

Art Nouveau in contemporary children's picturebooks: Ornament, typography and page design

Res. Asst. Şule Bayrak Yıldız^{1*} 

¹Bandırma Onyedli Eylül University,
Faculty of Art, Design and
Architecture, Department of Graphic
Design, Balıkesir, Türkiye
sbayrak@bandirma.edu.tr

*Corresponding Author

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Abstract

This article examines how Art Nouveau operates in two contemporary children's picturebooks, Lisa Perrin's *After Alice* (2015) and Júlia Sardà's *The Queen in the Cave* (2021). It argues that in these books Art Nouveau works not merely as a historical decorative reference, but as a page-organizing system that shapes visual composition, directs the reader's attention, and reinforces narrative atmosphere. The study focuses on the cover and interior-page illustrations of these two case studies. Methodologically, it employs qualitative comparative visual analysis, with particular attention to page architecture, line rhythm, color strategy, ornamental density, and typographic integration. The findings show that curvilinear motifs, botanical framing, borders, and serif typography do more than quote a historical style; they function as structural elements that support readability, visual continuity, and atmospheric coherence across the book. This is significant in the context of contemporary picturebooks because it suggests that historical ornament can remain active as a functional visual language rather than survive only as nostalgic decoration. In this sense, Art Nouveau continues to offer an adaptable design logic for contemporary illustration.

Keywords: Art Nouveau, Children's picturebooks, Digital illustration, Page design, Ornamental framing

Extended Abstract

Introduction: Art Nouveau is usually recognized through its flowing lines, plant-based motifs, decorative framing, and the close relationship it establishes between image and lettering. What is less obvious is how these qualities continue to appear in contemporary children's picturebooks. In such books, the page is not simply a surface for illustration. It is a designed space in which image, text, rhythm, and readability must work together. This makes the picturebook a useful place to examine how a historical visual language can remain active in contemporary illustration. In this study, Art Nouveau is approached not as a style brought back unchanged, but as a set of formal strategies that still shape attention, atmosphere, and visual coherence on the page.

Purpose and scope: This study focuses on two contemporary children's picturebooks, Lisa Perrin's *After Alice* (2015) and Júlia Sardà's *The Queen in the Cave* (2021). It examines how ornament, typography, and page design operate in these books and how Art Nouveau-related features continue to shape the reading surface under digital production conditions. The scope is limited to covers and selected interior pages published between 2012 and 2022.

Method: The research uses qualitative comparative visual analysis. The books were chosen through purposive sampling. The analysis was carried out through five main areas: page architecture and composition; line rhythm and drawing technique; color strategy; ornamental density and motif selection; and typographic integration. These categories enabled reading both books through the same set of visual concerns while preserving their differences. The analytical process moved in two stages. First, each book was examined separately through close reading of the cover and selected interior pages. At this stage, attention was given to framing, visual hierarchy, the movement of the line, the placement of lettering, the handling of decorative elements, and the balance between richness and readability. Second, the observations drawn from the two books were considered alongside selected historical Art Nouveau references. These references were not used as fixed models or one-to-one sources. They were used to clarify broader principles such as flowing line, surface unity, decorative framing, and the close relation between text and image. Additional works by Lisa Perrin and Júlia Sardà were considered only where they made recurring tendencies in the two main case studies easier to see. The analysis also

considered how crafted visual qualities survive under digital production conditions, especially through line quality, surface texture, and controlled detail.

Findings and conclusion: The analysis shows that Art Nouveau is most visible in these books when ornament carries a structural role. In *After Alice*, curving botanical forms frame the central figure and title, while the serif lettering follows the same visual rhythm. The cover reads as a single designed surface. The title does not feel added after the image. It belongs to the same compositional structure. The interior pages maintain this quality through controlled detail, careful emphasis, and a consistent relation between decoration and narrative atmosphere. Art Nouveau appears here in the pacing of the line, in the framing of the page, and in the steady relation between typography and image. In *The Queen in the Cave*, the visual tone is different. The palette is warmer, the decorative treatment is denser, and the atmosphere is more enclosed. Even so, the page remains clear and readable. Borders, empty space, and ornamental elements work together to guide attention without crowding the composition. Sardà's hand-drawn sensibility remains visible in the finished illustrations. This point is especially important for the study. The work retains a crafted surface quality while still belonging to contemporary digital production. Art Nouveau appears here through rhythm, framing, and the use of decoration as part of the reading surface. Read together, the two books suggest that Art Nouveau is best understood through what it does on the page. Curving forms, vegetal motifs, borders, and integrated typography all contribute to emphasis, continuity, and mood. Their importance lies in their function. They help shape how the page is read. The study shows that Art Nouveau remains active in contemporary children's picturebooks through formal habits that still carry visual force. Its continuing value lies in the organization of the page, the handling of rhythm, the relation between ornament and readability, and the integration of typography with image. This becomes clear in both *After Alice* and *The Queen in the Cave*, even though the two books differ in palette, atmosphere, and surface density. The study is limited to two books, so its conclusions should be read with caution. Even so, the findings point toward a useful direction for further research. A broader group of picturebooks could show how widely these visual strategies circulate in recent illustration. Interviews with illustrators and reader-response studies could also deepen the discussion by showing how such strategies are planned, perceived, and adapted. The study therefore, offers a focused starting point for future work on ornament, typography, and page design in contemporary children's picturebooks.

Keywords: Art Nouveau, Children's picturebooks, Digital illustration, Page design, Ornamental framing

INTRODUCTION

Art movements do not remain fixed within the period in which they first emerge. Their visual principles often continue in later forms of design, illustration, typography, and graphic communication, as noted by Hodge (2021) and Lahor (2007). Children's picturebooks make this continuity especially visible. In these books, illustration does more than accompany the text; it shapes how form, rhythm, color, and composition are first encountered by young readers. For that reason, picturebook illustration is one of the areas in which broader aesthetic ideas enter everyday visual experience and become part of early visual learning. Children's books also carry cultural values, visual habits, and shared ways of seeing. Chung (2024) draws attention to their role in transmitting social and cultural perspectives, while Sipe (2000) emphasizes the importance of the picturebook as an aesthetic object. In practical terms, this means that illustrations help children become familiar with visual organization, compositional balance, and stylistic expression at an early stage. Scholastic (2015) and Reading Partners (2018) similarly underline the role of picturebooks in the development of visual literacy, which helps explain why illustration deserves to be examined with the same seriousness as text.

The present study focuses on the years 2012-2022, a period in which digital tools became deeply embedded in children's book illustration. Here, digital production conditions are considered through three connected concerns: contemporary surface design, materiality, and post-digital craft. The issue is not only that illustrations were produced digitally. More important is how line, texture, detail, and surface are handled within digital or hybrid workflows. Rather than being considered only in technical terms, digital production is examined here as a visual condition in which line control, surface texture, and crafted detail remain active within digitally finished illustration. This makes it possible to ask how crafted visual qualities continue to survive in recent picturebooks, even when the final work is digitally finished, and why that persistence matters for visual analysis.

Art Nouveau is especially useful for this discussion because of its flowing lines, plant-derived forms, decorative detail, and refined treatment of typography. Art Nouveau is recognized for its organic forms derived from nature, flowing lines, decorative details, and refined typographic sensibility (Beksaç, 2015). Its influence

extended across architecture, fashion, interior design, book design, and posters, bringing aesthetic experience into everyday life. In contemporary picturebooks, its continuing relevance lies in the way ornament, lettering, and framing still shape the page. The question is therefore not whether recent illustrators simply borrow Art Nouveau motifs, but how they use its formal principles to organize visual attention, support readability, and build atmosphere.

This article examines two contemporary picturebooks: Lisa Perrin's *After Alice* (2015) and Júlia Sardà's *The Queen in the Cave* (2021). These books were selected because Art Nouveau-related features appear across both cover and interior-page design, and because typography in both works functions as part of the overall visual structure. The central question of the study is how Art Nouveau operates in these books under digital production conditions. More specifically, the article asks through which formal strategies ornament, typography, line, color, and framing continue to shape the page. The findings discussed in the following sections address this question directly and show how Art Nouveau remains active in contemporary picturebook illustration through page organization, visual rhythm, and the close relationship between text and image.

The Historical Process of the Art Nouveau Movement

The term Art Nouveau, first used in the 1884 issue of the Belgian journal *L'Art Moderne*, emerged in the nineteenth century (Martinez, 2019). Art Nouveau is an art movement that denotes a fifteen-year period beginning in 1890 and ending shortly after the start of the new century (Lahor, 2007: 6). As a movement that influenced many artists across numerous countries, Art Nouveau both influenced and was influenced by many fields of art and design, including music, sculpture, poetry, and literature (Amaya, 1971). According to Rheims (1966: 10), Art Nouveau stood out particularly for its determination to break away from academicism and to create a new world. Consciously initiated in the 1890s as a concrete expression of the "social conscience," Art Nouveau opposed the romantic tradition that existed in the nineteenth century and aimed, on the eve of the twentieth century, to reflect across all branches of art a new "realist" stance toward the individual and the individual's relationship with society (Lenning, 1951: 3).

According to Howard (1996: 4), Art Nouveau encompassed nearly all of the abundant innovations of the period; although it contained a reaction against empirical knowledge and the signs of materialist progress, it nevertheless shared, through new worldviews, a sense of discovery, a new identity for the self, and a kind of love of movement. Defined in various ways by many, Art Nouveau is, at its core, an aesthetic understanding that is compatible with cultural diversity, rejects the old world order, embraces a progressive outlook, adopts a realist stance, draws inspiration from nature, and employs orderly, uninterrupted lines. In the context of the floral motifs and asymmetrical and linear planes, it also draws on Japanese art. According to Hodge (2021:16), Art Nouveau artists depicted form through organic themes and asymmetrical Japanese-style compositions. In the 1888-designed cover of the Japanese Art Journal shown in Figure 1, curvilinear lines are likewise prominent.

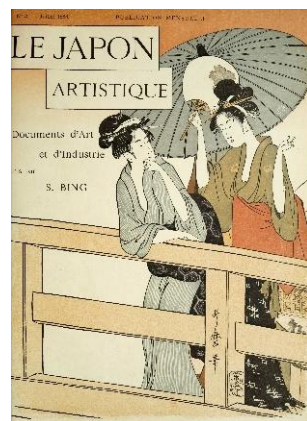


Figure 1. Cover design of a Japanese Art Magazine

The time period in which this movement, revealing the transformations brought about by the Industrial Revolution on art, took place was one in which art moved beyond museums and art galleries and began to assume a function that addressed everyone and served the public.

Figure 2 presents an advertising design produced by Henry van de Velde (1863-1957) for the *Tropon* egg brand. Bearing the slogan “Tropon, the most concentrated nourishment,” the work can be seen as an early example of aestheticized advertising addressed to a broader public. In the late nineteenth century, the food sector, like many other industrial fields, underwent a significant transformation as food preservation, processing, and distribution practices changed across Europe. At the same time, the wider circulation of prepared and packaged products expanded the conditions of commercial promotion (Oddy & Drouard, 2013). Within this setting, Art Nouveau posters combined commercial promotion with aesthetic refinement and became increasingly visible in urban public spaces (Petre, 2008).

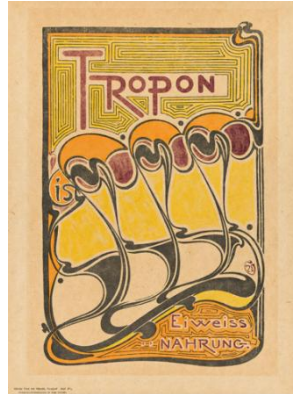


Figure 2. Poster design for the *Tropon* brand

Many Art Nouveau artists and designers advocated for the decorative arts to attain the status of fine art (Hodge, 2023: 92). The movement, which placed strong emphasis on craftsmanship, was characterized by organic and curvilinear forms, as well as the frequent use of plant motifs and female figures. Flowers, leaves, branches, and shoots were often incorporated into these compositions, while feminine figures contributed to the symbolic and visual coherence of the overall design.

Nature was one of the central sources of Art Nouveau visual language, often represented through interwoven patterns, curvilinear forms, and ornamental density. A clear example of this approach can be seen in the work of Alphonse Mucha (1860-1939). As shown in Figure 3, Mucha’s 1896 calendar design includes a striking female figure, a halo-like form above her head referring to the twelve zodiac signs, and abundant ornamentation.



Figure 3. Calendar design created for *La Plume Magazine*

Characterized by ornate motifs and curvilinear structures, Art Nouveau extended across a wide range of applied arts, including household objects, jewelry, book design, graphic work, and illustration (Sembach, 2007). In the late nineteenth century, the expansion of print culture and poster production made these visual principles increasingly visible in everyday life. As Petre (2008) argues, Art Nouveau posters played an important role in bringing art into public space through advertising and mass visibility. Within this broader context, Art Nouveau also shaped book and magazine design through flowing lines, decorative surfaces, and the integration of image and typography. As shown in Figure 4, the poster produced for the “Job” brand reflects this visual language

through its ornamental framing, flowing lines, and the close relationship between figure, typography, and decorative surface.

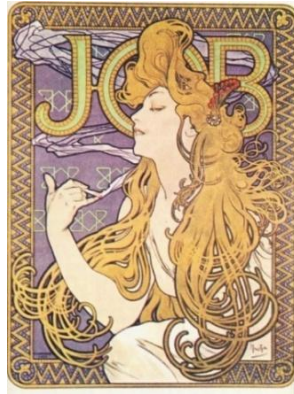


Figure 4. Poster design produced for the *Job* brand

Art Nouveau was visible not only in commercial advertising but also in the visual promotion of exhibitions and cultural venues. As shown in Figure 5, the poster for a permanent Art Nouveau exhibition in Paris reflects characteristic features of the movement through its stylized plant forms, decorative framing, muted color palette, and the close integration of text and image. The typography is not treated as a separate informational layer; rather, it becomes part of the overall composition. In this respect, the poster demonstrates how Art Nouveau functioned as a unified visual language across different fields of design.

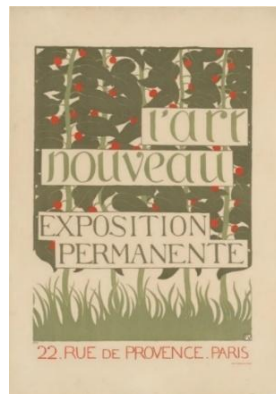


Figure 5. Poster for a permanent *Art Nouveau* exhibition in Paris

Art Nouveau and Typography

Typography, the visual organization of written language, is a fundamental element of book design. Through typography, words and ideas acquire visual form, reach the reader, and become accessible through different modes of presentation (Sarikavak, 2017: 2). Moreover, typography has an influence not merely by offering readability to the reader, but also by shaping the reader's or viewer's purchasing behavior and enabling the emotion of the text to be grasped more effectively. A typeface can create a neutral effect on the reader, or it can also generate an effect that activates passions (Ambrose & Harris, 2014: 6). For example, while the roundness of a typeface can be regarded as a visual metaphor for qualities such as organicity, naturalness, and femininity, a bold typeface may connote meanings such as assertiveness and solidity (Van Leeuwen, 2005: 140). In the Art Nouveau period as well, artists and designers, aware of this, used typefaces consistent with the movement's general style. In the typographic elements employed, curvatures, ornamentations, and calligraphic elements can be observed. This situation can be regarded as the counterpart in the art of lettering to Art Nouveau's reaction against industrialization. They sought to convey the sense that the typefaces were produced originally for the work or design in question. Figure 6 presents the "Eckmann" typeface designed in 1896, and Figure 7 presents the "Auriol" typeface designed in 1901. The harmonious curves used in Art Nouveau visuals are also evident in these typefaces.



Figure 6. Eckmann Font

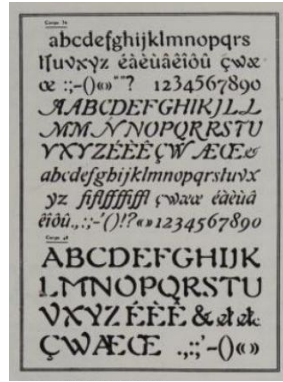


Figure 7. Auriol Font

The typeface in Siegfried Bing's work, shown in Figure 8, created for the L'Art Nouveau exhibition held at the Grafton Galleries in London in 1899, reflects characteristic features of the period. Although the lettering shows a relative simplicity in its nature-inspired curvilinear structure, its serif forms still retain an ornamental quality associated with Art Nouveau. The contrast between thin and thick strokes gives the text a sense of movement, while the overall arrangement echoes the asymmetrical rhythms often found in the visual language of the period. This concern with typography did not remain limited to letterform alone; it also extended to the organization of the page as a whole.

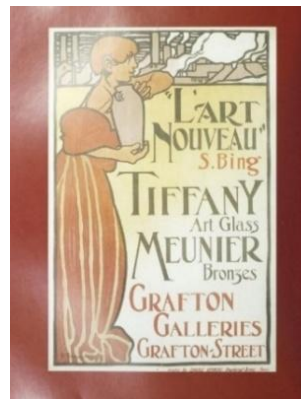


Figure 8. A poster designed for the *L'Art Nouveau* exhibition

Art Nouveau's lasting contribution to graphic design lies in its tendency to treat text and illustration as parts of a single visual system. Rather than composing the page by first producing text and image separately and then bringing them together, Art Nouveau designers often organized the page as a unified surface (Clara, 2021). As shown in Figure 9, the interior page from *Étude de la plante* exemplifies this approach through the close integration of decorative framing, title lettering, illustration, drop cap, and body text. A comparable concern for visual unity can also be seen in the interior page design presented in Figure 10.



Figure 9. Interior page from *Étude de la Plante*



Figure 10. Book interior page design

This understanding of the page as a unified visual field can also be related to the work of William Morris (1834-1896). Although Morris is more closely associated with the Arts and Crafts movement, he also produced significant works in printed book design, in addition to the furniture, wallpaper, and household objects he created throughout his career. Arguing that the books of his time were as poor in quality and badly designed as the furniture of thirty years earlier, and that printing had fallen far behind, the designer focused on this issue and, by 1891, published his first book bearing his imprint (Selz & Constantine, 1972: 24-25). Through the books printed at the “Kelmscott Press” he founded, he demonstrated that a book could be transformed into a work of art by having the designer attend to every element of the book, including the typeface (Selz & Constantine, 1972: 25). He helped elevate book design and typography as central concerns of artistic production and also supported the idea of art for the public benefit. Figure 11 presents a design created by William Morris for the Kelmscott Press. The curvilinear structures inspired by nature, characteristic of the Art Nouveau movement, are also striking here.



Figure 11. Kelmscott Press emblem

As shown in Figure 12, the cover of *The Valley of Vision*, written by Henry Van Dyke and illustrated by Margaret Neilson Armstrong, reflects several features associated with Art Nouveau book design. The deep blue ground is animated by an ornate floral composition rendered in gold and warm orange tones, which gives the surface a decorative richness while preserving clarity. Stylized botanical motifs spread across the cover in a symmetrical arrangement, and the title is integrated into this ornamental structure rather than placed as a separate element. The spine also carries a vertically organized decorative panel, reinforcing the sense of unity across the whole cover. Through its floral stylization, framed lettering, and carefully balanced surface design, the cover presents a strong example of Art Nouveau influence in book design.

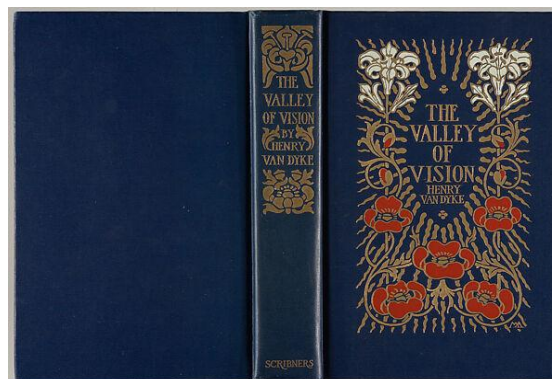


Figure 12. Cover design of *The Valley of Vision*

Figures 13, 14, and 15 show that characteristic features of Art Nouveau -such as refined lines, floral motifs, borders, and decorative surface treatment- also played an influential role in book cover design. Book covers are among the most important means through which a book first addresses its reader. The first connection between author and reader is often established through the cover. Incorporating elements such as typography, color, and pattern, book covers may also influence the reader’s purchasing behavior. When a cover visually refers to the content of the story, it can also familiarize the reader with the narrative world before reading begins. As a paratextual element, the book cover functions as a mediating surface between the text and the reader, while its visual design may also shape the reader’s first impression and perceived value of the book (Genette, 1997; Park et al., 2023).

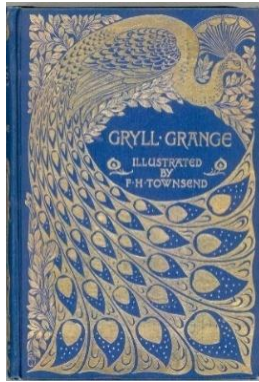


Figure 13. Cover design of the book *Gryll Grange*

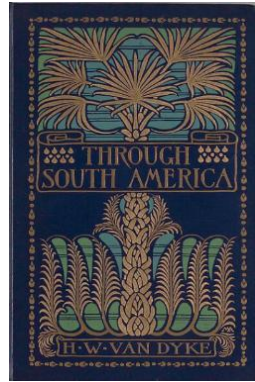


Figure 14. Cover design of the book *Through South America*

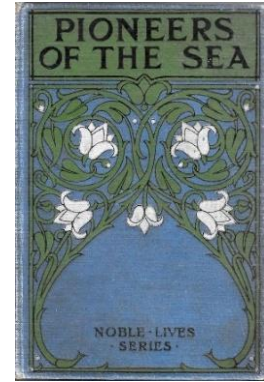


Figure 15. Cover design of the book *Pioneers of the Sea*

These examples show that Art Nouveau shaped book cover design through more than ornament alone. They also highlight the importance of framing, typography, and visual unity, which provide a basis for the contemporary case studies discussed in the following section.

METHOD

This study employs qualitative comparative visual analysis to examine how Art Nouveau-related features appear in contemporary children's picturebooks published between 2012 and 2022 under digital production conditions. The research is based on two main case studies selected through purposive sampling: Lisa Perrin's *After Alice* (2015) and Júlia Sardà's *The Queen in the Cave* (2021). These books were chosen because Art Nouveau-related features appear consistently across both cover and interior-page design rather than as isolated details. In both books, typography also functions as part of the overall visual composition. The analysis was carried out through five main categories: page architecture and composition, line rhythm and drawing technique, color strategy, ornamental density and motif selection, and typographic integration. Each book was first examined individually through close visual reading of selected covers and interior pages. The observations were then compared in order to identify recurring formal principles such as flowing line, decorative framing, vegetal motifs, and the integration of text and image.

Historical Art Nouveau examples were used as comparative reference points to clarify these formal principles. The aim of this comparison was not to establish direct influence, but to determine whether similar visual strategies continued to operate in contemporary picturebook design. Additional works by Lisa Perrin and Júlia Sardà were considered only when they helped make recurring tendencies in the main case studies more visible. The digital dimension of the study was approached not simply as a matter of production technique, but as part of the visual logic of the works. For this reason, the analysis also considered how line quality, surface texture, and controlled detail were handled in digitally produced or digitally finished illustrations.

FINDINGS

An Analysis of Lisa Perrin's *After Alice*

Published by Headline Publishing in the United Kingdom on 20 October 2015, *After Alice* reimagines the world of Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Carroll's novel is structured around Alice's descent into a fantastical world populated by figures such as the White Rabbit, the Cheshire Cat, and the Queen of Hearts. In *After Alice*, this familiar narrative universe is revisited through Ada, Alice's friend, who sets out to follow her and falls down a rabbit hole in turn (Deitz, 2019). As shown in Figure 16, the cover already signals this connection through visual references to the White Rabbit, the Cheshire Cat, the Queen of Hearts, and the tea-party world associated with the original story. Because both the cover and the interior illustrations were designed by the same artist, the book also achieves a strong sense of visual unity.

One of the first elements that stands out in the cover is the use of cool pastel tones, which recall a color sensibility often associated with Art Nouveau. The curvilinear forms are equally notable. The vegetal elements with flowing branches evoke the stylized plant motifs frequently used by Art Nouveau artists, while the female figure with wavy hair, refined hands, and a flexible body posture also recalls the movement's visual language. The selection of objects further reinforces the narrative dimension of the design. Details such as the magician's hat, the Queen of Hearts playing card, the clock, and the teacup refer directly to the story world. The relationship between figure and ground, together with the grouping of text and image within a unified frame, strengthens this sense of visual unity. The curvilinear structures in the typeface are also compatible with the branch forms in the illustration. In addition, the black ground enhances the sense of mystery, while variation in typeface and scale helps guide the viewer's attention across the surface.

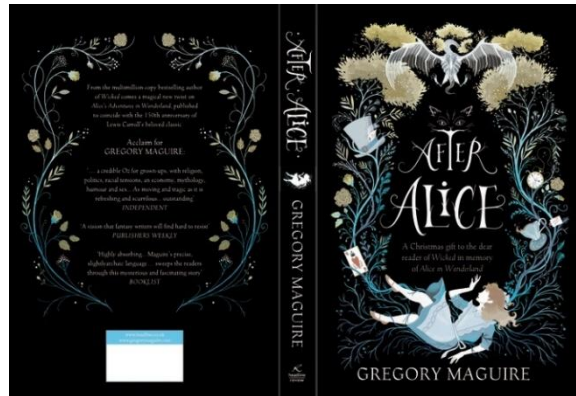


Figure 16. Cover design of *After Alice*

This narrative connection is reinforced through the treatment of the title and the surrounding decorative elements. The title *After Alice* is written in large letters and immediately draws the viewer's attention. Directly below it, the phrase "a Christmas gift for the dear Wicked reader in memory of Alice's Adventures in Wonderland" appears in small lowercase letters in green tones, set in a serif italic typeface. This choice improves readability while remaining consistent with the overall design in terms of color and form. The visual forms are highly curvilinear and flexible, and their rectangular arrangement creates a natural frame for the text. The posture of the girl figure conveys a sense of falling appropriate to the story's content. Her elegant stance, the use of feminine features, and the vegetal forms all recall the visual language of Art Nouveau. Similar qualities can also be seen in the Art Nouveau examples shown in Figures 17 and 18, particularly in the subdued facial expressions, refined hand gestures, and the flowing treatment of drapery.

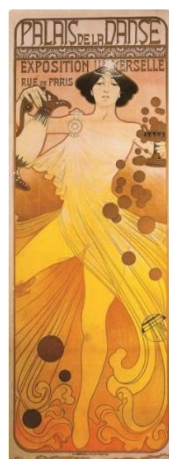


Figure 17. Poster design by Manuel Orazi Figure 18. Poster design by Paul Berthon

Selected additional works by Lisa Perrin are included here only to clarify recurring formal tendencies already visible in *After Alice*. As shown in Figure 19, similar features can also be seen in Perrin's *The Dollmaker of Krakow*, particularly in the subdued facial expression, the plant forms that spread across the surface, the serif and asymmetrical lettering, the reserved text area, and the use of borders.



Figure 19. Lisa Perrin, cover design for *The Dollmaker of Krakow*

When the artist's other works are examined, the effects of the Art Nouveau movement are likewise noticeable. Figure 20 presents an illustration by Lisa Perrin, while Figure 21 presents a lithograph by the French Art Nouveau artist Paul Berthon. In both, an elegant female figure stands out, and the overall spirit of the works appears similar. Positioned at the very center of the composition, one of these figures is shown in right profile and the other in left profile, and both hold flowers with curvilinear, refined hands. Their wavy hair and the flowers surrounding them evoke the Art Nouveau movement.



Figure 20. Lisa Perrin, illustration featuring a female figure with flowers



Figure 21. Magazine cover design created by Paul Berthon for *L'Ermitage*

Figure 22 presents a design created by the illustrator and academic Lisa Perrin for a fashion-themed group exhibition, while Figure 23 presents a work by the painter and graphic artist Otto Eckmann (1865-1902) for the cover design of *Jugend*, a magazine whose title means "youth" in German. In both works, the plant motifs covering the background and the strong yet elegant female figures placed at the focal point of the composition reflect Art Nouveau's nature-inspired, feminine aesthetic.



Figure 22. Lisa Perrin, illustration for a fashion-themed group exhibition

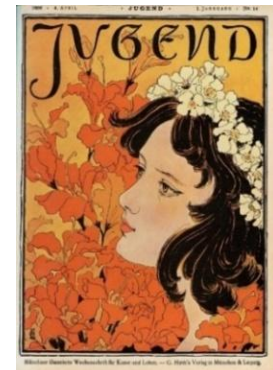


Figure 23. Issue of *Jugend Magazine*

Taken together, these features show that Art Nouveau in *After Alice* does not function merely as decorative quotation. Rather, it operates as a page-organizing system in which framing, curvilinear rhythm, and typographic integration work together to guide attention and sustain visual unity. In this respect, the cover

demonstrates how Art Nouveau-related strategies remain active as structural devices in contemporary picturebook design. A different version of this page-organizing logic appears in Júlia Sardà's *The Queen in the Cave*, where similar concerns are developed through a different palette and compositional atmosphere. Figures 20-23 are used not as separate case studies but as supporting examples that make recurring Art Nouveau-related tendencies in Perrin's visual language easier to recognize.

An Analysis of Júlia Sardà's *The Queen in the Cave*

Júlia Sardà's *The Queen in the Cave*, first published by Walker Books in the United Kingdom in 2021, also reveals clear Art Nouveau influences. As both writer and illustrator of the book, Sardà constructs a visually dense yet controlled narrative world shaped around the story of three sisters who set out on an excursion to a cave. The book's mysterious atmosphere, ornamental surface treatment, and integration of text and image make it especially relevant to the present study (Shelf Edition, 2021).

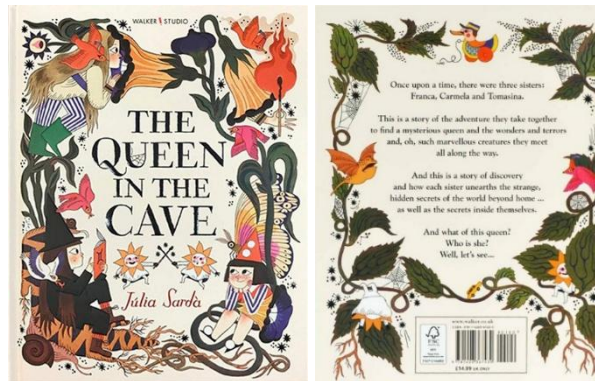


Figure 24. Front and back cover design of *The Queen in the Cave*

Figure 24 is included not only as a record of the book's cover design but also as evidence of how framing, color contrast, and ornamental integration establish narrative atmosphere and visual hierarchy from the outset. The cover is organized as a two-dimensional composition shaped by warm color relations, controlled contrast, and ornamental framing. The color relations are handled to preserve the clarity of the forms. Warm colors dominate the overall design. The text and background were selected in contrasting colors, enhancing legibility. The spider web in the cover lettering serves as a reference to the story's eerie and adventurous aspects. The drawings introduce the main characters and the story's setting. The characters' curious identities can be inferred from how they look into the flower and from their attitude while reading a book. In the author's name, an italic serif typeface commonly used in the Art Nouveau movement was employed. Typefaces similar to the one used are shown on the right. In the book title, the conjunction was written smaller than the other words, making it easier to draw attention to the main emphasis. The visuals have highly curvilinear, flexible forms. The shapes form a natural rectangular frame. The design was first hand-drawn by the artist with pencil and paper, and this approach aligns with Art Nouveau's exaltation of craftsmanship and rejection of mechanization. Figure 25 is especially important because it makes the production process visible and shows how digital finishing can preserve, rather than erase, hand-drawn structure, line rhythm, and crafted surface quality.

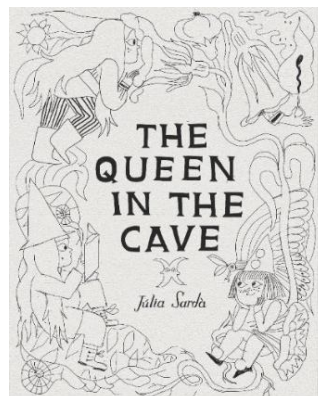


Figure 25. The designer's hand drawn sketch for *The Queen in the Cave*

Selected additional works by Júlia Sardà are included here only to clarify recurring visual tendencies already visible in *The Queen in the Cave*. In Figure 26, a page from another book design illustrated by the artist is presented. In this design from the book *Leina and the Lord of the Toadstools*, the rooster's curvilinear and flexible feathers, the serif typeface, the reservation of a dedicated area for the text, and the framing of this text with motifs evoke the Art Nouveau movement. In the image from the book *Bradley* in Figure 27, the peacock likewise features sharp lines and colors as well as curvilinear feathers. The bold use of white space, the creation of a rectangular blank area for the text, the serif typeface, and the rectangular frame composed of motifs display similar characteristics.

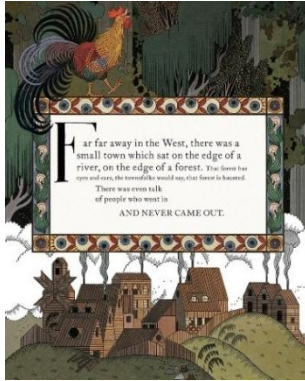


Figure 26. An excerpt from the interior pages of *Leina and the Lord of the Toadstools*



Figure 27. Cover design of the *Magazine Bradley, His Book*

In Figure 28, taken from an interior page of Júlia Sardà's *The Liszts*, the decorative border surrounding the text is especially noteworthy. A similar curved border structure can also be seen in Figure 29. In both designs, the focal point is the human figure, creating a contrast to the overall structure of the design. The emphasis on drawings rather than colors is also consistent with the spirit of Art Nouveau. The simpler approach compared to the other designs examined can also be attributed to the style of artists like Charles Rennie Mackintosh, a representative of the movement, who introduced a more minimalist look to Art Nouveau.

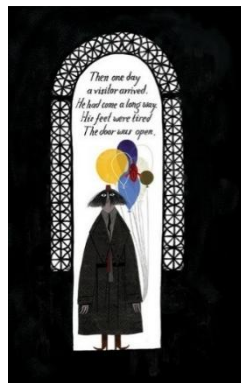


Figure 28. Júlia Sardà, interior page from *The Liszts*



Figure 29. A poster design by Alfons Mucha

In *The Queen in the Cave*, Art Nouveau is reinterpreted through a warmer palette, controlled negative space, and a flexible ornamental structure that supports mood without reducing readability. The case also makes the digital dimension more visible, since the transition from hand-drawn sketch to finished illustration shows how crafted qualities can be retained within digital production. Figures 26-29 serve as comparative reference points that help situate Sardà's use of borders, page framing, and decorative rhythm within a broader Art Nouveau-oriented visual logic.

CONCLUSION

This article has examined Art Nouveau in contemporary children's picturebooks as a visual logic that continues to help organize the page. A close reading of *After Alice* (2015) and *The Queen in the Cave* (2021) shows that

the strongest continuity lies not in a single motif or icon, but in a method: curves that keep the eye moving, ornament that behaves like structure, and typography that is treated as part of the image rather than as a separate label.

In Perrin's *After Alice*, the cover does much of this work immediately. Branch-like forms and stylized plants do not merely decorate the surface; they build a frame that holds the figure and the title together, so the page reads as one designed field. The serif forms and curving letter shapes echo the surrounding lines, creating a unified visual field on the page. Sardà's *The Queen in the Cave* arrives at a similar unity through a different route. Here, the palette is warmer, and the detailing is denser, but the composition remains readable because the illustrator controls contrast and spacing carefully; ornament becomes a way of directing attention rather than a way of crowding the page. The presence of hand drawing -visible in preparatory sketches and carried into the final rendering- also matters, because it keeps the images from looking clinically perfect even when the final stage is digital. Together, the two books suggest that Art Nouveau is best identified by what it does rather than what it quotes. Curved borders and plant-like motifs repeatedly serve as reading aids: they set a mood, create a visual rhythm, and make the transition between text and image feel continuous rather than abrupt. In this respect, the study suggests that Art Nouveau in contemporary picturebooks should be understood as a functional page-organizing system.

The contribution of the study lies in the way it reads ornament in contemporary children's picturebook illustration. Rather than treating Art Nouveau only as a stylistic echo, the article shows how ornament, typography, and framing continue to work as structural elements within the page. In this way, it adds to scholarship on children's book illustration by shifting attention from what ornament looks like to what ornament does. It also brings together art history, illustration studies, and digital production by showing how a historical visual language remains active in recent picturebooks through formal and compositional strategies. Taken together, these findings support the argument that Art Nouveau in contemporary picturebooks should be understood not as decoration alone but as a functional page-organizing system.

The analysis is limited to two titles and does not claim to represent the entire 2012-2022 field; however, it does point toward a productive way to study the topic: Art Nouveau as a practical page system for atmosphere and unity. Future research could extend this framework to a broader range of picturebooks, compare additional illustrators, or examine how such strategies operate across different publishing contexts. The study may also contribute to design-oriented discussions of contemporary picturebooks, especially in relation to how ornament, typography, and framing help organize a coherent reading surface.

Author's Contribution

The author contributed 100% to the study.

Competing Interests

There is no potential conflict of interest.

Ethics Committee Declaration

This study does not require ethics committee approval.

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Author's Biography

Şule Bayrak Yıldız is a graphic designer and academic based in Türkiye. She holds a BA in Graphic Design from Gazi University and an MA in Graphic Design from Anadolu University. She has worked as a teacher, freelance illustrator and visual designer at the Grand National Assembly of Türkiye. Since 2022, she has been working as a research assistant in the Department of Graphic Design at Bandırma Onyedi Eylül University while pursuing her PhD in Art and Design at Yıldız Technical University. She has been involved in research and academic activities in several countries and has participated in solo and group exhibitions.