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CHAPTER TWO

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Format, Design, Predominating Visual Features: The Meaningful Implications of Overall Qualities of Books and Pictures

Most often, the texts of picture books exist before the pictures. Editors commonly commission illustrations and consider the design of a book only after having accepted a text. Consequently, it is impossible to talk sensibly about the meaning of the pictures and the implications of book design in isolation from the words that evoked their creation in the first place. Although I focus specifically on aspects of book design and of illustration in the pages that follow, I inevitably interpret those qualities in the light of narrative information I have learned from their accompanying texts.

Nevertheless, it is essential that the meaningful aspects of books and pictures be considered, to begin with, without specific reference to texts, simply because these varying sources of information convey quite different kinds of meanings—all of which have narrative import. Texts do not so much provide illustrations with their narrative content as they inform us about how to interpret that narrative content—and vice versa. What Roland Barthes says of captioned press photographs is also true of picture books:

The totality of information is . . . supported by two different structures (of which one is linguistic); these two structures are concurrent, but since their units are heterogenous, they cannot mingle; here (in the text) the message's substance is constituted by words; there (in the photograph) by lines, surfaces, shadings. Further, the two struc-

tures of the message occupy separate if contiguous spaces which are not "homogenized." . . . Therefore, though a press photograph is never without written commentary, analysis must first of all deal with each separate structure; it is only once we have exhausted the study of each structure that we will be able to understand the ways in which they complement each other. (*Responsibility of Forms* 4)

What follows in this and the next four chapters is a study of the meaningful implications of picture-book design and picture-book illustrations considered without specific reference to the complementary nature of their texts. It becomes possible to explore the unique nature of that complementarity only after considering the narrative content of the books as objects and the pictures by themselves. *study pictures w/o "reading" texts*

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As we all know, the same words said differently can convey different meanings. Said sadly, the sentence "The boy fell down the stairs" demands our concern; said with a giggle, it might evoke laughter. We call this quality of language "tone," as in tone of voice; it changes the meaning of an utterance and the attitude we take toward it even though no part of what is said is changed. *illustrations draw tone.*

While there is no word equivalent to "tone" that applies to visual images, they can certainly create similar effects. A cartoon of a boy falling down stairs demands a different response from a broodingly dark representational depiction of the same subject, yet we probably could not identify any particular area or object in the picture as the source of our different attitude toward it. The nontextual elements that create mood or atmosphere in picture books are not really separable parts or components. They are not objects within an individual picture but, rather, predominating qualities of a book as a whole—matters like the size or shape of pictures (or even of the book the pictures are found in), the artist's choice of medium and style, the density of texture, and the qualities of colors. Aspects of books and pictures such as these focus our expectations even be-

text/image structure

fore we explore the pictures closely enough to notice the relationships between their details; they imply an overall mood or atmosphere that controls our understanding of the scenes depicted.

That they can do so explains one of the most basic characteristics of picture books. The texts in them tend to be so simple as to be without tone—like the sentence “The boy fell down the stairs.” The virtually toneless texts of books like Pat Hutchins’s *Rosie’s Walk* and Maurice Sendak’s *Where the Wild Things Are* relate events with almost no mention of the emotional reactions of those who participate in them, beyond the occasional “he was happy” or “he was sad,” and even then with no attempt to evoke what it might feel like to be happy or sad. Characteristically, then, picture-book texts merely assert; we learn only that Rosie went for a walk or that Max made mischief. The emotional quality of what is asserted must be conveyed by the pictures, which then inform those who look at them about the tone of voice in which to read the words—the attitude to take toward them.

As with most of the other information pictures communicate, they imply attitudes only through systems of signification that work to create specific expectations in viewers; and like other aspects of pictorial significance, these systems depend upon a viewer’s prior acquaintance with a variety of forms of experience. Our expectations of a book with glossy, four-color pictures differ from those we have of a fat leather-bound volume with small print and no pictures at all only because of our previous knowledge of a number of different kinds of books. Meanwhile, however, more obvious and basic aspects of experienced reality may lead us to associate bright colors like red and yellow and orange with warmth and sunlight and thus to expect a book in which those colors predominate to be a cheerful one. Furthermore, some of the codes that control attitudes, such as our conventional association of smaller books with younger children, seem to be arbitrary; while others, such as the focus on the significance of setting that occurs in wider books, seem to emerge logically from practical considerations. In all these cases, however, our expectations define our attitudes to the stories books contain; and picture-book artists can therefore

use conventional expectations to give the tone and imply the attitude they desire to the words they illustrate. In this chapter I discuss the ways in which varying formats of books and varying uses of predominating color, line, and shape influence our attitude toward the events a book describes. Because the relationships between individual visual styles and conventional codes of signification are both particularly problematic and particularly relevant in the communication of narrative information, the implications of style are the subject of a more detailed discussion in the next chapter.

Before I begin to discuss the signifying qualities of various aspects of books and pictures, I must point out that I have drawn most of my examples from a group of highly respected and, I believe, highly successful picture books. The illustrators and designers of these books clearly have a firm grasp of the significance of all aspects of format and illustration, and my discussions of them may seem to imply that all aspects of all pictures always convey appropriate meanings. As the existence of many poorly conceived books asserts, that is clearly not the case. Anyone who wishes to find examples of picture books that send confused messages through an apparent lack of consciousness of the signifying implications of some of their own attributes does not have to look very far. Interestingly, one need not even seek out specific examples of misused signifiers—one need only choose a book which seems inferior in terms of overall style and subject, and it is bound to contain example after example of uncontrolled details.

Meanwhile, the admirable books I focus on here seem complete even before investigation of their details—and remarkably, the various systems of signification they evoke all seem to support and amplify the same central effect. Because they do, the meaningful aspects of these books often seem invisible—they disappear from view in the very act of creating the effect that prevents us from easily noticing them; and it is for that reason that they need the sort of attention I am about to pay them.

As my earlier discussion of books for babies suggested, our understanding of the story a book contains depends first of all on our understanding of what a book is for; and that depends on our earlier experience of books. For those who have not enjoyed their previous encounters with books, any

emotion conveyed through illustrations

new one will seem a dreadful object, and their reading of the story it contains will be colored by that dread. The actual physical appearance of individual books is just as obvious an example of how prior expectations control our responses to stories: it influences our attitude to the stories the books contain before we even begin to read them. We expect more distinctive literature from hardcover books with textured, one-color covers and more conventionally popular material from books with luridly colored plastic coatings. We tend to think differently about paper-covered books and ones with hard covers, and as a result we respond differently to the same story in different formats; what might seem forbidding and respectable in hardcover often seems disposable and unthreatening in soft.

The size of a book also influences our response to it. We tend to expect rambunctious, energetic stories like the ones by Dr. Seuss from large books and more fragile, delicate stories like those by Beatrix Potter from smaller ones. In fact, larger books do allow larger effects, while smaller ones demand restraint from an illustrator, lest they appear overly fussy; but these differences are as much a matter of convention as of technical limitations. We tend to read smaller books expecting charm and delicacy—and to find it even if it is not there—and to read large books expecting energetic rambunctiousness—and to find it even if it is not there. For instance, commentators tend to find Mercer Mayer's very small books about a boy, a dog, and a frog charmingly delicate and to celebrate the vitality of Mayer's larger books; yet Mayer's style is consistent (and consistently heavyhanded) throughout his work, despite these variations in format.

We associate both very small and very large books with the youngest of readers. Presumably, the very small ones can be held by very small hands, while the very large pictures in the very large ones can be interpreted by inexperienced eyes. Consequently, the very largest and very smallest of picture books tend to be the simplest in content and in style, and we approach their stories with expectations of simplicity—childlikeness—as soon as we see them. Books of middle size—for instance, Trina Schart Hyman's *Snow White*—are often subtler and more complex, and we un-

consciously accept this greater degree of subtlety simply because it suits our expectations for books of this size. Meanwhile, larger books, like Nancy Eckholm Burkert's *Snow White*, or smaller ones, like the series of wordless books by John Goodall, that look painterly and are filled with subtle details, often strike adults as overly sophisticated for young readers. Again, the difference is less in the books themselves than in our general expectations.

Nevertheless, our attitudes toward different sizes of books do have some ground in actual technical limitations; the deficiencies of pictures intended for a smaller format that have been reprinted in a larger one make that distressingly clear. Unlike much of Maurice Sendak's work, the pictures in the four books in his Nutshell Library are simple cartoons, and for good reason; subtleties of line would not be noticeable in such a small space and might well create a crowded effect. As rereleased separately in a larger format and enlarged, however, these same drawings seem overstated, the lines too thick, the areas of unshaded color uncharacteristically large and harsh. Although depicted through the exact same pictures and words, the actions of the boy Pierre, who doesn't care, seem delightfully irrepressible in the smaller format but insufferably self-indulgent in the larger one. Similarly, one of Richard Scarry's characteristic animals, isolated from a pageful of similar animals in a large book and enlarged to fill a page by itself in a smaller book like *Early Words*, comes to seem peculiarly unenergetic. The rabbits in *Early Words* pose stiffly, and their faces never do anything but smile; yet the same figures, smaller and surrounded by many other similar figures involved in many different activities, convey an impression of intense activity. They can do so not just because the variety of different poses creates interesting tensions in the group as a whole that are not present in any one of its components but also because these smaller images do not arouse our expectation that faces seen close-up will convey emotional information; we look at the same image differently when it is a different size and rightly find ourselves having a different response to it.

The shape of a book influences our response to the story it contains as much as its size—but not, except in the case of oddities like books in the

book size → very large → very small

Snow White example

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size, shape of book

shape of their subjects, because of any conventional attitudes we might have to certain shapes: after all, most books are similarly rectangular. But different sorts of rectangles do impose different restrictions on artists and, consequently, accommodate different sorts of pictures that do in fact require different sorts of responses.

While most picture books are wider than they are high, most people are higher than they are wide, and so are most of the animal heroes of picture books. The extra width of wider books allows illustrators to fill in the extra space around the people they draw with information about the places they occupy—their setting; and if we operate, as illustrators almost always do, on the assumption that such external appearances reveal internal characteristics, we learn much of character in such pictures through the details of background. Thus, we come to understand much about the fastidious bachelorhood of Burkert's dwarfs and the more mysterious strangeness of Hyman's dwarfs through these illustrators' differing depictions of the dwarfs' homes and possessions, as seen in relatively wide pictures behind the characters: Burkert's dwarfs live in a bright, tidy house in which the furniture is servicably plain, Hyman's in a dark womblike one in which all the furniture is carved with mysterious icons. Books like these tend to focus on relationships between characters and their environment; they ask us to take an attitude of detachment, to stand back objectively and interpret characters in terms of details of their settings—and we will do so exactly to the extent that our experience of books has provided us with the expectation to do so.

show what comp/contrast

But in narrower books, or in those books in which illustrators have chosen to place pictures only on one side of the two-page spread, there is less opportunity for depicting setting and, as a result, greater concentration on and closer empathy with the characters depicted. Not all illustrators take that opportunity; although Chris Van Allsburg's pictures for *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi* take up only one side of each spread, they are still wider than they are high, and wide enough to emphasize the smallness of the hero, Alan, in relation to his settings. But Beatrix Potter frequently lets her characters fill the narrower pictures of her small books, especially

at moments when they are experiencing strong emotion; and many picture books illustrated with cartoons are narrow also and focus on action and facial expression rather than on environment. For instance, Dr. Seuss's *Horton Hatches the Egg* is a relatively narrow book, and the pictures frequently occupy only one side of a spread; they rarely show much of the settings, and we learn about the elephant Horton through the cartoonist's techniques of gestural exaggeration rather than through Horton's relationships to the world around him.

Interestingly, Horton's dispute here is with himself, internal: should he sit on Mayzie's egg or not? Frog and Toad of Arnold Lobel's series of cartoonlike books are also usually involved in internal emotional conflicts rather than physical ones or even disputes with each other, and they too appear in narrow pictures that emphasize gesture and expression rather than wide ones that emphasize setting and physical relationships with others. To be sure, Max's equally intense internal conflict in Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* occurs, at least in part, in wider pictures in which complex settings are the main focus of our attention; but these wider pictures cleverly express Max's feelings in terms of his relationship with his environment, which functions as a concrete expression of his mental state. Significantly, the title of this book refers to a place, as do the titles of Sendak's other books that focus on setting and express internal conflict in terms of imaginary but nevertheless external places: *In the Night Kitchen* and *Outside Over There*.

The choice of paper stocks is another physical aspect of books that influences our attitude toward the events depicted in the pictures printed on them. Glossy paper gives colors a glistening clarity, but it is distancing, partially because the light shines equally through all the colors and creates an overall sheen that attracts attention to the surface of a picture and therefore makes it more difficult for us to focus on specific objects depicted. This shiny surface acts somewhat as Arnheim suggests varnish did in evening out the colors of traditional oil paintings: "A color composition based on nothing but such a common denominator could describe only a world of absolute peace, devoid of action, static in mood. It would represent that

state of deadly serenity at which, to borrow the physicist's language, entropy approaches an absolute maximum" (*Art and Visual Perception* 348). It is interesting how often picture books on shiny stock do imply a sort of serenity, or at least stillness; but in books like Sendak's *Outside Over There* and Hyman's *Snow White* it is not by any means a deadly serenity, for the complex tensions, contrasting colors, and imbalances of the pictures form a paradoxical relationship with the serene evenness of the surface. In fact, these books evoke a believably magical atmosphere by exactly this sort of paradoxical tension—a tension that is pushed to its two extremes in Van Allsburg's *Wreck of the Zephyr*, in which the startling impossibility of a boat sailing through the sky is counterpointed not only by the evenness of the shiny surface but by the serenely unstartling effect of a highly limited palette of colors that creates an effect something like that of varnish. Meanwhile, more decorative books with less (and less unsettling) pictorial narrative information, such as McDermott's *Arrow to the Sun*, use glossy stock merely to enliven already highly vibrant colors; there is little stillness here because the contrasts of the bright colors disturb the evenness of the surface.

More roughly textured paper seems to invite our touch and in that way supports an atmosphere of involvement and intimacy, even sometimes of claustrophobia; that is certainly the effect of Van Allsburg's books in black and white on roughly textured paper—*Jumanji* and *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*—as opposed to the more open and less unsettling world Van Allsburg creates in colored pictures on glossy stock, as in *Wreck of the Zephyr* and *The Polar Express*. Also, rougher stock can be more easily worked into various levels of light and darkness, so that illustrators who wish to focus on specific objects in their pictures can do so more easily on more roughly textured paper; the exaggerated perspective and resultant sense of separation and isolation of objects in Van Allsburg's black-and-white books is again a good example.

Clearly, then, we have begun to establish our attitudes toward stories even before we have actually looked at the pictures or read any of the words in the books that contain them. When we do begin to look more

close to the pictures, we do so in the light of the information we have already accumulated—not just from our assumptions about books in general but also from our basic understanding of what pictures themselves are. We take it for granted that, unlike wallpaper or the sky, a picture is particularly worth looking at—that it is likely to contain something of special interest or particular meaning to us simply because an artist has chosen to offer us this specific visual information and must have had some good reason for doing so. We also take it for granted that we are free to look at the objects in pictures, indeed, that the mere existence of the picture means that we have been invited to do so and that we can do so guiltlessly. Furthermore, any picture that has been offered to our attention, especially one found in the context of a picture book, implies that the image it depicts is significantly meaningful, worthy of our consideration. Illustrated stories could not exist if we did not take it for granted that differences in place and time influence both the characters of people and the meaning of events; that surface appearances therefore help to make people and events what they are by creating differences that matter; that such differences are noteworthy enough to be recorded; that they are noteworthy not just because surface appearances themselves create feelings and attitudes but because they *mirror* interior feelings and attitudes; and therefore that the way things look is highly evocative of what they mean. In their very existence, then, picture books express our assumption of the metaphorical relationships between appearance and meaning.

Because they do, we can and do tell books by their covers; we use the visual information we find there as the foundation for our response to the rest of a book. Illustrators often try to create appropriate expectations by pictures on covers or dust jackets that appear nowhere else in a book and that sum up the essential nature of the story. The precise impersonality of Burkert's version of *Snow White* is summed up in the tidily framed, meticulously precise, and highly impersonal portrait of the heroine on the cover. The anarchic ebullience of Spier's *Noah's Ark* is conveyed by the appearance together on the cover of all the creatures depicted in different pictures later in the book. The decorative lethargy of Errol Le Cain's *Twelve Danc-*

image meaningful

book covers

shiny paper

textured paper

ing *Princesses* is expressed by a cover that turns the princesses into a symmetrical border for the words of the title. The cover of *Where the Wild Things Are* suggests how much the book expresses the internal by means of the external in showing not Max himself but his boat and a sleeping Wild Thing—the objects Max imagines. That this cover should thus give away the imaginative surprise that the plot of this book builds toward suggests how little Sendak is interested in suspense and how much he wants to establish a dreamlike atmosphere. All these covers help establish the mood that the rest of each book conveys.

On other covers we see William Steig's Pearl enjoying the forest, blissfully unaware of the sneaky fox about to accost her in a picture that sums up the focus of *The Amazing Bone* on the dangers of trusting appearances; we see Alan chasing his dog through a group of scary topiary figures of animals in an otherwise unseen part of Gasazi's garden that sums up the focus of *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi* on tensions between the real and the magical; we see Burton's Little House inside a symbolic circle that sums up the focus of *The Little House* on cyclical patterns and on wholeness. Unlike these books, many picture books have covers which merely contain duplicates of pictures also found inside; but those pictures still often seem to have been chosen to convey the essence of the story inside and thus to set up appropriate expectations for it.

After the cover, we might begin to notice more specific qualities of pictures as a whole. To begin with, a frame around a picture makes it seem tidier, less energetic. Cartoons in picture books usually focus on physical action and rarely have frames, unless they are in a strip format that requires different pictures on the same page to be separated from each other. Furthermore, looking at events through strictly defined boundaries implies detachment and objectivity, for the world we see through a frame is separate from our own world, marked off for us to look at. It is interesting that many picture books depict objects that act as frames on their title pages, like doorways inviting viewers into another, different world. There is the gate of Gasazi's garden. Hyman gives us the title of her *Sleeping Beauty* inside an arch, and Burkert, the title of her *Snow White* inside the actual frame of a mirror.

frames

Books which take an objective, unemotional view of the events they describe often have frames around all their pictures—sometimes, even, around the words of their texts. In Errol Le Cain's *Twelve Dancing Princesses*, the sumptuous frames around the words of the text balance the two-page spreads by giving some visual weight to otherwise white pages; as a result, the two sides of each spread, one mostly white space and the other richly illustrated, seem more equal to each other. That symmetry not only creates a sense of tidy order, it also increases the decorative atmosphere of the book as a whole. The focus here is less on what is happening or whom it is happening to than on how pretty it all looks, how sumptuously ornamental; we are to indulge our senses rather than care for the characters. Not surprisingly, both the pictures and the borders around the text have heavy black frame lines around them and are surrounded by narrow borders of white space. In *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*, another book in which each two-page spread consists of one mostly white page of text and one page of illustration, there are also borders around the words of the text, and these also create balance. But the white space that frames the pictures in this book has a different effect, simply because the pictures themselves are different. They depict intense activity that seems mysteriously inactive; the tidiness of the frames adds to their paradoxical nature and emphasizes the mystery. Not surprisingly, books that focus more centrally on action and emotion rarely have frames of white space; for instance, Trina Schart Hyman's melodramatic pictures for *Snow White* extend to the edge of the page.

As Hyman's work suggests, however, a frame around a picture has a different effect from that of a frame within a picture. While she rarely frames her pictures, she often uses framing devices within the pictures—the open windows that Snow White's mother stands out against, the trees that frame Snow White, the various arches of trees and windows and such that appear on every page of *Sleeping Beauty*. Rather than add objectivity or detachment, these heighten the dramatic focus; they force us to pay attention to specific parts of the pictures.

Framing is usually consistent throughout a picture book: the pictures

frames

have frames or they do not have frames. In *Where the Wild Things Are* and *Outside Over There*, however, Sendak sometimes frames the pictures in white space and sometimes does not, apparently depending on the mood he wishes to convey. According to William Moebius, "Framed, the illustration provides a limited glimpse 'into' a world. Unframed, the illustration constitutes a total experience, the view from 'within'" (150); *Wild Things* provides examples of both, as first we gaze at Max making mischief in framed pictures that demand our separation from him and later experience a joy we can share in the unframed pictures of his rumpus with the Wild Things. In fact, and as many commentators have pointed out, *Where the Wild Things Are* has a more carefully orchestrated use of framing than any other picture book. The presence of white space around the pictures of Max as he makes mischief seems to constrain him, hold him in. The pictures gradually become bigger and thus the borders smaller as Max is sent to his room, until the pictures fill the right side of the two-page spread; the constraint seems to lessen. Then, as Max embarks on his journey to where the Wild Things are, the pictures creep onto the left side. When he arrives, the picture fills the top of both pages; when words cease in the frenzy of the rumpus, the pictures fill the page. Then, after the rumpus, the process reverses itself, until the book ends on a totally white spread that contains no picture and only four words. Watching a set of slides of this book flash quickly past on a screen is a startling revelation of the relationships possible between visual and emotional constriction—between framing and meaning.

More mysteriously, the pictures in *Outside Over There* usually fill the page, except for a white bottom edge on which words appear—but not the four pictures in which Ida hugs the changeling left in place of her sister, then realizes it is a changeling, and then puts on her Mama's rain cloak. There seems to be no obvious reason why these particular pictures should have a frame of white space all around them, except, perhaps, that they represent the one point in the book in which Ida is not able to believe that she is in control of the situation. Here, as in *Wild Things*, Sendak may be

white space around frame

using white space around pictures to suggest a character's sense of being restricted.

But while white space around a picture can act as a frame, create a sense of constraint, and demand detachment, it can also do just the opposite; it can provide a focus that demands our involvement. That happens when a picture ends at the edges of the objects it depicts; isolating characters against a white space the shape of their own bodies forces attention upon them. In the first picture for *Peter Rabbit*, Beatrix Potter shows us rabbits as animals, wearing no clothes, seen with the detachment of observation within a landscape framed by a white border; but in the second picture the rabbits have been humanized by clothing and stand against a white space that now has the irregular shape of their bodies. We have no choice but to be more involved with these characters, just as we must be intensely involved with Peter later in the book at those moments of intense distress when Potter depicts him against a white background.

The relationship between pictures and white space tends to control where the words of a text can be placed; often, therefore, the physical relationship of text to picture is less significant than that of white space to picture. Nevertheless, book designers can work to affect our attitude by choosing where within the white space available they place a text. Even though the words of text communicate differently and require kinds of responses different from pictures, written language is like pictures in one important way; both are things to be seen. When we open a picture book, both words and pictures confront our eyes, and consequently they have literal relationships as well as symbolic ones. The words of a text are not just symbols of spoken sounds but part of the visual pattern on the page, without reference to their actual meaning.

As such, they communicate information beyond their specific meanings. Most obviously, the size of type conveys information about the intended audience; it is a convention that books for younger readers contain larger type sizes. In "Learning from Illustration," Evelyn Goldsmith says, "As far as I know, six-year olds do not normally lack visual acuity, so I

type size

suppose it has come about because the passages of text tend to be short, and if they were printed any smaller they might appear insignificant" (114). Whether there is a practical reason or not, the convention influences our understanding of books that use it.

The relative placement of words and pictures also does much to influence our reading of a page as a whole and of a book as a whole. One way in which it does so is to create or disturb the visual balance of each spread of a book. In *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*, the words on each left-hand page balance the images on each right-hand page not just because of the borders surrounding them but because they are hefty and regular blocks of print. But while many of the two-page spreads in *Where the Wild Things Are* also consist of one page of words and one containing a picture, the words almost always occupy very little space and thus leave most of the pages they appear on empty. That adds to the dramatic tension of the story. The asymmetrical imbalance between a page full of color and another with nothing but a few black marks on it gradually disappears as Max finds an imaginative way to purge his own tension and as the pictures grow to fill the space. The only pages with both words and pictures on them that seem relatively balanced are the ones directly before and after the wild rumpus, which have equal blocks of words under the picture on both sides of the spread. In this way as well as in every other, this book builds toward and then away from that central sequence.

Obviously, then, there can be narrative significance in the relative placement of words and pictures. In "Learning from Illustrations," Evelyn Goldsmith suggests there is evidence to support the idea that "the placing of a picture to left or right, above or below the text, can affect the amount of time spent reading the text itself" (116). Consequently, when the text has usually appeared below the pictures and suddenly appears above one, the rhythm of our response to the events we are learning about changes. In Steig's *The Amazing Bone*, for instance, the words usually appear under the pictures, so that we would logically view the pictures and then read the words. But in moments of intense action there are two pictures on each page, with words either above them or below them or both; and in mo-

way we read a page

ments of intense emotion, when Pearl is in serious danger or, at the end, when she returns happily home, the words tend to appear *above* the pictures. We usually look at a page from the top down, and because of their inherently attractive nature, we tend to look at pictures first, then read words. When Steig puts the words above the pictures, therefore, he puts us in an ambivalent state: should we read first or look first? This ambivalence adds tension to the tense moments of his book. Chapter 9 of this book deals with other effects of our movement between pictures and text as we read a picture book, particularly those which use either of the two most common arrangements of text and picture: the text on the left side of a two-page spread with the picture on the right, or the picture on the top and the text on the bottom.

But more unusual arrangements are possible—and as with most disruptions of conventional design, they create strong narrative effects. In Burkert's *Snow White*, for instance, the pictures and words are separate from each other, on alternating two-page spreads; while each of the pictures appears at exactly the right point in the story, the pictures and text are separate enough that they seem like two parallel but isolated experiences rather than one integrated one; and the moments Burkert chooses to illustrate emphasize this gulf by being ones that are surprisingly insignificant to the plot of the story. As a result, these strong pictures do not so much illustrate the story of Snow White as they become a different story on their own.

*picture/text split
Snow White*

On the first page of Burton's *The Little House*, however, the words and pictures are so closely integrated that the visual markings for language actually become part of the depicted scene. The words fill in the white space between two rows of flowers that stands for the walk leading up to the house and thus represent the stones of the walk as well as the verbal signs that communicate the story. In an interesting discussion in *Ways of the Illustrator*, Joseph Schwarcz speaks of how illustrators place letters within their pictures as part of the visual image; he sees it as a playful game, part of humanity's fascination with the system of communication it has invented (65). In fact, pictures which introduce letters as characters or

as part of the landscape are something like puns; verbal puns insist on the importance of accidental similarities between the sounds of words, and these visual puns connect the visual appearance of letters and words, which are in fact inherently meaningless in themselves, with the meanings they signify. A good example is found in *In the Night Kitchen*, where Mickey's "QUIET DOWN THERE!" fills a space as large as the space depicting Mickey himself in his bedroom; here, as often in picture books, the relative size of the lettering represents varying degrees of loudness. In a different use of the visual patterns of words, the words seen as a whole on each page of *The Little House* form shapes on the page that duplicate the spiraling curves in the pictures that accompany them, an effect that supports and amplifies the general atmosphere of the book as a whole.

Words can also act as visual objects that create relationships within the image; for instance, the speech balloons in *In the Night Kitchen* appear behind the bakers when those bakers are riotously involved in singing a song, but when one of them is perplexed by Mickey's eruption from the oven, he is partially occluded by the speech balloon containing words in front of him. The words in *Arrow to the Sun*, printed directly on top of the pictures with no white space around them, are even more integrated into the pictures: they provide visual weight, so that if they were not present, the pictures would have a different organization.

According to David Bland, illustrations in perspective make book design difficult: "The problem . . . is to reconcile the flatness of the text with the depth of the picture" (*History* 65). The picture in *The Little House* in which the words form the walk up to the house is visually ambivalent for just that reason: if the words are understood as words, they imply no depth; but since the space they occupy gets wider toward the bottom, they do imply the walk in perspective. The words as words stand in front of the picture, but as a representation of the walk they are within the depth the picture implies.

That is not particularly annoying in *The Little House*, because the pictures are so cartoonlike that perspective in them is more an idea than an actual effect. But in other books there is indeed a problem in relating the

relationship text & pictures

depthless space that words occupy to the implied depth of pictures. In fact, the more representational pictures become, the more they need to be separated from the rest of the page by a frame or border. That is another positive effect of the borders around the pictures in *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*; we have the sense that we are looking through the border into the world beyond it, so that the flatness of the page on which the words are printed does in fact make sense as being a flat surface positioned in front of the scene depicted.

But in a few interesting instances, illustrators create curious ambiguities by framing the words with the pictures. In Hyman's *Snow White* the words are either on a white piece of paper that seems to be pasted on top of the pictures, or they are in what seems to be a hole cut through the pictures and behind them. The result in either case is a dissipation of some of the realistic feeling of the pictures. This is clearly a flat surface we are looking at; we cannot forget that the pictures possess only the *illusion* of depth. In this highly emotional book, that has the effect of counterpointing and relieving some of the intensity.

In *Outside Over There*, Sendak makes a different use of the same technique. Sendak places words inside label-like insets in the middle of an illustrated page only at the beginning and end of the book—before and after Ida's adventure—and in the very middle, when Ida hears her father's song. The words within these labels all refer to Ida's parents and separate them and the pages they appear on from the rest of the book, in which Ida is on her own, free to indulge in her own fantasy. In reminding us of the illusory depth of the picture and thus stressing the illusory nature of the reality we see before us, the labeled pages subtly require us to realize the differences between our own reality and the illusions of fantasy—both Ida's fantasy about the goblins and Sendak's fantasy about Ida.

At the end of *Outside Over There* there is no label; we see Ida playing with her sister as the words float in the air above her. Are the words in front of the pictures or behind them? It is hard to tell; in fact, the same white space that implies background for the figures is merely blank white space around words at the same time. That sort of arrangement is sur-

text w/ pictures

prisingly common in picture books—and, once one becomes conscious of it, rather unsettling. The ambiguity is unresolved—and contrary to David Bland, who finds such ambiguities a quality of bad design, I believe that they often add to the interest and tension of picture books. In the case of *Outside Over There*, for instance, the visual ambiguity of the page tends to qualify the apparently happy ending; after all, Papa is not home yet, and Momma still looks depressed. The pictures in *The Little House* move around the text in a way that creates this sort of ambiguity in perspective *only* in the unhappy sections of the story. At the beginning and end, the words and the pictures are separated on opposite pages, or else the pictures on the page with the words are just disconnected visual symbols that create no perspective demands; but in the middle of the book the words appear in what the pictures imply is sky, and even ground, and the effect is tense rather than contenting. As often in picture books, the qualities of balance and regularity that theoretically contribute to good design are absent. The result is not bad art but good storytelling.

But such deliberate divergences from the principles of good design require clever planning by illustrators before the tensions they create can speak of more than just ineptitude. As a further example of that, the blocks of white space that contain the text and dilute the depth illusion in the pictures in Hyman's *Snow White* also demand other narrative strategies. These blocks of white space sometimes seem annoyingly obtrusive to the many viewers who suspect there are interesting things to look at behind them, and Hyman must work hard to focus visual attention away from or around the white space. She does so most often by framing it with a part of the scene that is in shadow or with figures whose heads or limbs point toward a central focus on the other side of the spread; but on one occasion she cleverly uses it to divide and thus cleverly counterpoint the image of the solitary queen preparing a poisoned apple on the full page of illustration to the left and the image of Snow White surrounded by loving dwarfs that appears in the Queen's mirror to the right of the text. Here the Queen's evil behavior is signified by a silhouetted black cat that takes up a

position behind her similar to her own, so that it appears to be her shadow, while across the divide of the block of text, Snow White also inclines at a similar angle but in the opposite direction; and while the image of Snow White contains a hand that clearly echoes the Queen's tensely positioned hand on the worktable on the other side of the spread, this hand on Snow White's arm also continues the counterpoint, for it belongs to a dwarf in the process of comforting Snow White. Hyman thus gives these difficult white blocks narrative import by cleverly focusing attention away from and around them.

But Charles Mikolaycak does the exact opposite in his brooding pictures for Zilpha Keatley Snyder's *The Changing Maze*. The mysterious garden maze of this story comes to seem even more mysterious when the composition of the pictures forces our attention toward significant and interesting objects within it that are in fact hidden behind the white block on which the text appears—various statues, parts of the protagonist's body, and, at the climax of the story, the chest of gold that the plot centers on. Both Mikolaycak and Hyman have turned an apparently unfortunate choice of layout that ought to have been a liability into a useful source of narrative information.

The Changing Maze also seems mysterious because the events are depicted in a muted palette of somber greens and browns and sickly yellows and grays that evoke an eerily mysterious mood. The perception of color has a direct sensuous appeal; Julia Kristeva goes so far as to suggest that the color in visual art speaks not only of conventional meanings—blue suggesting the blue of the sky, for instance—but also to the unconscious, that aspect of being which resides outside of the boundaries of the world we can name with language and thus think about, and, “as a result, color . . . escapes censorship; and the unconscious irrupts into a culturally coded pictorial distribution” (220). Presumably, therefore, all pictures in color both evoke a code of signification and speak either satisfyingly or disturbingly of matters beyond meaning or intention. But the paradoxical result of this simultaneous communication is that specific colors come to

evoke specific emotions and attitudes and thus can work to convey mood more exactly than any other aspect of pictures. A nonnarrative effect thus develops profound narrative implications.

The conventional meanings of colors are of two sorts: those, like the red of a stoplight, that are merely arbitrary and culture-specific and those that relate specific colors to specific emotions. As I will show later, the culture-specific codes tend to be more significant in terms of their ability to give weight and meaning to the objects within pictures, but it is the emotional connotations that most influence the mood of picture books—the connections between blue and melancholy, yellow and happiness, red and warmth, which appear to derive fairly directly from our basic perceptions of water and sunlight and fire. Since such associations do exist, artists can evoke particular moods by using the appropriate colors—even, sometimes, at the expense of consistency: Max's room in *Where the Wild Things Are* is blue when he is first sent to it, a much more cheerful yellow after his visit to the Wild Things; and his bed changes from moody bluish purple to cheerful pink.

The emotional implications of colors are particularly clear in those picture books in which one color predominates. The association of blue with melancholy is so much a part of our cultural tradition that the predominance of blues in Evaline Ness's melancholy *Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine* affirms the mood of the story, and the predominant blue of Steig's *Amos and Boris* seems to express two common associations—both melancholy and serenity. Indeed, Kristeva suggests that, because we seem to perceive blue with the rods of the retina's periphery, "the perception of blue entails not identifying the object; that blue is, precisely, on this side of or beyond the object's fixed form; thus it is the zone where phenomenal identity vanishes" (225). That may account for the passive and peaceful serenity that blue often evokes; not surprisingly, cultural codes identify blue with the serene Virgin Mary.

The red of fire conventionally implies both intensity and warmth. Consequently, although red is the only color in Dr. Seuss's *How the Grinch Stole Christmas*, the red of the Grinch's eyes clearly implies anger, while

the red of the sky as the villagers sing happy Christmas songs implies warmth and love. Yellow, the conventional color of cheerfulness, dominates in many cheerful children's books and is also found in combination with other colors in picture books that specify the particular sort of cheerfulness intended. With the warm oranges and reds in *Rosie's Walk*, yellow provides a balance for what might be a frightening story in a different color scheme. The cheerful yellow combined with serene blue in Kurt Wiese's pictures for *The Story about Ping* and in Steig's *Amos and Boris* is quieter—cheery in a more calming way.

Green, traditionally the color of growth and fertility, predominates in the vibrant pastoral world of Sendak's pictures for *Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present*. The monochromatic warm brown of McCloskey's *Make Way for Ducklings* amplifies the story's warmth. In combination, green and brown, the colors of earth and of foliage, often create an atmosphere of organic richness. They predominate in the dank but undeniably fertile world of Raymond Briggs's *Fungus the Bogeyman* and in less intense hues in Lobel's *Frog and Toad* books, where they imply the same reptilian earthiness in a less intense and less unsettling form. They appear again, and again less intensely, in *Anno's Journey* and make the imaginary Europe of that book a fertile but distinctly unthreatening place. These three books also form a spectrum in terms of the yellowness of their greens and browns—the most disgusting, *Fungus*, is yellowest; the most pleasant, *Anno's Journey*, the least yellow. Similarly, the yellow-greens and browns that appear in the caverns of the wicked Onis in Blair Lent's pictures for Mosel's *The Funny Little Woman* make them seem repulsive, while the deliciously springlike world the woman escapes into at the end of the book is a purer green; and the more muted but still yellowish greens and browns of Mikolajcak's pictures for *The Changing Maze* more broodingly imply a similar kind of mysterious dank danger as that of the Oni's cave.

Gray, the color we attach to characterless people, often suggests bleakness, lack of intensity, a cool detachment. The oppressively predominating gray of the stone walls surrounding Snow White's mother in Burkert's picture of her demands our detachment from her but also contrasts with

Color change
of setting

blue

red

yellow

green
brown

The Funny
Little Woman

gray

the vibrantly colored patterns we see surrounding her as we look through her window into her room; perhaps as a foreshadowing of her daughter's fate, she is a small spot of lively beauty in an otherwise bleak and forbidding world. In *Intercity*, the wordless story of a train trip, Charles Keeping creates a similar relationship between what can be seen around a window and what can be seen through it. The feeling of boring detachment in the predominantly brownish gray pictures of passengers on a train contrasts with the vibrant colors of the world outside the train's windows, which the passengers ignore. The contrast between the monochrome of the passenger pictures and the rich colors of the window pictures supports the central theme of the book: we see the passengers as they themselves see the world, and we see the richness of the world they miss because they do not bother to look at it.

As Keeping does here, many illustrators vary the predominating color in different pictures of the same book in order to convey the different moods of different parts of stories. In Adrienne Adams's pictures for *Cabbage Moon*, for instance, the monochromatic backgrounds change to suit the events that take place in front of them rather than the literal situation: the villainous Squink steals the moon against a melancholy blue sky and makes salad out of it in a sickly yellow-green room, which turns into an angry red when the angry dog bursts into it; later, a princess and prince declare their love against a more romantic pinkish red.

In Susan Jeffers's *Wild Robin* the pictures of Robin's boring everyday life are mainly browns and greens, whereas the mystical land the fairies take him to are suffused with violet, a color often associated in picture books with fantasy. The pictures for Van Allsburg's *Wreck of the Zephyr*, a fantasy about a flying boat, are predominantly purple. The forest that grows in Max's room in *Wild Things* is a combination of purplish blues and purplish pinks; the goblins of *Outside Over There* wear purple cloaks and reside in a purple-toned cave. In Raymond Briggs's *The Snowman*, the pink bedspread and curtains of the boy's room become purple in the night light in which he awakes to find his snowman come to life; his pinkish robe turns purple too. As dawn comes and the snowman becomes unmoving

again, the robe and the curtains and the spread turn pink. A psychological study by Lois Wexner suggests that most people associate purple with stateliness and dignity, I suspect because of its cultural connections with royalty; but in picture books, it is usually associated with the effects of moonlight, darkness, and mystery.

If a picture in which one color predominates strongly suggests a particular mood, then so does a picture that leaves out one particular color. The pictures in *Rosie's Walk* seem so peaceful and unthreatening not just because of their style but also because they contain yellow and red and even green, but no blue at all. Whether or not we associate the absent blue with sadness, these pictures do establish a definite mood, a mood different from the much calmer and more serene mood of Kurt Wiese's pictures for *The Story about Ping*, which emphasize blues and yellows and downplay red.

In the experiment by Lois Wexner I mentioned earlier, "no mention of color names was made by the experimenter. This was in order to avoid associations to color stereotypes" (432). Nevertheless, Wexner's conclusions suggest strong associations between particular colors and particular emotions, many of them confirming the suggestions I made above: blue is calm and serene, red both exciting and hostile, yellow is cheerful. Perhaps more interestingly, however, Wexner also discovered that different colors might be associated with the same emotion by different subjects. For instance, her studies show that many people associate cheerfulness with yellow, a smaller number red, an even smaller number orange and green. On the basis of this study, then, we might expect a particularly cheerful book to be predominantly yellow, with a lot of red and some orange and green; and that is exactly the color scheme of *Rosie's Walk*.

Other picture books also seem to share the schemes implied by the various responses of Wexner's subjects. They selected red, orange, and black almost equally to suggest defiance and hostility; these are the predominant colors of the assertive story of hostility *Arrow to the Sun*, and an orangey red and black are the only colors in H. A. Rey's story of a defiant monkey, *Curious George*. Many selected blue, and almost as many green, to represent calmness and serenity, with a smaller number choosing yellow; green pre-

color change
violet
pink

purple

dominates in Sendak's serene pictures for *Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present*, blue and yellow in Steig's *Amos and Boris*, which describes tempestuous events but still has a surprisingly calming effect. Security is associated with blue by most, with brown and green by some others; interestingly, blue, brown, and green are the predominant colors of the land of the Wild Things, a theoretically frightening but undeniably safe place for Max. Most of Wexner's subjects associated tenderness with blue, some with green; those two colors form most of the backgrounds of Briggs's wonderfully tender *The Snowman*. Red and brown are almost equally associated with protectiveness; they predominate in Burkert's picture of Snow White in the dwarfs' house, along with blue, which with brown implies security. It seems that picture-book illustrators often take advantage of associations with color combinations of which they themselves may not even be aware.

Other qualities of colors can also convey the emotional content of pictures. Consider the two pictures of Max in his bedroom in *Where the Wild Things Are*. Not only do the colors of the wall and the bed change, but their doing so changes the effect of the pictures as a whole. In the first picture the pink of the bedspread is different from the purple of the bed, and both jar with the greenish yellow carpet; in the other picture everything is suffused with a warming yellow that brings the room together; the bed matches its spread and a bowl on the table. The unified calm of this picture contrasts mightily with the discordancies of the first one. Artists frequently use related colors to imply calm and discordant ones to suggest jarring energy or excitement.

The predominant color of *Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present* is green, a peaceful green of a growing, abundant world. But the green is slightly different in each picture; and closer inspection reveals that, as Mr. Rabbit and the girl discuss different colors, the green of the landscape around them is suffused with light of the color they discuss. As they discuss red the woods behind them contain red foliage, the ground beneath them pink splotches, presumably flowers; but as they discuss yellow the woods are lit with yellow-orange, and they walk toward a brownish yellow road. None of these pictures seems to be using colors symbolically; the yellowish green

is not necessarily more cheerful than the pinkish green one. They all imply the same calm serenity; and they do so, I think, because of the unified concord created by their suffusion with tones of one secondary color.

In *Rosie's Walk*, on the other hand, there are large areas of pure color, all different from each other. The effect is slightly jarring but cheerfully exuberant. Books as different as Clement Hurd's/Leo and Diane Dillon's *Goodnight Moon* and *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears*, which also use unrelated colors in shocking combinations, all share a quality of energy and excitement, whereas even pictures as vibrantly colorful as the scenes through the window in Keeping's *Intercity* express bucolic serenity as least partly because of their careful blendings of different shades. Barbara Bader speaks of "the loose casual liveliness that comes of letting contours and colors overlap" (*American Picturebooks* 337); there is certainly a different mood in the casual pictures by artists like Roger Duvoisin from that created by the precisely outlined colors of artists like Sendak or Peter Spier or Leo and Diane Dillon.

In fact, pictures that use many different colors are not necessarily lively. Spier's pictures for *Noah's Ark* seem calm, even those depicting the storm, certainly in comparison to the wonderfully alive contrasts of *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears*. Part of the reason for that is the almost total absence of red in Spier's pictures; but part also is the relative saturation of the colors used. We distinguish colors in a number of ways—by hue, that is, classifications like red or blue that refer to different segments of the spectrum; by shade, the degree of relative darkness or brightness, as when we speak of light red or dark red; and by saturation, the relative intensity of colors, as when we speak of bright red and pale red. The colors in *Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears* are more saturated and therefore more intense than the colors in *Noah's Ark*; the less saturated colors of *Noah's Ark* seem more gentle, less assertive.

On the other hand, differences of shade suggest not the differences in levels of energy implied by the word "intensity" but the symbolic differences we usually read into darkness and light, shade and sunshine. Pictures that use dark shades seem both more somber and more cozy than

Compare Goodnight Moon to Why Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears

dark's light

lighter pictures; consider the difference between the jazzy opening pages and the comforting closing ones of Clement Hurd's *Goodnight Moon*, in which the gradually darkening room is evoked by a gradual darkening in the shades of the colors. The always light pictures in *Rosie's Walk* are neither threatening nor comforting; they create an atmosphere of unseriousness that prevents us from either being threatened by the fox or overly joyful about Rosie's ignorance of him. The darker tones of *Where the Wild Things Are* imply both threat and coziness; the darkness can both frighten and allow the contrasting coziness of lighter spaces. For that reason, I think, we expect dramatic emotion from the high contrasts between areas of light and shadow in books like *Wild Things* or Hyman's *Snow White* and greater detachment from more evenly toned pictures like either the light-filled pictures of *Mr. Rabbit and the Lovely Present* or the generally brooding dark-toned pictures of Van Allsburg's *Wreck of the Zephyr*.

But the psychologists Benjamin Wright and Lee Rainwater suggest that it is neither hue nor shade which most meaningfully communicates emotional connotations; "it is saturation which manifests itself most powerfully in the analysis of the relations between connotations and perceptions" (98). Their study reveals that an atmosphere of happiness depends on lightness and saturation more than on hue; that showiness depends almost exclusively on saturation; that forcefulness depends on color darkness; that elegance depends on both saturation and hue, blue being particularly elegant; and that calmness depends on darkness in association with blueness. Of the qualities they explored, only warmth seems to depend exclusively on hue, redness in particular.

The truth of these findings may be confirmed by a quick second look at the books I discussed earlier in terms of hue alone. The cheerful *Rosie's Walk* is light in shade throughout, the brooding and forcefully emotional *Snow White* by Hyman almost always dark. *Arrow to the Sun* is intense and definitely showy, while the stylishly elegant pictures for *Sam, Bangs, and Moonshine* are both predominantly blue and highly saturated.

Furthermore, it is possible to identify picture books that express interesting combinations of the qualities Wright and Rainwater discuss. *Why*

Mosquitoes Buzz in People's Ears is showy (highly saturated color), forceful (the shades tend to be dark reds and greens and oranges), and elegant (intensely black backgrounds). *Peter Rabbit* is happy (light), not very showy (unsaturated colors), not very forceful (lighter shades), and at times elegantly tasteful (especially in the predominating use of blues and browns). *Where the Wild Things Are* is not particularly happy (quite dark), not showy (the colors are muted), forceful (the shades are dark ones), at times warm (particularly under a pink sunrise), elegant (many of the colors in the book have a blue cast to them), and, perhaps most interestingly in terms of the frenzied action depicted, very calm (dark and blue).

absence of color

If the uses of color I have cataloged help to create atmosphere, then so, obviously, does the absence of color. In picture books, as in movies, color is the norm; currently, black and white seems to be reserved for movies that ask for special responses from their audience—for those that deliberately evoke nostalgia about the way movies once were or for those that work to announce themselves as serious and different, as important as documentaries. While some picture books are in black and white for economic reasons, serious picture-book artists who choose to avoid color in a medium noted for its use of color often have similar special points to make.

The obvious example is the work of Chris Van Allsburg. The black-and-white pictures in both *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi* and *Jumanji* evoke the feeling of black-and-white still photographs that have been slightly overdeveloped to emphasize their contrasts. They are uncompromisingly objective and detached—unlike the world we see subjectively with our own eyes simply because they are so much like photographs. Paradoxically, we commonly associate black and white with uncompromising truth, utter absence of subjective coloring: documentary. Van Allsburg's pictures have the quality of documentary, of detached observation that shows exactly what there is to see without the frivolous intrusion of color, and they are unsettling simply because what we see so uncompromisingly is often magic and impossible.

Furthermore, the heavy contrasts of these pictures emphasize the patterns created by the various shapes and so do the black lines that outline

connection b/w this illustrated picture books & black & white photography.

each shape, so that the relationships of those shapes on the flat surface of the page are as significant as the relationships of the figures the shapes represent in the three-dimensional picture space. As a result, and as happens in photographs with high contrast, the often intense action the pictures depict is slowed down, held by the patterns; like still pictures of people caught in moments of fast action, the pictures are astonishingly still, as if the people and animals and trees had been turned to stone. The magic of these pictures depends to a great extent on these paradoxical relationships between what is depicted and the photographic techniques used to depict it—between our expectations of documentary truth and our perception of magic, between activity and stopped time.

The documentary quality of certain sorts of black-and-white depiction—our faith that they show us the real, unvarnished truth—is used to advantage by David Macaulay in his black-and-white picture books about the construction of various buildings, particularly *Unbuilding*. This book shows in documentary detail an event that has not yet happened, the dismantling of the Empire State Building. The ink drawings are precise and careful, close enough to the working diagrams of engineers and architects to evoke conviction. In color, the unbuilding of the Empire State Building would be a charmingly whimsical fantasy—as perhaps, are the colored drawings by architects of buildings they have not yet built. In black and white, it achieves the tongue-in-cheek pseudoconviction of fairy tales, that characteristically matter-of-fact reporting of utterly nonfactual events.

Van Allsburg and Macaulay both achieve a sense of reality by imitating and thus evoking our conventional expectations of conventionally realistic depictions, photographs, or architect's sketches; but in other circumstances, black-and-white drawing is not necessarily a good medium for the representational depiction of the way the world looks. It shows us less of the visual world than our eyes do—shades, but no hues—and forces us to fill in what is not actually shown. Perhaps that explains why black-and-white documentary seems so truthful and serious—it demands our mental activity, so that we cannot just sit back and soak it in. But since black-and-

black & white illustrations
vs. color

white pictures are, in fact, less complete than those in color, they actually reveal less of surfaces, of physical objects and facial characteristics.

Furthermore, color, placed in between the lines that represent objects, fills in shapes and gives the objects solidity; so without color, the lines become more obvious, and without the solidifying qualities of weightiness and bulk they can more forcefully depict motion. Generally speaking, and unlike the work of Van Allsburg and Macaulay, most of the black-and-white drawing in picture books is cartooning or caricature, and most of it emphasizes action over appearance—not how objects look but what they do.

That focus also explains why black-and-white illustrations seem so much more appropriate in longer books than in picture books. Picture books emphasize showing as much as telling, and their pictures often fill in the details of emotion and of setting that their words leave out and that color seems most suited to convey. But in longer books, words can convey at least some of those details, and pictures in color seem superfluous when they merely duplicate information the text itself communicates. On the other hand, good black-and-white pictures that emphasize line over shape can add energy to long books in which details of emotion and of setting might otherwise retard the action. While they are not in picture books, three widely admired sets of illustrations of children's novels—Tenniel's for Carroll's *Alice* books, Ernest Shepherd's for Milne's *Pooh* books, and Garth Williams's for E. B. White's *Charlotte's Web*—are worth considering here, partially because they reveal something about the use of black and white in comparison with color and partially because they suggest important differences between picture-book illustration and other children's book illustration.

All three emphasize line over shape. No area is ever completely black in any of these pictures; even the blackest of spaces retains evidence of crosshatching in small bits of un-inked white, so that even the insides of fireplaces and such lack solidity. Furthermore, even the pictures that depict inactivity—the sleeping king in *Through the Looking Glass*, Eeyore

looking at himself in a stream in *Winnie the Pooh*, the supersatisfied Templeton after his rich feast at the fair in *Charlotte's Web*—have numerous complexities of line that either imply activity in the environment or else force the eye into activity in its act of perception.

Not surprisingly, however, most of the pictures in these books focus on actual movement. Tenniel's pictures for *Through the Looking Glass* depict numerous moments of shaking and pulling. His generally less energetic pictures for *Alice in Wonderland* show moments either just before or just after strenuous action and create tension by implying action: we see Alice about to open the door in the wall, about to drink, about to grab hold of the rabbit, and so on. Both books contain sets of pictures showing physical transformations, such as a disappearance of the Cheshire Cat, and both reach a climax in pictures depicting frenzied activity: the cards flying into the air in *Wonderland* and the candles growing toward the ceiling in *Through the Looking Glass*. These active pictures balance Carroll's often slow-moving text, which dwells delightfully but not always excitingly on verbal games-playing and theoretical discussions.

Shepherd's drawings are more cartoonlike than Tenniel's and more energetic. He uses action lines to show Pooh falling from a tree, footprints to show where the animals have been, pictures in series that look almost like comic strips to show Pooh practicing jumps or Eeyore admiring his tail. The pictures often have no background at all, yet the faces of the animals often seem emotionless, so we must concentrate on what they do. Considering the quietness of Milne's stories, these drawings are surprisingly energetic; like Tenniel's, they provide a necessary balance to the text.

While Williams's line is heavier than Shepherd's, he makes up for it by using complexities of crosshatching and shadow-texturing more often and by concentrating on depictions of intense activity. He shows just about every occasion in *Charlotte's Web* when people or animals are swept off their feet—Lurvy toppling over Wilbur, Wilbur in midair as he tries to spin a web, Avery turning a handstand at the fair. Even in less frenetic moments, Williams implies muscular tension in the bodies of his characters, particular their hands. In the calm of the doctor's office, Mrs. Arable

clutches nervously at her purse; in the calm of the barn, Fern's hands always seem to imply a hyperactive clutching or grasping—the high-spirited energy of youth. *Charlotte's Web* is a surprisingly inactive novel—in fact, it is about how violent action is prevented, and it is filled with poetic descriptions that retard the action. So the energetic line of the drawings balances the often dreamy music of the text.

These three sets of pictures show what illustrations at their best can accomplish in longer books; if there are few equally distinguished picture books that use the techniques of black-and-white cartooning, I suspect that is because the balance between words and pictures in picture books is crucially different from that in longer stories. In picture books, the words usually stick to telling us about what happens, and we expect the pictures to add something the words do not tell; and black-and-white cartoons do best what the words of a good picture-book text have already done.

These differences become clear in a comparison of the black-and-white work of illustrators with their picture-book work in color. Charles Keeping's use of parallel and concentric lines to create texture is his most characteristic gesture. But even the intense activity of the horses' mad rush in *Through the Window* does not disrupt the heavy, foreboding, and mysteriously dead solemnity of that book; the dark shades of these pictures hold down the energy of their lines. Surprisingly, something similar happens in the different light-filled pictures of *Intercity*, in part because washes of color restrain the energetic line, in part because the rhythmically repeating parallel lines create an overall sense of pattern that focuses our attention on the surface organization of each picture as much as on its subject; and that is as it should be, since Keeping intends us to look at these scenes framed by a train window as we would look at paintings in a gallery, more significantly objects of aesthetic pleasure than representational depictions. But when Keeping uses the same repeating parallel lines in black-and-white pictures, like those in Garfield and Blishen's *The God beneath the Sea* and *The Golden Shadow*, the effect is startlingly energetic—even in spite of the gray wash in many pictures. With no color to hold them down, the lines become more significant than the shapes they make; and Keeping takes

Alice in Wonderland
Tenniel's illustrations

Pooh

Charlotte's Web

advantage of that by using different repeating patterns of lines in the same picture, so that the surfaces are filled with contradictory and energetic sets of radiating and parallel lines and splotches. In these pictures, as always seems to happen when line becomes predominant over shape, energy and activity predominate over solidity and pattern.

That is not to say that all artists in black and white focus on the energies of line. Some, like Wanda Gag, use black-and-white's potential for heavy contrast to create more restfully decorative effects. Even though there is much use of line to create shadow in Gag's *Millions of Cats*, the heavy contrasts between light areas and dark ones orient the pictures toward pattern rather than toward action. In techniques like block printing, in which the ink is not laid down on the paper by the line of a pen, the blocks of black and white tend to operate more like colors, creating solid shapes rather than energetic lines. Furthermore, such a technique associates these pictures with the static conventions of folk art, which tends to be more oriented to pattern than to action. Not surprisingly, Gag's story also focuses more on pattern than on movement, on repetition rather than on forward movement. While a lot happens in *Millions of Cats*, the story tends to offer more pleasure to those who have heard it before than to those who are hearing it for the first time. It is comfortably predictable rather than threatening or even very exciting.

But if *Millions of Cats* is comfortably secure, it is not just because it emphasizes shape over line, pattern over energy; it is also because the shapes happen to be primarily rounded and curved ones—the sort of shapes we associate with softness and yielding. Such associations have an obvious effect on our attitudes to pictures. The sad story of urban blight that Burton tells in *The Little House* never seems particularly sad, simply because the spiraling curves of the original country landscape continue throughout, and because almost nothing in the book is actually angular or sharp-edged. The house itself has gently curved walls, as do even some of the skyscrapers that eventually surround it in later pictures; and those skyscrapers that do have straight lines are nestled among curved roads and against curved clouds. Compared with these unthreatening curves, Keep-

ing's bristling depictions of whiskers, feathers, and bloodstains in *The God beneath the Sea* are unsettling; our eyes respond to all these sharp points the way our bodies might if we sat on them. Meanwhile, the numerous small squares and triangles that cover parts of the surface of many of the pictures in books by Brian Wildsmith—the picture of lions on the title page of *The Circus* is a good example—create a sense of dead lassitude that forces us to admire these pictures as pleasantly decorative compositions, if we admire them at all.

Most picture books contain no clearly predominating shapes; and as I will show later, the various shapes in them imply different relationships between objects. But at least one book has not one but two predominating shapes: almost everything in *Arrow to the Sun* is either angular or curved. The boy is angular, so is the arrow he becomes, so is the pueblo; the women are curved, as are the pots and the earth and a snake with a tale in its mouth. The fact that everything is either one definite shape or another creates an interesting tension in pictures that otherwise might seem decorative and unenergetic.

Similar shapes in groups create patterns; as *Arrow to the Sun* makes clear, a predominating pattern or set of patterns also influences our attitude to pictures. The many tidy rows of leaves and feathers and pears that fill many of the objects of *Rosie's Walk* hold down the areas of the pictures that they occupy and thus force attention on the more energetic unpatterned areas of randomly splashing water or randomly flying hay. But they also create an overall effect of unified calm. On the other hand, conflicting sets of differing patterns, like those in Keeping's work, create tensions with each other that are active and disruptive.

Paradoxically, perhaps, both intensely patterned and intensely disrupted visual surfaces convey relatively less narrative information; if books like *Millions of Cats* and *Rosie's Walk* sometimes verge on the merely decorative, the intensely energetic work of an artist like Beverly Brodsky moves toward the depiction of highly wrought emotions that are strangely detached from specific visual objects, so that they convey an attitude but nothing specific to take the attitude toward. Indeed, Brodsky takes clever

shapes

I don't agree

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advantage of just this aspect of her work when she manages in her *Story of Job* to convey the wrath and power of God himself through intersecting patterns of wildly swirling lines and disrupted splashes of color; her pictures do not so much work to convey narrative information as they operate as an emotional counterpoint to the narrative of the text—a sort of evocative background music.

Eventually, both excessive pattern and excessive lack of pattern approach and then pass over the boundary between representation and abstraction. A totally repetitive image cannot tell a story, for nothing is disturbed, and there can be no conflict, no plot; a totally unrepentive, unpatterned image cannot evoke enough order to focus our attention on the areas of disorder that convey narrative tensions. Consequently, narrative art is always a combination of pattern and randomness, order and disorder—one might even say, of abstraction and representation, for narrative art always offers both an image of a depicted object and purposeful distortions of that image that evoke codes of signification and thus convey information about the object.

One final overall quality of pictures is often isolated as a significant creator of mood: the various media in which illustrators work. Commentators on picture books often suggest that the characteristics of differing media limit the range of subjects each medium can convey or impose certain moods upon pictures made in them. For instance, Glazer and Williams say, “It would be difficult to illustrate a story about a fog with sharp-edged woodcuts” (87) and suggest that in Feodor Rojankovsky’s *Frog Went A-Courtin’*, “the medium gives a slightly grainy aura to the pictures, as if a child had helped make them. The crayon, supplemented with pen and ink, pleasantly matches a child’s simple song” (65). Indeed, the differences between black-and-white pictures and ones in color that I discussed earlier do depend in part on differences in media, and so do the differences between line drawings and block prints. As E. H. Gombrich says in “Standards of Truth,” “The image cannot give us more information than the medium can carry” (248). Black lines on white paper cannot reveal the color of objects in the real world, and block prints reveal texture only with difficulty; collage inhibits the creation of depth, and watercolor in its

translucency creates the impression of light more readily than tempera.)

But while it might be difficult to illustrate a story of a fog with sharp-edged woodcuts, it is not necessarily impossible: the pictures in Lionni’s *Swimmy* successfully use techniques of block printing to convey a feeling of undersea fluidity. As for the childlike quality of crayon, consider *The Snowman*, in which Raymond Briggs uses a crayonlike graininess to achieve a subtle luminosity more suggestive of impressionist painting than of childlike art. While the characteristics of media certainly influence the way they are used, they do not necessarily limit artists to particular effects.

Artists do, certainly, choose media in terms of the effects they wish to create; but it is their *conviction* that certain media are best suited for certain effects that let them create those effects, not the media themselves. An artist who believes that woodcuts ideally convey boldness and power will choose to make woodcuts to express boldness and power; an artist who believes that woodcuts convey simplicity and folksy charm will choose woodcuts to convey simplicity and folksy charm. Furthermore, viewers are not likely to confuse bold power with charming folksiness; if we look well, we will see in these two sets of woodcuts what their artists made them convey. In *Prints and Visual Communication*, William Ivins shows how conventional attitudes grew around various media, so that people who believed that “a wood-engraving should look like a wood-engraving and be all neat and tidy with its net of lines” (105) attacked William Blake for making nonengravinglike engravings. Ivins concludes, rightly, that “what makes a medium artistically important is not any quality of the medium itself but the qualities of mind and hand that its users bring to it” (114).

That is not to say that our conventional expectations of media do not influence our attitudes to various pictures. Sometimes such attitudes do actually result from limitations inherent in a medium—when an artist conscientiously exploits such limitations, as does Van Allsburg in his use of the limited hue but wonderful shading possibilities of pencil on white paper in *The Garden of Abdul Gasazi*. But more often, a choice of medium conveys an attitude toward the subject of a picture because the artist has exploited our conventional expectations for pictures in that medium. As the comments by Glazer and Williams suggest, our association of crayons

various
media

with children might well lead us to expect childlike qualities in crayon work; sharing such associations, an artist like Rojankovsky might well choose such a medium in order to create childlike drawings. Similarly, many artists make gentle watercolors and starkly "primitive" woodcuts.

In *Ways of Seeing*, John Berger suggests that the richness of detailed information about the physical surfaces of objects possible in oil paintings made oils an ideal medium to convey power; from the Renaissance on, vast numbers of oil paintings were commissioned to show the expensive possessions—the houses and jewels and furnishings—that rich men could afford to buy. In picture books, this tradition of richly detailed environments is found mainly in pictures that illustrate fantasies, particularly fairy tales. It begins in the sumptuous work of artists like Arthur Rackham and Kay Nielsen and Edmund Dulac, who made pictures for expensive gift-book editions of fairy tales in the early years of this century, and it continues in the work of artists like Burkert and Hyman and Le Cain. All these artists create a sense of the reality and the wonder of the fantasy lands they depict by filling them with objects and details and textures and wonderfully decorated surfaces. The more these pictures look like traditional oil paintings, the more solidly real seem the fantasy places and objects they depict and the more strongly they relate to our conventional association of wonder with richness and with owning things.

But interestingly, these artists do not always work in oils: their pictures, usually watercolors, simply have the look, the density and detail and dwelling on rich surface textures, that we expect of traditional oils. In evoking the characteristic effects of one medium through the use of others, these artists reveal how very much our expectations of media depend on convention. In fact, the medium itself is not the message. The medium is never the message. Having chosen a medium to help them achieve the attitude they want to communicate toward their subject, artists must then use their knowledge of the various techniques of dynamics and atmospherics that I describe in this book in order to make the medium evoke that attitude.

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CHAPTER THREE

Style as Meaning

Unlike such qualities as format and color, discussed in the last chapter, style is not a separable entity. It is the name we give to the effect of all the aspects of a work of art considered together. In *Art and Illusion*, E. H. Gombrich suggests a similarity between style and the different accents with which different people speak the same language (364). In *Ways of Worldmaking*, Nelson Goodman offers a similar metaphor: "a style is a complex characteristic that serves somewhat as an individual or group signature—that bespeaks Resnais or Whistler or Borodin, that distinguishes early from later Corot, Baroque from Rococo, Baoulé from Pahouin" (34). And in *Ideology and the Image*, Bill Nichols uses the metaphor of the moiré pattern: "the appearance of a new pattern created from the combination of two others"; Nichols speaks of "a distinctive coalescence of codes (in the manner of an ideolect) whose interference with and reinforcement of one another set up a *moiré* pattern known as the textual system or style" (48). "Style," then, refers to that which is distinct about a work of art—that which transcends the implications of its specific codes and marks it out as different from other works.

Accent or signature or moiré pattern, style involves all actions or gestures about which there can be a choice—matters of content as well as of form. In picture books, then, style emerges from characteristic patterns of structure or attitude and also from choices of subject; in order to express Beatrix Potter's style a book must both use her characteristic medium and