

Jury report Miep Diekmann Thesis Award 2022

It is my honor to present to you the jury report of the Miep Diekmann Award for the best master's thesis on children's literature studies in the Netherlands and Flanders. As this is the fifth time that this award is offered, we are slowly building up to becoming quite the tradition.

However, as you might have noticed from the switch in language, there is something a bit special about this edition – it is considerably more internationally minded than previous editions. The IBBY historians will have to check the accuracy of this observation, but the jury members noted a significant increase in English-language research in this year's contributions. This is obviously the result of the introduction of an international track on children's literature and media at Tilburg University that has delivered its first graduates last year, but we hope that other international students will also start finding their way to children's books and children's literature studies.

This first observation got the jury thinking about the importance of international and intercultural communication in the field of children's literature studies. We feel that the patron saint of this particular award, Miep Diekmann herself, would subscribe to this notion. Diekmann spent parts of her childhood in the Dutch Antilles and would later remark on the impact this has had on her writing. She would write several books that are set in the Caribbean, promoted new voices from the Antilles at her Dutch publisher Leopold, and contributed to the close collaboration between Leopold and the Aruba-based publishing house of Charuba.

Another thing that stood out in this year's contributions to the award was the clear motivation of the emerging scholars to connect academic concepts with urgent societal topics. We have read research on important topics including veganism, gender representation, modern conceptions of fatherhood, video games, multilingualism, and even the Covid pandemic. Again, we think Miep Diekmann would have approved of this insistence to connect academic and societal goals. Diekmann frequently insisted on the need of children's literature to show the many different perspectives and experiences of childhood and the world. She explained:

“I do not want to bring reconciliatory literature, but clarifying literature. I think of engagement, showing as many sides of a thing as possible, to open something up and say to your readers: now *you* think about it. And they will start thinking about it, they even get mad. That is when I know I have achieved what I wanted, because now they are processing it.”

The thesis that the jury has chosen as the winner of this year's award combines both of these things: it takes an international and transcultural perspective on a topic that has clear academic and societal impact. We are very pleased to grant the Miep Diekmann Thesis Award 2022 to **Sonali Kulkarni** for her thesis titled: ***Bilingual Synergies: A Semiotically-framed Inquiry into the Iconotextual Complexities of Bilingual Picturebooks***. Congratulations, Sonali!

In this thesis, Sonali explores the integration between words and images in bilingual picturebooks. The research is placed against the background of an ever-increasingly globalized world in which languages and cultures continuously mix. For many children around the world, multilingualism has become the norm. In this context, we find a growing interest in children's literature that represents this multilingual reality. These books are celebrated for their great pedagogical potential, but there is as of yet little research to understand how they actually work. How do we read a book that presents the story in two languages at the same time? And how is this complicated by the introduction of images? In this thesis, Sonali proposes a theoretical model through which we can start to understand these kinds of multilingual experiences in picturebooks.

The jury is impressed by the bravery of picking such a complex and underexplored phenomenon and even more impressed by the theoretical depth and accuracy with which Sonali manages to theorize a way of approaching this problem. Although this thesis shows academic rigor, it is by no means a dull read. Sonali writes with an ease that makes the text accessible to different kinds of readers. She mixes theoretical observations with personal anecdotes, such as the touching reflections on her discovery of the dictionary: the only book in her childhood that reflected parts of her bilingual upbringing. What is more, because the research is so clearly embedded in the contemporary context, it will also appeal to those of us who are working on reading promotion in which the rise of multilingualism has raised specific problems and opportunities.

The jury is very pleased and proud to welcome a laureate who contributes to both the academic and the societal field of children's literature. We congratulate Sonali Kulkarni with her achievements.

Suzanne van der Beek (Tilburg University)

Vera Veldhuizen (University of Groningen)

Alix Wassing (Dutch Reading Foundation)