



PROJECT MUSE®

Consuming Books: Synergies of Materiality and Narrative in
Picturebooks

Rebecca-Anne C. Do Rozario

Children's Literature, Volume 40, 2012, pp. 151-166 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/chl.2012.0013>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/477942>

Consuming Books: Synergies of Materiality and Narrative in Picturebooks

Rebecca-Anne C. Do Rozario

Picturebooks offer an extraordinary opportunity to explore the boundaries and possibilities of books as material objects. Indeed, the genre is designated in part by its physicality. Authors and illustrators make full use of the page spreads, covers, and dust jackets to narrate, and often employ a variety of dimensional print effects including pop-ups, embossing, and inserts. The genre of the picturebook relies on a synergy of text, visuals, and texture. A cohort of picturebook creators exploits this synergy further, incorporating the materiality of the book into the narrative, in turn transforming the book with metatextual sleight of hand. In effect, the material book becomes the stuff of narrative, and while many of these books have been examined through the lens of the postmodern, their use of materiality has not been fully articulated.¹ Such use celebrates the history and traditions of ink and paper; with this article I will focus in particular upon Emily Gravett's work, which is an exemplar of this use of materiality, as well as referencing the work of authors and illustrators like Lauren Child and Terry Pratchett. In a publishing environment increasingly looking toward the e-book and the dematerialization of text and illustration, this work in picturebooks reinscribes the enchantment of materiality and explores its role in narrative.

In *It's a Book* by Lane Smith (2010), the celebration of the book and the anxiety about digital technology are narrated through the exchanges between a monkey and a jackass. The monkey is reading a book. The jackass, armed with a laptop, cannot grasp the nature of books, which don't have facilities to tweet, play games, or use passwords. When he finally takes the book, a series of illustrated clocks marks the steady passage of time as he concentrates on reading. The monkey then goes to the library to get another book to read. Margaret Mackey suggests that "as components of new media forms enable different forms of tacit awareness, the contrasts between different tools for reading do render some elements of the printed book available for explicit contemplation" (105). *It's a Book* certainly draws attention to such contemplation, albeit chiefly to what the book does not do, rather than to its paper-and-ink elements. The conflict between the material conditions of reading—the

laptop versus the book—is tilted in the book’s favor, suggesting that in actually lacking attributes/distractions, it encourages greater engagement in the reading act. As a shift toward e-books begins, the value placed here on books and libraries is deliberate. Likewise, the use of the jackass none too subtly underscores qualities, including a lack of concentration, associated with non-book readers, thereby privileging the book reader.² Yet while *It’s a Book* engages with the nature of the various media forms, it doesn’t narrate the materiality of the book itself.

Since words and pictures can be read on alternative devices or objects, including digitally, what is at stake here is the book as a construction of ink and paper. Much is made of textual and visual play in picturebooks, but the material nature of the book is often passed over. There are references to artistic techniques, spatial framing, and the like, but materiality, including paratextual matter such as the cover, is frequently subordinated to narrative. Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott point out that “The contribution of paratexts to the picturebook is clearly highly significant, especially since they frequently carry a substantial percentage of the book’s verbal and visual information” (256). Paratext also provides a physical frame of reference for the text as part of a book, so that those picturebooks utilizing paratext in the narrative can be more fully focused on the material particulars of the printed book, rather than simply its text and illustration.

Picturebooks in which the books themselves play a significant narrative role are actually not unusual, but they often focus on metatextual/intertextual over material play. David Wiesner’s *The Three Pigs* (2001) begins in an ostensible picturebook about the three pigs and the wolf, but the pigs escape, finding themselves between the illustrated panels. Their appearance becomes more realistic once they’re loose, as though they’ve been visually constrained by the artwork and only become physical once outside its borders. Safe from the wolf, they begin exploring the white space beyond the panels, folding the panels into paper planes, invading or choosing between panels. However, the nature of these illustrated panels as physical and material is not manifest in the tale, aside from a little represented creasing to indicate fold lines.³ Wiesner’s story concerns what is printed on the page, rather than the page itself.

Other picturebooks, however, incorporate the materiality of books into the narrative, often emphasizing the synergy through protagonists interacting substantially with the books. Lauren Child’s *Beware of the Storybook Wolves* (2000) features child protagonist Herb on the cover reading a copy of *Little Red Riding Hood*. Movement in and out of Herb’s

books—whether it's the wolves escaping *Little Red Riding Hood* or Herb going into a fairy tale volume to find jelly—is clearly delineated. Herb finally goes to sleep on top of all his storybooks in order to avoid further encounters with their characters, an imaginative nod to the idea that narrative content is contained, and therefore may be imprisoned, within the pages. Paratextual significance is involved through the small wolf's presence on the illustrated book the mother holds: "Herb recognised him as the back-cover wolf."⁴ In fact, the small wolf likewise appears on the back cover of *Beware of the Storybook Wolves*, although there are textual differences in the representations of the covers and it isn't explained why the big wolf's transformation into a caterpillar features on the back cover of *Little Red Riding Hood* before the relevant incident occurs in the narrative of *Beware of the Storybook Wolves*. However, while the protagonists interface with books, the latter's materiality is still not overtly manifest.

It is in Child's follow-up volume, *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* (2002), that we see the materiality of books become more entwined with the narrative: a simulation of the act of reading making a physical impression. Herb falls into a book of fairy tales he has been reading, and along the way is brought to account for his vandalism of said book: leaving squashed peas between the pages, drawing moustaches and glasses onto ball guests in "Cinderella," and cutting holes into pages. One hole is correspondingly cut from the page of *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?*, assimilating the page into the narrative. Child's use of drawing and collage represents the different textures and execution of illustration and text, allowing for greater interplay between protagonists and physical book, and this involves the paratext as well. On the back cover, for example, the vain Goldilocks is depicted writing her own blurb: "Starring the divinely talented Miss Goldilocks." *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* highlights the impacts of interaction between reader-protagonists and books in terms of squashed peas and scribbling.

The interaction between reader and book in narrative can thus explicate the materiality of the books themselves and, furthermore, explore the kinds of relationships that form between readers and books through the act of reading. Terry Pratchett's *Where's My Cow?* (2005), illustrated by Melvyn Grant and part of Pratchett's Discworld series, is actually absorbed into the narrative about its own reading. Of Pratchett's books generally, Jessica Tiffin notes "their very acute response to the multiplicity and complexity of modern consumer society and its attendant cultures" (159). In this particular case, Pratchett responds

to the culture of picturebook publishing and the tradition of pastel, pastoral tales that fail to address the urban realities of so many of the children to whom these tales are read. Sam Vimes, the protagonist and a Commander of the Ankh-Morpork City Watch, reads the pastoral-themed *Where's My Cow?* to his son, Young Sam, but declares it irrelevant: "And Sam Vimes thought: Why is Young Sam's nursery full of farmyard animals, anyway? Why are his books full of moo-cows and baa-lambs? He is growing up in a city." Thus this reader-protagonist begins to deviate from his copy of *Where's My Cow?*.

Sam's initial act of reading the book to his son, complete with facial and arm gestures, is pictured against a backdrop of its narrated pages. As Elisabeth Parsons suggests, "Adults perform picture books for children within the intimate space of personal relationships," where "picture books operate as scripts and sites for performance by forming a visual and spatial backdrop, providing textual narratives, scripting dialogues, and incorporating scores for an interplay of speech, gesture and the production of abstract sounds." In this case, Pratchett and Grant generate this performance in their narrative, building the intertextual relationship between the pastel text and the book about the reader-protagonist's performance of that text, distinguished by its earthier aesthetic. The pastel illustrations of farm animals merge with the nursery space as Sam scripts himself and his urban environment into the narrative's performance: "Where's my daddy? Is that my daddy? It goes 'Bugrit! Millennium Hand and Shrimp!' It is Foul Ole Ron!" One book becomes the other, and consequently, the covers of both *Where's My Cow?* books are identical. Each is marked with a medal symbol, "Children's Winner of the Ankh-Morpork Librarians' Award." This reference to the fictional city and its librarian in effect embeds the paratext within the narrative world of Pratchett's Discworld series.⁵ There is no clear, uninterrupted division between the actual book and the book in the narrative—each informs and shapes the other. The book itself and its narrative representation coexist: written, drawn, and printed as one object.

Emily Gravett, the main focus of this study, has produced several such books, including *Wolves* (2005), *Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears* (2007), and *Spells* (2008). These books fully exploit the synergy of narrative and materiality so that the two are in effect fully integrated. To create and engage with the materiality of the book, Gravett provides a range of anthropomorphized reader-protagonists. They act as both readers and revisionists, leaving their physical traces upon their books. In *Wolves*,

a rabbit borrows a book on wolves from the library, and in the process of reading is devoured by one of the described wolves, leaving only book debris. In *Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears*, Little Mouse rewrites and modifies *Emily Gravett's Big Book of Fears*, creating a secondhand book. *Spells* charts the discovery of a book of spells by a frog wishing to be a prince, who forgets to read the fine print as he literally tears through the book. In all cases, the narrative relies on the materiality of the book.

Gravett's books are especially notable for the inscription of the paratext—or more particularly, the peritext—that disregards the “threshold” dividing narrative text from what surrounds it (Genette 2).⁶ Gérard Genette explains that “the paratext is what enables a text to become a book and to be offered as such to its readers and, more generally, to the public” (1). However, Gravett utilizes the book itself as text. For instance, Genette notes “the publisher's peritext: the cover, the title page, and their appendages, which present to the public at large and then to the reader many other items of information, some of which are authorial and some of which are the publisher's responsibility” (23). In picturebooks like Gravett's, the author herself presents the publisher's peritext as narrative text; such information as the publisher's name, recommended retail price, and ISBN numbers often appears on depicted scraps of paper, as though torn off and redistributed. Such peritext is rarely represented as firmly fixed to the text, but is tacked on as metatextual play.

Furthermore, the use of the book as text reproduces the lived experience of books in an act of mimesis, as suggested already by the performance factor. Marina Warner writes of this spirit of animation: “Things may not actually spring to life in a game, but playing generates stories and turns the mute and inert expressive; handling a thing cannot animate it, but it can render it intelligible. Many stories do their very best to imitate this process” (7). Gravett's books are presented from the first as library or secondhand books—books that have already passed through other hands and generated other readings—even as they depart the publishing house. This in itself is a significant utilization of peritext: making what is new deliberately appear used in order to animate the text and suggest an established past of reading that in turn produces the story. To generate this appearance, Gravett employs machine print, handwritten print, collage, pencil-sketching, watercolor, and other diverse illustrative techniques that represent material multiplicity through the scanning and printing processes.

The picturebook is a material part of a child's or adult's—or even a rabbit's, mouse's, or frog's—act of reading. Warner argues that “Before children learn to read, they act like readers when they play with materials and objects like readers” (9). The book, actually intended for reading, is foremost such an object. And because the books Gravett narrates are nonfictional, informational texts, she emphasizes play with their materiality as fictional narrative, focusing less on the information in them than on their material existence as objects for reading.⁷ Karin Littau notes that “books are carriers of meaning, but first and foremost they are also material objects which determine modes and habits of reading” (37). These modes and habits in turn have an impact on the book, and Gravett illustrates and writes that impact into her narrative. As Christine Hall notes, “As the rabbit gets further into the book . . . we readers get further into our book,” encapsulating the temporal mimesis of the act of reading, though still constituting the books as separate, identifying “at least four versions of the book” (140). Yet the various versions are never fully separate from each other, coexisting as the one material narrative. Nikolajeva and Scott cite the framing technique of *mise en abyme*, “defined as a text—visual or verbal—embedded within another text as its miniature replica” (226), although it is ambiguous as to which book replicates the other, and often the books change proportions as the material evolves the narrative. Likewise, Sylvia Pantaleo takes up the concept of *mise en abyme*, but also notes that “The boundary between the story world and the outside world is subverted in *Wolves* for both readers and Rabbit” (19). It is not only subverted, I would argue, but refuted.

Wolves is presented as a library book called *Wolves*. G. Rabbit, the reader-protagonist, borrows the library book, illustrated to match the actual cover beneath the dust jacket. As the rabbit leaves the library, he opens his book to the endpapers. Unlike the paratextual endpapers, which are unadorned and pristine as befitting a new book, these are in effect narrated as the same endpapers, but worn, befitting a library book already in circulation. On the right is an image of a West Bucks Public Burrowing Library circulation slip with stamps providing dates of previous “burrowings” back to 03/07/91.⁸ On the left is attached a brown cardboard pocket, stamped with the library's details. Within the pocket is a blue-lined card, again stamped with the library details as well as with the title and author of the book, the call number narrated as handwritten by a fictional librarian. The card further narrates previous mistreatment by readers with a reproduction coffee stain and a graffito

of two rabbits, their ears forming a heart shape, as though a reader had been absorbed in romantic daydreams. Although the picturebook is a singular creative act, Gravett's illustration provides a detailed, narrated history of book marking, from a library's identification and tracking of inventory to a previous reader's defacement of the book.

The narrative is, in fact, a historical celebration of the library book in material form. Contemporary libraries generally employ technologies that have rendered obsolete such printed matter that records borrowing history and connects it physically to the book in question. These older print cultures would be unexperienced by the target audience of Gravett's work. The narration of such material thus embeds the narrative in a nostalgic book culture, one that makes more visible upon the book itself its passage between readers. Shaun Tan's *Tales from Outer Suburbia* (2008) also reproduces this material in the peritext. The imprint of old tape, stamps, and such marks the last page of the book. There is a circulation slip with a card poking out of a pocket. The circulation slip, however, is not indicative of the borrowing history of Tan's book, but serves as a means to naturalize acknowledgments within the narrative: "This book is due for return on or before the last date stamped below. In the meantime, the author wishes to thank the following people and organisations for their generous assistance and support" (95). The reference to "meantime" conjures the temporal situation of readers, who have their possession of the book limited by this admonition. They must "return" it by "31 Feb 2056," a date that, needless to say, does not exist. Nonetheless, Tan playfully restricts possession. Many readers will have actually borrowed the book, but the book's material narrative itself suggests that it passes through the hands of different readers.

Janet L. Borgerson and Jonathan E. Schroeder note how "the popular value of used goods—including books—contradicts the notion that 'clean' and 'new' determine the borders of consumer desire" (46). The library or used book circulates independently of and beyond its original material value as a new item, becoming a changed object. By Gravett or Tan producing a new book (published as "new") that appears to be used, they capitalize upon this contradiction, challenging the notion of newness in terms of consumer and reader desire. The value of the books now lies in their "wear"—fictive evidence of past use. According to Borgerson and Schroeder, "In a postmodern book market, we would expect to witness the consumer as producer, forming a new relation with the object, interacting to create a 'new' text by augmenting, annotating, animating, and archiving, not simply accepting the authorial version"

(57). The postmodern reader-protagonists of Gravett's books in fact do all these things: the notion of the consumer/reader reproducing the text becoming the narrative crux.

Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears is a representation of this process: on the book's cover, the title is shown as *Emily Gravett's Big Book of Fears*, with "Emily Gravett's" crossed out and replaced with a handwritten "Little Mouse's." Little Mouse appropriates authorship of the picturebook through narrative activity that mimics the consumer's.⁹ Indeed, Little Mouse is acting for two real-life rats, Button and Mr. Moo, to whom the book is dedicated and who actually assisted in the creative marking. The dedication, represented as a scrap of paper, appears on the final endpapers of the hardback edition. The "original" printed dedication, "This book is dedicated to anyone who suffers from Musophobia (Fear of mice)," is crossed out, with a penciled arrow leading to the paw-written message: "The fabulous rats Button and Mr. Moo, who taught me everything I know about nibbling." A chewed-up reproduced black-and-white photo of the two rats is seen as being stapled to the bottom of the dedication scrap. The "I" is ostensibly Little Mouse, though the rats are the actual pets of Gravett's daughter and, as Charlotte Higgins reported in *The Guardian*, did contribute to the creation of the book: "Over the six-month period in which she was creating the book, Gravett would leave plain pieces of cartridge paper painted with yoghurt in the rats' cage. After a few days, when it came to cleaning it out, she would retrieve a chewed up, peed-on sheet. She then scanned the paper and used the resultant image, mostly overlaying it on to a more textured sheet of paper to create the look she wanted." Gravett utilizes the paper that has been consumed by the rats to create her book, a reproduction of their initial "work" upon the material.

The cardboard, hardback cover of *Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears* is deliberately rendered to appear worn. Tears and wear on the front cover are complimented by an entire hole through which the image of Little Mouse appears from the endpapers. Upon the back, Gravett reinforces the "used" status of the book: Little Mouse is seen tearing into a piece of paper taped to the cover; the paper is a receipt from Big Cheese Books for *Emily Gravett's Big Book of Fears*. The receipt notes the condition of the book—"poor, scribbled in, rodent damage"—which is realistic, considering the creative process. Small, detached fragments of the receipt are used to record the publisher, recommended price, and bar code of the new, physical book while the entire effect simulates the used book within the used book market.

Many of Gravett's books are in fact doubly bound—the physical binding representing the book in the narrative. Both *Wolves* and *Spells* utilize this double binding. The physical hardback copy of *Wolves* features a dust jacket that is the same as that depicted on the library leaflet in the narrative. Rabbit carries around a copy of the book without the dust jacket, the same cover as that of the physical book: plain red cloth with “WOLVES” stamped in black on the front. Contrary to typical practice, these layers of the hardback (dust jacket and cover as separate) are likewise reproduced in the paperback edition. Notably, the picturebook is aimed at an age group that has only a limited literary experience, yet Gravett very clearly represents the physical peritext of books as part of the narrative, drawing attention to the diverse parts and their significance as the narrative moves through them.

The title page, including frontis, represents a brief “external” view of *Wolves* as a narrated book: ostensibly the perspective of the reader-protagonist before being absorbed—rather literally—in the book. The photographic image of the rabbit's doormat fills most of the double-page layout. The doormat is, in effect and most aptly, marking Genette's paratextual threshold: the moment between the physical book and the book Rabbit is about to borrow, prompted by the leaflet upon this threshold. The mail includes a postcard, printed with bibliographic information. The publisher and date of first publication appear as the post office stamp. A dedication, reproducing what presumably is the author's handwriting, is placed where the usual message is positioned upon a postcard. Peritextual information thus appears as part of the reader-protagonist's story. There is also the leaflet publicizing the arrival of *Wolves* at the library, in which the dust jacket itself is illustrated, but obviously without later peritextual additions such as book prizes, medals, and review quotes. There is, however, a rewriting of Gravett's surname as Grrrabbit. Likewise, the dedication is to Oleander Grrrabbit; “Oleander” is Gravett's daughter's name. On the hardback edition, this rewriting—Grrrabbit—is also visible on the spine of the cover beneath the dust jacket.

Gravett frequently and deliberately rewrites her name as author. As with *Wolves*, the author's name appears on the dust jacket of *Spells*, but the title page/frontis features an image of the protagonist holding the book, this time with the author's name appearing as Emily Gribbitt. This image is not of the dust jacket, but of the yellow cover of the book beneath it, again drawing attention to the layers. When the physical dust jacket is removed, the cover is just the same as in its representa-

tion, with “Emily Gribbitt” appearing on front and spine, just as “Emily Grrrabbit” appears on the spine of *Wolves*.

This rewriting of the author’s name with a pseudonym places the author’s name in narrative—she transforms as the author of the narrated book, becoming “Grrrabbit” to rhyme with “rabbit” and “Gribbitt” to onomatopoeically imply a frog. Genette writes of the process of “*imagining the author*,” in which “the real author attributes a work to an author who, this time, is imaginary but provided with some attributes” (47; emphasis in original). Gravett’s rewriting of her name with the pseudonym is a variation on this process, whereby she imagines herself into the fictional world she is materially representing, yet likewise retains the use of her name on the outer cover, rendering the imagining highly visible to those readers paying attention.

As Gravett imagines herself into the fictional world, her reader-protagonists are likewise absorbed into the materiality of the narrated book, in turn transforming the physical one. Rabbit, for instance, reads *Wolves*. While Rabbit is seen reading the book in the foreground, the pages being read appear in the background, rather as the initial pages of *Where’s My Cow?* appear behind Sam Vimes as he reads. The pages provide details about the wolves, such as “Grey wolves live in packs of between two and ten animals,” with illustrations, but very soon we see the illustration of one wolf dominate, with Rabbit, head still in book, superimposed. When we see that wolves “have sharp claws,” one sketched claw overlaps Rabbit, signaling the change in narrative orientation between reader-protagonist and book. At “bushy tails,” Rabbit is seen apparently striding through the illustration of the wolf, no longer separate, but part of the illustration. Rabbit stops in alarm when the book in his paws synchs with the book he is now part of. Illustration and text are matched, each with a significant ellipsis that fails to complete the sentence concerning what wolves eat.

The inference is clear. *Wolves* has absorbed its reader, placing him in immediate danger from the narrated wolves. Thus the next two pages show the mauled cover and the scrap of text that completes the sentence: “. . . rabbits.” However, Gravett provides an alternative ending, made up, it would appear, from torn fragments of the bodies of the wolf and rabbit, rearranged so that they are sharing a jam sandwich. Their bodies are thus reconstructed from the ruins of the narrated book, the alternative ending created from the pages themselves, the violent material of the ending rearranged.

Nonetheless, the last page spread (before the endpapers) “book-ends” the narrative, returning to the threshold of Rabbit’s doormat, covered in fresh mail. Among the letters is one actual envelope, glued to the page and stamped on the back as coming from the West Bucks Burrowing Library. Within the envelope is a slip of paper that can be removed: a letter from the library informing Rabbit of his overdue loan of *Wolves* and the current fine. The inclusion of the envelope as physical object highlights the paratextual interplay, for the book has consumed its reader and will not be returned.

Gravett’s narrative is descriptive of how readers, sometimes quite fantastically, affect and consume the materiality of a book and, vice versa, how the book can affect and consume the reader’s material body or environment. Reading is not simply a cerebral activity—the text has materiality, so the reader’s consumption of the text leaves impressions. Littau works with the premise “to ‘make perceptible’ not just that readers have bodies, but also that books have bodies, that is, that they are physical, that they enter into physiological relations with other bodies” (154). As Littau acknowledges, literary theory has shown a tendency to treat the text as intellectual, even to the extent of Stanley Fish’s assertion in the 1980 title *Is There a Text in This Class?*. Fish’s treatment of text is indicative of the theoretical disembodiment of text, which makes possible Fish’s proposition that “interpretive communities,” not texts, produce meaning (14).

Fish explains: “I had escaped formalism by displacing attention from the text, in its spatial configurations, to the reader and his temporal experience” (4). Gravett, by making the protagonist a reader, represents that temporal experience as material text, for her text can only be understood *as* a book one moves through. Indeed, Genette likewise asserts the material and matter of paratext as “temporal occasions,” recognizing that paratext can occur at different times in relation to the text, whether a title is written at the last minute or a critic’s response is published after the text’s initial publication (264). It is Little Mouse’s making of meaning as he progressively moves through *Emily Gravett’s Big Book of Fears* that reconfigures the spatial, physical aspects of the text, including paratext. There is a hole in the frontis, for instance, the “of” and a bit of the “F” of the title displaced as a torn-out scrap. Through the hole appears Little Mouse from the next page; he looks frightened and is holding a pencil. Little Mouse, as the page turns, is already becoming tangled up in the text: wrapped in the illustration of a spiderweb. *Emily Gravett’s Big Book of Fears* is a text on which a fear

is printed on each page, along with the invitation to the reader: "Use the space below to record your fears." The narrative of *Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears* is thus the reader-protagonist's material response to this invitation and has a temporal aspect. Little Mouse is depicted traveling through the pages of the book, the leaves of the book discoloring, becoming torn and bent. The gradual wearing of the physical book is essential to understanding the temporal aspect of Little Mouse's writing of the text.

Little Mouse also adds textual material to the book: his own writing, cards, torn newspaper articles, leaflets, postcards, photographs, and occasionally objects such as feathers taped, stapled, and paper-clipped to the pages. Some of this material exists three-dimensionally, the actual layers of material narrating subplots. For example, a stapled article about "Mouse numbers slashed," which discusses the killing of mice by a knife-wielding farmer's wife, can be folded out to reveal an advertisement for "three fab knives." No narrative connection is articulated. The juxtaposition of textual materials reveals a kind of reading that actually relies on engagement with spatial and temporal indicators.

Little Mouse's progress is also measured by the ever shrinking pencil he nervously nibbles—by the end of the book, just a stub. The pencil is Little Mouse's primary tool for rewriting text as he reads it. At the conclusion, he settles down in the peritext, hugging what remains of the pencil, his expression indicating satisfaction with the read journey and his adventures with rewriting the text. He snuggles in a collage of paper scraps, including the book's receipt penciled in with Little Mouse's name and a self-portrait with a medal for his bravery, a declaration of his having dealt with his fears through the book. Littau, in discussing modernity, contends that "It is as if there is now little time for the reader to think, reflect at their leisure, or truly digest" (45). Clearly, Little Mouse represents a return to the ability to digest and regurgitate, his drawings on the endpapers describing what he has learned from his reading.

Spells is similar to *Little Mouse's Book of Fears* in that the reader-protagonist, a frog, engages with Emily Gribbitt's *Spells*. However, there is a greater separation between physical and narrated book. The black background of the physical pages is distinguished from the aged cream of the pages of Gribbitt's *Spells*. Those cream pages, however, create the narrative. The frog who "wished it was a book about boats" is seen standing upon the open *Spells*, pages torn to make mast, sail, pirate flag, telescope, hat, sea, and birds. The frog wishes "he was a

handsome prince kissing a beautiful princess,” fashioning himself an origami crown and making a cut-out princess from the pages. He then realizes that there is a spell to turn him into a handsome prince, but he must put the spell together from all the ripped pages. The following pages are actually split in half, permitting mixes of images and text as the frog turns into various creatures before fitting together the correct pieces and turning into a prince, modestly placing torn print that spells “prince” over his naked body as both clothing and identifier. Upon kissing the princess, however, he turns back into a frog. Gravett does not explain this occurrence until the endpapers, where a paper fragment bears the fine print of the spell: namely, that a princess’s kiss will undo it. Gravett’s use of the torn fragments as narrative plays with the very notion of how the physical text can be reconfigured to create new meanings (or spells)—and, indeed, how the failure to read the text as physically presented can lead to disastrous new meanings and consequences, as in the failure to note the fine print in a spell.

Gravett carries this play with narrative as text into epitext through her personal Web site, run through her publishers, Pan Macmillan. Genette posits that the difference between peritext and epitext “is in theory purely spatial. The epitext is any paratextual element not materially appended to the text within the same volume but circulating, as it were, freely, in a virtually limitless physical and social space” (344). Genette, understandably considering the time of his writing, did not mention the Internet as an aspect of the public epitext. However, the Internet has indeed become a pivotal form of epitext, particularly with authors and publishers using it to provide promotional material for books, including previews, examples of early drafts, and responses to reader queries. Much of this material would formerly have been private or of limited accessibility, but is now an established online aspect of book publishing.

This online epitext is closer in nature, perhaps, to the text of Fish’s equation, having no physical presence. Jerome McGann writes of “the first stages of a major shift in how we think about and manage texts, images, and their vehicular forms. From a literary person’s point of view, the relevance of these changes can appear purely marginal: for whatever happens in the future, whatever new electronic poetry or fiction gets produced, the literature we inherit (to this date) is and will always be bookish” (168). Gravett’s site is indeed “bookish,” producing a nonmaterial epitext that aggressively represents the materiality of her books, simulating pages and page turning, for example. Angela

Yannicopoulou goes so far as to argue, “Bearing in mind that hypertext is a network of nodes and the links between them, where textual chunks (verbal and visual) can be creatively connected to each other, children’s literature can be regarded as hypertextual whenever it denies the compulsory linearity of reading and offers different narrative possibilities to be activated” (15). In fact, it is the very nonlinearity of Gravett’s picturebooks that links them so readily to the bookishness of hypertext.

The site, *emilygravett.com*, is entered through a sketch of a library. The Web site thus mimics the conceit of entering a library to access books, although the library itself appears as an illustration on a stamp. Thus the context represents physicality by rendering the sketch of the library as a physical piece of textual matter. The next click brings the reader to a red page, upon which is superimposed another page, creating the sense of dimension that actually doesn’t exist in the sense of hypertext. This page is a sketch of the interior of a library, with a self-portrait of Emily Gravett at the librarian’s desk. Posters, books, games, and containers of pens upon the shelves lead the visitor to other sections of the Web site offering games, activities, and information about her books as well as upcoming releases. These previews themselves represent the open pages of the books, the hypertext again representing the material text—in essence, behaving in a decidedly bookish manner. The Web site thus reinforces Gravett’s use of text as physical book.

Many other authors use such techniques on their Web sites. J. K. Rowling’s official site, for example, is entered through an image of her desk. Click on the diary and it opens up like an actual diary, a pen quickly scribbling “Biography” across the right-hand page while photographs, train tickets, and doodles fly in and attach to the left-hand page with paper clips and tape. Although the “book” is equipped with a scroll bar, it also allows the reader to click on the lower corner of the right-hand page and turn it, with new photographs and other material attaching to the next left-hand page. While Rowling’s Web site is not “bookish” in the strictest sense, the use of representations of calendars, diaries, and other print material in the hypertextual environment highlights the physical status of text. This is apt in terms of Rowling’s own work in the Harry Potter series (1997–2007), in which books and print matter like maps and newspapers play a pivotal, often physical, role in wizard culture. Rowling has also released *The Tales of Beedle the Bard* (2008), a book that originally appeared in her series, along with the ostensible

textbooks *Fantastic Beasts & Where to Find Them* (2001) and *Quidditch Through the Ages* (2001), thus rendering fictional texts as physical books.

The materiality of the book, whether physical or represented, is a significant part of storytelling and intrinsic to how text is read and, indeed, absorbed and rewritten. As Mackey suggests, such books “virtually put readers *inside* book systems” or, taking it a step further, inside the materiality of the book itself (115; emphasis in original). Authors like Gravett carry this over to the online epitext, recreating materiality in the digital environment. Yet it is the ability to synthesize this materiality with narrative itself that distinguishes picturebooks, particularly through reader-protagonists who, in the act of reading, collapse the boundaries between the physical object being read and the narrative. In this way, picturebooks call attention to the potential synergies of narrative and materiality.

Notes

I thank the *Children's Literature* reviewers and editors for their advice on this article's earlier drafts.

¹See, for example, Sipe and Pantaleo; Nikolajeva and Scott; Bull and Anstey; and Lewis. The playfulness of picturebooks and their tendency toward intertextuality, self-referentiality, and related narrative and visual devices make the postmodern approach both appealing and reasonable.

²Ironically, there is a video trailer for the book available from the Macmillan Web site at <<http://us.macmillan.com/itsabook#video>>. While the book itself highlights the value of the reading experience with books, the video actually provides an alternative reading experience, undermining the privilege of the printed book.

³Indeed, the pigs cast shadows but the pages themselves don't, suggesting that the pigs are physical, but the book is not.

⁴Picturebooks often lack an official page numbering system, so page numbers are not indicated in this article unless printed.

⁵It is worth noting that Pratchett's Discworld novel, *Thud!* (2005), includes a subplot in which Sam Vimes is attempting to maintain his scheduled reading of *Where's My Cow?* during an investigation.

⁶Peritext is a form of paratext, referring to the material attached to the book. In this article I employ both terms, since, as I will later discuss, there is also an element of paratext online that is pertinent to the discussion.

⁷Sylvia Pantaleo also refers to the shifts in address and discourse, including the “expository” text, in a study of the book's creation of metalepsis: “The different registers of language further signal a shift of diegetic level or narrative frame in the book” (20).

⁸The rewriting of “borrowing” as “burrowing” is, of course, a play on words related to the rabbit readers. Gravett's rewritings tend to be founded in sound rather than in meaning. Since picturebooks are designed to be read out loud, the privileged sound-play is apt.

⁹Lauren Child's *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* features “This book belongs to Herb” on its title page, signaling the child's possession, if not revision, of the book. However, in the narrative Herb never owns *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?*, but does own an unnamed fairy tale book, so the inscription of the reader-protagonist's possession does not clearly arise from narrative.

Works Cited

- Borgerson, Janet L., and Jonathan E. Schroeder. "The pleasures of the used text: revealing traces of consumption." *Consuming Books: The Marketing and Consumption of Literature*. Ed. Stephen Brown. New York: Routledge, 2006. 46–59.
- Bull, Geoff, and Michèle Anstey. *Evolving Pedagogies: Reading and writing in a multimodal world*. Carlton, Austral.: Education Services Australia, 2010.
- Child, Lauren. *Beware of the Storybook Wolves*. London: Hodder Children's Books, 2000.
- . *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?*. London: Hodder Children's Books, 2002.
- Emily Gravett Official Site. <www.emilygravett.com>.
- Fish, Stanley. *Is There a Text in This Class?: The Authority of Interpretive Communities*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 1980.
- Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Trans. Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997.
- Gravett, Emily. *Little Mouse's Big Book of Fears*. London: Macmillan Children's Books, 2007.
- . *Spells*. London: Macmillan Children's Books, 2008.
- . *Wolves*. London: Macmillan Children's Books, 2005.
- Hall, Christine. "Imagination and Multimodality: Reading, Picturebooks, and Anxieties About Childhood." Sipe and Pantaleo, 130–46.
- Higgins, Charlotte. "Award-winning Book Illustrator Reveals Her Secret: Rat Pee." *The Guardian*. 27 June 2008. <<http://www.guardian.co.uk/books/2008/jun/27/news.uk>>.
- J. K. Rowling Official Site. <<http://www.jkrowling.com/>>.
- Lewis, David. *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks: Picturing text*. Abingdon, UK: RoutledgeFalmer, 2001.
- Littau, Karin. *Theories of Reading: Books, Bodies and Bibliomania*. Cambridge: Polity, 2006.
- Mackey, Margaret. "Postmodern Picturebooks and the Material Conditions of Reading." Sipe and Pantaleo, 103–16.
- McGann, Jerome. *Radiant Textuality: Literature after the World Wide Web*. New York: Palgrave, 2001.
- Nikolajeva, Maria, and Carole Scott. *How Picturebooks Work*. New York: Routledge, 2006.
- Pantaleo, Sylvia. "Mutinuous Fiction: Narrative and Illustrative Metalepsis in Three Postmodern Picturebooks." *Children's Literature in Education* 41 (2010): 12–27.
- Parsons, Elisabeth. "Starring in the Intimate Space: Picture Book Narratives and Performance Semiotics." *Image & Narrative* 9 (2004). <<http://www.imageandnarrative.be/inarchive/performance/parsons.htm>>.
- Pratchett, Terry. *Thud!*. London: Doubleday, 2005.
- . *Where's My Cow?*. Illus. Melvyn Grant. London: Doubleday, 2005.
- Sipe, Lawrence R., and Sylvia Joyce Pantaleo. *Postmodern Picturebooks: Play, Parody, and Self-Referentiality*. New York: Routledge, 2008.
- Smith, Lane. *It's a Book*. New York: Roaring Brook P, 2010.
- Tan, Shaun. *Tales from Outer Suburbia*. Crows Nest, Austral.: Allen & Unwin, 2008.
- Tiffin, Jessica. *Marvelous Geometry: Narrative and Metafiction in Modern Fairy Tale*. Detroit: Wayne State UP, 2009.
- Warner, Marina. "Out of an Old Toy Chest." *Journal of Aesthetic Education* 43.2 (2009): 3–18.
- Wiesner, David. *The Three Pigs*. New York: Clarion Books, 2001.
- Yannicopoulou, Angela. "Hypertextual Elements in the Interactive Fiction of Trivizas." *Bookbird* 45.1 (2007): 15–22.