

CHAPTER THREE

ON BEYOND Z: THE VISUAL IMAGINATION AND POSTMODERN CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS

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"In the places I go there are things that I see
That I *never* could spell if I stopped with the Z.
I'm telling you this 'cause you're one of my friends,
My alphabet starts where *your* alphabet ends!"
(Dr. Seuss, *On Beyond Zebra!*)

Throughout the last four decades of the twentieth century, a new genre was emerging as authors and illustrators vaulted over, ducked under, or simply smashed through the linguistic and visual boundaries generally felt appropriate for children's literature. As with any new genre, debates developed over what to call this postmodern phenomenon: illustrated story? annotated pictures? picture narrative? imagetext? iconotext? picturebook? picture-book? picture book? Picturebook is now the favoured term because it "signals" not only "symbiotic variations" that arise when images and text are juxtaposed but also "the synergetic integration of pictures and words in the book." In contrast, the others terms, including picture book, signal "the division, or degrees of separation, between the pictorial and the verbal within... the book."¹ I have opted for picture book as two

¹ Schwenke Wyile 193n2. Andrea Schwenke Wyile (193n2) and David Lewis (xiv) mention several variations on "picture book": for example, Barbara Kiefer and Maria Nikolajeva and

words because, while the “symbiotic variations” and “synergetic integration” are essential for discussing the relationship of image and text, so too are the degrees of separation. And who is the creator of a picture book? Sometimes it is an author who collaborates with an illustrator, sometimes (although not as frequently) an artist who seeks out a writer to provide the accompanying text, or sometimes one person serves as both verbal and visual creator.² This may seem a simple enough relationship with functions clearly defined, but again, theorists have proposed a variety of terms to describe the creator’s or creators’ presence in a picture book: picturebook maker (Lewis xv), visual narrator (Nikolajeva and Scott), pictorializer, narrator-focalizer, and pictorial-focalizer (Schwenke Wyile 185). Increasingly, other creative participants are being acknowledged and credited on the title page such as the designer, who assembles the words and images on each page throughout the book, or the photographer responsible for capturing the sculpted creations of the primary artist or for supplying images caught through the camera’s eye that complement the writer’s verbal text. Finally, who peruses a picture book: a viewer? an observer? a beholder?³ a co-producer? a co-creator? or the more generic and hybrid “reader”

Carole Scott favour the one-word option, whereas Perry Nodelman favours the two-word and Peter Hunt, as editor of Oxford University Press’s *Children’s Literature: An Illustrated History*, the hyphenated variations. Lewis justifies his decision to make the word “picturebook” “a compound... the better to reflect the compound nature of the artefact itself” (xiv). W.J.T. Mitchell discusses variations on “image text” (image/text, image-text, imagetext) in his *Picture Theory* (89n9). Nikolajeva and Scott establish distinctions among the “picture narrative,” which is “wordless or with very few words”; the “picturebook,” in which “text and picture [are] equally important” (6); the “illustrated story,” in which “the pictures are subordinated to the words” (8); and other related forms, including Kristin Hallberg’s “iconotext” (11). Nodelman argues that placing words and pictures “into relationship with each other inevitably changes the meaning of both” (199) and, more radically, that “words and pictures necessarily have a combative relationship; their complementarity is a matter of opposites completing each other by virtue of their differences. As a result, the relationships between pictures and texts in picture books tend to be ironic: each speaks about matters on which the other is silent” (221). Nodelman’s extreme polarization of word and image has been much debated by other theorists (for example, Lewis 68, Schwenke Wyile 182).

² Nikolajeva and Scott discuss the “imperfect collaboration between verbal text and picture” that often occurs, particularly with American picture books, when the stories are sent by the publisher to an illustrator, who may or may not have any contact with the original storyteller. The images can be “quite static... more decorative than narrative,” and the “product is, in fact, not a picturebook, but an illustrated book” (16).

³ Jane Doonan opts for the word “‘beholder’ because there is no established term to describe someone with formal understanding of visual images that are not free-standing works of art or one-off decorations but sequences of scenes, comic-book frames, illustrations in books. To call such a person a reader, and the skill visual literacy, would be

who decodes both words and pictures (Schwenke Wyile 194n9)? "'Reading' no longer means interacting with words on a page alone," writes Eliza Dresang in *Radical Change: Books for Youth in a Digital Age*. "In an increasingly graphic environment, words and pictures are merging" and developing "a synergy that goes beyond traditional word-picture relationships of the past" (65).

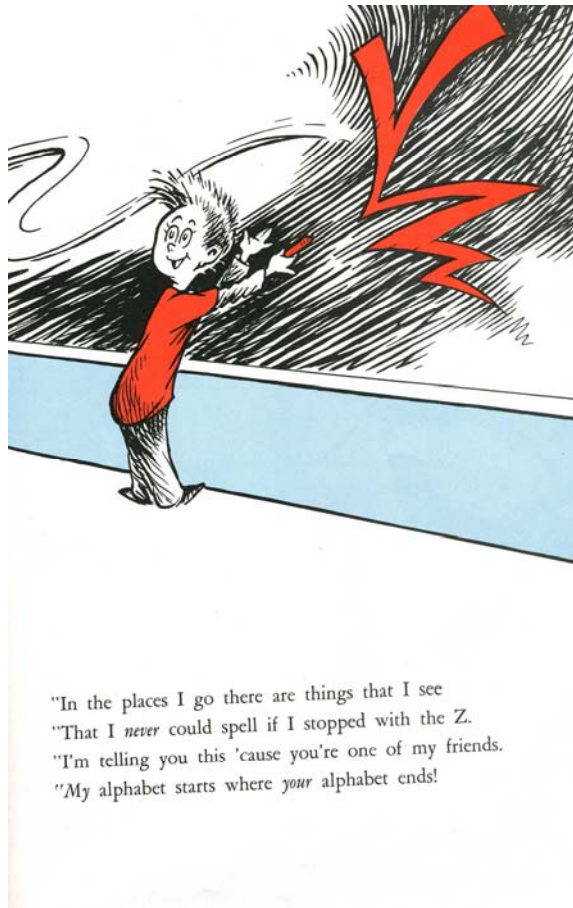


Fig. 1. Dr. Seuss (Theodor Seuss Geisel). *On Beyond Zebra!*. New York: Random, 1955. Print.

Whatever we call this new phenomenon, the authors, illustrators, and author-illustrators of the postmodern picture book certainly accepted the challenge of Dr. Seuss's *On Beyond Zebra!* (Figure 1) to rebel against the arbitrary

convenient but fails to acknowledge the difference between the ways we receive written words and pictorial images" (9).

limits that the progressive alphabet and conventional picture book impose⁴ by creating text and images which disrupt the boundaries traditionally erected between art and everyday experience and between the absent author-illustrator and the present reader. In so doing, postmodern picture book creators were, in a very new way, generating interactive and fluid liminal spaces between words and images that stimulate the reader's visual imagination to "picture things which are not there." Wolfgang Iser, of course, argues this point with reference to the responsive reading of written texts and does not have visual texts in mind: "the written part of the text," he contends, "gives us the knowledge, but it is the unwritten part that gives us the opportunity to picture things; indeed without the elements of indeterminacy, the gaps in the text, we should not be able to use our imagination" (283). Perry Nodelman conjectures that anyone "looking for the sort of 'gap' that Wolfgang Iser isolates as the basis for a reader's involvement with a text, will find the task complicated by pictures that make explicit the information unspoken by the text" (1). There are those who believe that the inclusion of images—or any kind of pictorialization, including films—renders unnecessary and even leads to the eventual erosion of the visual imagination. Such arguments, however, confuse optical and mental powers of seeing. Verbal and visual modes of expression involve different capacities: verbal is more given to temporal relationships, and visual to spatial; as well, visual depiction has the potential for greater physical specificity than verbal expression,⁵ whereas the psychological world requires "the subtleties of words to capture complex emotion and motivation" (Nikolajeva and Scott 83). When combined in a picture book, verbal

⁴ George Bodmer observes that with *On Beyond Zebra!*, "Seuss is calling into question the nature of an arbitrary alphabet. The narrator's invented letters are equally valid, since they perform the tasks of letters and serve a function in discourse." More generally, Bodmer concludes that Seuss often unfolds "a world that is usually overlooked" and that his "progression of unfolding bespeaks a rebellion against the limits of imagination, or the limits the outside world would impose on imagination" (116).

⁵ These are ideas that Nodelman develops throughout *Words About Pictures*, well summarized in his statement that "the visual spaces depicted in pictures imply time and that the temporal sequences depicted by words imply space" (243). Nikolajeva and Scott, discussing various ways in which text and image counterpoint each other, argue that "[s]patiotemporal relations is the only area in which words and pictures can never coincide. The picture, the visual text, is mimetic; it communicates by showing. The verbal text is diegetic; it communicates by telling" (26). Lewis observes that "the words in a picturebook tend to draw attention to the parts of the pictures that we should attend to, whereas the pictures provide the words with a specificity—colour, shape, and form—that they would otherwise lack" (35).

and visual modes of expression interanimate one another.⁶ This interanimation engages the reader's visual imagination to make connections and provide a shape to what is seen optically on the individual page, pair of pages, and entire book; it is, in essence, what invites the reader to co-create the story. Paradoxically, then, the inclusion of images in a book enhances the potential to "picture things that are not there," and indeed, the more detailed and intricate the visual content, the more opportunity there is for the visual imagination to be playfully engaged. The postmodern picture books that I will examine invite their readers into the invisible world beyond the letter z—an unseen, intangible and often unexplored world—through the "gaps of indeterminacy" within both the written text and visual images as well as between the written text and visual images. Engaged in these picture books, young readers can begin to hone those skills that we refer to as visual literacy, the ability "to discriminate and interpret the visible actions, objects, [and] symbols, natural or man-made" found in our environment, according to John Debes, who coined the term "visual literacy" in 1969 and who was a co-founder of the International Visual Literacy Association (in Avgerinou). Visual literacy is, I will argue, the foundation of other kinds of literacy such as eco-literacy, emotional literacy, and media literacy.

But have not children's picture books always stimulated their readers' visual imaginations? Have they not always challenged their readers to picture things that are not there? Have they not always provided readers with the stimuli to unleash their minds from their daily and material preoccupations and experience adventures in fantastic lands? They have, but the major difference between earlier and postmodern picture books is the element of instability that many of these texts incite. In "The Paradox of Space in Postmodern Picturebooks," Bette Goldstone observes: "Rather than trying to interpret and represent a stable reality with clear parameters and mores, postmodern artists reflect upon a world—complex and confusing, a world which questions its purpose and function and has unstable and quixotically changing boundaries" (117). In postmodern picture books, the breadcrumbs that are scattered—whether words or images—to stimulate the imagination cannot always be followed on a linear outward or homeward path, and, even when this is possible, there are many other paths that open a network or web of possibilities. Sometimes the leap from word to word, image to image, and

⁶ Borrowing from Meek (176-77), Lewis uses the terms "interanimate" and "interanimation" throughout *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks*. Again, this is a much debated term, with many variations. Lawrence Sipe gives an overview of these variations: duet, counterpoint and contrapuntal, antiphonal, interference, polysystemy, among others (97-98). Sipe prefers the term "synergy" and borrows a theory of "transmediation" from literacy studies "in understanding how we construct the conversation between words and pictures" (101).

word to image is small and effortless if the span is a mere gap, but sometimes the span is an abyss into which the reader risks falling. Some of the picture books that I will discuss stimulate their readers' imaginations through minimal text and spare images, others through an excess of detail. There is no dominant media type, style, or target age group, but what they all have in common is their interanimation of pictures and words to create liminal spaces "on beyond z" into which readers can enter and expand their visual imaginations. Three techniques are particularly valuable for the blurring or collapsing of the boundaries traditionally imposed between the created world and everyday experience and between author-illustrator and reader: first, multiple perspectives so that text and image tell additional, different, or even contradictory stories, often requiring contrapuntal readings; secondly, framing devices that break down boundaries between text and image, between the page and the book, and between the book and the world; and, thirdly, once the multiple perspectives have provided various points of entrance and once frames have collapsed, compositional strategies that embed images within text and text within images, even conflating text and image so that they are indistinguishable.

In *Reading Contemporary Picturebooks*, David Lewis identifies "double orientation" as one of the identifying characteristics of the picture book, traditional and postmodern: "One of the reasons why pictorialization —the promiscuous mixing together of words and images— is able to shake loose generic bonds and derail expectations [and hence adapt readily to postmodernism], is that it enables the picturebook to look in two directions at once and sometimes permits picturebook makers to play off one perspective or view against the other" (68). The classic example of this "double orientation," one that is often considered to be an early postmodern text, is Pat Hutchins's *Rosie's Walk* (1968). The written text is "virtually toneless" (Nodelman 42): "Rosie the hen went for a walk / across the yard / around the pond / over the haystack / past the mill / through the fence / under the beehives / and got back in time for dinner." Much has been written about this simple little tale, but in terms of perspective, one observation is particularly relevant to the stimulation of the visual imagination. Basing his observations on the idea of the "glance curve" proposed by perception psychologist Mercedes Gaffron, Nodelman discusses the unconventional, even unsettling, way that Hutchins positions her protagonist. When a viewer looks at a picture, Gaffron concluded from empirical evidence of beholders, we do so "in terms of 'a certain fixed path which we seem normally to follow within the picture space,'" moving "from the left foreground back around the picture space to the right background. Because we look first at the left foreground, we tend to place ourselves in that position and to identify with the objects or figures located there"

(135; Gaffron 317).⁷ In Hutchins's book, however, as Nodelman observes, the text and the images are at odds: beginning with the title page, the text and opening illustration suggest that "Rosie ought to be the center of our attention," but throughout the first pages of the book, the fox is consistently on the left (136). The narrative movement of the "walk" dictates a right-facing Rosie, which the text reinforces, as the reader peruses the words from left to right, following Rosie off the page to the next stage of her barnyard adventure (Figure 2). Who is the centre of attention, "the *real* protagonist": Rosie or the fox? Nodelman suggests it is the fox (136); alternatively, I would suggest that it is the reader who becomes engaged in a somewhat more dangerous and decidedly more humorous story than the words narrate. The reader, therefore, sees the story in a different way from the always oblivious Rosie, conveyed through both text and image, or the fox, who views Rosie as supper, conveyed solely through the images. The rhythm of the book is obliviousness (reinforced by image and text), a sense of danger (reinforced solely by image), and humour (our visual imagination bridging and shaping the pictorial and verbal clues provided in each of the previous openings). This is a new reading of this story, which the visual imagination, a bridging agent between text and image, brings into play, a humorous story conveyed through the wordless illustrations, which defuses any danger that a beholder may bring to these images either through the body language of the about-to-pounce fox and/or the cultural associations of fox as predator (Figure 3). A "double orientation" has thus generated multiple perspectives.

⁷ Gaffron also attempted to provide cognitive evidence on brain functioning, but as she herself acknowledged, when this research was undertaken (in the late 1940s), these were only "[p]reliminary studies of the physiological foundations" (329); as such, this part of Gaffron's argument is generally now disregarded and even discredited. Nevertheless, that it is a convention for artists, including picture-book artists, to direct the viewer's gaze in the direction as described by Gaffron is still considered a valid observation; of particular interest for postmodernism are the deviations from this convention. Sipe, for example, discussing Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, notes how the images work against "our propensity... to 'read' illustrations from left to right" (104), although never mentioning any specific studies or theories. Nikolajeva and Scott also refer to the "usual left to right motion" in a picture, which when reversed, brings us back into the text, the story (31; cf. Gaffron 318); elsewhere, they comment that "[c]ounterclockwise is not a natural direction for Western readers to follow, and neither is starting in the upper right-hand corner" (148-49) and that "the 'natural' way to decode movement is left to right, the way we read words... Most picturebook authors seem to have accepted this convention when they arrange the book in a single movement from left to right" (153).



Fig. 2. Pat Hutchins. *Rosie's Walk*. New York: Macmillan, 1968. Print.



Fig. 3. Pat Hutchins. *Rosie's Walk*. New York: Macmillan, 1968. Print.

In the sense that the reader is an active participant in creating the text, not a passive consumer, *Rosie's Walk* is clearly aligned with Roland Barthes's writerly as opposed to readerly texts (4-5). However, it is not Barthes's ideal text as behind the game that has been played, and behind the repositioning of the reader, there is a "truth" for which the visuals provide evidence. What is most interesting about Hutchins's work is that she privileges the image over the text, inverting (although not really subverting) the traditional privileging of text over image.⁸ But, according to Barthes, the ideal text would privilege neither as its

... networks are many and interact, without any one of them being able to surpass the rest; this text is a galaxy of signifiers, not a structure of signifieds; it has no beginning; it is reversible; we gain access to it by several entrances, none of which can be authoritatively declared to be the main one; the codes it mobilizes extend *as far as the eye can reach*, they are indeterminable...; the systems of meaning can take over this absolutely plural text, but their number is never closed, based as it is on the infinity of language. (5-6)

Rosie's Walk is safe on several levels: Rosie returns home unharmed, her naive innocence intact; as well, the reader, although having been given the role of co-producer of the text through the engagement of the visual imagination, is clearly guided to respond to one truth. Texts that create "networks," not just parallel trajectories, more closely approximate Barthes's ideal text. With the postmodern picture book, especially the more extreme examples, not simply a "double orientation" is opened up but multiple orientations that create a decidedly uncertain terrain.

In Anthony Browne's *Voices in the Park* (1998), Hutchins's "double orientation" is doubled again. Each of the four voices is provided its own linguistic and textual style, marked by its own specific font (Figure 4). The written word is not just something to be read but to be seen.⁹ As Andrea Schwenke Wylie concludes, "*Voices in the Park* is a study in the multivalence of perspective and the plural nature of human experience" (189). Nevertheless, because each perspective is told in turn—each has a title page followed by five to eight images—the same network of synergies is not created as in the text consistently considered to be the

⁸ Nikolajeva and Scott would disagree; they argue that the text of *Rosie's Walk* is "dependent on the pictures, but the picture definitely does not carry the primary narrative, the text being selective. Words and pictures actually tell two different stories, from two different points of view" (18).

⁹ Discussing the role of designers in picture book creation, Nodelman observes that, through a designer's input, "written language is like pictures...; both are things to be seen" (53).

quintessential postmodern picture book: David Macaulay's *Black and White* (1990). It may appear that the four stories of *Black and White* converge visually and verbally into one story, "to bleed into one large story on one double-page spread" (Kiefer 141) near the end. Therefore, critics have tended to read *Black and White* through one or more of these stories. As the title page alerts, however, there may be "a number of stories that do not necessarily occur at the same time" between the frames that the reader can envision. Reading the verbal and visual stories becomes a "game," which, as Nikolajeva and Scott observe of "all postmodern games... presupposes that the reader is familiar with the way paratexts normally function"; therefore, entering into the spirit of the game, the reader "may deliberately question the paratextual conventions" (254). *Black and White* —and the plethora of interpretations given to it— certainly bears out the joke on which Macaulay based his book: what is black and white and red (or read) all over (Figure 5)? As with perusing a newspaper, the reader is guided to sort through the multiple stories at various stages of development at any given moment. *Black and White* sows the seeds for more advanced media literacy within its reading community.

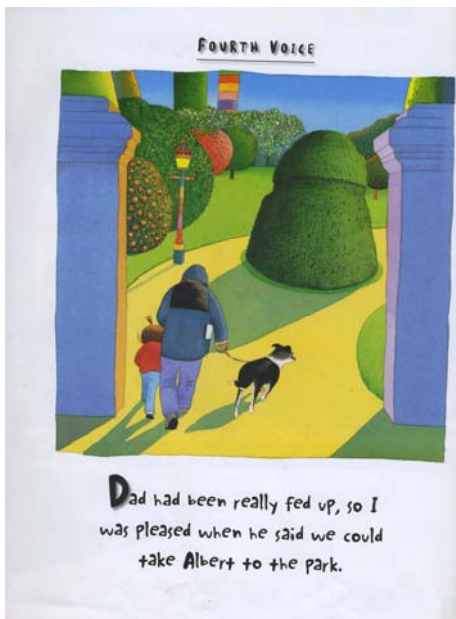


Fig. 4. Anthony Browne. *Voices in the Park*. London: Doubleday, 1998. Print.



Fig. 5. David Macaulay. *Black and White*. Boston: Houghton, 1990. Print.

The multiple perspectives and points of entry into these postmodern picture books collapse boundaries between inside and outside, fiction and reality, author and reader. In the more traditionally formatted picture book, words are fixed within their frame, images within theirs, often the frame being simply that provided by the edges of the page, with a limited number of potential variations on this overall principle: placement of text and images on alternating pages, placement of text and image in their own boxes or spaces on the same page, or superimposing of text on image, both still being clearly distinguished one from the other. In the picture book, William Moebius states, “[e]ach page affords... an ‘opening’; implied, of course, is a closing, a deliberate shutting out of what came before, and a constant withholding of what is to come. Unlike a published reproduction of a mural or a frieze, upon which the eye can wander, scanning a wide field for pattern, for signs of unity, the picturebook opening allows only limited exposures” (141).

Some of the framing techniques used in postmodern picture books call into question Moebius’s statements. Even the cover of Roberto Innocenti’s *Rose Blanche* (1985) challenges Moebius’s suggestion that each page of a picture book is a discrete, autonomous entity. Within the frames of the window out of which Rose looks is reflected a scene from outside the window —although it could as well be from inside the house— of wounded and sleeping men in uniforms (Figure 6). This scene appears much later in the book as the right-hand tenth opening (Figure 7). Unlike the cover picture —which is in mirror image with soldiers and the truncated shaft of the gun in the lower corner pointing left and which is multi-framed with the outer edges of window panes, translucent curtains, reflected background buildings, window frames, and brickwork¹⁰— we see the later scene through Rose’s perspective, our eye following her gaze out of the right side of the picture along the shaft of the tank’s gun which breaks the frame of the picture (as does the window dormer at the top). This breaking of the frame provides a historical context, indicating as it does the final push to the Eastern front (hence the west to east direction of the vehicles), as well as a transparent transition to the next two-page spread, a scene of chaos (Figures 8 and 9). As we might with a mural or frieze, our eye wanders, looking for a way into this crowded scene; until this image, we have entered each scene either by regarding the picture through Rose’s eyes or by focusing on her figure,¹¹ perspectives to which the original French text of

¹⁰ Nikolajeva and Scott remark generally on the framing of a cover picture: “Framing creates a sense of detachment, and together with the title and the author’s name on the cover, it emphasizes the existence of the book as an artifact” (247).

¹¹ In his article “The War Inside Books,” Innocenti writes: “A story about or against war must be seen from outside, as if we were witnesses who are able to intervene. But you cannot be

Christophe Gallaz is sensitive and reinforces verbally.¹² Up to this point, as well, the troops have been moving to the east, but they are now in retreat, so the direction is reversed.¹³ In this image, there is nowhere to rest the eye because, the text tells us, “Rose Blanche disappeared that day.”

neutral or impartial. The kind of book I am thinking about shows events, moments, relationships, evidence, details —indicating and charging the reader to become a judge, to think for one’s self” (30). There is a masterly variety in the positioning of Rose throughout the visual text to allow the reader to judge and “think for one’s self.” One noteworthy example is the right-hand fifth opening where Rose observes a little boy trying to escape from soldiers, who recapture him: “The soldiers climbed back into the truck; doors banged shut and it pulled away. It happened very fast.” Rose’s naivety is stressed by her positioning in the lower left-hand corner in side profile. Discussing how the “dilemmas of a first-person perspective” have been overcome by some illustrators (124), Nikolajeva and Scott observe that positioning the viewer behind the protagonist (as with this image) guides the viewer to share the protagonist’s “conceptional point of view: we see the adults from below, from an oppressed position... The subject position is clear: the reader, identifying with the protagonist/narrator, feels small and powerless” (125). The heaviness of the military vehicles and buildings over Rose’s head reinforce this sense as does the puzzled look on her face.

¹² When Swiss author Christophe Gallaz accepted the commission to provide text for Innocenti’s drawings and few verbal jottings for *Rose Blanche*, he was confronted with several major problems of perspective. Gallaz’s decision to use first-person narration from the perspective of Rose for the first half of the book demonstrates his sensitivity to the positioning of Rose within Innocenti’s images. Then, however, Gallaz was confronted with further challenges: how to convey the implications of what Rose observes but has not the knowledge or context to process and how to narrate the latter scenes of the book through to Rose’s death. *Rose Blanche* has been rewritten several times as it is being translated into various languages. The complex publication history of *Rose Blanche* has been traced by both Susan Stan and Emer O’Sullivan.

¹³ O’Sullivan discusses the left to right and reversed movements in greater detail (153).

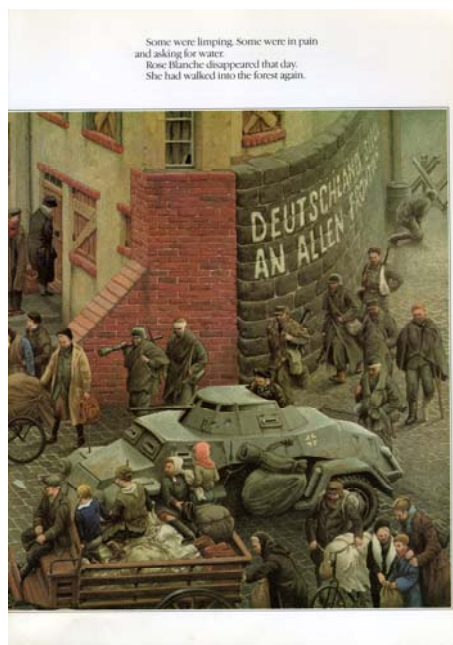
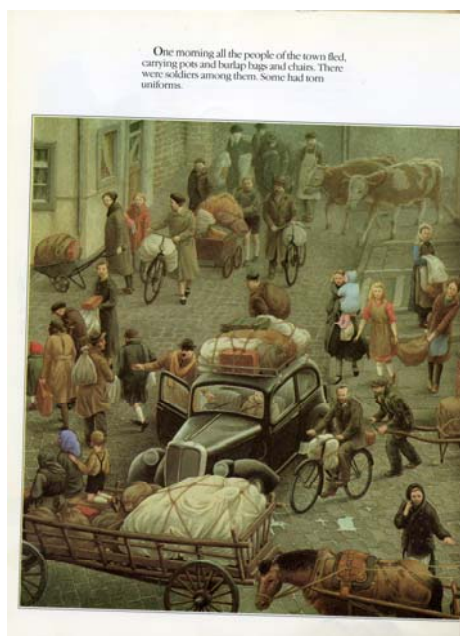
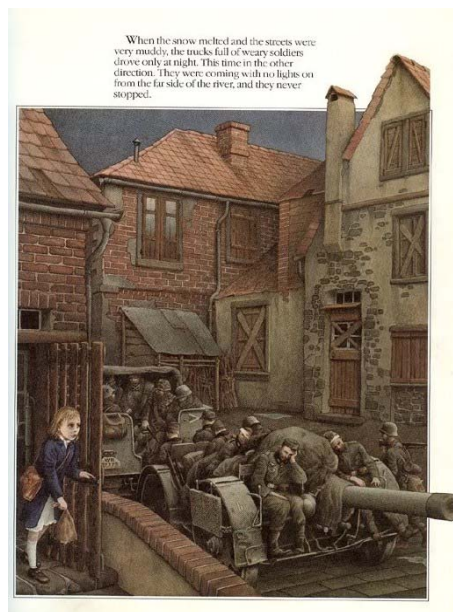
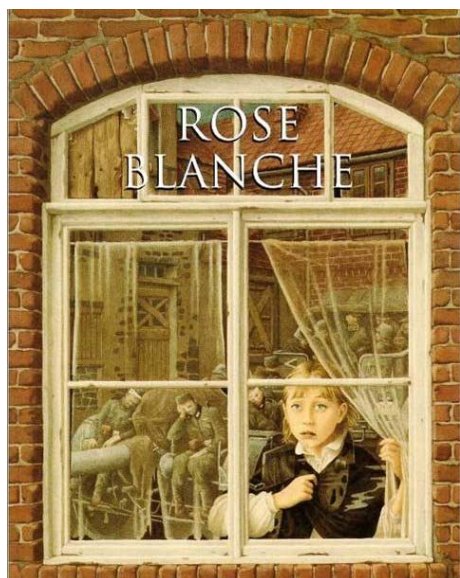


Fig. 6-9. Roberto Innocenti. *Rose Blanche*. Text by Christophe Gallaz and Roberto Innocenti. Trans. Martha Coventry and Richard Graglia. New York: Creative, 1990. Print.

With the memory of this scene, we turn to the next page (Figures 10 and 11). Again, this is a picture with uncertain perspective as the lines moving in from the left corner, created by the ruts from tire treads and debris of fence posts and girders, pass below Rose and the ghostly soldiers in the background. In fact, the only line that points to Rose is the gun of the most distinct soldier, accentuated by the one flash of colour in the right-hand side of this image. The other lines point out of the picture, not into it, a subtle strategy to break the frame. Two openings later, we recognize the scene despite its newness (Figures 12 and 13). Between the frames of the previous image and this, a liberation and a tragedy have occurred. Even though the lines do not draw our eye to the fence, our visualizing imagination focuses our attention on this part of the illustration as we remember the place where Rose last stood. Only the red poppy draws our eye to the blue flower, which, as the final image of the book, stands as a memorial to Rose Blanche (Figure 14). In this picture book, seemingly traditional yet with clear postmodernist tendencies, Innocenti provides several different perspectives, including no perspective at all; moreover, he breaks frames, suggesting metaphorically the vulnerability of those who live within frames, and incorporates text into the images to establish a political context and the sense of time passing,¹⁴ but at the end, one single wordless image remains to suggest a story—it certainly cannot tell the whole story— of Rose Blanche, her family and neighbours, and those behind the barbed-wire fence deep in the woods outside her village. Rose Blanche is too naive to read the visual signs around her. She, like the villagers, looks but does not see. This picture book reflects the tragedy that can ensue within a visually illiterate community of readers.

¹⁴ These include “Bäckerei Heinrich” of the first opening, “Verboten” on the road that Rose Blanche takes to the camp, and changing graffiti on the village walls that reflect the political fluctuations. O’Sullivan discusses the “propaganda graffiti” and its impact on different readers (163-64).

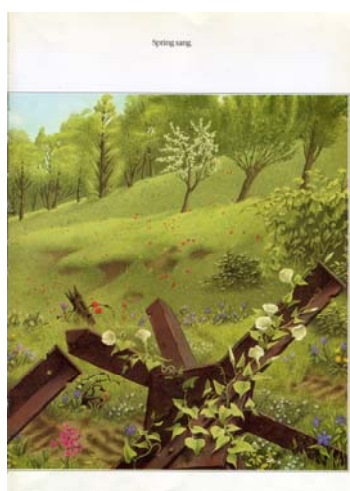
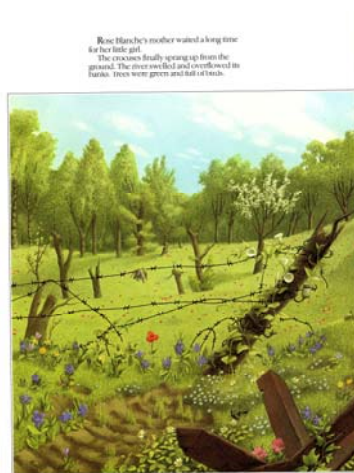


Fig. 10-14. Roberto Innocenti. *Rose Blanche*. Text by Christophe Gallaz and Roberto Innocenti. Trans. Martha Coventry and Richard Graglia. New York: Creative, 1990. Print.

In the picture books discussed so far, their creators break frames and collapse boundaries between text and image, page and book, and book and the world optically and metaphorically. Some author-illustrators have achieved these effects physically. Monique Felix's mouse series, which began with her *The Story of a Little Mouse Trapped in a Book*, published originally in 1980, was the first to break physical boundaries as the mouse gnaws its way out of the pages and through the hard cover of the book. Rather than have the reader enter into an enclosed and even protected imagined world, Felix's series invites the reader to leave and escape the confines of the book. The safety and security of the frame have been abandoned. Postmodern picture-book creators have, as well, made innovative use of the old pop ups and cut outs in a more self-consciously metafictional way to break down physical boundaries between individual pages and the book itself and, in so doing, interrogate the autonomy of the imagined world and its separateness from the world of everyday experience. In Peter Sís's *Madlenka* series, for example, pops up and cuts outs are not just extraneous devices but features that complement other visual and textual elements that celebrate creative freedom. Sís's experiences of curtailed freedoms—he grew up in communist Czechoslovakia and now lives in New York City—have greatly influenced his children's books, both in content and design. Of the design of the first *Madlenka* book, published in 2000, the *New York Times Book Reviewer* wrote that each tableau "is dense with visual information," producing "a kind of two-dimensional hypertext of maps and windows that allows [readers] to flip from the cartography of real places to a geography of pure imagination" (Scott). The cuts outs in *Madlenka* create a sense of a third dimension, which is enhanced in *Madlenka's Dog* (2002) with the addition of ingeniously designed pull out tabs that establish the diversity of the backgrounds of Madlenka's neighbours while showing experiences that hold them together "[i]n the universe, on a planet, on a continent, in a country, in a city, in a house on a block where everyone is walking a dog."

Other writers, in a more purely metaphorical way, break down boundaries between the created world and everyday experience by working in a medium or incorporating found objects, often in a collage effect, that are particularly appropriate for younger readers. Barbara Reid achieves wonderfully playful—and surprisingly artistic—three-dimensional effects with plasticine. In books such as *The Subway Mouse* (2003) and *Perfect Snow* (2009), she experiments with perspective and framing, producing postmodernist fragmentation and instability, and incorporates found objects such as discarded hairpins, paper, and food, all of which are then photographed for inclusion in the book. The juxtaposition of the elements of nature with those of the man-made world suggests the need to live in harmony with one another as both harbour potentially dangerous and even

destructive forces: playful children and rain marring and eradicating the “perfect snow”; debris, cats, hunger, and fear threatening the subway mouse, Nib, as he wends his way to “Tunnel’s End,” “a dangerous, roofless world filled with mouse-eating monsters.”

When scraps of writing are incorporated into visual collages, what Nikolajeva and Scott refer to as an “‘intraiconic text,’ that is, words appearing inside pictures and in some way commenting on or contradicting the primary verbal narrative” (118), they often resonate in a satirical way. The effects can be quite light hearted, as in Reid’s plasticine art or Lois Ehlert’s collage art. In Ehlert’s *Snowballs* (1995), for example, luggage labels, along with a metal-screw mouth, bottle-cap ears, and plastic-fork arms, allude to a more complicated evolution for snow baby than having grown from a snowball. Moreover, they are some of the “good stuff” that will remain behind as debris when snow baby melts into slush. Reid’s and Ehlert’s picture books, in very direct ways, encourage the kind of visual literacy that will help foster eco-literacy by reading the visual cues in the natural and man-made environment that can lead to ecological sensitivity and understanding.

Incorporating text through found objects is only one of the many ways that postmodern picture-book creators have negotiated boundaries between what is considered art and what is considered real. Multiple perspectives —textual and visual— together with the collapsing of frames create spaces in which the real and the created world can co-exist and into which readers may enter and exercise their visual imaginations, the first step in the development of any form of literacy as we become more ecologically and socially aware. In the last four decades, postmodern picture books have played a significant part in fostering such awareness by conflating images and text and so collapsing boundaries between art and the outside world. Social and ecological awareness will be, Jeremy Rifkin posits in *The Empathic Civilization*, the foundation for the planet’s survival: “We are fast extending our empathic embrace to the whole of humanity and the vast project of life that envelops the planet,” Rifkin concludes. “Can we reach biosphere consciousness and global empathy in time to avert planetary collapse?” (616).

A pioneer in inspiring global empathy is Ezra Jack Keats, who wrote and illustrated twenty-four picture books. Keats’s verbal texts never articulate the griminess or grimness of his characters’ neighbourhood or the ethnic background of the characters. This information is, however, consistently conveyed through Keats’s collage and gouache illustrations, many featuring slogans, graffiti, and advertisements that establish the harshness of the environment of the characters, and, by extension, many of his readers. The son of impoverished Polish immigrants

of Jewish descent living in Brooklyn, New York, Keats, as an author-illustrator, “crossed social boundaries by being the first American picture-book maker to give the black child a central place in children’s literature” (“Ezra Jack Keats”). This statement is made on the web site of the Ezra Jack Keats Foundation, dedicated to his legacy of supporting art and literacy programmes in public institutions. Keats’s stories such as *Dreams* (1974) and *Louie* (1975) are about the intangibles of friendship and family, empathy and generosity, the indomitable human spirit, and the joy of creation, all of which transcend a person’s environment. In Keats’s books, the images —both the illustrations and the verbal material included in these illustrations— tell stories that often lie hidden beneath the surface and so spark empathic responses in their readers through their powers of visual imagination.

Perhaps no other picture-book creator has been more instrumental in fostering emotional literacy than Shaun Tan. The term “emotional literacy,” coined by clinical psychologist and transactional analyst Claude Steiner in 2003, is the ability to recognize, interpret, and respond appropriately to one’s own and others’ feelings (Steiner). In such remarkable texts as *The Lost Thing* (1999), *The Red Tree* (2001), and *The Arrival* (2006), Tan’s visual story-telling engages the visual imagination of his readers to respond empathically as they read text through images and images through text. Not only is emotional literacy achieved but also “advanced empathy” is developed, the kind of empathy that primatologist Frans de Waal, author of *The Age of Empathy*, argues needs “both mental mirroring and mental separation” (124).¹⁵ As readers follow Tan’s depressed young girl groping, fumbling her way through the bleak world “without sense or reason” depicted in the pages of *The Red Tree*, their powers of observation and empathy are challenged to see and respond to the tiny red seed of hope that needs only to be recognized and acknowledged to germinate and blossom. It seems, at times, that the young girl has become so inward looking, so self-absorbed, that she will fail to notice and respond (Figure 15). By the book’s end, however, the seed has burst open, “bright and vivid quietly waiting just as you imagined it would be” (Figure 16).

¹⁵ Similarly, developmental psychologist Martin Hoffman, one of the world’s leading experts on the psychology of empathy, contends: “At the most advanced stage, observers may act out in their minds the emotions and experiences [received variously] and introspect on all of it. In this way they gain understanding and respond affectively to the circumstances, feelings, and wishes of the other, while maintaining the sense that this person is separate from themselves” (7).



Fig. 15-16. Shaun Tan. *The Red Tree*. 2001. Vancouver: Simply Read, 2003. Print. Fig. 15 source from Shaun Tan's home site, <http://www.shauntan.net/books/red-tree.html>.

Some reviewers and educators have criticized Tan's *Red Tree* as being inappropriate reading for children. Equally controversial has been Maurice Sendak's *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy* (1993), which invites its readers to co-create the tale of homeless children, wrapped in newspapers, a task that demands reading the headlines scattered throughout its pages (Figure 17). As with Macaulay's *Black and White*, awareness is raised about how essential media literacy is in combating this global injustice.¹⁶ Nikolajeva and Scott write of this story:

The text has completely invaded the illustrations, and its coherence, hard to understand even on its own, is in continual conflict with the words that appear in all parts of the illustrations:... most of all as newspaper headlines, articles, and advertisements that make sad, ironic, and biting satiric comments on the plight of the children, on the state of the community at large, and on the rapaciousness of some and poverty of others in an economically turbulent world. (238)

¹⁶ In "Global/Local: Media Literacy for the Global Village," a paper submitted for the inaugural meeting of the International Media Literacy Research Forum and subsequently posted on the Center for Media Literacy web site, Barbara J. Walkosz and her colleagues write: "In today's global society, citizens need the skills to access, analyze, evaluate, create and interact with media information" in order "to process information efficiently and effectively" (7).



Fig. 17. Maurice Sendak. *We Are All in the Dumps with Jack and Guy: Two Nursery Rhymes with Pictures*. New York: Harper, 1993. Print.

Sendak himself saw “homelessness [as] a metaphor of the danger” in today’s world, but because it is a condition that can be alleviated and perhaps even remedied through a sense of community, *We Are All in the Dumps* is “a story about children surviving and how difficult it is to get on with life” (qtd. in Kiefer 96).

Similarly, Eve Bunting’s *Smoky Night*, with David Diaz’s symbolically charged collages made from scraps of found material, inspires sensitivity —essentially fosters visual literacy and the consequent emotional and media literacy— in its readers. *Smoky Night* depicts the Los Angeles riots through the eyes of a child, Daniel. The heavy black frames of both text and image enclose but cannot cloister Daniel, his mother, and his cat from the rioting in the street below. Captured in acrylic paints, the brilliant bold colours of the outside world are reflected in the interior scene. Diaz’s paintings are, appropriately, very much in the realm of street art —the kind of murals on the sides of buildings seen in Keats’s illustrations. It is, however, when Diaz incorporates the looted cereal and rice into his background that the boundaries between Bunting’s world of verbal fiction and Diaz’s world of visual imagery collapse, reflecting as well the conflation of the created inside world of the book and the outside world beyond the book. Behind the spilled produce of Mrs. Kim’s market are colourful chalklike drawings. And boldly caught within a series of frames is the frantic Mrs. Kim (Figures 18 and 19). The looters are cut off at the edges, and their evening’s spoils spill out onto the two-page spread. Like Innocenti’s *Rose Blanche*, the naive narrator takes it all in optically but not

mentally, observing but not processing what he has observed. Readers are assisted to process some of this information by Daniel's inclusion of his mother's comments, in this case that "'it's better if we buy from our own people.'" Buying and looting obviously rest on two different sets of criteria. Daniel never understands the racial tensions behind the riots, although in his innocent wisdom, he provides a possible remedy —getting to know one another. The verbal content of this picture book —the story told in words, many of them the mother's mediated through Daniel— is on torn scraps of paper suggestive of the rest of the debris that the looters have left in their wake. Daniel's revelation, however, is like a crowned placard pinned on a wall (Figure 20) as a reminder of what happens when people remain behind walls and fail to read the visual cues in their environment —victims of visual illiteracy and hence barred from the other literacies contingent on reading imaginatively and empathically.



Fig. 18-20. Eve Bunting. *Smoky Night*. Illus. David Diaz. San Diego: Harcourt, 1994. Print.

Dr. Seuss's *On Beyond Zebra!* ends by inviting readers to begin but not be restricted by another progression of alphabetic icons. With words and images as tools, and pages bound between covers as their medium, postmodern picture books collapse the boundaries between the inside and outside worlds of the book and between the absent author-illustrator and the present reader. Kate Banks's *Max* (*Max Words*, 2006) is a collector of words, his brothers, Benjamin and Karl, collectors of coins and stamps. When Max's brothers arrange "their collections in different orders, it [does not] make much difference," but when Max rearranges the letters and words that he collects, he discovers that he can create and enter into any number of imaginative stories (Figure 21). Words are a conduit to and for the visualizing power of the imagination; even though words may be contained within walls and frames or pages and covers, they need not be constrained by them.



Fig. 21. Kate Banks. *Max's Words*. Illus. Boris Kulikov. New York: Farrar, 2006. Print.

Illustrator Roberto Innocenti, in his acceptance speech for the 2008 Hans Christian Andersen Medal awarded by the International Board of Books for Young People (IBBY), confessed:

I envy writing because of its ability to describe thoughts, sensations, the inner "I," the hidden emotions. Seeing the protagonist certainly does not help one to identify with him. But as a recompense, telling an illustrated story, or a story parallel to that of the text, the information and the background given can be enlarged, the social and historical context can be described, and one can wander freely in the landscape and even hint at other secondary stories. So, together or separately, the written words and the fixed images are a type of culture and an irreplaceable patrimony.

When working in conjunction with images, words are the most powerful stimulus that the visual imagination has to foster those various literacies that today's young readers will need as they encounter people as diverse as the characters found in the pages of these postmodern picture books. As Innocenti suggests, it is not "seeing" the characters that will promote empathy but visualizing them through the lens of an imagination that transports readers to a space beyond and behind the visible surface, a space to which the lens of the eye is not privy.

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