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■ Ronia Revisited

Enhancing children's crossover narratives
and themes through illustration

A MASTERS THESIS IN VISUAL COMMUNICATION DESIGN

BY CLAUDIA BERGSDORF



Abstract

In this project I argue that recurrent universal themes such as death, time and identity are integral to the continuum of crossover children's fiction*. Through a close reading of my favourite crossover book *Ronia the Robber's Daughter* (1982), and by correlating key moments from my personal history with identified themes I will show how this genre is able to communicate the universal and the personal. My thesis examines how illustration can enhance the universal and the personal and thereby make the concept of the continuum explicit.

Many books intended for children appeal to both adults and children alike. This genre is described as crossover fiction. As an illustrator I am interested in how illustration can enhance this literature and the themes contained in the narrative text. My research focuses on commonly appearing themes (for example death, nature and time) identified by scholar Maija-Liisa Harju (2009). By conducting a comparative analysis of crossover literature case studies and a formal aesthetic analysis of their illustrative content I

investigate how these themes can be enhanced through illustration. I analyse how cultural context such as exemplified by the illustrative work of Antony Browne can help shape universal themes, thereby adding a personal dimension to the narrative text. In this investigation I identify how formal elements (colour, line, motifs and composition) and visual metaphor can be implemented as a design strategy in visually communicating the resonance between my own life story and the universal themes specific to Astrid Lindgren's *Ronia the Robber's Daughter* (1982).

* *Crossover fiction*: Fiction enjoyed by a readership of many ages. Essential components of a crossover book are: diverse address, complexity in form and/or theme, evidence of diverse readership (Beckett, *Crossover Fiction: Global and Historical Perspectives*, 2009)

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