational to young readers. Still, this is not a clear-cut example of the radical change characteristic of youth speaking for themselves; it is not an intimate portrayal that allows readers to easily relate to its protagonist/s. But to the degree that young readers identify with them, the story does give the children an empowered role, in that they are able to deal with the overwhelming problem of the black spot on their own.

Multiple perspectives are more clearly present, through the cacophony of reactions and ideas that the children voice in both the handwritten and machine-typed verbal text. The crowd of teeny-tiny people that appear on the last page to express horror at the disturbance in their world by one of the black spot’s crumbs (enormous, to them), offers an unexpected perspective-shift.

5.2.3 Radical change in boundaries: unresolved ending

Although the ending provides resolution to the children’s problem in one way (the black spot is destroyed), it introduces another potential problem: what to do with the crumbs? This unresolved question becomes grounds for reading the whole (metaphorical) story in a new light.

5.3 Book 3 طيّرٌ يَا طيّارةّ "Fly, Oh, Kite"

EACL winner in year: 2011
Author/Illustrator: Amānī al-ʿAšmāwī/Hanādī Sulīṭ
Publishing House/Country: Dār Nahḍat Maṣr/Egypt
Radical change type/s: 1, 2, 3

5.3.1 Summary

“Fly, Oh, Kite” is told in the first person voice of nine-year-old orphan Zahrā’. The text is quite detailed and extensive, most likely making it too difficult for readers much younger than the age of the main character. The narrative details Zahrāʾ’s struggle to cope with the loss of her parents and her old life, whilst having to start a new one in the home of relatives previously unknown to her, in a foreign city. She handles her situation by attempting to withdraw into a bubble of tears and misery, but mostly fails to do so thanks to the efforts of a kind neighborhood boy named ʿAbd al-Raḥmān to befriend her, and by her Aunt Zaynab to keep her preoccupied with household chores.

A turning point comes for Zahrā’ when ʿAbd al-Raḥmān lays out a plan to “liberate her from her misery”. Together, they craft a kite out of paper and reed, onto which Zahrāʾ is instructed to write “whatever weighs on her” with a broken pencil, so that the invisible words won’t be revealed to anyone. They then carry off the kite and fly it by the sea. Zahrāʾ can sense her
worries getting a little lighter. The “magic kite” indeed helps Zahrā’, along with her discovery that ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, like her, has no parents and still does his best to enjoy life. The story ends with Zahrā’ revealing in retrospect that she used the kite for a period of three years, and now is keeping it to give away to an unhappy child in need of “a guaranteed aid that will rid him of his misery”.

In several instances, as someone in the story strikes up a tune, the narration is interrupted by the lines of famous Arabic songs—most notably fīrī ṣāyāra, ‘Fly, Oh, Kite’, by the legendary Lebanese singer Fayrūz23, which has given the book its title.

5.3.2 Radical change in form and format: multiple layers of meaning, synergy, graphics and interactivity

At first glance, ‘Fly, Oh, Kite’ seems like a straight-forward account by a child in mourning—and perhaps it is. But there are several things about the portrayal of Zahrā’’s friend ʿAbd al-Raḥmān that invite allegorical readings, starting with the scene when she first meets him. This happens immediately upon her arrival to the new city, which is the Egyptian port city of Alexandria. The boy seemingly appears out of nowhere, walking on his hands on the wall of the Corniche, singing lyrics from a famous Arabic song24. ʿAbd al-Raḥman is subsequently portrayed as the epitome of kindness and perceptiveness—the exact kind of friend that Zahrā’ needs. He acts a sort of guide to Zahrā’’s new life, and plays the main supporting role in her journey of inner growth, prompting me to wonder: is this an actual child—or a sprite, angel, or pretend friend that Zahrā’ makes up in order to cope? His name, ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, is a common Arabic name, but its meaning, ‘servant of the merciful one25’, seems significant. Has this boy been sent from the heavens especially to take care of Zahrā’?

In one climactic scene (p. 22), ʿAbd al-Raḥmān, Zahrā’ and her new acquaintance Mahā go to fly the kite for the first time. The girls sit on the beach, befriending each other and singing together, as ʿAbd al-Raḥmān climbs burj al-murāqaba ‘the watchtower’—or lifeguard tower—and then, like the rescuer he is, sits in the lifeguard’s seat whilst compelling the kite to soar, just like Zahrā’ is starting to “soar” in her new life.

I found radical change characteristics mainly in the verbal text of this book—less in the visual text. However, one page-spread (see Image 4) sticks out in its design, providing an example of “graphics in new forms and formats”, an “interactive format” as well as “words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy”, all in one. Here, handwritten sentences in different colors circle and repeat around an image of Zahrā’ as she sits—her head propped in her hands and the broken pencil at the ready—pondering what next to “write” in her invisible script.

23 A common transcription of the name is “Faizaz”.
24 The song is ya markab al-hind ‘Oh, Ship of India’ by Saudi singer Muhammad ’Abdhu.
25 al-raḥmān ‘the merciful/compassionate’ is one of God’s 99 names in Islam.
Image 4. Graphics in new forms and formats: Word design and placement convey Zahrāʾ’s stream-of-consciousness of secret thoughts. Words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy: The (handwritten) verbal text can not be distinguished from illustration and vice-versa. Interactive formats: Readers can decide whether or not, and in which order, to read Zahrāʾ’s “secret” thoughts. They must also interact physically with the book in an unusual way—turning it around—in order to read the spiraling text. Youth who speak for themselves: The first-person narrative of the verbal text—especially the handwritten text which shares the intimacy and directness of a diary entry—is easy to relate to and identify with. Previously unheard voices: The first-person account of a child in mourning is unusual in picturebooks.

The spiraling sentences are the most forthrite of the entire book, revealing in a candid way what the main narrative has only alluded to up until this point. The text reads:

‘I miss my mother and my father… I miss our house in Suez… I don’t know how to play with the children… I don’t know how to be pleasing to Aunt Zaynab and Uncle Salāh… I’m scared of everything at my new school… I’m miserable because I’m an orphan… I don’t know many things because I’m a failure…’

The verbal and visual elements of this illustration work in a synergetic way, i.e. the sum is greater than its parts. The design of the words (written in a child’s neat handwriting) and their placement (in spirals around the image of Zahrāʾ, her pencil at the ready), transmit meaning; along with the main narrative text that tells us about ʿAbd al-Raḥmān’s instructions Zahrāʾ (to “write” her worries with a broken pencil), we can deduce that these are the worries that are “flowing” out of Zahrāʾ, in a stream-of-consciousness type of way.

Two aspects of the verbal/visual illustration (Image 4) make it “interactive” in the radical change sense: that readers can decide whether or not, and in which order, to read Zahrāʾ’s
“secret” thoughts, and that the reader must turn the book around and around to read the spiraling text, interacting physically with the book in an unusual way (Dresang exemplifies this very thing on p. 116 in her 1999 book).

5.3.3 Radical change in perspectives: youth who speak for themselves, previously unheard voices and multiple perspectives
On the subject of changing perspectives in children’s literature, Dresang (1999) writes…

“In the past, children’s literature favored the storyteller’s or the omniscient author’s view. Multiple perspectives were considered too complicated for children to follow, and even first-person narration not altogether ‘appropriate’–children, it was thought, needed the judicious distance and the clearly laid out action-scenes that traditional narration provided and would be bored or confused by first-person accounts. In contemporary fiction, however, more and more characters speak for themselves […]” (p. 259-260)

…and on the specific subject of “youth who speak for themselves”...

“Even when young readers know they are reading fiction, they can identify with characters who express their thoughts in informal and intimate terms.” (p. 153)

Although fictional, I think Zahrā’’s first-person narrative voice qualifies as an example of “youth who speak for themselves”. In particular, the thoughts that she writes with her broken pencil (see Image 4) share the intimate quality of diary entries, since they similarly are not meant to be read by anyone. Comparable to the most cathartic types of unloading that different Internet forums enable for their users, Zahrā’’s “invisible” sentences are “radical” in their directness. They have the potential of mirroring the innermost feelings of many children in the real world, whether they have been through similar trauma as Zahrā’ or not.

Not only does this book feature intimate first-person narration, but the narrator is a grieving child–a seldom heard voice in children’s literature, not least in a picturebook.

‘Fly, Oh, Kite’ also displays “multiple perspectives” in both the verbal and visual text. When it comes to the verbal text, we exclusively hear from Zahrā’, but her perspective changes as the book carries on. The illustrations provide multiple visual angles rather than one stable viewpoint throughout. For instance, an image showing Zahrā’ and her chaperon at the time of their arrival to Alexandria, is “zoomed out” and provides somewhat of a “bird’s eye view”: it displays a cityscape with a jumble of buildings–behind which we glimpse the Corniche and the sea–and two tiny figures (one of them Zahrā’) walking (p. 4). The cinematic angle accentuates how small Zahrā’ must feel in this foreign city. Another unique image captures a kitchen table, laid out with craft materials for the children’s kite project, viewed from above (p. 16-17).

5.3.4 Radical change in boundaries: subjects, characters and communities
In “Fly, Oh, Kite”, we are not told any details about the life that Zahrā’ grieves, prior to the death of her parents–and we never even find out how or why they died. The plot is not about loss, but about grief. Grief as subject-matter in a picturebook is boundary-breaking in itself.
However, the subject treatment is even more radical in a text for children; the portrayal of Zahrā’’s volatile mental state and how it affects her ways of thinking and acting, is complex and nuanced. The following passage (from p. 26) exemplifies this:

في يوم الجمعة التالي، بعد الإفطار قامت لخاتي زيَّنَب: "يا عفني يا زهراء ليُنتظف عرفتك".
فوجئت بشقى فأول: "لماذا أنتم匀ا أنا!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!؟!？
Radical change type/s: 1, 2

5.4.1 Summary

‘Karīm was an eight-year-old boy. Karīm’s family was poor, and their house was old, but Karīm was happy, especially when the evening sheltered him in his bed.’

Thus begins this story, of a boy that loves to stare up at the “creatures” that he sees in the peeling layers of paint in the ceiling of his bedroom. He finds problems to solve—for instance, a cow in one part of the ceiling is searching for grass, which Karīm finds for her in another part of the ceiling. In the morning, he is “rewarded” when his mother gives him a glass of milk to drink. Another time, he receives mulberries for helping a bird—and after he has noticed that the “grass” in the ceiling is drying out, he is delighted to find a leak in the ceiling which lets water drip... In this way, the lines that separate imagination from reality are repeatedly blurred.

The story’s turning-point occurs when Karīm discovers that his ceiling friends are gone. They have been painted over by Karīm’s parents, who are apparently oblivious to the parallel world that is so central to their son. Karīm silently mourns the loss of his friends. Expressing disappointment to his parents does not seem to occur to him—and throwing a fit definitely does not. But by the following page, a solution to Karīm’s problem has appeared—perhaps “magically” or through the interference of a parent who was not so oblivious after all?—in the form of a notebook, in which he starts writing down his stories. “And that was how Karīm started writing”, the book concludes.

Image 5. Interactive formats: The page-spread invites interaction reminiscent of cloud-gazing, as readers make out their own images in the illustration.

5.4.2 Radical change in form and format: interactivity and multiple layers of meaning

The second page spread (p. 4-5) of this book is abstract, consisting of dark “shadows” on a green background. Thanks to the verbal text, which tells us of the shapes that Karīm sees in
the chipping paint of his bedroom ceiling, we can surmise that this is what we are looking at—an illustration of the ceiling through the eyes of Karīm in his bed. The visual abstractions, along with the knowledge that the protagonist sees “creatures” in them, become an invitation to readers/viewers to engage interactively with the book and one another, by trying to make out their own images in the illustration. (In subsequent illustrations, however, it is very clear what each shadow is “supposed to” resemble, which may limit the potential of creative interaction even with the abstract page, in re-readings.)

There is one idea in this book which seems to demand interpretation: the relation of the ceiling creatures to real-world events. Toward the end, the verbal text tells us that they are šaḫṣiyyāt al-ḥayāliyya ‘imaginary creatures’ (p. 34). Still, young readers may ponder whether the milk and the mulberries that Karīm was given just incidentally coincided with his ceiling stories—or if the creatures possessed some kind of magic.

5.4.3 Radical change in perspectives: multiple perspectives and youth who speak for themselves

The visual points-of-view vary in this book between what Karīm sees through his eyes (e.g. Image 5), imaginary scenes (e.g. what Karīm sees in his head)—rendered not through Karīm’s “eyes”, however, but an outsider’s view—and a “traditional” outsider’s view, showing “factual” information. The lines are not clear between these multiple perspectives. For instance, on pages 10-11, the cow from the ceiling world winks at Karīm from the right side of the page-spread, as he waves back while drinking a glass of milk on the left side, his mother hovering behind him.

Verbal and visual text as well as “the drama of the turning page” (Bader, 1976, p. 1) collaborate over the expanse of two page-spreads in this book, to capture the conflicting (in this case) perspectives of child versus adult. The episode begins with Karīm unknowingly rushing to bed:

‘[…] he laid down in his bed as usual, he looked up, and what a surprise! Karīm searched and searched without finding anything, not the cloud, and not the bird, and not the tree and not the cow. And while he was doing that, he heard his father saying:’

The illustration of this page-spread is a close-up of Karīm, surrounded by darkness, clutching his sheets and staring upwards, open-mouthed and wide-eyed. To hear what Karīm’s father says, we must flip the page. Now, the image has zoomed out and Karīm is sitting up in bed, still staring upwards. His father leans in through the doorway, and the room is bright, as if he has switched on the light. The ignorance of adults in relation to the world of children, is epitomized in the father’s satisfaction:

‘Heh… Does the new ceiling paint please you, Karīm?’
Images 6-7. Multiple perspectives: The comedy–and tragedy–of the collision of adult and child perspectives is enacted through words, pictures and “the drama of the turning page”.

‘Creatures in the Ceiling of the Room’ does not contain “youth who speak for themselves” in the way that Dresang conceptualizes it. However, the book appears to highly value the idea of youth speaking for themselves; the act of writing is portrayed, especially through the visual text, as something very empowering. At the end of the book, Karîm is pictured laying in bed, with his arms under his head, smiling and looking completely content, with a pencil and notebook on top of the covers beside him. The verbal text reads:

وفي الصباح، كان إلى جانب كريم قلمًا ودفترًا صغيرًا، وداخله قصة عن شخصياته، التي كانت تستكمل سقف الغرفة.

‘And in the morning, there was a pencil and a small notebook beside Karîm, and inside of it [the notebook] was a story about his imaginary characters that lived in the ceiling of the room.’

Through writing, Karîm can keep his stories and his world safe and preserved; no adult can “paint over” them.

5.5 Book 5: bağlat al- qāḍī ‘The Judge’s Mule’
EACL winner in year: 2015
Author/Illustrator: Šafīq Mahdí/Ṭayyiba ʿAbdallāh
Publishing House/Country: Dār al-Burāq/Iraq
Radical change type/s: 1, 2, 3

5.5.1 Summary

كان لأحد القضاة بغلة يركبها في الذهاب إلى عمله والعودة منه، وكان يربطها في الانتظار الخاص به...
وفي يوم من الأيام... وبعدها كان القاضي يوضعها للصلاة، خرجت البغلة من مربطها كما تخرج المشعرة من الجنيين، ثم نشرت نحو الريء ودخلت فيه حتى غابت عن الظرف.

‘There once was a judge26 who had a mule whom he rode on his way to work and back home again, and he tied it in its special stable…
Then one day…
While the judge was washing himself for the prayer, the mule came out of her stable like when a hair comes out from dough, then she walked toward the water-jug and went inside it until she vanished from sight.’

26 Literally: “There belonged to one of the judges a mule…”
This curious event is the basis of ‘The Judge’s Mule’, which recounts a ḥikāya qadīma min baġdad ‘an old tale from Baghdad’, as stated on the front cover.

With mounting frustration, the judge tries to compel his neighbors to believe his incredible observation. Instead, he is deemed crazy and brought in shackles to a mental hospital. To get out, he takes back his story. Safe at home again, he watches as the ears of his mule come out of the water-jug... The story ends with the “lesson” that the judge has learned: “To not tell people of everything that I see, for what everyone does not know, they dismiss.”

5.5.2 Radical change in form and format: synergy, graphics and multiple layers of meaning

The mule and judge pair make an entrance onto the first page of this book by trotting in from the upper right-hand corner—moving “forward” in the direction of the text and story. The illustration is silly: the mule, wide-eyed with tiny legs, is weighed down by the stout judge whose mustache sticks straight out past his shoulders. In the verbal text, the graphic rendering of the word baġla ‘mule’, which is enlarged compared to the rest of the text and tipped to the side, is a comical parallel to the entrance of the judge and mule. Words and pictures work in a synergetic way here and in several other instances of the book.

The font used in a picturebook can also work in synergy with other elements to create meaning. The font of this book, although it is easily readable, has an “old” feel. It matches other verbal and visual elements indicating that this is an old, Middle Eastern tale—like the text of the second page spread which begins wa-yawm min al-ayām ‘and one day amongst days’, i.e. the Arabic version of “once upon a time” or “then one day”, and the Ottoman-era clothes sported by the judge and other characters.

There are also plenty of examples of radical change synergy through “words that tell the story by their size [...] and position” (Dresang 1999, p. 91) and radical change graphics, through words which “transmit meaning by the way they are designed” (ibid, p. 82). An example of both can be found on the third page spread27 (Image 8), where the verbal text tells us that the judge shouted bi-ʾā lī ʿawtíhi ‘at the top of his voice’ to let the world know the incredible thing that he had just witnessed, i.e. his mule going inside a water-jug. The word al-baġla ‘the mule’ (repeated three times) is enlarged and “in motion” in varying ways. With the third repetition, the word is upside-down! The appearance of the words being shouted underscores both the volume (the enlarged word) and the craziness of what the judge is expressing (the word that is upside-down). Word-design can affect the way the story is read and understood, since the size and position of the words cue the reader to read with shifting emphasis, volume and “wackiness”. In this case, the design of the verbal text illustrates the shouting more clearly than the visual text.

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27 This book is not enumerated.
‘The Judge’s Mule’ contains multiple layers of meaning. The verbal text is ambiguous and the answers provided by the visual text are unsatisfactory. The water-jug, in red clay with a spout, is pictured on several occasions as huge in relation to the judge and the mule. If we are to trust the pictures, there is no size problem preventing the mule from fitting in the jug. Perhaps, then, the judge’s strong reaction has more to do with how the mule is able to “slink around” in an atypical manner for a hoofed animal. The verbal text does not tell us why (in the world of the book) a mule going inside a water-jug is an extraordinary incident, only that it is. Are we even to trust the judge’s account of what he has seen? He seems to jump around across the pages, giving the impression of an unruly character who may or may not be a little wacko. What “actually” happens in the story, thus, is up for debate: did the mule enter the water-jug at all? And if so, how? It is also interesting, that it is a judge that is judged in the book. He is considered lacking in judgment. Has he been judged unfairly? (And if so, will the unfair judgment of the judge change the way he judges other people?) From his own perspective, he is judged for telling the truth—but when he lies, he is forgiven and let go. Many possible parallels may be drawn to real-life…

5.5.3 Radical change in perspectives: multiple perspectives
We don’t hear directly from different characters in ‘The Judge’s Mule’. The tale is told in the third person and the visual viewpoint is an outsider’s perspective, the most common for a picturebook. Yet the whole drama revolves around different (clashing) perspectives. The
judge sees himself as someone simply recounting what he has observed, whereas “society” views him as crazy. As a reader, you have to decide what to believe, or settle on the unsolvability of the story.

5.5.4 Radical change in boundaries: unresolved ending
The judge does come home at the end of the story. Getting out of the mad house was “simple” in one way—he just had to take back what he had said and he was let go. On the other hand, he had to betray his own conviction. That is not the happy ending that we are used to in picturebooks. What’s more, is that the main question remains unresolved. The central drama of the story is that the judge isn’t believed. We never get the answer to whether or not he was right. Although the judge experiences seeing the mule come out of the jug at the end—nobody else does, i.e. the protagonist is not rectified. He just learns (and leaves us with) a sobering lesson about humanity—which, if the judge was a little wacko, maybe we shouldn’t take so seriously…

6. Discussion
This section discusses the results and implications of my analysis, and uses them to answer the research questions. I detail some of the patterns found within the dataset as a whole, with a focus on which radical change types and characteristics that seem to dominate and my thoughts on why.

Radical change was identified in all five books under study. All books in the sample, to some extent, fulfilled the criteria of Type One: Changing forms and formats and Type Two: Changing Perspectives. For a comparative overview of the types and characteristics found in each book, see Appendix 4.

6.1 Visual sophistication
When it came to Type One, “graphics in new forms and formats”, “words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy”, and “interactive formats” were the digital characteristics that dominated. Examples of these were found in four out of five books. Overall, most of the radical change found in the dataset involved the visual text in some way. The notion that “the visual” is incredibly pervasive and advanced in our digital age (see 2.1.) is, in other words, reflected by almost all of the books. Of course, the fact that we are speaking about picturebooks is crucial to this result of my study. The picturebook tradition has always leaned on an interplay between words and pictures. However, in four out of the five books under study, the relationship is developed enough to refer to it as synergy, as it is defined in radical change theory (for a definition, see Appendix 1).

That they are award-winning books may be of significance to this finding, as well. Radical changes in forms and formats often make for visually striking books, which might appeal to book award juries as much as they appeal to children. (After all, the digital age youth that Dresang referred to in 1999 are beyond middle age at this point—some of the jurors may well come out of that generation.) Digital techniques in layout and publishing have also made
effects that pertain to Type One more common, such as varying the size of certain words in typed text as a way of expressing changing emphasis or volume—as was done in ‘The Black Spot’ and ‘The Judge’s Mule’.

6.2 Different kinds of interactivity
As indicated above, some form of interactive elements were found in four out of five books. There was a large variation when it came to the types of interactivity that the books provide, and to which extent. In ‘I Love…’, the symbols bar acts as a “key” to the main linear text, but it also provides the means for interactive play—skipping back and forth and retelling the narrative. Exclamations, interjections and comments by the line-drawing characters in ‘The Black Spot’, are elements that readers can decide whether and when to “point and click” on. ‘Fly, Oh, Kite’ contains one interactive page spread, where the main protagonist’s thoughts spiral around her, prompting the reader to flip the book around and around. ‘Creatures in the Ceiling of the Room’ offers a chance at interactive play reminiscent of cloud-gazing (but because subsequent illustrations are more “finished” in their representations, that original playfulness may get stifled).

6.3 Right and wrong—didactic or not?
The only characteristic found in every single book was “multiple perspectives, verbal and visual”. Multiple perspectives in ‘I Love…’, ‘The Black Spot’ and ‘The Judge’s Mule’ had to do with differing points-of-view expressed in the verbal text, whereas in the other two books it mostly had to do with viewpoints in the illustrations. In ‘I Love…’, ‘The Black Spot’ and ‘The Judge’s Mule’, not only are differing perspectives expressed, but the whole narrative centers around them. Neither one of these books advocate for one sole “correct” perspective.

When it comes to ‘The Black Spot’, there is one perspective or idea that turns out to be “right”—the one advocated by the avant-garde character Marwān, that the solution to getting rid of the black spot is the slow and steady chipping away at it. On the other hand, we never find out what the black spot actually is—all the creative ideas that the children voice retain their plausibility. ‘I Love…’ and ‘The Judge’s Mule’ have no clear right or wrong perspective. In the former, however, the viewpoint of the child who loves all of the colors (i.e. sees and appreciates all of creation, unlike the birds and star) can be seen to represent the ideal “human” perspective.

Unresolved endings were found in the books with a clear allegorical form, i.e. the ones that also contained clear examples of “multiple layers of meaning”: ‘The Black Spot’ and ‘The Judge’s Mule’. ‘Fly, Oh, Kite’ and ‘Creatures in the Ceiling of the Room’ have conventionally happy endings, and both hint at bright futures in which their protagonists go on to do good in the world: help other miserable children on the one hand, and write (stories for children, perhaps?) on the other. These endings, as opposed to the unresolved endings, contribute to the impression of a somewhat didactic agenda. ‘The Black Spot’, however, is

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28 Dresang conceptualized interactive formats as formats requiring readers to choose “whether to ‘point and click’ here or there with their eyes and their minds” (Dresang 1999, p. 114). This is part of the operational definition of “interactive formats” in the coding frame (Appendix 1).
less unresolved than ‘The Judge’s Mule’, and it contains a clear message about working together to achieve collective goals. ‘The Judge’s Mule’ does leave us with a message—not to be too honest with other people. Perhaps I am reading it wrong, when I don’t see this as “resolution”? Whatever the case, the contemporary narratives (including ‘I Love…’) all seem to contain a positive, hopeful view of humanity, whereas ‘The Judge’s Mule’ (cited as “an old tale”) is dismal.

6.4 No radical change settings?

Using the definition that “settings previously overlooked” go beyond generic settings like home, school, forests and other natural environments (see Appendix 1), I did not identify any clear examples in the dataset. However, a different interpretation is possible. One might say, for instance, that some of the settings in ‘Fly, Oh, Kite’ are unusual—the story takes place at home, but also on the street/Corniche and the beach. The specificity of having the story transpire in a recognizable, real-life place (here, the Egyptian city of Alexandria) might be unusual in children’s literature (although more intertextual knowledge would be needed in order to make that assertion). I interpreted the setting in ‘Fly, Oh, Kite’ as a portrayal of “home”, albeit in a broader sense than in certain other books (like ‘Creatures in the Ceiling of the Room’ which is entirely set within the walls of a house/apartment), but home nonetheless.

Whereas the home settings of the two books mentioned above play central roles to the narrative, the settings in the three other books are vague. In ‘I Love…’, the setting is an unspecified rendering of “the world”: it has night and day, some houses with people, different birds and colors. The world of ‘The Black Spot’ contains palm trees and Mediterranean-style houses, *fez* or *ṭarbūš* hats worn by some of the children, cone-shaped hats worn by others, electric lamps and television… The impression is of an imaginative world, perhaps connected to the Middle East, but void of an exact time and place. A melange of visual cues in ‘The Judge’s Mule’ make the time and place appear ancient and Arab/Ottoman. However, the buildings, walls, valves and palm trees pictured play the role of decor rather than setting; there is no recognizable rendition of the judge’s house, the mule’s stable or the mental hospital (which are all mentioned in the verbal text). This is actually true of the people and animals portrayed, as well; everyone but the judge and mule have only a vague narrative role to play, as unspecified neighbors or townspeople. The male characters wear robes, turbans, checkered shawls (*küfiyyāt*) and full beards, and the women don printed dresses, veils, Bedouin-style jewelry and facial tattoos, in a concoction that is not necessarily historically correct. This creates the sense of an ancient, yet made-up, time and place.

In both ‘The Black Spot’ and ‘The Judge’s Mule’, thus, settings have an atmospheric function. Similar to illustrations of European fairy tales, which might use Medieval elements without regard for their correctness, these books use certain historical Arab/Ottoman markers to create a setting that is both familiar and unfamiliar, far away and close—a type of fairy tale land. Perhaps this could be called “radical”? In a global context, at least, it may be considered unusual to have markers of setting that are recognizably *not* European/Western, and that still just “are” (as a part of the unspoken, the background), with no narrative role. This may be especially true for picturebooks, since they are a European phenomenon from the start and
European/Western production and aesthetics thus have dominated—with many Western works translated into other languages and distributed across the world, not least the Arab world. Part of the reason for the Etisalat Award, in my understanding, is to counteract that—by encouraging original-Arabic works in which language, setting, characters, etc. are created in a way that is more relevant or recognizable to Arab children. In this way, the whole project of the Etisalat Award for Children’s Literature, and all of their award-winning books, are “radical”. Books like this, to the extent that they have existed, have long been “unheard” and “overlooked”—at least in a global context. The Etisalat Award shines the light on them and their Arabic authors, illustrators and publishing companies, attempting to create a new “yardstick” for Arabic works, so that they do not have to always exist in relation to Western works. In the context of this study, however, I could not classify all of the books as “previously unheard voices” and “settings previously overlooked” on the basis that they contain “Arabic” voices and settings. Had the sample consisted of Swedish books including some works translated from Arabic, my judgment would probably have been different. In such a context, the city of Alexandria, for instance, is decidedly an “overlooked” setting.

6.5 “Radical” and “change”—a matter of context/intertext

Many of the radical change characteristics pertaining to Type Two: Changing perspectives and Type Three: Changing boundaries are similarly dependent on context. Like “settings previously overlooked”, the digital characteristics of “previously unheard voices”, “subjects previously forbidden”, “characters portrayed in new, complex ways” and “new types of communities” require broad intertextual knowledge (i.e. knowledge of other texts in the same category or context) in order to assess. My interpretations of radical change in this study emanate from my understanding of what “radical” and “change” mean, not only to the theory of radical change, but in the context of contemporary Arabic picturebooks. Others may have argued differently. Perhaps a judge being sent to a mental hospital, for instance, could be seen as controversial in a picturebook? However, the book clearly states that it is an “old tale”. The subject then, apparently, has not been “previously forbidden”... Or has it? Has it survived (in an oral tradition, through centuries perhaps?), not in spite, but because of its potentially controversial content? Had the book depicted a modern-day judge in the visual text, it might have been just as controversial in our day. In the context of its ancient/fairytale-like “packaging”, it retains the possibility of subversive allegorical interpretations, without being controversial at face value. The same goes for ‘The Black Spot’.

‘Fly, Oh, Kite’ is the only book which has “previously unheard voices”, a clear example of “youth who speak for themselves” and “new types of communities”, as well as “subjects previously forbidden” and “characters portrayed in new, complex ways”. It also has the most radical change characteristics, as a whole. This book is aimed at an older audience—it is longer, and the verbal text is more extensive and complex—which may be part of the reason that it contains so many facets of radical change. Another reason may be that it tackles the subject of mental health, which—although “previously forbidden”—is given more attention these days than, I believe, ever before, on a world-wide scale. The wider availability of information and resources in our digital age probably has a lot to do with this. ‘Fly, Oh, Kite’ thus exemplifies how radical change in the global media landscape—the openness and access
that the internet has allowed for— is reflected in children’s literature. It may be noted, however, that the mental health struggles in ‘Fly, Oh, Kite’ (those of a grieving, depressed child) befall the main character out of extrinsic circumstance (the death of her parents), which might be seen as much less “forbidden” than struggles coming from “the inside”. Still, children that are struggling, for whatever reason, may find solace in stories like ‘Fly, Oh, Kite’—stories of less-than-perfect children trying to regain their footing in life.

6.6 How can an old tale represent radical change?
In the case of ‘The Judge’s Mule’, it was expected that this old tale in a new rendition should contain plenty of digital age characteristics in form and format, since everything pertaining to illustrations and design is new. However, it might seem strange that there should be any digital age characteristics embedded in the narrative itself... How can an old tale represent radical change? Here, it is important to remember that the characteristics are not exclusive to our age— they have simply become a lot more common, according to radical change theory (see 2.1.). The multiple perspectives, layers of meaning and unresolved ending of ‘The Judge’s Mule’ are what makes it interesting and worth thinking about, and likely is what has made the story last through the ages. That it carries these characteristics and yet was put into the form of a picturebook for children, and that the book went on to win a prestigious regional award— these circumstances can be read as proof of radical change within the realm of Arabic children’s literature at large.

7. Conclusions
The Etisalat Award-winning picturebooks of this study can all be considered “radical change books”. All of the books, to some extent, fulfill the criteria of Type One: Changing forms and formats and Type Two: Changing perspectives.

Radical change mostly pertains to visual aspects and word-picture relations in the books of the sample, but the digital age characteristic “multiple perspectives” (verbal and/or visual) was the only characteristic found in all books. In three out of five books, not only are multiple perspectives present, but the narrative centers around them. Neither one of these books clearly advocates for one “correct” perspective. Out of the three, two books are clearly allegorical in their form, containing “multiple layers of meaning”. They carry possibilities for subversive interpretations but without being controversial at face value.

Changing perspectives and changing boundaries were principally found in one out of the two books aimed at an older child audience. The same book is the only one that contains a “subject previously forbidden”, in the form of mental health (through its depiction of a grieving, depressed child). Mental health is an area that seems currently to be given more attention than ever before, world-wide. Struggles pertaining to grief might be less ”forbidden” than other mental health issues, however.

Two out of five books contain “unresolved endings”, which seems connected to a less didactic agenda. The four contemporary narratives all reflect a positive, hopeful view of
humanity, whereas the book that is cited as “an old tale” has a dismal message (at least, at face value). There are no “settings previously overlooked” in the radical change sense. In two out of the five books, the setting is some variant of “home”. In these books, the setting is more central, whereas the settings in the other three books are vague/generic. Two out of three books with vague settings however contain visual references to Ottoman/Arabic heritage, which function to create a type of fairy tale land—a “radical” reinvention, perhaps, of the dominant fairy tale lands based on (a)historical European references.

The large amount of radical change characteristics found in the sample of award-winning picturebooks in this study, speaks to the notion that contemporary children’s books considered by book award juries to be “good books” are often radical change books. This may be because they “stick out from the crowd” in their design, style and/or content and are viewed as innovative and/or important.

Radical change in children’s literature is linked to a philosophy of child-centered learning and a view of children as capable. Since the books of the present study are examples of radical change books, they can be seen as vehicles of these ideological viewpoints. In their capacities as award-winning books, whose influence and reach goes beyond the vast majority of other published works, they have the potential of advancing these views in the world of Arabic children’s literature and thus in the Arab world at large.

In addition, radical change books are thought to be especially attractive to digital age children. They can compete with digital technology by providing some of the aspects of that technology which make it so attractive in the first place. This is of special interest in the context of Arabic children’s literature: if digital age principles are incorporated (through radical change characteristics), they can help compensate for the hurdles to accessibility that the use of fuṣḥā, i.e. literary Arabic, creates. This may be done through content that has the potential of creating more interest (through unusual, eye-catching or challenging types of form and format, perspectives and boundaries), and by creating an elevated understanding (through graphic elements and synergetic storytelling, where pictures and words drive the narrative forward together). We know that the use of Standard Arabic is only one of many hurdles that stand between Arabic children’s literature and its potential audiences. However, the existence, in any capacity, of original Arabic-language books that are relevant and interesting to children, must be viewed as positive. We can just hope that they will actually reach all Arabic-speaking children in the future.
8. Reference list

8.1 Primary sources


8.2 Secondary sources

8.2.1 Books, chapters and articles


### 8.2.2 Web-based sources

Abdul Hameed Shoman Foundation (no date). *The Abdul Hameed Shoman Children's Literature Award: About the award.*
https://shoman.org/en/Awards-and-competition/Childrens-Literature-Award#Literature_Award [2023-08-11]


https://www.etisalataward.ae/process-criteria [2023-08-11]

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https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z_WYk6MpEDE [2023-08-11]


https://www.al-fanarmedia.org/2016/07/why-dont-arabs-read/?_gl=1*1vw6luy*_ga*MTM3NDIxNDAYMi4xNjIxNTY [2023-08-11]


Sheikh Zayed Book Award (2023). *Children's Literature Category.*
8.3 Dictionaries & guides


Wardini, E. (2020) Transcription Rules for Arabic Stockholm University
9. Appendices

9.1 Appendix 1: Coding frame

Coding frame using radical change types and characteristics, based on *Radical Change - Books for Youth in a Digital Age* (Dresang 1999) (all affected by the digital-age principles of connectivity, interactivity and access)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
<th>Subcodes</th>
<th>Operational Definitions</th>
<th>Flags</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Type One: Changing Forms and Formats</td>
<td>1.1 Graphics in new forms and formats</td>
<td>Verbal/visual that is “visually unusual or outstanding” in one or more of the following ways: -Color is generously used to convey meaning -Pictures, maps, or graphs play a predominant part in a book that might be expected to have mostly words -Words represent sounds or transmit meaning by the way they are designed or placed on the page -A printed message is superimposed on a picture, appearing simultaneously as both words and picture (p. 82)</td>
<td>11/GFF</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.2 Words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy</td>
<td>Verbal/visual text that contains one or more of the following: -Words that tell the story by their size, color, and position -Words that are superimposed or incorporated into the illustrations -Colors that are used symbolically in verbal text -Text that cannot be distinguished from illustration and vice-versa (p. 89-91)</td>
<td>12/WPS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.3 Nonlinear organization and format</td>
<td>Verbal/visual text that in its organization of story goes beyond a step-by-step, “one way only” progression (p. 105-106, 229)</td>
<td>13/NNL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.4 Nonsequential organization and format</td>
<td>Verbal/visual text that in its organization goes beyond the concept that “what comes next” is clearly and directly related to what came before and what will come after (p. 105-106, 229)</td>
<td>14/NNS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.5 Multiple layers of meaning</td>
<td>Narrative form that invites multiple alternative interpretations, i.e. the narrative is ambiguous, complex or layered. Examples: text that contains time switches, perspective shifts or stories within stories which “are skillfully woven together with frequent and seamless shifting back and forth” (p. 116-117)</td>
<td>15/MLM</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1.6 Interactive formats</td>
<td>Verbal/visual text that draws the reader into a storytelling partnership with the author (p. 239) or requires choice by the reader “whether to ‘point and click’ here or there with their eyes and their minds” (p. 114). Examples: -Dual narratives or parallel stories -The use of “speech bubbles” which may act like</td>
<td>16/INF</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
footnotes or create a story around the story - Formating demands the reader to interact physically with the book in unexpected ways, such as having to turn the book upside-down (p. 114-116)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type Two: Changing Perspectives</th>
<th>Multiple perspectives, visual and verbal</th>
<th>Text that portrays one or more of the following: - Multiple voices or points-of-view in verbal text - Multiple perspectives in verbal text voiced by one character who speaks from a range of life stances (e.g. in different stages of their life or through a multiplicity of views of self, changing internal perspectives or conflicting identities) - Multiple visual angles rather than one stable viewpoint throughout (e.g. illustrations may portray perspectives from the eyes of different characters or through varying “camera angles”) (p. 126, 135-139)</th>
<th>21/MUP</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

| Previous unheard voices | Verbal/visual text that portrays one or more perspectives that go beyond the experiences of majority society or “mainstream, middle-class, every-one-alike children” (p. 73), e.g. perspectives of marginalized or minority groups or the realistically portrayed perspective of an animal (p. 130-135, 181) | 22/PUV |

| Youth who speak for themselves | Verbal/visual text that contains one or more of the following: - Voices or insights of non-fictional youth which are recorded, rather than invented or interpreted, by adults - Voices of fictional or non-fictional youth expressing their thoughts in informal and intimate terms (e.g. through journals, diaries, memoirs or letters) - Voices of fictional or non-fictional youth expressing themselves through interviews, oral history, autobiographies or stories containing autobiographical elements - Fictional or non-fictional youth taking photos or video recordings as a means of speaking for themselves - Fictional or non-fictional youth using a language or dialect other than that of majority society, i.e. speaking “for themselves” in their mother tongue (p. 147, 153-162) | 23/YST |

| Subjects previously forbidden | Verbal/visual text that breaks with conventions in treating a subject or an aspect of a subject (e.g. through treating a controversial subject or through high complexity of subject treatment even for very young children) (p. 176, 180) | 31/SPF |

| Settings previously overlooked | Verbal/visual text that breaks conventions in its portrayal of setting, e.g. goes beyond “generic” | 32/SPO |
| 3.3 Characters portrayed in new, complex ways | Verbal/visual text that portrays characters through a focus on the growth of inner resilience rather than the attainment of outer results, and on the emotional repercussions of harsh circumstances rather than just the circumstances themselves. (p. 202, 206, 217) | 33/CNC |
| 3.4 New types of communities | Verbal/visual text that breaks societal conventions in the portrayal of friendship, community and family groups (p. 214-216) | 34/NTC |
| 3.5 Unresolved endings | Verbal/visual text that goes beyond children’s literary conventions by providing an ending that is lacking in closure and thus open to interpretation, forcing the reader “to reconsider the meaning of the entire story” (p. 214, 232, 255) | 35/UNE |
### 9.2 Appendix 2: Comparative table of radical change types and characteristics in dataset

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>↓ Types / Characteristics:</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type One: Changing forms and formats</td>
<td><strong>Graphics in new forms and formats</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Words and pictures reaching new levels of synergy</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Nonlinear organization and format</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Nonsequential organization and format</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Multiple layers of meaning</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>somewhat</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Interactive formats</strong></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>somewhat</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type Two: Changing perspectives</td>
<td><strong>Multiple perspectives, visual and verbal</strong></td>
<td>somewhat</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Previously unheard voices</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Youth who speak for themselves</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>somewhat</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type Three: Changing boundaries</td>
<td><strong>Subjects previously forbidden</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Settings previously overlooked</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Characters portrayed in new, complex ways</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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*51*
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>New types of communities</th>
<th>somewhat</th>
<th>✓</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Unresolved endings</td>
<td>✓</td>
<td></td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
9.3 Appendix 3: Example of coding
9.4 Appendix 4: Example of reading summary form

Reading Summary Form 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>In-text location (page no.)</th>
<th>Meaning Units</th>
<th>Code/Subcode</th>
<th>Associated context</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 1, 2, etc.</td>
<td>Verbal text, p. 1: “I climbed the stairs of the bus and I couldn’t stop crying. I had cried all week… I hadn’t cried all the time. However, I cried whenever I remembered what had happened to me.” Verbal text, p. 2: “When my father passed away two years ago, I moved with my mother to a residency in a small apartment adjacent to the apartment of my maternal aunt in Abbasiya. Then my mother also passed away, and there was no place for me to belong to and no family to live with; for this I was crying whenever I recalled my situation.”</td>
<td>31/SPF 22/PUV</td>
<td>31/SPF: The book portrays a child’s grief both over her parents deaths and over being uprooted and feeling without place in the world. These are heavy subjects in the context of a picture book (introducing children to the nightmarish idea that parents can die), but also, the subject treatment (Zahra’s volatile mental state and how it affects her way of thinking and acting) is complex. 22/PUV: The “voice” of a grieving child is not common in children’s literature, especially told in 1st person. (Note: The plot is not about losing one’s parent, but about creating a new life, dealing with the grief, and gradually moving on.)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 4</td>
<td>Visual text: Image of cityscape with Zahra and her uncle walking down the road.</td>
<td>21/MUP</td>
<td>Unusual visual angle – a bird’s eye view emphasizing Zahra’s “smallness” in the big, new city</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>p. 4-5</td>
<td>“And after a little while, we saw a boy nearby, the same height as me, walking on top of the railing on his hands, with his two legs lifted in the air, singing as he went: And the sea is my”</td>
<td>15/MLM</td>
<td>Zahra’s new friends (especially Abdelrahman) are portrayed as extraordinarily perceptive and friendly - the exact kind of friends that Zahra needs. Considering this beginning scene, where</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| p. 6-7 | **Visual text:**
This page spread contains four illustrations - one per corner, flanking the text - portraying Zahra completing the chores of making her bed (looking miserable), feeding the chickens (they solicit from her a weak smile), accompanying Aunt Zeinab as she irons (Zahra stands cross-armed, looking in the other direction, i.e. cutting herself off), and setting the table (here, she seems possibly to be looking at or listening to Aunt Zeinab, but her eyes are empty). In every picture, Zahra’s mouth is shut. Aunt Zeinab is portrayed as busy with the chores and her mouth is open - either talking to Zahra or singing. Her body language is calm - it mirrors the verbal text that mentions her “simple way”.

**Verbal text:** “I spent the first week trying to isolate [myself] in my room, but my aunt Zeinab’s idea/will was stronger than my efforts, [so] she called me in the morning to eat breakfast with them, so I apologized for any case (inconvenience?), she simply said: ‘No problem… Sit with us even if you don’t eat.’ Then my uncle Salah went out, so my aunt

| 34/NTC | **Interpretation:** One might suspect that, rather than being oblivious to Zahra’s antisocial behavior, Aunt Zeinab is willfully ignoring it. She includes Zahra and asks things of her (demonstrating that she is needed) and thereby “pushes” her, but she does so gradually—and not without offering help. She never pushes Zahra beyond her limits, judges her or admonishes her.

The adults are portrayed as caring, forgiving and understanding: They are there to help, and they do (in practical ways—for help with processing her emotions, Zahra leans on her peers). Aunt Zeinab and Uncle Salah help Zahra in creating a routine and a “new life”. |
Zeinab called me to help her in the tidying of the house, and feed the chickens, and the preparation of the food… And one day she asked of me to iron my clothes… so I said to her: ‘I don’t know how’. So she replied in her simple way: ‘No problem… Sit down opposite me and I [will] iron; you learn.’’”

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>p. 8</th>
<th>Verbal text: “I went out of the house and I was devastated with anxiety, [but] I saw Abdelrahman playing football with other children… I was glad to see him; for he was the only one I knew in this place, and I waved to him and I hurried along…”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 10</td>
<td>“I don’t know what bothered me in the words of Uncle Salah… I burst out crying, then I rose to my feet (literally: to standing) and I took off to the roof-top without asking permission… and I stood leaning on the railing, and I was left thinking about the reason for my tears… But I didn’t come across a sensible reason, and I brushed away my tears and I</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There is definitely “a focus on the growth of inner resilience rather than the attainment of outer results”. The author could have focused on the death of Zahra’s parents and the fact that she has to move–this could have been central to the plot. Instead, it is simply background information. The whole plot is about how Zahra deals with the emotional repercussions of those difficult life events, with the help of new friends and family–from no hope/motivation to a place of renewed hope and joy.

The potpourri of feelings that Zahra is dealing with, and her confusion about what is “going on” with her (trauma?) and the weight of the world on a young child’s shoulders, i.e. thinking “what will become of me?”, is not common in children’s literature… The story is written in 1st person, from the child’s point of view.
<table>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>p. 15-16</td>
<td>Zahra's name handwritten “in the air” around her</td>
<td>11/GFF: The words represent the sound of Zahra’s friends shouting her name, i.e. “words represent sounds (…) by the way they are (…) placed on the page. 12/WPS: Words are incorporated into the illustration.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| Page | Visual text: Handwritten text in different colors spiraling around an image of the main protagonist (Zahra) as she sits, pondering, with a broken pencil in her right hand and a kite on the table in front of her. Verbal text: “I miss my mother and my father. I miss our house in Suez. I don’t know how to play with the children. I don’t know how to be nice/pleasing to Aunt Zeinab and Uncle Salah. I’m scared of everything at my new school … I’m miserable because I’m an orphan… I don’t know many things because I’m a failure…” | 12/WPS: Words are incorporated into the illustration, representing Zahras thoughts/what she writes with the broken pencil. 16/INF: Readers can decide whether or not to read Zahra’s “secret” thoughts that she writes with her broken pencil. Also, the design of the page is interactive in itself: the reader must turn the book around and around to read the text (like Dresang writes about on p. 116) 23/YST: Just like with a diary, the thoughts that Zahra records onto the kite with her broken pencil will never be read by anyone. They are therefore unflinchingly candid and direct. |
| p. 26 | “The next Friday, after breakfast Aunt Zeinab said to me: “Come on Zahra, let’s clean your room.” And I heard myself say: “Why should I clean it?!?” Then I was confused and I wished to correct myself | 22/PUV: The confusion of Zahra’s mixed emotions makes her prone to social-ineptness, the descriptions of which are not common in children’s literature - especially coming from the awkward child’s own |
(literally: rectify my position), so I said “I don’t know how to clean rooms”.

| p. 29, 30 | “So I thought of taking refuge in the only thing which I had perfected…to cry… But I was ashamed of myself… Here Abdelrahman didn’t feel miserable, even though he was orphaned of father and mother, like me… As a matter of fact, his situation was more miserable than mine, for he had never seen his father and his mother, and never knew them originally… and yet, he was helping me to be rid of my misery. ”

“I thought my Aunt Zeinab and my Uncle Salah had noticed a big change in my personality since that day… for I was ashamed of myself whenever I saw or thought of Abdelrahman…” | 21/MUP | “Multiple perspectives voiced by one character who speaks from a range of life stances” (Dresang 1999, p. 126) Zahra’s perspective on her own misery changes when she finds out that Abdelrahman is even worse off than her, but doesn’t bury himself in sorrow but attempts to make the best of life - and generously shares his resources (his creativity, his friends, his home) with someone in need, like her. The perspective shift also consists of becoming grateful of what she had, instead of just mourning what she had lost, i.e. she had had a relationship with her parents and memories of them, and her new home, her aunt and uncle and her new friends seem understanding, caring and positive.

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30 “Authors and illustrators of these radically changed books [...] are portraying many different kinds of characters with individualized reactions to chaos, rather than attempting to paint a picture of an idealized childhood world. They treat the young reader as competent and able to deal with complexities. [...] Authors weave, together with the more dismal pictures, those of realistic hope, of inner resilience that allows survival. In the process, new depths and dimensions of community are often discovered.”

“The enlightened attitude of some adults toward the capabilities of the present digital generation calls for books which challenge the intellects of young readers, broaden their horizons, and more closely resemble the world they encounter day to day.”

“The bottom line is that the digital world brings the “real world” into young peoples’ lives.” (Dresang 1999, p. 216-217)