CHAPTER ONE

Playing grown-up: complexity, sophistication and children's (picture) books

Peter Hunt writes that a respected teacher of children's literature in New Zealand has told him that "when she tells people what she does, they tend to think she is mentally retarded" (1991a:25). When I tell people that I am working towards a Master's degree in English, they generally look quite impressed and somewhat intimidated. But when they learn that my dissertation is about children's picture books, they invariably stop looking intimidated (which is good) or impressed (this is less satisfying). These people think it simply cannot be very difficult to study "kiddy books" – especially kiddy books with pictures. This is not surprising: most of them have read kiddy books themselves, and coped perfectly well without any degrees in English at all. (In fact, most of them succeeded in reading these books when they were kiddies!)

What is perhaps more surprising is that the same idea is not uncommon in English academic circles either. There seems to be an "unexamined assumption that what is written for children must necessarily be simple – as though writing for juveniles were the literary equivalent of juvenilia…or as though a paediatrician were naturally inferior to any other kind of medical specialist", as well as a conviction that "most of the texts are trivial, and perhaps that they are intended for a lesser culture" (Hunt 1991a:21). Hunt suggests that "in the critical hierarchy, children's books are so trivial that to study them is not a legitimate activity" (1994:2). Furthermore, he says that to the academic, "children's literature…is a non-subject. Its very subject-matter seems to

disqualify it from serious adult consideration; after all, it is simple, ephemeral, popular, and designed for an immature audience. It is not, as a university academic once put it to me, 'a fit subject for academic study'" (1991a:6). "For those within the traditional literary establishment, 'children's literature' is [thus] a straightforward contradiction in terms" (Hunt 1994:6). To make it "the site of wrangles over ideology or critical stances invites ridicule from some, and honest doubts from others" (Hunt 1994:25).

Despite this very common dismissive attitude, however, children's literature – by which is most commonly meant contemporary children's books in general, rather than the two or perhaps three children's books commonly accepted as part of the (adult) literary canon – is finally seeing growing recognition as an academic field of study. America led the way in the early seventies when, according to Watkins and Sutherland, children's literature began

> being recognized as part of the mainstream of literature, and its study in colleges and universities grew rapidly. Although this was initially in library schools and education departments, children's literature increasingly became a normal feature of English Literature departments…. A growing corpus of serious literary criticism has emerged and established authors of adult books have chosen to write for children…. Although academic recognition has taken longer in Britain, there are now established postgraduate courses, and the period from 1970 has been one of extraordinary activity in the discussion of the subject. (1995:293-294)

Furthermore, it seems that as far as "reviewing and public recognition are concerned," children's books are more and more often "surrounded by informed discussion" (Hunt 1994:128).

One response to the growing academic recognition of children's literature is Maria Nikolajeva's argument that

> when we today begin to see children's literature in a broader perspective, it is not only because we have become more clever, but because the object of study, that is, children's literature, has undergone a remarkable change. Today we are slowly but surely becoming aware of a feature thus far entirely ignored by critics, namely that children's and juvenile literature has grown more "literary" and artistically elaborate. (1996:6)

Nikolajeva insists, also, that "during the last ten or twenty years children's books around the world have become more sophisticated", and that "children's literature today is evolving towards complexity and sophistication on all narrative levels" (1996:7,207). In terms of form, she sees evidence of this growing sophistication in formal experiment, going so far as to speak of a "disintegration of traditional narrative structure" (1996:207). She identifies a move away from the traditional circular home-adventure-home structure of children's books, towards a linear narrative that does away with the secure return to home and the known, and often even avoids resolution of any sort with an open ending (1996:79-82). In the content of children's books, she says that "superficial renderings of events" are being replaced more and more by "deeper psychological insights", and she discusses "the sophisticated treatment of space-time relations", as well as a growing metafictional "questioning of conventional approaches to the relationship between text and reality" (1996:7,8,207). Stylistically, she uncovers an increasing "variety of literary devices and expressive means", a "conscious striving to exploit the richness of language", and new, experimental narrative techniques (1996:7,8). Overall, she argues that development in children's literature is manifested in increasing multidimensionality, generic convergence, multivoicedness and intertextuality (1996:7,99,207).

Nikolajeva's work forms the foundation of this thesis, in which I analyse and theorize about complex, sophisticated aspects of several children's picture books. The features that I identify as complex and sophisticated are not always widely recognized as such,

probably because, as Lewis argues, "we are limited in what we can say about picture books by our familiar ways of thinking and talking and writing about them", or, in other words, by "forms of discourse that only provide a partial view of what is in fact a compound and complex whole" (1990:139,141). But, with Nikolajeva's arguments and the manifestations of sophistication that she identifies as a springboard, I will proceed from the assumption that complexity and sophistication can indeed be found in contemporary children's books, and, particularly, in children's picture books.

Representing a compound and complex whole, these books are difficult to define as a genre, and the term "picture book" is frequently used very imprecisely, not only by non-specialists, but also by academics and practitioners in the children's book world. Marshall, for example, focuses her definition of the term on proportions, saying that picture books are illustrated books that have "more illustration than text" (1982:105). Townsend is less concerned with how many pictures there are than with their importance, saying that in a picture book "the artwork has at least an equal role to that of the text, very probably has the major part, and occasionally is unaccompanied by any text at all" (1974:308). Hunt, who makes a point of distinguishing between the picture book and the illustrated book, nevertheless uses the term "picture book", in practice, to refer to anything from wordless books to the illustrated books of Shirley Hughes and Quentin Blake (1994:175,157,158). Such vague and indiscriminate uses of the term are confusing at best and, at worst, meaningless. For the purposes of this paper, therefore, I shall use a narrower – and thus more meaningful – definition of the picture book genre, based on the essential differences that have developed over time to distinguish it from books that are merely illustrated.

Illustrated books for children have existed since at least 1659, which saw the publication of "an illustrated language book for children which would teach them Latin through the study of familiar objects and occupations", the *Orbis Sensualium Pictus*, by Comenius (Wooden 1986:16). Comenius's book is "generally considered the fountainhead of illustrated books written especially for children" (Wooden 1986:2). The first step in the development of a special type of illustrated children's book, however, came when the illustrated book "for delight came into its own in the late Victorian era with the works of Kate Greenaway, Randolph Caldecott, and Walter Crane….Caldecott's nursery rhymes, Crane's illustrated folktales, and Greenaway's babies in baskets of roses…became a standard of excellence in what could almost be considered a new genre" (Egoff 1981:248). Briggs and Butts, in fact, say of Caldecott that "it is not going too far to say that in his sense of the relationship between text and illustration he helped to create the modern picture book" (1995:165).

But it was the nineteen thirties that saw the development of the true picture book, as distinct from the illustrated book. The "bright colours and blending of text and pictures" of Jean de Brunhoff's 'Babar' books, first published in English in 1934, were "very influential" (Hunt 1995:205-206). They encouraged "the increased use of lithography", while the hand-lettered 'Little Tim' books published by Edward Ardizzone in the late thirties set "a trend for the interweaving of text and pictures" (Hunt 1994:124). Dr Seuss's first book, *And to Think That I Saw it on Mulberry Street*, was published in 1937, and by the sixties Dr Seuss was "single-handedly changing the reading habits of hundreds of thousands of American children" (Fadiman 1962:283). Epstein describes him as "a genius – a sort of supercharged Edward Lear…whose books sell in the millions" (1963:86).

In the United States, therefore, “the proliferation of fine picture-books, immeasurably enriched by the contributions of European illustrators, had already begun” by the time the Second World War ended, but in Britain, “the picture-book for very young children was slow to get moving after the war” (Hollindale & Sutherland 1995:285). But from “the 1950s onwards, the picture-book, in all forms from the very junior board-books to books which are actually for teenagers or adults, increased in quality and quantity” (Hunt 1994:156). There was

> increasing recognition in art schools of the importance of illustration and picture-books, combined with the development of academic criticism of children’s literature, including the examination of the nature of illustration and the importance of the relationship between word and image. (Watkins & Sutherland 1995:310-311)

The key period from the thirties to the sixties thus saw the development of the kinds of books that represented what Egoff calls "the classic definition of a picture book: ‘a perfect balance between text and pictures,’ a work that evoked a total response”, where neither “the text nor the pictures worked as well separately as they did together” (1981:249). Bator discusses the nature of this “perfect balance” in more detail, and begins to move towards a meaningful working definition of the picture book:

> The picture book is not simply any book that happens to contain illustrations. When the artist merely replicates textual detail, the result is an illustrated book. If, however, the illustrator expands or interprets the text, the picture book results. It is not the number of pictures but the function of the art which creates a picture book. (1983b:149)

Bator’s definition has its problems, because, of course, it is impossible for an illustrator *not* to interpret the text to some extent. (Is it a polar bear or a grizzly? Is the little girl black, white or confident?) Nevertheless, his focus on the function of the illustration is important. Matthias and Italiano describe this function, more appositely,

as that of "enriching the story and extending the text" (1983:162). They fail, however, to follow their argument to its logical conclusion: pictures that extend text, rather than *illustrating* meaning, *carry* meaning. Pictures thus do what text does, and differ from it only in appearance, so that it becomes impossible to say whether text "extends" art, or art "extends" text. (In fact, it becomes difficult to deny that visual art *is* text.) This leads us to a second important aspect of the picture book: the relationship between words and pictures. Marantz bows to this relationship when he argues that "the picture book must be experienced as a visual-verbal entity if its potential values are to be realized" (1977:154). In Lewis's words, "we read the pictures through the words and the words through the pictures" (1990:143). And Moebius simply stresses the "integral relationship between picture and word" (1986:133). In this thesis, then, picture books are understood to be fictional, illustrated books in which the pictures (and, often, the design), rather than being merely decorative, are vehicles for meaning (in the form of narrative, philosophy, characterization or what you will), with text and art integral aspects of an interdependent relationship.

Picture books are thus "inescapably plural. They always require a command of two different forms of signification: the verbal or textual and the pictorial or iconic. Meaning is always generated in at least two different ways" (Lewis 1990:141). There are, therefore, "many ways in which words and pictures may be played off against each other" (Lewis 1990:142). Lewis suggests, for example, that there are more metafictive picture books than we commonly realise, and that these books "prise open the gap between the words and the pictures, pushing them apart and forcing the reader/viewer to work hard to forge the relationship between them" (1990:141). Pullman argues that "the complexity of interplay between picture-meaning and text-

meaning" allows for "the greatest storytelling discovery of the twentieth century: namely, counterpoint", so that we can now "see a character saying one thing while doing something else" (1989:171). (The potential for counterpoint also seems to open an easy route to more complex moral, ideological, philosophical and psychological comment than is easily expressed in the limited vocabulary usual in books for very young children.) Visual-verbal plurality allows, furthermore, for a complex, Stephen Hawkingesque vision of the nature of time, because of its "loosening of the tyranny of the one-way flow" of time, so that "the stream of time breaks up into little local eddies" (Pullman 1989:172). And it also challenges the directional flow of narrative, in a "growing tendency for picture book endings to [be] left open" (Scott-Mitchell 1987:84); uncertainty is, after all, *invited* when the word-picture gap may be "wide enough for the relationship" between the two "to remain wholly indeterminate" (Lewis 1990:141).

This kind of indeterminacy is encoded into the picture book not only by its form, but also by its audience. According to Lewis, the picture book

> is in close communion with the still-evolving and the incomplete, and its open-ended quality arises from contact with the developing world of the young child. Many picture books have an air of refusing to take anything for granted; they seem to assume an audience for whom the shape and nature of much in the world, especially the activity called reading, is still in flux. Culler speaks of readers who have developed a sense of '…what can be done with literary works', but beginning readers are precisely those for whom the issue of 'what can be done' is *not yet settled*. (1990:142-143)

The world of the picture book audience is thus a place "where conventions are easily challenged because they are newly learned, not so ingrained" (Moss 1992:51). It is also a place with an overwhelming propensity towards play, where conventions are also easily challenged because they are likely to played with, whether they seem to an

adult culture to invite play or not. Meaning, always unstable, is thus particularly mercurial in this world.

One reason why I have made the picture book the focus of this study should, by now, be apparent: it is a particularly fertile area for the study of complexity and sophistication in children's literature, because "contemporary picture books for children are often a site for radical and demanding experimentation. In the last twenty years the picture book has shed its image of having importance only for the very young reader as the first stage along the route to 'real' reading" (Moss 1992:51). This may be because, according to Watkins and Sutherland, the period from 1970 to the present "has been the richest period of experiment in the history of the picture-book" (1995:311). Egoff feels, indeed, that the picture book "may well be leading the changes seen in present-day children's literature", with "new trends" including "experimentation, candor, visual and textual sophistication [and] social conscience", and she suggests that "the genre which appears to be the simplest actually is the most complex, deploying two art forms, the pictorial and the literary, to engage the interest of two audiences (child and adult)" (1981:270). Moss sees "complex patterns emerging in picture books…which have some things in common with the categorization of radical postmodernist texts", so that while the genre of certain books "suggests a very young readership", their content implies a "sophisticated interpretation" (1992:54). His argument is thus that it is "in the area of picture books that we can find the greatest number of texts which might be said to be testing the limits of children's literature" (1992:66).

Nevertheless, complexity and sophistication in children's books are not restricted only

to picture books, and it would be inaccurate to assume that the picture books I discuss in this thesis bear no relation to the state of children's literature as a whole. They do not represent it in the sense that they are the most typical, the most like the average, of children's books. I do not think that a most typical or most average children's book exists. But children's literature is unique among genres for being defined by its audience, and the picture book looks like "the most obviously juvenile of the children's book field"; it is a "preliterature or protoliterature" (Bator 1983b:150); it is "the coziest and most gentle of genres" (Egoff 1981:248). It is also the "one area in which children's books have found their own individual voice, and have influenced literature in general" (Hunt 1994:155). While children's literature "borrows from all genres", the picture book, "as opposed to the illustrated book", is the "one genre that it has *contributed*" (Hunt 1991a:175). The picture book is thus not only most manifestly related to that which makes children's literature children's literature, but it is also the sole (and inevitably, therefore, the most essential) contribution of children's literature to the literary world. The second reason why it is the focus of this thesis is, thus, that I think it is the genre that can most appropriately be called the quintessential (if not always the typical) children's genre.

It is, however, represented in this study by only a very small number of texts. Nikolajeva, too, admits to the regular reappearance of certain titles throughout her study of growing complexity and sophistication (1996:207). Like her, I must insist that the reason "is not my lack of imagination but the restrictions of the material itself" (Nikolajeva 1996:207). Hunt points out that "books which take advantage of the form remain in a minority. What may have emerged here is the immense potential of the type" (1991a:188). There are many complex and sophisticated children's books,

especially picture books, but they remain the exceptions, rather than the rule. The resistance they have attracted from people such as Tallis (in Hunt 1994), Green (1962), Morris (2000), Egoff (1981), Townsend (in Moss 1990), Rees (in Moss 1990) and Bowles (in Moss 1990), in forms ranging from dismissive neglect, practitioner territorialism, ideological suspicion and denial, to simple distaste, is thus quite disproportionate to their numbers.

I mentioned the dismissive academic attitude towards children's books at the beginning of this chapter. Because of it, children's literature, "as a subject of serious, but not solemn, study, has grown from a highly eclectic and involved 'practitioner' world" (Hunt 1991a:6-7). As a result, most commonly "the study of children's literature tends to take place in the practical disciplines of librarianship and education and perhaps psychology, rather than in the more theoretical discipline of 'literature'" (Hunt 1991a:22). As Snyman points out, practitioners in these disciplines "are interested in the child and his world, and often also in literature but…are still fundamentally non-literators [sic]" (1987:48). Snyman presumably means that the majority of people involved in the study of children's literature have little or no knowledge of, or training in, the field of literature, and no reason to look at children's literature as literature, rather than as an area of culture related to children. The fact that the study of children's literature is primarily a "practitioner" field has thus rendered questions of artistic sophistication or complexity largely irrelevant to it. Hunt describes, for example, how "a major British award-giving committee actually questioned whether 'literary' standards were at all relevant to choosing a 'good' children's book" (Hunt 1991a:20).

More damaging than this kind of neglect, however, is the atmosphere of definite mistrust that has grown up between the practitioner world and the world of English academia. Hunt writes: "Educationalists have told me that children's books should not fall into the hands of the English Department; English departments are suspicious of educationalists and librarians dealing with literary matters (or, indeed, of the materials amenable to such use)" (Hunt 1991a:22). The result is a ghetto mentality. Practitioners aggressively and defensively resist "literary", as opposed to practical, interests, while academics aggravate this resistance by clinging possessively and protectively to "their" territory. Since the practitioners form the largest group and have the loudest and most accessible voice in the children's book world, the implications of their resistance to academic interests, such as textual complexity and sophistication, are significant. "On the one hand, it is understandable that something seen as out of the range of children should not be forced upon them; on the other, there is an anti-intellectualism which leads directly to an implied restriction upon what children should be able to read" (Hunt 1991a:23).

Such restrictions are always and inevitably ideological decisions, and there is, indeed, an ideological slant to the friction between the two sides of the children's book world. Children's book professionals whose primary concern is with the literary artefact, such as academics, have come to be associated in the children's book world with "a broadly conservative and 'reactionary' ideological position" (Hollindale 1988:21). This association may be founded on a common perception of "literature" – in the traditional sense relating to a perceived greatness, rather than the one in which I use it in this thesis – as an essentially inaccessible and, therefore, elitist preoccupation. For many children's book practitioners, "suspicion of 'literature' implies a strong

suspicion of the dominant cultural system. The characteristics of literature – seen as exclusive and intellectual – are not merely inappropriate, they are positively undesirable" (Hunt 1994:6). Since textual complexity and sophistication are, inevitably, associated with "literature" in this traditional sense, they, like it, are frequently seen ideologically as inherently suspect things, so that resistance to them acquires a moral mandate. (Of course, the idea that "literature" is accessible and of interest to only a small elite implies a somewhat condescending attitude to the rest of humanity, which may lack the educational advantages of this elite but should not, presumably, be assumed, as a result, to be completely unintelligent and incapable. And while the literary canon may well be the child of an intellectual elite, children's literature can certainly not be accused of bearing its taint, never having been considered for membership.)

A less principled, but no less powerful, form of resistance to artistic complexity and sophistication in children's books involves a head-in-the-sand denial of their existence, even among literary scholars. Tallis, for example, demonstrates that the Thomas the Tank Engine books can be read as typical postmodern texts, and then concludes:

> My use of the Rev. W. Awdrey's work must not be construed as placing it on the same plane of worthlessness as that of Donald Barthelme…The trouble is…the criteria that place…Barthelme on the side of the angels will also put A.A. Milne, Rev. W. Awdrey and a host of other writers of children's books in the forefront of the *avant garde*. Once you start reading anti-realist theory into the practice, you can find it everywhere and in children's literature most of all. (in Hunt 1994:134-135)

The "implication that it is churlish to use texts in this way" is clear (Hunt 1994:134). And Tallis's denial of the evidence of his own reasoned analysis is breathtaking. But while he may perhaps be excused on the grounds that children's literature is neither

his field nor the focus of his argument, Green, who argues that children's books are taken seriously only when literary complexities that are really not the point are "read into" them, is a scholar and fierce defender of children's books. Nevertheless, he insists that even for those books, such as *Alice in Wonderland* (1864) and *The Wind in the Willows* (1908), that have achieved serious recognition, "it has seemed that an excuse must be found, and painstaking (and painful) efforts have been made to prove that they are really allegories, or deeply psychological parables, intended to convey disguised truths to initiated adults" (1962:36). I mentioned above a point that Lewis makes about the way we think about picture books; his argument is, I think, also directly applicable to Tallis and Green's thinking about children's literature as a whole:

> our familiar ways of thinking and talking and writing about picture books tend to limit what we can say about them (something that is true of all ways of thinking and talking). In other words, there is a tendency for us not to perceive picture books as unconventional and exceptional creations despite the fact that they frequently possess a playful and subversive quality. (1990:131-132)

It seems to me that we are often restricted in what we can say about children's books, not only by the limiting discourse that surrounds them, but also by emotional associations that we are unwilling to sever from our childhood reading. "To the layperson, to link the warm and friendly business of educating and entertaining children with theory of any sort seems like destroying the pleasure of it and taking it away from 'real' people" (Hunt 1991a:6). Many adults also "admire children's books as the last frontier of innocence" (Moebius 1986:133), and there is clearly "a sentimentality about childhood that pervades adult commentaries on children's books" (Hunt 1994:18). It peeps out from behind Tallis's little gibe at Donald Barthelme's – but never Rev. Awdrey's! – "plane of worthlessness". Green provides a quite

mawkish example when he says that from the shores of Peter Pan

> we may sail adventuring in I know not how many directions, but to the Never, Never Land we shall always return – led away for magic moments by the Boy who wouldn't grow up, before returning refreshed and re-invigorated to seek those joys in the world of real men and women from which he was forever shut out. For such, to all of us, of whatever age, is the true message of the great children's books. (1962:48)

And Morris suggests, similarly, that "perhaps somewhere at the limit of language reached in the work of Margaret Wise Brown is that place where all of us adults can be young twice – a place where literature, after all, can become 'universal'" (2000:174).

These examples seem to demonstrate aptly both Perry Nodelman's observation that "people who take literature seriously [think that] children's literature can only be important if it isn't really for children at all, but actually secret pop-Zen for fuzzyminded grownups" (in Hunt 1994:2), and Hunt's suggestion that adults are "wary of approaching children's books critically (approaching them emotionally is another matter)", perhaps because "they fear the loss of a valued part of childhood – that the spell will be broken" (1994:2). Dorfman and Mattelart, similarly, suggest that "the adult, in protecting his dream-image of youth, hides the fear that to penetrate it would destroy his dreams and reveal the reality it conceals" (in Moebius 1986:133). And the safeguarding of the dream (or spell or trance) relies heavily on the ability to deny completely the existence of textual complexities and sophistication, with their taint of artistic – or adult or artificial – device.

The most fundamental form of resistance to complexity and sophistication in children's books is not denial, however, or even principled rejection, but simple distaste. Distaste is an objection that, conveniently, requires no explanation if it can be

conveyed expressively enough to carry the reader of the criticism off on a wave of companionable bile, and it is the democratic choice because it is available to both the practitioner and the academic, the traditionalist and the progressive ideologue. It is evident in the tone of Egoff's discussion of New York publishing house Harlin Quist Books:

> [Quist] publishes imaginative, even 'freaky' texts with surrealistic illustrations that offer psychological insights into childhood and sly commentaries on the adult world. If they are to be taken as children's picture books, they certainly explore to the limit the potential of visual and linguistic symbolism. These 'new wave' publications helped to establish the picture book as an art form for adults. (1981:263)

Moss rounds up several more examples from several sides of the fence(s):

> John Rowe Townsend, for example, quoting Isaac Bashevis Singer, proclaims that 'while adult literature is deteriorating, literature for children is gaining quality and stature' and he sees 'the modern novel giving the impression of slinking into a corner: narrow, withdrawn, self-occupied' (Townsend 1971:12). Clearly the influence of Fowles or Calvino must not be allowed to pollute the purity of children's literature. Townsend would far rather see child readers 'enter into things and live the story'. Davis Rees, too, is intent on judgement. Alan Garner's *Red Shift* is 'very nearly impenetrable' (Rees 1980:61) and 'not a children's book' (ibid.:65). Departure from the narrative norm, such as in *I am the Cheese*, is viewed with suspicion and perhaps even distaste. Steve Bowles, a young British critic, probably sums up this kind of evaluative stance when he condemns Aidan Chambers's *Dance on my Grave* as the kind of 'arty farty stuff' which 'has plagued British teenage fiction for years' (Bowles 1987:17). (1990:46)

Unlike Bowles, I like the "arty farty stuff" that has animated British teenage fiction for years. I like complexity and sophistication in their current, playful forms. And so I am convinced that the widespread distaste for, neglect of and resistance to them among children's book people are inappropriate. This is perhaps not a very compelling argument, but then I have not found the arguments against "literary" factors such as complexity and sophistication very convincing either. And I think it is a good thing anyway to reveal my bias from the start. I could also point out that I am,

of course, not entirely unique in this bias. What Moss says about metafictive texts is equally true of other forms of complex and sophisticated books: "children do have an interest in these kinds of texts – certain kinds of readers find them fascinating" (1992:51).

I think it is a very good thing for children to be fascinated by books, and this is another reason why I think we should embrace the complex and the sophisticated in children's literature. There is the valid objection that children should not have texts that are "out of their range" forced upon them. But, according to Moss,

> Charles Sarland, looking at the structure of popular novels by Dahl and Blyton concludes that 'children are remarkably competent at handling all sorts of technical devices of story telling provided that the story is clearly of their culture, for them' (Sarland 1983:170). He argues that there might be a case for children being able to cope with quite complex forms. For Sarland, 'modern adult fiction may be infinitely more complex [than children's fiction] but the difference is quantitative not qualitative' (ibid.:169). (1990:46-47)

It would seem, then, that complex, sophisticated books are well within the range of child readers, as long as these books are *children's* books. They will, of course, not be within the range of every child. And some children will not like them. But if most children can cope with them, and many children may like them, then I simply do not think it is fair (or ideologically defensible) to deny children access to them.

Nevertheless, "Crago claims that 'our creative and publishing practice has denied many child readers the chance to experience anything but the simplified'" (Moss 1990:47). This is in part because of the limiting discourse that decides how adults think, talk and write about children's books; but this kind of dominant discourse is, of course, not always and automatically a "true" discourse. It is in part because of the well-intentioned influence of those practitioners who believe that complexity and

sophistication are damaging in some way, because they are too difficult and discouraging, too elitist, perhaps too "arty farty". But Sarland shows that ordinary children from any reading social group can cope with the complex, and I am convinced that many may even like the "arty farty". It is also very largely because of powerful market forces: the simple, straightforward (quite likely, delightful) children's book is a much surer publishing product than the marginalized (although not necessarily marginal) sophisticated text. I do not suggest that the publishing industry should ignore these facts and become some sort of charity. Nevertheless I do not think it is a good thing to allow publishing market forces – which have no concern for children, beyond wanting them to be literate and wanting their parents to be solvent – to dictate what children are given the opportunity to read.

And so I think it is a good thing to accept complexity and sophistication in children's books, and it will be the aim of this thesis to show that it is inappropriate for the children's book world to resist their presence in children's books, because while significant resistance to complex, sophisticated children's books remains, writers and publishers will continue to offer all children – even those who like such books and whose parents would like them to read such books – only very limited access to them. It will simply not be profitable to do otherwise.

CHAPTER TWO

My counterpoint just jumped out of the frame:

how to read picture books

According to Nikolajeva and Scott, there are "a number of approaches to picturebooks among the existing studies" (2001:2). This is hardly surprising, as there are a number of approaches to the study of books, and a wide variety of literary and cultural theories and analytical methodologies to apply to them. For children's books, moreover, there is also a wide variety of theories of developmental, educational and child psychology that can be applied to the texts – and to the children who read them – as well as numerous pedagogical theories about reading, about language acquisition, and about intellectual, emotional, social and moral development. Furthermore, in the case of picture books, not only pedagogical theories about visual literacy, but the fields of art history and criticism also become relevant.

I am neither an educator or a psychologist, nor an art historian, and my concern in this thesis is with the picture book as text. Most of the theory that I discuss, however, focuses on pictures and design rather than words. This is precisely because my approach is primarily textual, and thus assumes knowledge of textual analysis and ignorance of artistic elements. But, whether it focuses on words or on pictures, the theory is, of course, only a guide to some of the ways in which words and pictures may be played off against – or used to support and enhance – each other, rather than the key to a fixed code. As Schwarcz says:

> It is always hazardous to generalize on matters of symbolic and especially aesthetic communication. Both language and graphic expression include

> more than can be detected in them by the single reader and viewer; they can be understood on different levels and looked at from different angles. (1982:10)

Moebius explains, similarly, that it "would be misleading and destructive of the possibility of an 'open text' to say that within the graphic codes this particular gesture means one thing or another, regardless of the specific text. We must speak of 'dominances' and 'probabilities'" (1986:139). Different "pieces of the symbolic code work differently in different stories, and will lend themselves to different interpretations" (Moebius 1986:137). "Furthermore, these codes and contexts work simultaneously to create the effect of the whole; they never occur in the splendid isolation from each other that my catalog might seem to ascribe to them" (Nodelman 1988:xi).

Nor do such codes ever exist in isolation from the many other approaches that exist in the world of the children's picture book. Despite my interest in the picture book primarily as a text, then, I want to begin this discussion with a brief look at some important alternative approaches to the subject. The first of these ignores the picture book text entirely, stressing rather the importance of the context in which picture books are read.

Marshall points out that adults often use picture books "for reading to and sharing with the child", so that the pictures "become a conversation piece with the adult elaborating on the text, confirming it, reinforcing it, testing it with the child, usually as a natural part of communication" (1982:99). Bator argues, similarly, that because "the children's picture book is preliterature or protoliterature which an adult reads to a child, it is a necessarily shared literature" (1983b:150). Both their arguments are

supported by writer and illustrator David McKee, who says, "For myself, and I'm sure many illustrators like me, there is a consciousness of the fact that the picture book is perfect for sharing between child and adult" (1993:67-68).

Nevertheless, with the fact that the picture book is very much a "shared literature" firmly established as a background to the rest of this thesis, it may be more helpful to look at Lewis's identification of "three ways in which picture books are often described and analysed. We might call these descriptive vocabularies or discourses the *pedagogic*, the *aesthetic* and the *literary*. The *pedagogic* constitutes the picture book as text for the beginner reader"; it "often relegates the pictures to the lowly role of prop for the beginning reader who is tackling print for the first time" (1990:139). Nikolajeva and Scott argue that "the consideration of picturebooks as educational vehicles" represents a "predominant focus" of picture book studies, and make it clear that such an approach is concerned not only with beginning reading, but also with "aspects such as socialization and language acquisition" (2001:2). Egoff argues, in fact, that "the realistic picture book is now seen as an adjunct to books on childrearing. Since these are by intent 'message' books, their words have a greater significance than the artwork which for the most part is humdrum" (1981:259).

Nodelman thus feels that "most discussion of children's picture books has either ignored their visual elements altogether or else treated the pictures as objects of a traditional sort of art appreciation that focus [sic] on matters like balance and composition rather than on narrative elements" (1988:ix). This second approach, which Lewis calls the aesthetic approach, "examines picturebooks as objects for art history and discusses topics such as design and technique" (Nikolajeva & Scott

2001:3). It "constitutes the picture book as a book of pictures. The discourse here draws on art criticism or art history and, not surprisingly, it usually causes the written text to drop below the horizon while pictorial or illustrative matters are dealt with" (Lewis 1990:140). An extreme example of this approach is provided by Marantz, who insists that picture books "are not literary works to be read. They are art objects to be experienced" (1977:156).

Not only does this approach ignore the fact that the picture book is a book, but it may also find very few supporters in the art world. As Snyman points out, "the art of illustrating is usually seen as a peripheral area by the art critic…. To the art critic without interest in the knowledge of literature and the world of the child, these aspects are mostly only a hindrance to the free creative ability of the artist" (1987:49). Furthermore, Nodelman suggests that the approach of the art critic may be an inappropriate one for picture books not only because art theory cannot be applied to their verbal texts, but also because it may not even be applicable to their artwork, since picture books "organize visual information in a way different from what we usually expect of visual art" (1988:ix). He explains:

> Discussions of the dynamics of visual art usually concentrate on the ways in which the qualities and relationships of various elements of paintings and drawings create balanced compositions and thus provide the aesthetic satisfaction of wholeness. But the individual pictures in a picture book do not in their nature possess that kind of wholeness, for each picture is conceived as only part of a larger whole that also includes a text and other pictures…. Since stories characteristically achieve a state of balance only at the end, and only by moving beyond the disruptions and tensions that constitute their plots, it is often only the last picture in a picture book, the one depicting the resolution, that satisfies the traditional ideas of balanced composition. (Nodelman 1988:125-126)

What this means is that "often in picture books, the qualities of balance and regularity that theoretically contribute to good design are absent. The result is not bad art but

good storytelling" (Nodelman 1988:58). Clearly, however, "because of their sequential nature," picture books "need a very different approach from that which views pictures as individual works of art" (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:4).

Where the pedagogic approach to the picture book ignores the art, the aesthetic thus ignores the text. Lewis suggests that the literary approach, however, often simply ignores the entire genre. "Just as children's literature is frequently considered to be little more than capital-L Literature writ small, so picture books are taken to be 'just stories' writ even smaller" (1990:140). This is perhaps not surprising; Nodelman argues that

> from the viewpoint of literary theory, the most perplexing aspect of picture books is that they exist at all – that there should even be a kind of fiction that depends so heavily on pictorial information. Not only do most narrative theories ignore the ways in which illustrations often have a part in the telling of stories, they also tend to focus on how narratives involve readers by *not* providing the kinds of information that illustrations offer. (1988:1)

Even when "picturebooks are treated as an integral part of children's fiction, with critics employing a literary approach", what they tend to discuss is "themes, issues, ideology, or gender structures. Occasionally some aesthetic/narrative aspects are touched upon, for instance by Stephen Roxburgh. However, literary studies often neglect the visual aspect or treat pictures as secondary" (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:3). (Morris, for example, in a somewhat bizarre twist to this approach, introduces his criticism of children's picture books with the explanation that his "enduring interest is in the text of these books as a type of modern poetry" (2000:152).) Snyman argues that "the evaluation and appreciation of illustrations of children's books are undertaken by people who have received no training in the fine arts, such as educationists, librarians and sometimes literators [sic]" (1987:49). Indeed, visual

images and their ways of communicating are foreign to the scholar of text, rather than of art. The "experienced reader is confident with written material, but how pictorial art communicates is, for many, unfamiliar territory. While this does not affect our delight in picture books, it certainly limits our understanding of them" (Doonan 1993:7).

What the literary approach thus has in common with both the pedagogic and the aesthetic approaches is that it fails to make allowances for the fact that picture books "are unlike any other form of verbal or visual art. Both the pictures and the texts in these books are different from and communicate differently from pictures and texts in other circumstances" (Nodelman 1988:vii). Certainly, none of these approaches is adequate for a study of picture books as I defined them at the beginning of this thesis: fictional, illustrated books in which the pictures (and, often, the design), rather than decorating, are vehicles for meaning, with text and art integral aspects of an interdependent relationship. Such a definition requires an approach which recognises that "the art of the picture-book…rests on the *interaction* between illustrations and the text" (Tucker 1981:47; my italics). This approach must be predicated on the understanding "that modern authors of picture book texts are free to choose their language as one part of a two-part invention or convention", so that the "language is shaped by the fact that there are illustrations, and the picture is shaped by the fact that there is language" (Landes 1985:52). It implies that meaning "is always generated in at least two different ways", and that it is thus "simply not possible to read a picture-book story as you would unillustrated prose" (Lewis 1990:141). It demands that we "read any individual element of a particular book through, or in the light of, the other elements that surround or embed it" (Lewis 1990:143). Words and pictures exist and

function "independently but also together" (Scott-Mitchell 1987:77).

Schwarcz explains, therefore, that "the full meaning of the illustration can only be revealed in context" (1982:4), but misses the point that the full meaning of the text, too, can only be revealed in the context of the relationship between picture book text and word. He focuses his study of visual communication in children's books on, among other things, two questions: "How does the illustration relate to the verbal text? In what ways does it influence, clarify, enhance, weaken, or comment on the impact, mood, and intention of the written word?" (Schwarcz 1982:4). Since words in the picture book are one vehicle for meaning, rather than the only or even the primary one, it is, however, equally important to ask how the text influences, clarifies, enhances, weakens or comments on the impact, mood and intention of the artwork.

These kinds of interactions may be either quite straightforward or very complex, depending on the individual book. Egoff feels, for example, that the picture book has "a kind of unvarnished directness and frankness; there can be very little of the vagueness that words are so good at between its covers. What is meant cannot be implied but must be shown and related in the precise, literal terms that very young children can recognize" (1981:247). Hunt, too, feels that "a verbal text, while it may have immense interactive potential, may also disguise by virtue of the inexperience of the reader", whereas picture books "have a more immediate effect; they are more accessible, they literally show as well as tell" (1994:166). Moebius, however, seems to discern a more complex interaction than straightforward show-and-tell. His description of the shifting balance of meaning between picture and word is a very tense one:

> Between text and picture, or among pictures themselves, we may experience a sort of semic slippage, where word and image seem to send conflicting, perhaps contradictory messages about the 'who' or the 'what' of the story. Here is a kind of 'plate tectonics' of the picturebook, where word and image constitute separate plates sliding and scraping along against each other. (1986:135)

The note of tension is echoed by Sendak, in an interview with Lorraine: "You must not ever be doing the same thing, must not ever be illustrating exactly what you've written. You must leave a space in the text so the picture can do the work. Then you must come back with the word, and the word does it best and now the picture beats time" (Lorraine 1977:326).

It is thus possible, as I suggested in my introduction, that the distinction between pictures and text in the picture book might be merely one of appearance. Pullman perhaps raises the issue best when he asks: "Are all pictures pictorial? Or are some of them literary – as if they were drawn words?" (1989:185-186). Picture book artists "aren't necessarily interested in color and shape and line for their own sake. These are their tools, enabling them to express thoughts and ideas" (Lent 1977:160). "As always in visual imagery that has a narrative purpose, narrative informativeness is more significant than visual accuracy" (Nodelman 1988:156). Because of this, "in the picturebook what matters is something more than the artist's mastery of materials and technique, or the felicity of the book's design"; in studying the communicative codes of picture book art, "we are no less concerned with dignifying the artist's creation. We are, as it were, making soundings in the harbour of 'design-as-communication', marking the deeper channels of a modern art-form" (Moebius 1986:134).

Of course a proper recognition of the essentially textual nature of picture book art does not imply a disregard for the importance of the written text. Hunt emphasises

"the simplicity of the language" of the picture book (1991a:175). However, many picture books are not designed to be read by the beginning reader, but are rather, as I have said, shared texts, mediated by parents and other adult readers; their vocabulary is not limited by the reading vocabulary of the young child, and the limits imposed by a young child's speaking vocabulary are not tremendously significant for a mediated text. Limiting numbers of words does not have to imply using only simple words. And, according to Landes: "Although the language in picture books can be characterised by extreme economy, this is not to say that it is exempt from the usual canons of style. Good writing is good writing at any level. Picture books are judged by their words as well as their pictures" (1985:53). Lent, similarly, points out that since "a picture book doesn't have as many words as other books, every word, every sentence becomes that much more important. A sentence appearing by itself draws more attention than if part of a paragraph" (1977:158). The concept of design-as-communication clearly does not invalidate traditional communication through the written word.

But, as Bator says, asserting that "text and pictures are equals in a literary-art symbiosis does not guarantee a proper approach to this genre" (1983b:150). A proper approach requires not only a knowledge of what Lewis calls "its ineradicably bifurcated nature" (1990:143), but also an understanding of the ways in which this nature affects its functioning. This means that if the text of the picture book is represented in both its words and its pictures, then a study of picture books as texts, rather than as artworks, requires a study not only of their words, but also of their

pictures, and of the relationship between the two*.

This relationship is a complex one; "words can add to, contradict, expand, echo, or interpret the pictures – and vice versa" (Hunt 1991a:176). And these kinds of complex interactions take place in the context of the fact that "a picture may complement or contradict the words, but it is not read in a linear way" (Hunt 1994:9). This means that,

> as Sonia Landes has said,… 'What today's illustrators understand is that picture books really deal with two story lines, the visual and the verbal; and each can be separately phased so as to reinforce, counterpoint, anticipate or expand, one the other.' They have great semiotic/semantic potential; they are emphatically *not* simply collections of pictures…. (Hunt 1991a:176)

Townsend says, similarly, that a picture book "is not like a painting, or even, as a rule, like a sheaf of paintings; it is shaped as a whole, from its beginning to its end"; he makes the important point that "picture-book art…operates in the time dimension as well as the spatial ones" (1974:309). This is because of the interaction of words and pictures, where "images are perceived holistically, [but] words are perceived linearly" (Hunt 1991a:180). In Schwarcz's words: "Language discloses its contents *in time*; written language, ever since alphabets were invented, adds to this a fixed direction: we comprehend as we read along lines whose meanings we decipher in *linear progression*" (1982:9).

This linear progression influences the way we look at the pictures in a picture book. "Each page affords what Barbara Bader, the pioneer historian of the genre in its American development, has called an 'opening'; implied, of course, is a closing, a

* From this point on I shall use the term 'text' to refer to the communication of the picture book as a whole, by means of both words and pictures. Other writers, of course, use the term in its conventional

deliberate shutting out of what came before, and a constant withholding of what is to come" (Moebius 1986:132). "What will the effect be when the page is turned? A surprise? Or an answer?" (Lent 1977:159). "We anticipate the next while looking at the one before, we laugh now that we see what we had not noticed or expected before, we let our eyes wander off a familiar character's face to a puzzling word on the page and back again" (Moebius 1986:132). We notice "whether the text runs on in front of the pictures, hinting at what will happen, or whether it is saying broadly what the pictures show specifically or whether words and pictures appear to be having different lives of their own" (Doonan 1993:18). Even a single picture may initially confront the viewer "all at once, as *a surface*", but "soon after we have taken in the first overall impression of a picture, our eyes begin to meander, to linger over some spots in the picture and hurry past others, detecting certain connections between areas and shapes and colors" (Schwarcz 1982:9). This means that while the linear progression of reading influences the way we look at the pictures, the way we look at the pictures also affects the linear progression of, and thus the flow of time in, traditional reading, so that in a sense, "the stream of time breaks up into little local eddies", in what Pullman calls a "loosening of the tyranny of the one-way flow" (1989:172).

Pullman thus suggests that when we look at the pictures in a picture book, a "different kind of seeing is involved: the sort of simultaneity that we get in cinema" (1989: 172). Pullman's comparison of picture books to cinema is not unique. Picture book artists "Blair Lent, Maurice Sendak, and Uri Shulevitz all suggest an analogy with filmmaking…. Sendak credits Mickey Mouse, Busby Berkeley, and King Kong as being more important influences on his art than William Blake" (Bator 1983b:150).

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sense, referring to verbal text, and I have not altered their usages when quoting from their work.

And Marantz points out that picture book illustrations "are dependent upon their sequencing and association with the overall design of page and book, and so suffer a loss of meaning and significance when separated and displayed", so that the "illustrations in the illustrated book can be viewed as still photographs, while the pictures in the picture book demand an approach more like a motion picture" (1977:152). What this means is, in Lent's words, that a picture book "*depends upon the turning of pages and how one picture follows another*" (1977:159). Nikolajeva and Scott point out that Nodelman, similarly, "makes a point of picturebook pictures being different from works of art in their composition, since every picture in a picturebook (except perhaps the last one) is supposed to encourage the viewer to go on reading" (2001:152). And Hunt, too, picks up on the idea that picture books not only depend on the movement of the turning page, but actually manipulate that movement, when he says: "In a sense, the page-break becomes a significant quasi-grammatical unit" (1991a:182).

There are various ways in which picture books may exert a measure of control over the speed and rhythm of reading. Nikolajeva and Scott introduce the concept of the "pageturner", which they say "corresponds to the notion of cliffhanger in a novel. In the novel, a detail at the end of a chapter creates suspense and urges the reader to go on reading; in a picturebook, a pageturner is a detail, verbal or visual, that encourages the viewer to turn the page and find out what happens next" (2001:152). Doonan mentions the role of "textless page openings", which she says may hurry readers along or slow them down (1993:20). And she reveals how the rhythm of reading can even signify genre, in books "with text and illustration on facing pages of the opening. The resulting visual rhythm, a series of strong beats, suits the folk- and fairy-tale form

with its often repetitive structure, stereotypical characters, and its associations with settling down to hear a good story" (Doonan 1993:85).

Rhythm does not consist only in the turning of the page, but also within and across pages. According to Nikolajeva and Scott, for example, there is an inherent "tension between verso and recto", which the creator of a good picture book can use "to imply movement as well as temporal and causal relations" (2001:151). "As to the shape, size and arrangement of the illustrations, the most static presentation is the plate; the most dynamic is a sequence showing the character in action over several closely presented frames, and possibly breaking an individual frame in what looks like a hurry to get out of it" (Doonan 1993:85). Nodelman highlights the importance of the spatial dynamics of words and pictures, saying that we "usually look at a page from the top down, and because of their inherently attractive nature, we tend to look at pictures first, then read words" (1988:55). This suggests that any arrangement which tries to force us to reverse this pattern sets up an alternative rhythm; Nodelman says that "when the text has usually appeared below the pictures and suddenly appears above one, the rhythm of our response to the events we are learning about changes" (1988:54). As an example, he describes a picture book in which the artist suddenly "puts the words above the pictures" at a tense point and so "puts us in an ambivalent state: should we read first or look first?", and he argues that this "ambivalence adds tension to the tense moments of [the] book" (Nodelman 1988:55).

Despite these kinds of manipulations, "what the beholder has to contribute in the time-and-space of the turn of the page…is a major feature of the picture-book form" (Doonan 1993:19). Regardless of whether the rhythm of reading is controlled by the

reader or by the book, Lent suggests that the picture book's "preoccupation with movement, the continuation from page to page, and this concern that words move with the pictures, is one of the things that make picture books unique" (1977:160).

The picture book is also unique in the extent of its ability to shape our expectations and the manner of our reading before we even begin actively reading it. "The actual physical appearance of individual books is [an] obvious…example of how prior expectations control our responses to stories: it influences our attitude to the stories the books contain before we even begin to read them" (Nodelman 1988:44). Hunt argues that

> to some extent we *do* judge books by their covers, and that the style of type or the stiffness of the binding or the quality of the paper or the smell of the ink does influence us. Most people (and not only children) have a sensuous relationship with books; how they feel, how they weigh in the hand, the size, the shape (and, for very young children, the taste) all matter. (1991a:77)

The objecthood of the picture book, however, is even more significant than that of the ordinary book. "No approach to the picturebook can overlook the importance of medium and design as a part of the reader's experience" (Moebius 1986:134). "Much of the complexity, the use of metaphor and example, is expressed by the visual elements: the size and shape of the book, the thickness of the paper, the type…and the flow of the tale as the pages are turned" (Marantz 1977:155). Marantz says that, as an expressive form, the picture book "gains its strength from the totality of its making, including its paper stock, typography, binding, and design" (1977:153). Even its typeface "is chosen from catalogs that show hundreds of styles and weights, chosen as carefully as the colors the artist will use" (Lent 1977:160).

Every detail of design is thus essentially important. One of the first design elements to

make an impression, however, is usually the cover. Moebius describes how, more than a century ago, design began to be important as cover, "endpapers, title-page design, all were carefully-chosen elements of a whole, an experience wrapped, not without conscious intention, as a gift" (Moebius 1986:133). Landes, too, speaks of covers as "wrappers" (1985:52), but she feels that contemporary illustrators have gone beyond the covers of the past. "Caldecott's covers", she says, "are announcements of the contents, a montage of pieces of the stories to come. Today's illustrators often want the cover to do more – to develop character, to set a mood, to anticipate a theme" (1985:51). They may "try to create appropriate expectations by pictures on covers or dust jackets that appear nowhere else in a book and that sum up the essential nature of the story" (Nodelman 1988:49). Some do still "have covers which merely contain duplicates of pictures also found inside; but those pictures still often seem to have been chosen to convey the essence of the story inside and thus to set up appropriate expectations for it" (Nodelman 1988:50).

Moebius suggests a further function of the cover: having "an opening and a closing page, a cover with two sides", the picture book has "a temporal as well as a spatial frame" (1986:141). Landes also suggests that pictures without words can be used at the end of a book "to *hold* the reader to the story", or at the beginning "to lure the reader *into* the story" (1985:52). In other cases, Moebius says, what "the front and back pages say is often mutually complementary, symmetrical even" (1986:141-142). This observation is, I think, equally applicable to front and back covers, and often also to front and back endpapers. In such cases the function of the endpapers is, according to Nikolajeva and Scott, "that of an establishing scene" (2001:247). Landes, similarly, compares stories which begin with a "leader" on the cover which continues onto the

title page to "action films like the James Bonds and the Pink Panthers" (1985:52). Ultimately, Nikolajeva and Scott argue that the paratext as a whole has a significant influence on our reading: "titles, covers, title pages, and endpapers can…manipulate the reader/viewer to read in a certain manner" (2001:25).

If I seem to be overstating a point, consider the fact that, even with unillustrated books for adults, we tend to "expect more distinctive literature from hardcover books with textured, one-color covers and more conventionally popular material from books with luridly colored plastic coatings" (Nodelman 1988:44). In picture books, similarly, we "tend to expect rambunctious, energetic stories like the ones by Dr. Seuss from large books and more fragile, delicate stories like those by Beatrix Potter from smaller ones"; more importantly, we "tend to read smaller books expecting charm and delicacy – *and to find it even if it is not there* – and to read large books expecting energetic rambunctiousness – *and to find it even if it is not there*" (Nodelman 1988:44; my italics). And, in the context of approaches to the picture book as either shared medium or beginning reading material, size influences reading because it may "encourage sharing or promote the idea of a one-to-one silent get-together" (Doonan 1993:53). The fact is that "we can and do tell books by their covers; we use the visual information we find there as the foundation for our response to the rest of a book" (Nodelman 1988:49). It is clear that "we have begun to establish our attitude toward stories even before we have actually looked at the pictures or read any of the words in the books that contain them. When we do begin to look more closely at the pictures, we do so in the light of the information we have already accumulated" (Nodelman 1988:48-49).

The first aspect of the pictures in picture books that is likely to impinge itself on our consciousnesses, once we begin looking closely at them, is that of colour. "Of all the variations in the picture plane, those of color are the most immediately noticeable, and, like shapes, colors have emotional connotations that allow them to act as signifiers of states of mind" (Nodelman 1988:141). Moebius points out that the artist's choice of colour is often influenced by "factors outside the text", but we do traditionally associate "certain colours with certain moods or feelings" (Moebius 1986:143). In picture books, "the specific colors of specific objects within pictures usually have less significance than the overall colour scheme of the picture as a whole", so that when "illustrators vary the predominating colour in different parts of the same book", they are able to "convey the different moods of different parts of stories" (Nodelman 1988:141, 62). The list of associations between colours and moods and emotions that follows is compiled from Nodelman's *Words about Pictures*, and consists of both Nodelman's own conclusions and the conclusions of a psychological study by Lois Wexner, to which he refers (see 1988:60-64, 66, 111).

Black:	defiance, hostility
Blue:	melancholy, tenderness, security, passivity, calmness, peacefulness, serenity, elegance
Brown:	protectiveness, security, (with green) organic richness
Green:	growth, fertility, tenderness, security, calmness, serenity, cheerfulness, (with brown) organic richness
Grey:	bleakness, lack of intensity, cool detachment
Orange:	cheerfulness, defiance
Purple:	stateliness, dignity, effects of moonlight, darkness, mystery

Red:	hostility, defiance, intensity, excitement, cheerfulness, warmth, protectiveness
Yellow:	cheerfulness, happiness, calmness, serenity
Violet:	fantasy

Nodelman explains that the "conventional meanings of colours are of two sorts: those, like the red of a stoplight, that are merely arbitrary and culture-specific and those that relate specific colours to specific emotions". He says that "the culture-specific codes tend to be more significant in terms of their ability to give weight and meaning to the objects within pictures, but it is the emotional connotations that most influence the mood of picture books" (Nodelman 1988:60). Our interpretations of colour are also influenced by various other factors. According to Doonan, the "same colour may display friendly or disturbing aspects according to context"; at the same time, we ourselves "'read into' colour much as we read into texts, and what we see depends upon facts of the natural world, individual and cultural associations, personal colour sense" (1993:40). What this means is that the cultural associations of purple, for example, make it an appropriate colour for a queen's robe, but a picture that is predominantly purple will be less likely to evoke these associations of stateliness and dignity than the emotional ones of a mysterious moonlit night. Whether the purple night is frighteningly or thrillingly mysterious will, however, depend on the context of the rest of the story and picture and, for individual readers, also on their own personal and cultural associations and colour sense, if these differ from those of the book.

It will also depend very much on the shade and saturation of the purple. Nodelman writes:

> We distinguish colors in a number of ways – by hue, that is, classifications like red or blue that refer to different segments of the spectrum; by shade, the degree of relative darkness or brightness, as when we speak of light red or dark red; and by saturation, the relative intensity of colors, as when we speak of bright red or pale red. (1988:65)

He goes on to show that hue is less powerful than shade or saturation in evoking emotion, referring to the findings of a psychological study by Benjamin Wright and Lee Rainwater. Overall, they say that "it is saturation which manifests itself most powerfully in the analysis of the relations between connotations and perceptions" (in Nodelman 1988:66), but their findings do also show clearly the importance of shade:

> Their study reveals that an atmosphere of happiness depends on lightness and saturation more than on hue; that showiness depends almost exclusively on saturation; that forcefulness depends on color darkness; that elegance depends on both saturation and hue, blue being particularly elegant; and that calmness depends on darkness in association with blueness. Of the qualities they explored, only warmth seems to depend exclusively on hue, redness in particular. (Nodelman 1988:66)

Moving away from the shade and saturation of specific colours, Moebius identifies an association of "bright colours with exhilaration and discovery, and of dark colours with disappointment and confusion" (1986:143). This accords with Doonan's contention that a "high-key colour scheme using light colours is able to suggest feelings of well-being, whereas a low-key scheme in dark colours may well have a more sombre effect", as well as with her assertion that differences of shade suggest "the symbolic differences we usually read into dark and light, shade and sunshine" (1993:31). Nodelman, however, sees dark pictures in a less one-dimensional way: "Pictures that use dark shades seem both more somber and more cozy than lighter pictures", because "the darkness can both frighten and allow the contrasting coziness of lighter spaces" (1988:66-67, 67). His focus on the contrast between dark and light explains his feeling that we may "expect dramatic emotion from…high contrasts between areas of light and shadow and greater detachment from more evenly toned

pictures" (1988:66).

Nodelman points out that another element of picture book art that is

> often isolated as a significant creator of mood [is] the various media in which illustrators work. Commentators on picture books often suggest that the characteristics of differing media limit the range of subjects each medium can convey or impose certain moods upon pictures made in them. (1988:74)

He argues convincingly, however, that although "the characteristics of media certainly influence the way they are used, they do not necessarily limit artists to particular effects", since artists "do, certainly, choose media in terms of the effects they wish to create; but it is their *conviction* that certain media are best suited for certain effects that let them create those effects, not the media themselves" (1988:75). Such convictions may often be related to what the artist can expect his or her readers to associate with a particular medium. Often,

> a choice of medium conveys an attitude towards the subject of a picture because the artist has exploited our conventional expectations for pictures in that medium…. [Our] association of crayons with children might well lead us to expect childlike qualities in crayon work; sharing such associations, an artist like Rojankovsky might well choose such a medium in order to create childlike drawings. Similarly, many artists make gentle watercolours and starkly 'primitive' woodcuts. (Nodelman 1988:76)

What this discussion would seem to imply is that it is not media that influence mood, but style (although style is clearly often related to medium). Nodelman gives an excellent example of the effect of style when he says that a "cartoon of a boy falling down stairs demands a different response from a broodingly dark representational depiction of the same subject" (1988:83). In the same way as cartoons demand a non-serious reading,

> so-called realistic art inevitably implies an attitude of scientific objectivity. We assume that folk art is pleasant and harmless and so respond to the theoretical danger of *Rosie's Walk* as pleasant and

> harmless. We assume that surrealism is imaginative and mysterious because the surrealist style has traditionally been used in relationship to mysterious, imaginative subjects…. (Nodelman 1988:88)

Clearly, although "there is no word equivalent to 'tone' that applies to visual images, they can certainly create similar effects" (Nodelman 1988:41). These effects are the result of the fact that style implies "the identity of the person or civilization that produced it or the ambience of the usual circumstances of its use; thus, a style used in different circumstances will evoke informative associations with its original circumstances" (Nodelman 1988:80). "Consequently, mimicking the characteristics of the styles of other artists, even of other times or cultures, is a characteristic habit of picture-book artists" (Nodelman 1988:83).

A factor that depends greatly on medium and greatly affects style is that of line. Moebius says:

> The intensity of a character's experience may be represented by the thickness or thinness of lines, by their smoothness or jaggedness, by their sheer number or profusion or by their spareness, and by whether they run parallel to each other or at sharp angles. Thin, spare lines may suggest mobility and speed, thick, blurred or puffy lines, paralysis or a comfortable stasis. Jagged lines and those that run at sharp or odd angles to each other usually accompany troubled emotions or an endangered life…. Smooth and parallel lines…suggest a settled, orderly world. What I call the code of capillarity refers to the presence or absence of capillary-like squiggles or bundles; an abundance of such marks often signals vitality or even a surfeit of energy, rendering the scene crowded, nervous, busy, as if each line were a living organism, part of a giant audience. Swabs of plain colour provide relief from such jungles of line. (1986:142)

Nodelman also mentions the effects of jagged or sharply-angled lines, suggesting that "our eyes respond to all these sharp points the way our bodies might if we sat on them" (1988:73). Similarly, he says that "radial movement outward is typical of depictions of confused or intense emotion; it is often used to represent explosions" (1988:137). In general, he feels that whenever "line becomes predominant over shape,

energy and activity predominate over solidity and pattern" (Nodelman 1988:72). Similarly:

> pictures in which disconnected lines are emphasized over the solidity of shapes seem to indicate a lack of order; they do so by implying more energy, more activity. Such lines…seem to pull our eyes in a number of different directions at once and thus create a sense of unsettled chaos. (Nodelman 1988:161)

This is perhaps because

> spaces – lines joined together to enclose an area – affect us differently from the way disconnected lines do. Joined to form spaces, lines develop solidity and seem stable; lines that do not connect enclose no space, create no solidity, and seem to have more energy – to be disordered. (Nodelman 1988:73)

As well as lacking solidity, disconnected lines often lack regularity, and regularity or lack thereof is one of the most significant factors to affect feelings of order and disorder – and, concomitantly, of calm and disquiet. "Broken rhythms suggest the opposite of stillness", and "conflicting sets of differing patterns…create tensions with each other that are active and disruptive" (Nodelman 1988:138,73). "A very different visual rhythm is set up by waving patterns which promote the feel of continuous and smooth movement as in wind rippling long grass or a gentle swell at sea" (Doonan 1993:27); not surprisingly, regular patterns "create an overall effect of unified calm" (Nodelman 1988:73). As an example, Nodelman argues, with reference to Pat Hutchins's *Rosie's Walk*, that the "many tidy rows of leaves and feathers and pears" of the farm on which Rosie lives "are ritualized, repetitive, and therefore unsurprising, like wallpaper. No true danger could take place in such a comfortable decorative world" (Nodelman 1988:73, 137-138).

Line and linear patterning are not the only areas where a sense of regularity affects mood. Colours can create feelings of peace and calm – or their opposites – through

the regularity or irregularity with which they are combined, with artists frequently using "related colors to imply calm and discordant ones to suggest jarring energy or excitement" (Nodelman 1988:64). A similar feeling of energy and excitement may be behind the "intense drama" of stories whose illustrators "make significant use of changing angles" (Nodelman 1988:150).

Regularity is closely related to balance, and the "relative placement of words and pictures also does much to influence our reading of a page as a whole and of a book as a whole. One way in which it does so is to create or disturb the visual balance of each spread of a book" (Nodelman 1988:54). Nodelman introduces the concept of bilateral symmetry, the balancing of shapes, objects, colours, characters or any other points of focus on the two sides of a doublespread, and says that pictures that display bilateral symmetry "almost always seem to suggest repose or peacefulness" (1988:140).

A certain formal imperturbability is also evoked by the regularity and balance of a series of frames, and Doonan touches on the role of regular framing in the creation of mood in her discussion of a book with a traditionally separated plate and print layout, when she describes the "generous space of white margin which surrounds the coloured plate and accommodates the text and which in its cumulative effect contributes to the quiet formality of the whole book" (1993:32). Even when framing is irregular, "a frame around a picture makes it seem tidier, less energetic" (Nodelman 1988:50). Not surprisingly, books "which take an objective, unemotional view of the events they describe often have frames around all their pictures – sometimes, even, around the words of their texts" (Nodelman 1988:51).

Besides suggesting an objective, detached view of events, frames also "normally create a sense of detachment between the picture and the reader, while the absence of frames (that is, a picture that covers the whole area of a page or a doublespread) invites the reader into the picture" (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:62). This is because "the world we see through a frame is separate from our own world, marked off for us to look at" (Nodelman 1988:50). "Framed, the illustration provides a limited glimpse 'into' a world. Unframed, the illustration constitutes a total experience, the view from 'within'" (Moebius 1986:141). It "suggests a life going on beyond the confines of the page so that the beholder becomes more of a participant in than a spectator of the pictured events" (Doonan 1993:81). But, according to Nodelman,

> while white space around a picture can act as a frame, create a sense of constraint, and demand detachment, it can also do just the opposite; it can provide a focus that demands our involvement. That happens when a picture ends at the edges of the objects it depicts; isolating characters against a white space the shape of their own bodies forces attention upon them (1988:53).

A focus on characters which demands our involvement with them can also be achieved in "narrower books, or in those books in which illustrators have chosen to place pictures only on one side of the two-page spread," because these designs offer "less opportunity for depicting setting and, as a result, greater concentration on and closer empathy with the characters depicted" (Nodelman 1988:46). Similarly, pictures resembling film close-ups "generate involvement with characters by showing us their facial expressions and, presumably, communicating the way they feel" (Nodelman 1988:151). Such close-ups "tend to be on the front cover or dust jacket", and many picture book covers, while not necessarily demanding involvement, do "show their main character in a sort of introductory portrait that implies an acquiescence in the right of viewers to observe and to enjoy what they see", with characters "who smile

and invite the gaze of viewers" (Nodelman 1988:151, 120). Interestingly, while "a character on the lower left with his back turned to us will receive the most sympathy, for his position is most like our own in relation to the picture" (Nodelman 1988:136), a centred close-up of a character looking and smiling directly at us may, nevertheless, be one of the most effective ways of involving us in the picture and its story, because it implies not only that there is direct contact between us and the character, but also "that the victims of our gaze are willing victims" (Nodelman 1988:119).

The direct gaze influences not only our level of involvement with the story, but it is also one of many devices by which the artist determines the reader's point of view, "in the literal sense of where the viewer is positioned in relation to the picture, since although we are always in front of it the artist can exploit perspective to create the illusion that we are above the scene, or beneath it, or off to one side". This kind of strategy is important because it can foreground "some particular sector of the picture" (Stephens 1992:162). The artist is also able to influence the reader's point of view in a less literal sense. Is he or she "inviting us to look up to, or to look down upon the subject matter; or to look it in the eye? This has a marked psychological effect upon how we relate to what we are looking at" (Doonan 1993:34-35). Often, the viewpoint

> establishes the point of view both literally and psychologically. A low viewpoint (worm's eye) gives an image an elevated importance as it appears to tower over the beholder. A high viewpoint (bird's eye) lays the world out at the beholder's feet. Multiple viewpoints at a fixed level send us travelling along the picture, while no fixed viewpoint has us wandering all over the surface. (Doonan 1993:89)

A picture also establishes the viewpoint psychologically in that it determines whose viewpoint the viewer adopts. It

> may represent the point of view of a figure within the picture itself, so that we, the viewers, either see from the vantage point of that focalizing figure,

> or, seeing from a different vantage point, we see a different scene which includes within it a figure seeing. This enables the viewer to construct quite complex subject positions, being able at once to assess the perspective of the focalizing figure within the picture and to remain separate from that focalization. (Stephens 1992:162)

The artwork can even encourage the reader to consider points of view other than those of the focalizing figure or the main character. "It may do this by…depicting tacit witnesses on the fringes or in the foreground or background of the picture" (Moebius 1986:138). And the "notion of perspective does not only include the perceptional point of view, so we can equally speak about certain degrees of contradiction in ideology, since words and pictures can express different ideological attitudes" (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:25). Clearly, the "choice of a particular point of view can greatly affect the way we understand the situation a picture depicts" (Nodelman 1988:149).

A character's position in the foreground or background of the picture can be determined not only by the need to manipulate the viewer's point of view, but also by the need to focus the viewer's attention, or to ascribe visual "weight" to a character or object. Nodelman says:

> By visual convention, the center of a picture is also the center of our visual attention; the location of an object will attract our attention to a greater or lesser degree to the extent that it is closer or farther away from the center of a picture.
> Obviously, then, the relationship of an object to the top and bottom and to the left and right of a picture is also significant. Given our experience of gravity in the actual world, we seem to assume that an object of the same size has more weight in the top half of a picture than in the bottom half…. (1988:134)

At the same time, because "gravity pulls objects down in pictures as in life, the top halves of pictures tend to be less occupied than the bottom halves; and as a result, objects that do appear in the top half are surprising enough that they tend to attract us

more" (Nodelman 1988:134). Doonan, too, states that an object "in the upper part of a composition is perceived as heavier than one in the lower", but she adds that locating a character or object on "the right side of the picture makes for more weight than location on the left" (1993:28).

The depth of an object's position also affects its weight, or the amount of attention it draws. According to Nodelman,

> objects that seem to be further away from us in perspective pictures often attract our attention more than those that are closer up – even though they tend to be smaller than objects in the foreground (in perspective, of course, smaller objects are interpreted as being further away). The diagonal lines that indicate perspective seem to form arrowlike shapes that focus our attention on the objects they lead toward – the ones in front of the vanishing point. (1988:146)

A similar effect is also created by any actual "object that comes to a point"; it will tend "to focus our attention less on itself than on what it points toward, no matter how big it is or what surrounds it" (Nodelman 1988:128). But when depth is created without the use of perspective lines, it is the objects in the foreground that have more weight. "Warm colors – reds, oranges, yellows – seem to advance, and cool ones – blues and blue-greens – to retreat, and as result [sic], reds tend to have more weight than blues" (Nodelman 1988:144).

Colour, like depth, does however operate in more than one way to create effects of emphasis. "Bright colours are heavier than dark ones" (Doonan 1993:28), and pictures that imply a specific "light source focus our attention on the objects in the light – and, if it is depicted in the picture, the light source itself" (Nodelman 1988:154). Differences in colour, no matter what the colours involved, are also noticeable, so that "illustrators often draw attention to significant objects by depicting them in colors

unlike those of the remaining objects in the picture"; for this reason, "blank white areas tend to stand out as blocks of pure color when they are surrounded by a mixed palette of blended colors" (Nodelman 1988:142). As I have said above, "isolating characters against a white space the shape of their own bodies forces attention upon them" (Nodelman 1988:53). And quite aside from the emphasis created by the contrast of blank white space and the colour of an object depicted within it, "objects in a field of other objects stand out less than isolated ones" (Nodelman 1988:130). Doonan agrees that isolation "is a means of emphasis", but suggests that the shape enclosing figures that are not isolated should also not be ignored. She says that circular shapes, too, are a means of emphasis, "and an isolated circle counterweighs a larger rectangle and triangle. Regular shapes are heavier than irregular ones" (1993:28).

"Weight also depends on size: larger objects will be heavier than small ones" (Doonan 1993:28). According to Nodelman,

> the sizes of various objects as they appear on the two-dimensional surface of a picture influence the way we understand their relationships in the three-dimensional space they signify. Larger figures tend to overpower those that occupy less space – even though they might represent smaller objects. (1988:128)

Similarly, Nikolajeva and Scott say that we "assume that a character depicted as large has more significance (and maybe more power) than the character who is small and crammed in the corner of a page" (2001:83). Landes points out that size is not, however, always a positive thing, since "big = strong, but sometimes stupid; small = weak or frightened, but sometimes happy", depending on context (1985:52). Moebius relates a reduction in size – even as a result of distance – to the possession of "fewer advantages", but argues that large size "alone is not a sufficient criterion for the

reading of advantage; it may be a figure of an overblown ego" (1986:140). Nodelman points out, furthermore, that "other aspects of visual imagery can make up for the effects of size – our special interest in humans, the focusing power of words, or the fact that a solitary object usually has more weight that a number of similar ones" (1988:128-129).

But Nodelman also draws attention to another way in which size influences the focus of our attention:

> As well as viewing their characters from varying angles, picture-book artists can place them against differing sizes of backgrounds, much as movie directors do, in order to focus our attention on specific aspects of their behavior. Long shots, which show characters surrounded by a lot of background, imply objectivity and distance; they tell us about how a character's actions influence his environment, or vice-versa. (1988:151)

Depicting a character without any background, however, "focuses our attention on the action of the figures rather than on their relationship to their setting" (Nodelman 1988:131). And middle-distance shots, "which show characters filling most of the space from the top to the bottom of the picture, tend to emphasize the relationships between characters" (Nodelman 1988:151). "While most picture books are wider than they are high, most people are higher than they are wide, and so are most of the animal heroes of picture books" (Nodelman 1988:46). Middle-distance shots are thus more likely to appear in those pictures that are higher than they are wide. This leads Doonan to write: "Closer emphasis on a character in a vertical format might show us more about how that character feels" (1993:53). But even the more common wide format has much to reveal about the psychology of the picture book character. A wide book may focus less closely on a character's facial expressions, but it allows space for the depiction of the rest of the character's body language. "Cultural assumptions allow us to derive information from the gestures and postures of characters"(Nodelman

1988:117), and the "pose of a depicted character is a dramatic, expressive gesture" (Doonan 1993:17). Furthermore, Nodelman says:

> The extra width of wider books allows illustrators to fill in the extra space around the people they draw with information about the places they occupy – their setting; and if we operate, as illustrators almost always do, on the assumption that such external appearances reveal internal characteristics, we learn much of character in such pictures through the details of background. (1988:46).

Not only the background itself, but also the position of the character in that background, reveals a lot about the character's status and emotions. "Characters' size and placing on the doublespread (high or low, to the left, to the right) may reflect their attitude toward other characters, a permanent psychological quality, or a temporary mood; changes in the position reflect changes in the characters themselves" (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:83). "As with the stage," Moebius says, "it matters whether the actors are shown on the left or the right. A character shown on the left page is *likely* to be in a more secure, albeit potentially confined space than one shown on the right, who is likely to be moving into a situation of risk or adventure" (1986:140). Nodelman, similarly, says that, since

> we tend to empathize with a character on the left, the move of a previously established protagonist to the right can suggest that the protagonist is in some sort of difficulty; now we must glance past a dangerous figure who occupies the position on the left we would like to identify with and toward the figure we have learned to identify with, now displaced from his or her 'rightful' position. (1988:136)

Not surprisingly, then, Nikolajeva and Scott suggest that "safe homecoming is accentuated by the right-to-left movement" (2001:153). This makes sense because we read from left to right, so that turning over to the new "left-hand page will complete a thought, let us know that we can go on, that the thinking of the previous page is complete" (Moebius 1986:140).

One exception to the convention of the safety of the left side is probably also determined by our way of reading:

> once a dangerous event is over, the positioning of a protagonist on the right might in fact suggest rest rather than tension – particularly in the last picture in a book; that probably happens because our habit of reading from left to right means that the right side of the last page will be the last thing we look at and thus signifies an ending. (Nodelman 1988:136-137)

Of course, the security of the left and the risk of the right sides of the picture do also mean that the left may be associated with a lack of opportunity or development. "In fact, characters frequently move to the left when the story suggests that their progress is impeded" (Nodelman 1988:164). Similarly, when a picture emphasizes diagonals, which "are always associated with off-balance," Doonan says that "an emphasis from lower left to upper right will be understood as rising, as energy, going up in the world, friction, while the reverse direction is felt as falling, literally and metaphorically" (1993:27).

Like position on the left or right, height is also a significant factor. Moebius writes:

> Height on the page may be an indication of an ecstatic condition…or dream-vision…or a mark of social status or power, or of a positive self-image. Being low on the page is by contrast often a signal of low spirits, 'the pits', or of unfavourable social status…. The more frequently the same character is depicted on the same page, the less likely that character is to be in control of a situation, even if in the centre…. In…a succession of vignettes, those at the top of the page may signal a more competent character than those at the bottom. A character that is on the margin, 'distanced' or reduced in size on the page, and near the bottom will generally be understood to possess fewer advantages than the one that is large and centred. (1986:139-140)

Not only characters' positions in relation to the physical plane of the picture, but also their positions in relation to each other may often be determined less in terms of reality than by metaphor. Nodelman argues:

> The characters in picture books often form what stage directors would call

> 'stage pictures,' achieved on stage by blocking the actors; they take positions in relationship to each other that create a pleasing and informative visual image rather than mirror the ways in which people orient themselves to each other in reality. For instance, the characters in picture books often converse with each other while standing with their bodies and faces at ninety-degree angles from each other, both to create a balanced picture and so that we can see and read their facial expressions…. (1988:156)

Perhaps more importantly, the "mutual spatial relationship of two or more characters…often reveals their psychological relationship and relative status" (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:83). And when figures are arranged to reveal character and relationships, rather than to represent reality, "relationships between characters can be implied by their sharing or nonsharing of shapes or colors or perspective lines" (Nodelman 1988:156).

It should already be clear that such shapes, colours and perspective lines also imply different degrees of visual weight, a concept which plays an important role in the "stage pictures" created in this way, because it affects our sense of balance. Nodelman says:

> Discussions of composition in art center frequently on the shapes created by the layout of figures in a picture – the various triangles and squares that form the composition. Since such configurations create balance and order, the disruption of them can imply imbalance and disorder; and both balance and disruption can contribute to the meaning of pictures. For instance, three figures related so that they form a triangle with a stable base create less tension than three figures that form a triangle that stands on a point. (1988:130)

The visual weight of the shapes that make up a composition works with the visual weight of individual objects and figures in the composition to determine the balance of the composition and, with it, the balance of status, power and narrative importance between the characters depicted in it, with "weighty" characters given extra visual weight and less substantial characters having less weight. Important people, for

example, "can appear at focal points or wear brightly colored clothing or be heavily outlined; insignificant ones can appear toward the edge of pictures or have their backs turned or stand in shadow" (Nodelman 1988:156).

Shadow, along with other ways of obscuring objects or characters, is an obvious indicator of power and status. "Overlapping shadows tend to suggest the power of the objects that cast them over the objects they overlap", and artists "can use the way objects overlap each other to imply something about their relationships…. Arnheim suggests that 'occlusion always creates visual tension. We sense the occluded figure's striving to free itself from the interference with its integrity'" (Nodelman 1988:153).

While characters almost always overlap their backgrounds, the nature of the background tends to be more important than its occlusion (a background which occludes is, of course, another matter). "A character located within a two-dimensional façade is likely to be less 'open-minded', less able to give imaginative scope to desire than one pictured within a three-dimensional 'depth'" (Moebius 1986:141). If, however, "there is a vanishing point, or if above the horizon there is sheer open space", both reader and character may be placed "in a state of suspense. What lies 'beyond'?" (Moebius 1986:140). And if one "has been present earlier, the sudden absence of a horizon, of a clear demarcation between 'above' and 'below', is likely to spell danger or trouble" (Moebius 1986:140). "Generally speaking, figures seen from below and against less patterned backgrounds stand out and seem isolated from their environment and in control of it; figures seen from above become part of an environment, either secure in it or constrained by it" (Nodelman 1988:150). And, according to Nodelman, the "size of objects in relation to their background may imply

relationships between characters and environment" (1988:129).

Nodelman also suggests that "because we associate certain emotions with certain shapes, the shapes of visual objects as they relate to their background and to other objects can create specific tensions and thus imply meaning in themselves" (1988:126). For example, Doonan says that a "triangular emphasis in a composition 'speaks' of serenity, endurance and a range of associations arising from the combination of earth-boundness and aspiring height. But invert the shape or tip a triangle and feel the elements move" (1993:27). Where these kinds of associations depend on visual weight, others have to do with cultural associations. Nodelman says that we "tend to assume that squares are rigid and that rounded shapes are accommodating", and that rounded and curved shapes are "the sort of shapes we associate with softness and yielding" (1988:127,72). This explains Moebius's assertion that a character

> framed in a series of circular enclosures is more likely to be secure and content than one framed in a series of utterly rectangular objects. Often, an emphasis on rectangular shapes is coupled with a problem, or with an encounter with the disadvantages of discipline or civilized life. (1986:141)

Most pictorial frames or borders – by convention and because of the shape of the page – are likely to be rectangular. And borders or frames are closely related to effects of discipline and civilized life, often representing boundaries. "Tight bounds imply constraint", while "open borders imply freedom and fantasy" (Landes 1985:52). Because frames usually mark "a limit beyond which text cannot go, or from which image cannot escape, we may associate a sense of violation or of the forbidden or of the miraculous with the breaking of the frame…or at moments in which text suddenly intrudes itself into the picture" (Moebius 1986:141). In a similar way, a broken outline

around a character "imparts a liveliness to the figure because the pen itself seems to have skipped over the paper as it made the marks" (Doonan 1993:82).

It is important to note, however, that "a frame around a picture has a different effect from that of a frame within a picture" (Nodelman 1988:51). "It is interesting that many picture books depict objects that act as frames on their title pages, like doorways inviting viewers into another, different world" (Nodelman 1988:50). Doorways themselves have a measure of symbolic power in many picture books. Moebius refers to "the frequent depiction in picturebooks of gates, doors, windows and stairs, of roads and waterways", and argues that a "character who looks out the window or stands in the door…is implicated in the unspoken meanings of thresholds" (1986:137). Nodelman agrees that "doors and windows are symbolic thresholds, and roads and streams are symbolic paths to wisdom" (1988:108). Moebius also adds that inclines, whether "stairs, steps or extended ramp,… may provide a measure of the character's stature or of progress towards a depth or height of understanding or confusion" (1986:137).

The "changing representation of light, artificial and natural," also accords "with different degrees of character understanding" (Moebius 1986:137); light is, not surprisingly, a highly symbolic element of picture book art. Nodelman explains:

> Some of the more obvious narrative information implied by the objects in pictures relates to our most basic cultural assumptions. Dark tends to represent evil, light goodness; many picture books show evil characters in the shadows and good ones in the sunlight – or sad protagonists in the dark and happy ones in the light. Consequently, it tends to be the evil or unhappy characters in illustrations who wear hats that put their faces in shadows, whereas good or happy people most often have bare heads. (1988:111)

In fact, Nodelman argues that shadows "are so obviously symbolic that they usually

appear only when illustrators need them to symbolize something" (1988:153). Landes supports Nodelman's attachment of symbolic weight to picture elements such as light and dark, arguing that pictures communicate symbolism "even more than words". As an example, she writes:

> take the age-old battle of good and evil – Innocence and Experience – and look first at the chart in *Child As Critic*, by Glenna Davis Sloan. Blossoming trees, butterflies, sweet birds – a dove, and a newborn surround Innocence and the accompanying seasons of Spring and Summer. A vulture, a sword, a haughty beauty and a leafless tree surround the darker side of Experience and the seasons of Fall and Winter. (1985:52)

If the objects depicted in a picture have a particular potential for symbolism then, according to Doonan, the "abstract organization of a composition also acts as a visual metaphor" (1993:17). She refers to such visual metaphors as pictorial analogies, and explains:

> Pictorial analogies are the metaphors and similes of painting which enable what is shown to appear as one thing but also to carry other meanings.
> To discover pictorial analogies, look for the abstract repetition of shapes and lines, of proportions and patterns in the scheme, as well as what they represent…. There are also repetitions of shapes and lines that give further power through the affinities they make between animate and inanimate objects…. The formal links supply a psychological link…. (1993:42)

Nodelman says, similarly, that the "same shape repeated in different objects…and in negative shapes left between, on the same scale, provides links which make associations and affinities", and that the "various shapes in [picture books] imply different relationships between objects" (1988:73). And Moebius points out that colour in artwork can also function as "a linkage among different objects" (1986:143). Nodelman demonstrates that "bilateral symmetry can also contribute to the communication of meaning" (1988:140). It can create pictorial analogies between objects or figures on the verso and recto of a doublespread and, even more usefully, on those of an opening with a picture on each.

Identifying such pictorial analogies can often become something of a game for the reader of a good picture book. Many picture books, however, really do play games, with the reader, and within and between themselves. Moss says that

> Whalen-Levitt proposes a number of ways in which picture books 'play' with conventions. Initially, she cites those pictures which violate our commonsense view of the world and which use the idea of visual nonsense. An extension of visual nonsense is the picture which is 'impossible'. (1992:53)

Nikolajeva and Scott agree that a "special case is presented in the so-called impossible figures and optical illusions, for instance M.C. Escher's or Oscar Reutersward's. These create a pictorial space that has no correspondence to perceptible reality" (2001:214). As a general explanation of visual nonsense, they say:

> Nonsense is a stylistic device often based on the discrepancy between the literal meaning of the word and its metaphorical meaning, or between its true meaning and the way the characters interpret it. Visualization of verbal nonsense is a challenge for the illustrator, offering endless possibilities of pictorial play. (2001:212)

I would add that visual nonsense implies also pictures containing elements which make sense neither in their verbal nor their visual contexts, and are neither explained nor referred to in either verbal or visual text. They thus – playfully – leave the reader to decide whether they are extratextual jokes imposed on the story for the amusement of the reader, whether they do exist within the story but the characters are merely oblivious to them, or whether they form such an ordinary part of the alternative universe of the story that its inhabitants recognize no need to point them or respond to them in any way.

Further opportunities for visual games are opened up by "allusion to famous works of art", a "widely used intertextual element in contemporary picturebooks" (Nikolajeva

& Scott 2001:235). But this sort of visual intertextuality, which Nikolajeva and Scott call the "intervisual" (2001:228), is not without meaning. Anthony Browne's gorilla Mona Lisa, for example (in *Gorilla*, 1983), implicitly conveys certain values in connection with sacredness and accessibility in "high" art. At the same time, Nodelman argues, a "style borrowed from one particular painter can be as evocative of attitude as the borrowed style of a whole culture" (1988:87-88). Nikolajeva and Scott also identify "another type of intertextuality…, sometimes referred to as intratextuality: the authors' allusions to their own texts" (2001:232). Such allusions encourage the reader to join in the game of identifying their sources, but also suggest thematic and other connections between the texts involved. Unlike intervisual allusions to famous works of art, these allusions may be verbal, may involve the book as a whole, or may be purely visual.

A purely visual game that appears in many picture books, according to Hunt, is the presence of "leitmotifs carried by purely illustrative elements" (1991a:183); Doonan says that picture book "art favours 'running stories' in addition to the main one" (1993:18). These may not necessarily drive or even add to the plot, but can serve a wide variety of functions. For example, in the case of mis-en-abyme, "a text – visual or verbal – embedded within another text as its miniature replica", Nikolajeva and Scott explain that the "little picture does not directly duplicate the large one, but nevertheless mirrors it. The function of the little picture is a metafictional comment on the story" (2001:226-227). And, according to Doonan, the effect of a miniature story within the story is that

> we have to observe small pictorial details as well as what the words say in order to 'get the whole picture'. The emotional tone of the composite text emerges from the interaction of the two sources of information – words that tell and pictures that show. (1993:18)

This kind of composite text can occur

> when the story is told in both words and pictures. One picture can do what would take pages of words to do. The words can be used to talk about something that the picture can't show – a sound outside the room, the smell of nearby cooking, and so on. Pictures and words working together to tell a story. (McKee 1993:65)

More excitingly, the pictures

> may elaborate, amplify, extend, and complement the words. Or the pictures may appear to contradict or 'deviate' in feeling from what the words imply. A variant of this happens when the words and pictures counterpoint each other so that two separate stories run in tandem, as in John Burningham's *Shirley* books. (Doonan 1993:18)

We may even "find two or more parallel visual stories, either supported or unsupported by words" (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:25). It is thus in the area of counterpoint that Moebius's image of the sliding and scraping plate tectonics of the picture book is most applicable, and that the tense friction of the two media, words and pictures, may at times flare into a (richly productive) open discord. "Picture-book makers have always attended to this feature of the form, and are sensitive to the many ways in which words and pictures may be played off against each other" (Lewis 1990:141-142). Stephens describes "a capacity to construct and exploit a contradiction between text and picture so that the two complement one another and together produce a story and a significance that depend on their differences from each other" as "an important principle of intelligent picture books" (1992:164). Nodelman feels that the "mutual destruction by words and picture of our confident expectations of what each might mean on its own is characteristic of many picture books" (1988:223). And Nikolajeva and Scott write: "In the most dramatic cases, the verbal and visual texts contradict each other consistently, creating considerable ambivalence" (2001:175).

In the introduction to this thesis, I mentioned that Nikolajeva's discussion of complexity and sophistication in children's books formed the foundation of my analysis, and I described the manifestations of complexity and sophistication that she identifies. In this discussion, she does not mention ambivalence specifically, but she does identify a sophisticated move towards unresolved narratives. In the genre of the children's picture book, I too have found numerous examples of texts with more or less open endings, some going so far as to lack any resolution at all, and I have also seen several essentially ambivalent texts representing a particularly complex subform of the unresolved text.

Besides being a sophisticated development of the children's book in its own right, a lack of resolution is also a sign of the complexity and sophistication that may be found in the forms and narrative structures of an increasing number of contemporary children's picture books. Nikolajeva refers specifically to formal experiment and the disintegration of traditional narrative structure as manifestations of this complexity and sophistication. She associates these characteristics closely, although not exclusively, with a move from the circular narrative traditional in children's books to a linear form more common in adult reading. While I have also seen evidence of this change in shape in children's picture books, I would say that the narrative structures of several new picture books are so experimental that they could not be described even as linear, but follow some other new and nameless path.

This may be in large measure the result of several examples of multidimensionality, multivoicedness and generic convergence, and an incredible number of both

intertextual and strictly intervisual allusions, which have perhaps succeeded in pulling their texts from the traditional straight path onto several different paths simultaneously. These instances of multidimensionality and allusion have also often formed part of another form of complexity and sophistication not mentioned by Nikolajeva: illustrators' games with visual nonsense.

Such games raise questions about the responses of characters situated within them, and such questions inevitably imply a certain degree of psychological comment on the characters involved, in line with Nikolajeva's identification of an increasing psychological depth in children's books. Many of the contemporary picture books that I have read do, in fact, defy children's book tradition's preference for actual, rather than psychological, event, and centre firmly on the emotional and mental lives of their characters. A few leave the conventional focus on plot even further behind, to explore not only the psychologies of their characters, but the philosophies of the worlds in which they live.

Such psychological and philosophical interests, as well as unresolved and ambiguous texts, new and experimental forms and narrative structures, multidimensionality and multivoicedness, generic convergence, intertextual and intervisual allusion, and visual nonsense, are the complexities and sophistications I encountered most frequently in reading several hundreds of children's picture books before and during the writing of this thesis. There are thus many books in which one or more of these features are represented. The three that I analyse in this thesis, Anthony Browne's *Voices in the Park* (1998), David McKee's *I Hate My Teddy Bear* (1982), and John Burningham's *Granpa* (1984), however, were chosen because they each represent a particularly high

number of these features. They all use experimental forms and narrative structures, and reflect sophisticated psychological or philosophical interests. *I Hate My Teddy Bear* and *Granpa* are extremely ambiguous and resistant to resolution. *I Hate My Teddy Bear* brings about a convergence of the fantastic and the realistic, and it and *Voices in the Park* revolve essentially around issues of multidimensionality and multivoicedness, and play various sorts of games with visual nonsense. *Voices in the Park* is filled with both intertextual and intervisual allusion. There may be other picture books that have more sophisticated intertextual allusions or deal with more complex psychological material. But I think that combining a high number of complexities and sophistications in one book results in a book that is more complex and sophisticated, overall, than one which is complex or sophisticated only in one way, even if it is very complex and sophisticated in that way.

Voices in the Park, *I Hate My Teddy Bear* and *Granpa* may thus be described as "typical" of complex, sophisticated contemporary children's picture books, in that they represent the most common complex and sophisticated features of contemporary children's picture books. Because they also each incorporate not only one or two, but several of these features, they could also be described as the most complex and sophisticated of the many contemporary picture books I have selected from for study in this thesis.

CHAPTER THREE

Mr Magritte and the multidimensional gorillas:

Voices in the Park

Anthony Browne's *Voices in the Park* was published in 1998, and won the Kurt Maschler Award for that year. Browne has said in private conversation (August 2002) that it is a book which has often attracted academics, because of its companionship with his 1977 *A Walk in the Park*, which tells the same story and has the same characters. (Browne has never been happy with his 1977 illustrations, and *Voices in the Park* developed out of a long-held desire to redo and improve them.) While the intratextuality this relationship creates is worth mentioning as an introduction to this analysis, I am going to break with academic tradition and examine *Voices in the Park* as a book in itself, not as a companion to or revision of its predecessor; it is more than capable of standing alone, both as a representative of picture book complexity and sophistication, and as a story for young children.

The story revolves around four characters'* early evening walks in a park. The first character we meet is a mother, who tries to avoid the unpleasant stereotypical park characters of dangerous-looking layabout men and rough-looking dogs and children. Nevertheless, her pedigree Labrador, Victoria, does begin to play with a mongrel, and her son, Charles, befriends the mongrel's owner, a "very rough-looking child" called

* The characters in *Voices in the Park* speak, act and dress entirely like humans, but are in fact gorillas.

Smudge. Although Charles has been bored in the park until meeting Smudge, his Mummy takes him and Victoria home, leaving Smudge, her unemployed father, and their dog, Albert, behind. Immersed in a newspaper, Smudge's Dad notices nothing of the park around him, but is cheered up on the walk home by Smudge's happy chatter. Smudge has enjoyed the evening's play with her new friend "Charlie"; she takes home a pretty red poppy that he has picked for her, and then makes her dad "a nice cup of tea".

This simple story is, however, only one layer of meaning in a complex book. That there might be more to be uncovered is suggested by the title at the top of the first page, "FIRST VOICE": the story is retold four times, once in each of the four voices of the four central characters. This provides not only four different verbal narratives about the same evening, but also four visual narratives, as each character's story is illustrated from his or her own perspective. The visual perceptions of each character differ as markedly as their social and psychological perceptions, frequently depicting quite irreconcilable views of the same scenes or events, and not only the narrating personae, but the styles of the art, the fonts, and even the events and characters that are observed, differ vastly between different characters.

By hanging his apparently slight subject matter on this rather more sophisticated narrative structure, Browne enables himself to introduce a sophisticated philosophical theme. Postmodern thought argues that there is no essential "truth" about our existence; as a result, our "reality" is nothing more than our own production of things to know and perceive. We can thus never know the "true" or "deeper" meaning behind any narrative, because such a meaning does not exist. Child readers of *Voices*

in the Park (and most parent readers) presumably lack this kind of philosophical understanding of the unknowableness of "truth". No philosophical insight is needed, however, to see that we cannot know whose version of the evening in the park is the definitive one, and which is thus the "real" story.

Readers may simply choose to ignore this, and try to accept the narrative of the character they like and identify with, but this is likely to lead to difficulties. Only one of the characters is not likeable, and the most likeable character is not necessarily the one it is easiest to identify with. Smudge's "reality" is the most desirable, but, precisely because it is less idealized, Charles's is perhaps more comforting and easier to identify with. It may simply be easier to accept all the stories simultaneously – as postmodern thought would have us do – especially for a reader used to accepting magical beings and events in stories such as fairy tales. Another "easy" reading involves accepting the narratives of Smudge, Charles and Dad, but rejecting Mummy's because she is less likeable than they. Such a reading elevates certain "truths" above others, which makes no sense if all "truths" are equally untrue, but it does acknowledge the existence of simultaneous "truths" that are equally valid although different. (Despite its apparent inconsistency with postmodern logic, the rejection of Mummy's "reality" may also be very far from a misreading of the book, as I argue further into this chapter.)

Browne's repetitive polyphonic structure thus illustrates the postmodern idea that what each individual calls "reality" is, in fact, an entirely individual construct and, as such, it is no more and no less valid than that of, and wholly inaccessible to, any other individual. This idea is not only sophisticated, but also potentially very threatening,

because it may imply a world of complete isolation. Browne is always aware of his child audience, however, and counters feelings of threat and anomie through his use of colour and the powerful associations it carries. The saturation of the colour schemes in the book varies between repetitions and even, notably in Charles's repetition, within repetitions, yet the book overall is a bright, rather than dull or irregular, one. Both the fact that the overwhelming majority of the colours are bright ones, associated with and thus evocative of happiness, exhilaration, discovery and wellbeing, and the relative regularity of the saturation throughout, creating a sense of calm, contribute to a sense of security, non-threat and wellbeing throughout.

Although the narrative structure is both sophisticated and unusual, it has a similar effect, with its steady, regular overall rhythm. Individual repetitions of the story may vary in both their rhythm and the extent of their regularity, but the rhythm of the book as a whole is composed of the steady beats of voice following voice in orderly succession, creating a sense of calm and order. This is important; Hunt writes: "It is a truism that in early developmental stages, children prefer stories with an element of 'closure' – that is, where there is a 'sense of an ending'. More than this, they prefer that something is resolved, that normality is restored, that security is emphasized" (1991a:127).

Not only the regular, orderly rhythm of narrative following narrative, but also the structures of the four narratives themselves, emphasize security, with the circular home-adventure-home journey structures and resolutions typical of and traditional in children's literature. Each story is closed, with a more or less happy ending from within its narrator's frame of reference. Mummy separates her son and dog from the

rough influences that have threatened them, and brings them back under her control. Dad is cheered up by Smudge. Charles goes home with the hope of future afternoons in the park brightened by play with his new friend, Smudge, and Smudge herself returns home with a pretty flower to remind her of her happy day. Charles and Dad's repetitions are very slightly complicated by the hint of a quest structure: although they complete their circular journeys home, they also travel a metaphorically linear route, because they return home changed, Charles with a vision of hope and Dad cheered up. But Smudge's story is purely circular. She leaves home cheerful and happy, she goes into adventure cheerful and happy and, while she influences two other characters so that they go home changed, she herself ends by going home unchanged, still cheerful and happy. Her repetition of the story is thus the happiest of them all, and has the most unambiguously secure and content ending. It ends the cycle on the happiest, most secure note possible. Although the unknowability of the final, "true" story prevents resolution of the book as a whole, the circularity of the journeys of each of the four narratives that make up the book as a whole emphasises resolution and the restoration of normality, as all the stories, and particularly the final one, emphasise security. Browne's complex structure thus allows him to handle a threatening philosophical subject without loss of security for the child reader.

A further aid in this task is provided by two other sophisticated elements of the book, its visual nonsense and allusion. Browne frequently "creates a deviation from the written text through incongruent and absurd images appearing in the background of predominantly realist illustrations", so that "the detail forms a surrealistic scattering of visual jokes" (Moss 1992:60). According to Watkins and Sutherland, he "consciously works on many levels and often incorporates surrealistic imagery,…

sometimes combined with superrealistic surface detail" (1995:313). To complicate things still further, "Anthony Browne's work is a particularly fertile ground for references to other artists" (Moss 1992:54), and there "are recurring images and allusions within his oeuvre; allusions to the surrealist painters and common motifs" (Hunt 1991a:184). In fact, his books "abound in pictorial self-quotations, especially the images of gorillas and pigs" (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:235).

It is certainly thus true that Browne's sophisticated games and allusions complicate his books, and that many of the allusions will be missed by many child readers, with their limited experience of the world. But it is just as possible to see Browne's artistic allusions as accessible introductions as it is to see them as inaccessible references. And the very multiple worlds, allusions and visual nonsense that make a book such as *Voices in the Park* complex also have the potential to turn it into a glorious game. For a child who likes, and has read, other Anthony Browne books, there may be pleasure and amusement in the recognition of self-quotations such as the recurring gorillas. The different worlds of Mummy, Dad, Smudge and Charles invite a more colourful version of the classic "spot the difference" game. And the visual nonsense is a challenge and, often, a surprise to find, and is frequently a joke in its own right, as, for example, with the brilliant swimming trunks and the banana of the statues on Smudge's fountain, or the dogs literally going in Mummy's one ear and out the other. Rather than complicating the book to the point of inaccessibility, these elements give it a playful sense of fun, possibly adding to many children's enjoyment of and engagement with it, and surely helping to counter feelings of anomie and insecurity that may be engendered by its existential questions. Not only could nothing threatening take place in such a playful, humorous, silly world, but the book

effectively suggests that a world that is not bound by a single, rigid "reality", that is rather filled with inexplicable oddities from various alien, yet interesting, realities, may be not only a safe, but a fun, place to live.

The multiple realities depicted by means of Browne's sophisticated narrative structure also form the basis of a complex exploration of the psychologies of each of his four characters. Each of the four narratives in his book takes us directly into the mind of its focalizing character. Not only do we see from the character's perspective, but the allusions and nonsense of his or her visual narrative also throw up glimpses of his or her unconscious. These portraits from within are supplemented by impressions from outside, as each character is also seen from the perspectives of at least two of the other focalizers. Each retelling naturally shapes our understanding of the ones to come, and all influence our interpretations of each other. Each character can thus be studied from at least four perspectives: his or her own, those of at least two of the other characters with whom he or she interacts, and that of the omniscient reader, who sees the impressions each character makes on the others, but also forms his or her own impressions of the characters. The narrative that is of most interest may thus come to be seen as that of the psychological journeys of the four characters, with the story of an afternoon in a park simply a structural device for holding this, more absorbing, narrative together, and the unusual narrative structure a vehicle, with the visual and verbal texts, for its detailed explication from several different viewpoints.

The effectiveness of this way of exploring the minds of the characters is perhaps most clearly visible in the character of Charles's Mummy, whose thoughts are entirely superficial, whose focus is entirely outward, but whose character, beliefs and

motivations are exposed completely. Her verbal account of the afternoon reveals a conventional, wealthy, snobbish middle-class view of the world, entirely supported by the pictures. For example, she allows very little visual nonsense into her park (or, presumably, her unconscious), but one joke that does slip through takes the form of a queen in flowing robes and heavy crown on a park footpath, a most appropriate image in the subjective world of an Englishwoman who has chosen to name her dog Victoria and her son Charles.

The implicit snobbishness is confirmed when Mummy lets Victoria off her lead and says, "Immediately some scruffy mongrel appeared and started bothering her", after which "the horrible thing chased her all over the park." The picture on the facing page shows the two dogs apparently playing happily, Mummy's Labrador, in fact, chasing the mongrel, so that it is clearly only Mummy's low valuation of mongrels that makes this one a horrible thing who is bothering Victoria. Nevertheless, Mummy makes a similar judgement when she is ready to go home and finds Charles, in her words, "talking to a very rough-looking child". She calls him firmly and concludes that they "walked home in silence"; he has offended against her middle-class sensibilities with his unsuitable choice of playmate. Smudge's Dad has fared no better than Smudge in her estimation: when she shares a park bench with him, her approach to the world of such as he is symbolised perfectly by the lamppost that suddenly appears out of nowhere between them, separating her pristine, orderly area of the picture completely from his, with its dustbin and scattering of litter.

But by this point in her story Mummy's prejudices come as little surprise. She opens the book with the announcement: "It was time to take Victoria, our pedigree Labrador,

and Charles, our son, for a walk." Her plural possessives establish her immediately as a member of a conventional nuclear family. Her use of these plurals without explanation suggests a measure of security in her position: she assumes that a husband will have been imagined for her; she sees herself as outside of any category of person who might for a moment be thought of as a single mother. At the same time, it also suggests certain assumptions about her addressee: that he or she is the sort of person who would naturally imagine a husband in the background, that he or she is not the sort of person who might perceive a woman and child as a potentially complete family unit. Implicitly, thus, she assumes that the reader is of her sort – perhaps because anyone worth addressing would inevitably be of her sort.

Mummy's opening words also suggest a lot about her relationship with Charles. Not only does the word "son" fail to merit the initial capital of the word "Labrador", so that Charles represents a distinct anticlimax after glorious Victoria, but there is a sense that the son, like the dog, is simply a creature that must be walked and fed and watered daily to be kept in good condition. In fact, when they arrive at the park Mummy addresses Charles in terms associated with trained dogs: "'Sit,' I said to Charles. 'Here'". (The syntactic separation of the two instructions highlights their dog-training associations.) When she wants to leave the park, it is clear that she calls both dog and boy, but it is less clear which is which, as she says, "Charles, come here. At once…. And come here please, Victoria".

Mummy's social and emotional rigidity is figured by her physical rigidity. Her stiff, almost unnaturally erect posture suggests a stateliness and untouchability well-suited to her regal nomenclatural choices, and is complemented by the regular spatial

dynamics of word and picture on her pages, as well as by the neat, smooth, mostly parallel lines of hatching used to give texture to her fur and the grass in her world. The image of uncompromising, glacial formality is completed by the typology of her narrative: clear, formal, elegant, conventional, yet very strong, with serifs for clarity but no suggestion of decoration.

Her coldness is ingrained in Mummy; she distances herself from others whenever she can. In all pictures of her, she quite literally looks down on the rest of the world, and her pinched, tight face and down-turned mouth strengthen the impression she gives of constant general disapproval. Her arms are frequently folded across her body, creating a barrier between her and others and preventing physical contact; in pictures where she is seated next to Charles, her body is oriented either directly forward, rather than towards him, or away from him entirely. She does put her arm loosely around him, but the suspicion that this is for control rather than affection is confirmed in Charles's perspective of their departure from the park, where her long gorilla arm fits around his shoulder but maintains a significant distance between them. The only time she ever makes direct eye contact with anyone is when she is angry with Smudge's dog, and she glares out of the page at the readers. It would thus seem that she only ever engages directly with the world in anger, and because it is we, the readers, with whom she engages in this way, it seems that we, unreasonably, are under attack, and this has the effect of making us like her even less than we (presumably) already do.

Such dislike is further encouraged by the darkness of her fur and clothing, which emphasises her forcefulness and associates her with disappointment and confusion. It may be going too far to suggest that Mummy is imbued with the symbolic association

of darkness with evil, especially since her world does not share the darkness of her person, but it is certainly reasonable to observe that darker colours – like Mummy – tend not to be associated with happiness or exhilaration. Mummy is, however, firmly associated with the hard bright red of her hat, suggesting hostility, even defiance, and adding to her dominance by helping her outweigh most other figures in any picture.

Her weight is further increased by her size: she is nearly twice the size of Charles, and this is made particularly significant by Browne's distortion of relative sizes. Mummy is more or less the same size as Dad when they can be compared at the park bench, and Smudge is more or less the same size as Charles when they play together without the foreshortening effects of perspective on the climbing frame and bandstand. But the difference in size between Smudge and her Dad when they walk to and from the park is much less than the difference in size between Charles and his Mummy, so that Mummy's hugeness next to Charles is the result of a deliberate distortion, and thus becomes particularly significant. Apart from increasing her visual weight, her size thus also increases her significance (especially in Charles's life). It gives her power and strength; it makes her, in fact, overpowering. Yet, of course, it should not be forgotten that it also potentially suggests a degree of stupidity, and an overblown ego, and these interpretations are strengthened by her position on the pages on which she appears. She is almost always on the right, which increases her visual weight still further, but reduces the likelihood of our empathising with her.

In fact, Browne works so hard to prevent empathy with Mummy that when her wide open mouth is mirrored by the wide open mouths of the trees behind her as she calls for her missing son, it seems less likely that they are calling in sympathy than that

they are protesting in agony at the jarring stridency of this bright red-hatted and blue-coated figure in their mellow green and gold world. The detail of the picture supports this idea, with a tiny picture in Dad's newspaper of an open-mouthed person who strongly resembles the trees. This picture is revealed, in a later, closer, view, to be a visual quote of Edvard Munch's 1893 *The Scream*; the trees are thus definitely associated with Munch's anguished painting, at the top of one of the versions of which he "scratched in pencil, 'Can only have been painted by someone gone mad'" (Heller 1984:131). It is thus Munch's agonized scream, and perhaps Munch's madness, to which Mummy reduces the trees.

Despite the connections between the open-mouthed *Scream* and the open-mouthed trees and mother, the scream of the painting is, however, chiefly associated with Smudge's Dad, as it appears in his newspaper, in which he is looking for a job. He says that he knows this is "a waste of time really", and the scream seems to represent his frustration and despair, which remain unreleased in understated expressions such as "I needed to get out of the house". It is significant that he is the only figure to appear isolated against white space in an irregular shape (himself sitting in a chair); the absence of any kind of frame or border in his visual narrative suggests a lack of order and calm in his life. His posture is consistently bowed down and weary-looking, his face sad and hopeless. The expression on his face in his opening picture, hopeless, red-eyed, unhappy, as he gazes directly into the eyes of the reader, establishes a particularly powerful direct contact, drawing us in in sympathy and demanding a response. But there is no response for us to give, and the hopelessness of the confrontation creates an empathetic understanding of Dad's hopelessness.

On the way to the park, Dad walks through a highrise ghettoland of waste, poverty and misery. He passes a high wall topped with broken glass, and an even higher security fence, suggesting both that he lives in a world that is unsafe, and that he lives in a world of barriers and isolation. Two paintings, the Mona Lisa and Frans Hals's 1624 *The Laughing Cavalier*, are leaning against the wall, perhaps left there by a hawker. The Mona Lisa's famous smile and the cavalier's "ironical detachment" (Bernabei 1971:16) are replaced in this setting with weeping so copious that they are surrounded by a puddle of tears. The graffiti on the wall is overtly symbolic: a broken heart and an anarchy symbol. Father Christmas is reduced from a symbol of bounty to a beggar whose begging box holds only a few coins at the end of the day, despite the mild comic relief of his handwritten sign: "Wife and millions of kids to support". The street is littered with food wrappings, an empty Coke can, a syringe, and a lost notebook; a rat eyes the rubbish hungrily. The two trees are stripped almost bare of branches and bowed over by the winter wind. The two identical highrises are not illuminated or enlivened by a single warming light. And the bricks, fence, paving and windows of the blocks of flats are a subdued frenzy of conflicting patterns, which create a sense of active and disruptive tensions in the picture, and suggest that Dad's life contains similar tensions.

But although Dad says that looking for a job is "a waste of time really", he adds, "but you've got to have a bit of hope, haven't you?" Smudge is Dad's bit of hope. When they leave the park, he says, "Smudge cheered me up. She chatted happily to me all the way home." In the picture of the two of them walking home, Dad's posture is noticeably straighter, and his face much brighter and more interested, than before. The fence and paving are gone, and the anonymous pattern of the flats is broken by the

lights in the windows, bright and multicoloured, with irregular heart, star or circle shapes; the tall, straight trees are a lacy network of tiny branches and new budding leaves, strung with magical fairy lights across a sky filled with stars. Instead of a busy conflict of pattern, there is thus a bright, dazzling spectacle of light, colour and prettiness. The street is clean, the anarchy symbol has disappeared, and the heart is full, red and whole. Father Christmas's begging box and sign are gone, and he himself is dancing at the side of the road. The Mona Lisa and her cavalier, too, have escaped the constraints of their canvases and frames: with a rose between her teeth, the Mona Lisa is being led in a tango. And Smudge and her Dad, in animated conversation, are illuminated by a street lamp turned miraculously into a delicate white blossom on a tall green stem.

The light source suggests that Dad has gained understanding, and offers a cosy contrast to the darkness around them. The new brightness of the colours, even in the dark night, evokes a sense of exhilaration, of discovery, even of wellbeing. Whereas the walk to the park took place in the murky light of a dull sunset, and Dad perceived the park itself as a dark, dull forest, the walk home takes place in a dark but brilliant blue night, with the darkness illuminated in such a way as to make all the colours brighter. From a sombre mood of disappointment and confusion, sadness and heavy experience, Dad moves into a world of darkness and blueness – a combination powerfully evocative of calm – highlighted with yellow and red, and their associations of cheerfulness, happiness and serenity, as well as warmth and protection.

A red pattern runs across the wall and, with it, across the picture. It is picked up in the red windows of the flats, in Smudge's red jersey, in the Mona Lisa's red rose, and in

Father Christmas's red suit. It also appears in Dad's red scarf, which could not be seen on the walk to the park, and was dark and dull in the park itself. Now, however, it is a brilliant echo of all the other reds in the picture, linking Dad visually to Smudge and to the rest of the world. This linkage is an important one, because, up to now, Dad has shown little involvement with the world around him. He has nearly half the words of the other characters. His point of view has been limited, and the only figures he has been aware of have been Smudge and Albert, the dog. Even Mummy's disapproving presence next to him on the bench and her stentorian shouting have passed him by; the pole which separates Mummy from him is symbolic not only of her perception of an unbridgeable gulf between such as she and such as he, but also of his isolation and detachment from the rest of the world.

But Dad's world is the most richly allusive of all the characters'. It is a cultured world, with visual quotes of *The Scream*, the Mona Lisa and *The Laughing Cavalier*, and several references to classics of children's literature. Flying above his park is a tiny Mary Poppins on her umbrella. The streetlamps that are a feature of the book as a whole are represented in his park by a single lamp in a mysterious wood, reminiscent of the lamppost in C.S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950). And the puddle of tears surrounding the two paintings becomes, in this context, an echo of the pool of tears of the miniature Alice in Wonderland. Dad's world also shows awareness of the mythologies of popular culture, in Father Christmas and King Kong, who flexes his biceps triumphantly at the top of one of the highrises. This wealth of allusion suggests that Dad is perhaps potentially very different from the limited, narrow person we see here. The literary allusions hint at a carefree, sheltered childhood (or a very close involvement in Smudge's life), and he is firmly grounded

in the world of contemporary popular culture. It would seem that Dad may in fact be much more in touch with the wider world than a character such as Mummy, and it is certainly possible that his limited involvement with the world in the park and on his way to it is a product of mood and circumstance, not ignorance or inclination.

Charles, by contrast, is at all times a detached observer of the world. Our first views of him from within his own narrative show him first looking out of a window, and then watching people in the park from a distance. He is always wide-eyed and seems to be constantly looking out at the world in a state of mild, controlled puzzlement. Often, he looks out of the page at the reader, generally with this same mild bemusement, so that the effect is a disconcerting suggestion that we are merely one more element of this puzzling world, to be looked at, but not touched. (How easy it is to imagine Mummy repeating this instruction over and over again.)

Perhaps it is because of his detachment from the world that, despite being an observer, rather than a doer, Charles has quite a limited point of view. He sits on the same bench as Dad, but appears not to register his presence. He has a very narrow, stereotyped view of girls: when Smudge invites him to slide with her, he says, “It was a girl, unfortunately”, and when she proves to be “brilliant” on the slide and to go very fast, he is “amazed”. His view is so limited that he seems to remain unaware even of his Mummy (no mean feat) until she calls him to go home.

Keeping his distance from Mummy seems to be an involuntary element of Charles’s behaviour. His narrative opens with the words, “I was at home on my own again.” Since Mummy then tells him that it is time for their walk, it seems most likely that she

has, in fact, been there in the house with him all the time while he has been "alone". As her words, earlier, suggested that she thinks of Charles as a dependent creature not unlike a pet dog, so his words, in turn, reveal that he is incapable of relating to, or even thinking of, her as another person like himself. Unlike Smudge and her Dad, Charles and his Mummy never connect or interact on an informal, personal level.

Nevertheless, Mummy is a constant presence in Charles's life. When he gets to the park, her motif, the hat, is above him on the lampposts, in a tree and even in the clouds. Her shadow almost covers him, imaging her power over him and her interference in his integrity and, by putting him in the shade, suggesting both that he is unhappy and that he is of little significance – in his story, in his world. His significance is further reduced by the dull neutrality of his pale sand-coloured coat and pants, which reduce his visual weight at every opportunity, arguing insistently that he is of no significance, helping him fade and meld into the background, and drawing attention anywhere but to him. In fact, it is true that he is always overwhelmed by Mummy, and that she is always a more significant figure in his life than he is himself: as I have discussed above, she gains weight and significance relative to him by her size, by her dark, saturated clothing, and even by her position next to him.

Her influence is at work in the tremendous capillarity of the scene inside the house. Capillarity is usually understood to suggest vitality and energy or even to render the scene crowded, nervous and busy. In this sterile, empty, inert house, however, there is no scope for vitality and energy. Instead, the capillarity, at odds with the static subject matter, suggests frustration and repression. The succession of doorways with no doors

suggests the impossibility of escape or sanctuary from the presence that dominates the house. Charles's whole world is dark and overcast until he begins playing with Smudge, but Mummy's house is the darkest, its colours the dullest; it is the source of darkness and unhappiness. Smudge says that Charles looks sad to go home, and she imagines him returning with crumpled, unhappy face to a moated, gated and barred villa, capturing perfectly the coldness, detachment and isolation of his home. Its artificiality as a home, rather than a house, is perhaps suggested by the substantial frame surrounding the picture of Charles inside it. It is a picture of a home, a representation of a home, but never a real home. Growing up in it has given him drooping shoulders despite his straight back, and made his voice (as represented by his font) thin, pale and reedy.

His body language is as revealing as his voice, reflecting not only his isolation but also his vulnerability and timidity. Sitting on the bench with Mummy, he creates a protective barrier by folding his arms over his body. Otherwise, he frequently keeps his hands in his pockets, and, when they are free, he always keeps his limbs contained. Even at play with Smudge, he opens his arms only very slightly, for balance, on the slide, and returns on the climbing frame to neat containment, lifting his arms to hang on, but keeping his limbs straight and parallel so that they take up as small a space as possible. (Smudge, by contrast, widens the gap between her arms by bending them, swings her body along and kicks her legs out in opposite directions.) Only in the final game on the bandstand does Charles kick his legs out in abandon in a handstand, but as soon as he goes home with Mummy his hands return to his pockets.

Continuing the theme of containment, Charles's pictures are framed until right at the

end of his narrative. His opening picture at the window is the first in the book to be surrounded by a thick, coloured frame. Later, Browne once again uses the device of a lamppost to separate two characters on the park bench, and here Smudge and Charles's sections of the picture represent completely different worlds, where they even experience different seasons and weather. Significantly, Smudge's section is unframed, while Charles's is framed. (The conflict between the inertia of restraint and the pull of freedom is figured by a tandem bicycle in the background being pedalled in two opposite directions.) Even when the shapes of the climbing frame and the grass beneath it are imposed directly onto a white ground, the climbing frame itself frames Charles. This consistent framing suggests something of the constraint of Charles's life, with its careful order and firm boundaries, where when Mummy sees him with Smudge he says, "Mummy *caught* us talking" (my italics).

The frames also further a tendency towards the rectangular in Charles's world, with a series of rectangular walls, doorways, shadows and skirting boards in his mother's house, rectangular planks on the park bench, rectangular pedestals under the statues in the park, and a rectangular climbing frame. This emphasis on the rectangular suggests a problem, particularly an encounter with the disadvantages of discipline or civilized life. But, under the influence of Smudge, Charles does begin to break free from the constraints of his life and the discipline imposed on it by his mother. His first attempt at play, on the slide, involves a rectangular object distorted by perspective and, perhaps, by play. The bottom of the slide breaks the frame, just as Charles, at the top of it, is about to do in his hurry to get out, so that the picture and, specifically, the once-rectangular slide, evoke a sense of both the forbidden and the miraculous.

Finally, as Charles and Smudge climb a tree, the frame disappears from the picture, to be replaced only by a very uneven edge which reveals Browne's rough pencil planning marks. Significantly, this happens when Charles is – for the first time – in a position of power, since he says that he is good at climbing trees and shows Smudge how to do it. The picture shows Smudge already high above him in the tree, but Charles's smile – also a first – shows that the pleasure and empowerment of having been able to teach Smudge this skill have not worn off. Charles has finally rid himself of the limits that constrain his world, and the picture that follows covers the page right to its edges, so that Charles moves in one page opening from framelessness to complete, boundariless freedom.

At the beginning of his narrative, we saw Charles looking out of the window and, symbolically, standing at a threshold. Now the absence of frames around his pictures works in conjunction with other picture book conventions and illustrative details to show that by the time Charles returns home, he has – tentatively, timidly, restrainedly, but certainly – stepped over into a new life. The rhythm of his world is, quite literally, turned around after his slide with Smudge: until then, his page openings have consisted of a small picture on the verso and a large one on the recto, but in the opening after the slide this order is reversed, with the large picture on the verso and the small one on the recto. As his happiness, wellbeing and exhilaration increase, the overcast sky clears up, the colours of his world become lighter and brighter, and winter turns into a riotous, sunny spring. As the day ends, the clear skies make the sunset evening lighter than the stormy afternoon, and the gold and green of the evening is much warmer than the cold grey-blues of the house and the sky earlier on. Even Charles's return home with Mummy cannot suppress the change that has taken

place within him, and although the lavish display of full spring disappears, there are new leaves coming out on the trees and Charles himself leaves a trail of blossom behind him as he goes.

Along with this Hansel and Gretel trail, Charles brings his text with him onto this final, full-page picture: "Maybe Smudge will be there next time?" His hopes are tentative, and his dependence on Smudge is clear, but both his hopefulness and his involvement in someone outside himself are new. This is the only place in the book where text intrudes onto picture, strengthening the sense of violation, of the forbidden, and of the miraculous, as miraculous Charles violates the repressive rule of his life until now.

Nevertheless, nothing could be more different than Charles and Smudge's worlds. Smudge's narrative has no frames at all until the final page, and several full-page, borderless pictures. This suits perfectly her overwhelming sense of freedom and fantasy and her boundless energy, and suggests a life lived without hesitation or constraint, and with intense involvement rather than cool detachment.

Her final picture, the concluding picture of the book, despite its thick, bright yellow frame, does not negate this approach to life, because its frame does not represent a constraint on Smudge's life. Around a picture of a flower in a mug of water against a static background of solid colour, it is not at all suggestive of Smudge's active life, but rather resembles a still-life composition, a snapshot, a memento. This interpretation is reinforced by the flower itself, a memento given Smudge by Charles, a red poppy, associated with remembrance. The red of the poppy evokes the intensity

and cheerfulness and excitement of the day. The mug in which it sits is another token of happy play, decorated with a simple, childlike drawing of a black and white dog and a golden dog running through trees. The composition is thus filled with reminders of all that has made the afternoon memorable. Its frame represents not a boundary on Smudge's life, but her ability to capture and hold the happiness that she finds forever.

It is also an echo of the only other thick, coloured frame in the book, the frame around Charles's first picture, in his mother's house. This pictorial analogy links them, so that it is not only Charles who has taken something of Smudge's influence away with him, but also Smudge who is reminded of and associated with Charles. At the same time, however, the two thick frames, both yellow, invite us to contrast them and the two scenes depicted in them. Smudge's frame is very bright, evoking all the happiness and cheerfulness of yellow, while Charles's is a dull, dark yellow, weakening the happy associations and creating a more sombre mood. Within the frames, both scenes are predominantly blue, but Charles's is again dull and dark and evokes the coldness of blue, while Smudge's, where the blue is dark but bright, and paired with an equally bright green, evokes the security and peacefulness of both colours.

As the yellow frame invites comparison of Charles and Smudge, so the red poppy, reminiscent of Smudge, with her red jacket, but also of Mummy and her red hat, invites comparison of these two influences on Charles's life. They both share the power and strength of red, but, whereas both the hues and the saturation of Mummy's red hat and blue coat clash with the rest of her mellow autumnal world, Smudge's red jacket blends smoothly into her bright colourful world. Whereas Mummy's association with red is thus jarring and evocative of hostility, Smudge's evinces her

warmth, intensity, excitement and cheerfulness. These qualities are strengthened by the brightness of her world, which suggests happiness, exhilaration and wellbeing. Her vital enthusiasm and eagerness for life is apparent when she and Dad walk to the park and back, Smudge always in the lead; her happiness and cheerfulness can be seen in her constant smile of expectation or sheer pleasure in life.

It is not surprising that Smudge is never in the dark. The progress of ambient light from evening to night in her world is normal, but even at night she is always illuminated by magical light-sources. As she walks home with Dad, the warm light of the lampblossom shines on her. At the end of a path in the park with Charles, the little area in which they are framed by the trees is brightly backlit. And in the picture of the bandstand, it is night all around, but on the bandstand itself, where Smudge is playing: here it is bright, sunny day. The sense of her wellbeing, happiness and goodness is overwhelming. She, of all the characters, is rich in understanding. The abundance of magical, inexplicable illumination that surrounds her seems almost to suggest that she is charmed; the world will not allow her to fall into darkness. Her vision is free of the shadows experienced by others, because it is impossible to interfere with her integrity. Smudge is absolutely free, to be as intensely and absolutely herself as is possible.

Appropriately, the font that represents her "voice" is completely unique and individual. Neither script nor print, it looks as though it has been written with a paintbrush. It is resolutely informal, yet firm and confident, and exudes fun. It suits Smudge's body language, which is always loose, easy, animated and mobile. Smudge has significantly more words than any other character, because there is significantly more of pure Smudge exposed to view than of any other character. There are no gates

to Smudge's park. Her world exists without need of firm, restrictive boundaries; initially, for example, she has doubts about Charles, thinking him "a bit of a wimp", but it is typical of her attitude to life that she gives fun a chance and plays with him anyway. The artistic style of her world is the most surreal and has the most visual nonsense, and suits her imaginative, playful life. It illustrates a fertile fantasy world, with no room for mundane details such as brick walls or rubbish bins. Instead, this world is a place where giant fruit grow on trunks between ordinary trees, where trees themselves are seen to be gorillas or spouting whales when looked at closely, where tree trunks can be any shade of the rainbow and where the stone gorillas that decorate a fountain are dressed in bright, spotted swimming shorts, ready to take a dip. (Even Mummy is enlivened in Smudge's world, where the flowers on her scarf sprout and grow.) Smudge's pictures have the least capillarity of any of the visual narratives, because although her world is crowded and busy, it is appropriately crowded and busy; it has no surfeit of energy or nervous frustration, because it exists to use up all of Smudge's energy and then renew it.

The freedom and pleasure of Smudge's magical, fantastic world may be many child readers' favourite thing about *Voices in the Park*. The kind of escapism that such readers may be seeking has, however, only recently become a priority, and is still not the sole aim, of the (adult) children's book establishment. *Voices in the Park* could, in fact, be read as a loose allegory of the history of children's literature, which has always represented a struggle between didacticism and pleasure similar to the struggle in Browne's book between Mummy's socializing discipline and Smudge's pleasurable spontaneity; the struggle of children's literature has a very significant influence on the evaluation of *Voices in the Park*, and indeed of any children's book, because to

identify and understand some of the grounds for approval or rejection of a children's book by the children's book world, it is necessary to understand the outcome of the struggle of pleasure and didacticism in that world.

As the struggle over Charles is won by Smudge, and the principles of pleasure and enjoyment, so Penelope Lively (winner of both the Booker Prize for her adults' writing and the Carnegie Medal for one of her children's books) suggests that the struggle over children's books has now been won by the same principles, when she writes that we have in recent years "managed to shake off the yoke of nineteenth-century didacticism in children's literature…We do actually believe now that children's books should be fun and nothing else" (in Chambers 1978:56-57).

But Lively may underestimate the influence of didacticism; the didactic tradition of children's literature is, after all, "stronger than any that has occurred in the history of adult literature" (Kaye 1980:142-143). Nikolajeva goes so far as to argue that the "principal difference between research on children's literature and general literary criticism…is that children's literature has from the very beginning been related to pedagogics…. [It] has therefore been studied with a view to the suitability of books for children's reading" (1996:3). She says, for example:

> You can still read children's book reviews beginning with: 'The problem raised in this book is so important that…' – meaning that its artistic faults can be forgiven. Instead of encouraging authors to write good books, publishers still encourage competitions on certain issues and subjects. Children's book awards – multicultural book prizes, for example – are often oriented towards issues. The themes of many conferences on children's literature demonstrate the same attitude. (1996:4-5)

Like Nikolajeva, John Rowe Townsend also opposes the evaluation of children's literature in terms of its educational merit or "suitability", saying that "in writing there

is no substitute for the creative imagination, and in criticism there is no criterion except literary merit" (1967:62). Yet judgement by moral and social, rather than literary, standards, seems to be irresistible; Townsend himself points out that much of children's book criticism works within the framework of "an engaging intellectual frailty" because of which "we are able to reject the concept while accepting the reality" (1967:56).

This reality is that many critics reject *didacticism* firmly, but praise children's books that enlighten, enrich, cultivate and socialize: that *educate*, in a broad cultural sense. This view is perhaps inevitable. After all, one of the largest groups professionally involved in children's books is that of teachers, and Stephens reports that Protherough shows that teachers "see personal development and growth in self-understanding as major purposes for reading literature" (1992:3). And, in "terms of educational value, children's literature has much to contribute to the acquisition of cultural values" (Hunt 1991a:19).

This kind of educational interest in children's books is, of course, a long way from the rigid conscious didacticism of children's book history. It is not surprising that, as Townsend says, we tend to talk and write as though the didactic spirit were extinct in children's literature today. Yet Townsend adds, most importantly, that "if one looks at the 'quality' children's books of today, and still more at what is written about them, it is hard to avoid the conclusion that didacticism is still very much alive" (1967:55-56). This, too, is perhaps inevitable.

Stephens argues that since

> a culture's future is, to put it crudely, invested in its children, children's writers often take upon themselves the task of trying to mould audience attitudes into 'desirable' forms, which can mean either an attempt to perpetuate certain values or to resist socially dominant values which particular writers oppose. (1992:3)

Even where writers do not consciously try to mould their readers in any way or to perpetuate or resist any cultural values, Chambers, for one, argues that he has "yet to be persuaded that you can write a story without an element of the didactic in it" (1978:57). And Hunt feels:

> It is arguably impossible for a children's book (especially one being read by a child) not to be educational or influential in some way; it cannot help but reflect an ideology and, by extension, didacticism. All books must teach something, and because the checks and balances available to the mature reader are missing in the child reader, the children's writer often feels obliged to supply them…. Children's writers, therefore, are in a position of singular responsibility in transmitting cultural values, rather than 'simply' telling a story. (1994:3)

"Because the adult writer has power over the child reader, the image of the world presented" by the writer "may have a particular force or influence"; at the same time, adults "want to select what the children may or may not know, and at what stage in their development they may know it" (Hunt 1994:169). So it begins to seem that adults who care about children *must* judge their books in terms of either the effectiveness with which they fulfil the responsibility of transmitting cultural values, or the desirability of the values that they choose – consciously or unconsciously – to transmit. And the majority of adults working in the field of children's books *do* care about children; as I pointed out at the beginning of this thesis, these adults are most often practitioners: some, librarians, but many, educationists or even psychologists. It is thus not surprising that "children's books are commonly judged in terms of their *use*" (Hunt 1991a:8).

It is also not surprising, then, that one of the most noticeable developments in children's literature in recent times has been a movement, since the nineteen-sixties, towards "a 'new realism': streetwise, multiracial literature, often written from the 'inside'" (Hunt 1994:127). This movement was involved in the beginnings of "a determined attempt to widen the scope of children's fiction to include the experiences of previously marginalized groups, such as black people or working class people", as well as of attempts "to subvert traditional gender stereotypes in children's literature through feminists' campaigns against sexism in children's books" (Labuschagne 1995:73). The move toward social concern has been closely associated with books for teenagers, but it has affected all genres – particularly, according to Egoff, the picture book (1981:15). It has often been compared to the traditional moral didacticism of children's literature. Townsend says, for example: "Years ago we threw the old didacticism (dowdy morality) out of the window; it has come back in at the door wearing modern dress (smart values) and we do not even realize it" (1967:56). And Hunt writes that "the religious/didactic element in children's books has been replaced by a movement to be 'politically correct' – socially and racially aware" (1994:149). There has thus been some concern that social awareness might replace "literary" values; Ang goes so far as to insist that "the burden of political and ideological correctness is a bind on children's literature which it could well do without" (2000:167). She explains that she is not saying

> that children should not be taught tolerance, consideration, egalitarianism and a consciousness of the needs of the environment, but that when these factors work to the exclusion of others, literature is in danger of returning to a state of unhealthy enclosure. Literature that embodies these principles is to be praised, but that which exists only to preach about racial equality and saving the whales is not literature but propaganda, and the two should be differentiated. (2000:167)

Two things seem to emerge clearly from this debate. Overt didacticism may still raise

its head in the world of children's books now and then, but it is an unpopular creature. However, provided it avoids entanglement with this creature, a greater social awareness than that of the privileged, white, middle-class and male-centric world view that has dominated children's books since the time of John Newbery has come to be seen as a particularly desirable quality, "to be praised" in children's literature.

Voices in the Park does demonstrate a large measure of social awareness, but it is never overtly didactic. This is an important point, not only from the point of view of those who wish to conserve "literary" values, but also from that of those who wish to promote social awareness through children's literature. Hollindale writes that "the explicit social, political or moral beliefs of the individual writer, and his wish to recommend them to children through the story", represent "the most conspicuous element in the ideology of children's books, and the easiest to detect. Its presence is conscious, deliberate and in some measure 'pointed', even when…there is nothing unusual or unfamiliar in the message the writer is hoping to convey" (1988:27,28). The problem with this kind of overt ideological agenda is that precisely because it is overt, it is often less effective. "If you present as natural and commonplace the behaviour you would *like* to be natural and commonplace, you risk muting the social effectiveness of your story. If you dramatize the social tensions, you risk a superficial ideological stridency" (Hollindale 1988:29). Hollindale suggests, instead, that the better writer – both artistically and persuasively – may "opt for more circuitous methods…. If the fictional world is fully imagined and realized, it may carry its ideological burden more covertly, showing things as they are but trusting to literary organization rather than explicitly didactic guidelines to achieve a moral effect" (1988:29).

This more covert, and thus more effective, approach to the transmission of ideology is used by Browne, and is facilitated by the sophisticated elements of his book. The structure, nonsense and allusions that allow him to look closely into the psychology of each character enable him to comment subtly but strongly on class prejudice. The psychological focus of the book makes us fully aware of Mummy's snobbishness. With the polyphonic structure, it also shows us clearly that her stereotyped expectations are unfounded: Smudge is nothing like the "very rough-looking child" that Mummy sees, just as her gentle, knowledgeable Dad is far from a "frightful type". Not only is the error of Mummy's snobbish prejudices exposed, but her snobbishness, inevitably, becomes associated with her unlikeableness. As the postmodern philosophy represented in the narrative structure pushes the reader to reconcile all the characters' different realities, Mummy's unpleasantness, and Browne's use of picture book conventions to prevent empathy with her, push the reader to reject her reality, so that the inconsistency, the irreconcilability, of her reality with others is particularly emphasised.

Despite Mummy's formidability, her son displays a sexism typical of young children when he meets Smudge: he notes that she is a girl, "unfortunately", and is "amazed" when she is "brilliant on the slide" and goes "really fast". Again, our close knowledge of the minds of the characters exposes their inconsistency with stereotype, in this case not only Charles's negative stereotypes of girls, but both positive and negative stereotypes of each gender. (Browne's critique of feminism thus accords with contemporary postfeminism in going well beyond a simple affirmation and empowerment of women.) In the first place, it is Charles himself who is the

stereotypically "feminine" timid, passive, self-effacing follower whom one might be amazed to see going really fast on a slide, while Smudge, on the other hand, is the active, confident, energetic leader and initiator of their play, and Mummy is a forceful, powerful, overbearing dictator. Mummy is thus also the antithesis of the positive stereotype of the nurturing Earth Mother; she is juxtaposed with Dad, the passive, emotionally-dependent antithesis of both the stern and remote patriarch and the benevolent and wise protector of stereotypical fatherhood. Dad's "unmasculine" fatherhood is, however, very successful, and he has produced a happy, affectionate, confident and well-adjusted child; Browne's unsympathetic portrayal of Mummy is thus not a judgement of her unstereotypical, "unfeminine" motherhood, but an implicit criticism of her lack of warmth, kindness and understanding for their own sake.

The success of Dad's single-parent, father-only family, and the failure of Mummy's more traditional one, are simple but effective arguments against the idealization of that bastion of traditional gender roles and the middle class, the conventional, nuclear, two-parent family. At the same time, Dad's association with both popular and traditional culture, his success as a parent, his frustration and depression because of his lack of employment, and his active search for a job, all contrast powerfully with any number of bigoted ideas about the unemployed and, perhaps, the working class with which they are associated: that they are ignorant, that they are lazy, that they are unreliable, untrustworthy, unmotivated, undeserving, that they simply do not want a job. Perhaps it is even more important than his representation of arguments in support of unconventional family structures and the unemployed, however, that Dad represents these marginalized groups themselves, giving them a voice and preventing

the invisibility which keeps them marginalized and gives other groups license to create their own images of them.

By making marginalized groups visible and exposing stereotyped prejudices through the sophisticated examination of its characters' psychologies that is made possible by its sophisticated structure, visual nonsense and allusion, Anthony Browne's *Voices in the Park* may well satisfy both sides of the children's book world. It has no overt didacticism, and its complexities and sophistications protect it from accusations that it replaces "literary" values with social awareness. Yet it certainly is socially aware, and works very hard to transmit the values of a culture that has become more conscious of the invisibility of and, often, prejudice against, a certain class and a certain gender, as well as various other marginalized groups.

The children's book world has made it clear in recent years that it sees an absence of overt didacticism and a progressive social awareness as two important criteria by which it chooses to evaluate children's books. Since *Voices in the Park* is able to fulfil both these important criteria almost entirely because of its complex, sophisticated structure, visual nonsense, allusions and themes, it would seem to suggest that – by the standards of the children's book world itself – sophistications such as these may have a valuable contribution to make to children's books.

CHAPTER FOUR

Into the park with the polyphonic teddy: *I Hate My Teddy Bear*

Like *Voices in the Park*, David McKee's 1982 *I Hate My Teddy Bear* uses a sophisticated structure, involving visual nonsense and a multidimensional, multivoiced approach to the world (or worlds), as well as a walk in a park, to support an ideology opposed to traditional power structures in our society. However, *I Hate My Teddy Bear* is a far more radical and experimental book, both artistically and ideologically, than *Voices in the Park*. In fact, its approach to power relations – discussed more fully below – may even call into question the very thing that I have praised in Browne's book, the transmission of cultural values and, thus, the guidance of children's choices, through children's books.

Superficially, however, its narrative has a very simple, conventional, circular home-away-home structure, with a little humorous coda tagged on at the end. Brenda's mother comes to visit John's mother, and Brenda and John are sent out to the park to play with their teddy bears. They begin to argue about whose teddy bear is the best, and become increasingly heated as they each try to top the amazing abilities of the other's teddy, from speech to flight. Then John's mother calls them in to tea, and they go home to the delicious spread of cakes, pies, biscuits and sandwiches of children's book convention from *The Wind in the Willows* to the Famous Five series. The coda begins as the children are making their way home, when the teddies begin discussing their abilities. Pink Teddy is surprised to have heard that Blue Teddy can count

backwards, and Blue Teddy is surprised to have learned that Pink Teddy can sing. Both admit, however, that they cannot really fly.

To limit a discussion of *I Hate My Teddy Bear* to only this little story is, however, to ignore not only most of its visual content, but also its essential nature. Stephens argues that "a crucial textual distinction, broadly put, is between narratives that encourage readers to adopt a stance which is identical with that of either the narrator or the principal focalizer, and narratives which incorporate strategies which distance the reader" (1992:68); he points out that "a fictive text might offer its readers a variety of possible interpretative subject positions, ranging from the passive to the interrogative" (1992:80). *I Hate My Teddy Bear* is situated firmly in the category of distancing narratives that offer their readers interrogative subject positions.

This is the category that is less common (perhaps especially in children's books), and so it is the category that seems less natural, more intrusive, more insistent; it is the category that draws attention to itself (as it is the category of texts that draw attention to themselves). As a result, a scholarly approach that failed to attend to the "crucial" distinguishing aspect of such texts would be deficient. The sort of close critical analysis with which I approached *Voices in the Park*, however, has little to offer a discussion focused on this aspect. At the same time, the styles of David McKee's art and writing do not lend themselves either very easily or very profitably to this kind of approach (unlike those of Browne's work, which takes full advantage of the conventions of communication available to the picture book maker). I shall thus rather discuss *I Hate My Teddy Bear* in the more (overtly) theoretical terms to which it does lend itself, beginning with a detailed identification of its distancing strategies.

Stephens says there are

> many strategies by which readers may be 'estranged' from the possibility of simple identification,…and these function with different degrees of severity. They include: shifts in focalizer; focalizers who are not 'nice' people, and hence do not invite reader identification; multi-stranded narration, which may play one significance against another; intertextual allusiveness, which may indicate the presence of more than one interpretative frame and require top-down reading; metafictional playfulness, whereby a text draws attention to its own statuses and processes as a fiction; and overtly inscribed indeterminacies. (1992:70)

Its structural sophistication and lack of resolution provide *I Hate My Teddy Bear* with three primary estranging strategies: it has so many strands of narrative that it presents significant problems with the identification of focalizers (shifting, nice or otherwise), and because so few of its narratives are complete, it consists almost entirely of overtly inscribed indeterminacies. "In the first three pictures, there is a direct reflection of the words…. Thus far, coherence. But, even in the first picture, there are some unanswered questions…. All these present immediate questions of narrative" (Hunt 1991a:178). In fact, Brenda and John's simple, traditional plot is surrounded by so many narrative hints and tail-ends as to be almost submerged, since "instead of a single narrative world, there is an interlocking and interweaving of a plurality of worlds" (Wollen in Moss 1992:60). The text and the children ignore what is going on in the worlds around Brenda, John and their teddy bears, but the pictures are full of unfinished, unexplained bits of stories.

The main secondary story is introduced in the first opening by the huge white hand that is being carried down the stairs leading to John's flat, and the even larger foot that is being lowered past the flat window on a rope. A giant hand is being transported in every subsequent picture until Brenda and John return home; on their return, they pass

two men reading a newspaper with a cover picture of several men carrying a big hand, and while they are having their tea the television in the background shows another hand being carried by three men. The theme of hands is taken further, with a palm reader, a hand-shaped vase in John's kitchen, and two women looking at a book with a picture of a hand on its cover. Nevertheless, the story of the carried hands is resolved and explained in the final picture, where an open-air exhibition of hand sculptures is taking place in the park; the hands are labelled and people are looking at them and consulting reference books or catalogues.

But another running story is less fully resolved and more indeterminate. In the park, the children pass a man buying a mouth organ. A woman wearing a pink dress, cape and wide-brimmed hat is peeping out at the transaction from behind a large tree. Later on, we see the man sauntering along a pathway, carrying the mouth organ and followed at a small distance by the woman. She is walking with her hands behind her back in a classic pose of casual innocence, but the twist of her ankle and her turned-in feet reveal her nervousness. Soon, we come upon the pair again. He is sitting on a bandstand ringed with flagpoles or lampposts, playing his mouth organ. She is sitting a little way off on a folding chair, leaning eagerly (and openly) forward as she listens. Do they know each other? Why was she following him secretly? Does he know that she was following him? Where did the chair come from?

Another story, which generates fewer questions but is even more obscure, begins when Brenda says that she hates her teddy bear. A man in a tall brown hat is kneeling on the ground and consulting a sheet of paper, possibly a map. He is holding the end of a ball of blue wool that a woman is paying out as she walks away. The pair

reappear, still with the trailing wool and sheet of paper, when the woman in pink is following the mouth organ man. When John's mother calls the children in for tea, we see the woman alone. She has reached the end of the ball of wool and, with great concentration, is snipping the final foot of it off from the trail behind her.

Meaningless as this little story certainly seems, it is highlighted and given weight by hints and echoes of the blue woollen Hansel and Gretel trail throughout the book. As the ball comes to an end, it is matched by three rope-ends hanging down a wall on the same page; on the next, a woman is being pulled at the end of a lead by her dog, who is beyond the frame of the picture and cannot be seen. We have, however, seen this woman trailing a strained lead before, when we first saw the pair with the wool. On this page there is also a man pulling a box on a small trolley; a yellowish substance is leaking from the box and leaving a trail behind him. The page before this shows another woman with a lead (this time the dog trails behind), and the one before that introduces the whole theme with a trailing blue cord or pipe on the floor of John's flat.

Indeterminacy is perhaps most overtly inscribed in the story of the gloves. The woman with the straining lead draws our attention to a glove lying on the ground by turning to look down at it behind her. Two pages later, we see another woman talking to a man, her mouth, eyes and arms spread wide in puzzlement, and a glove on one of her hands; the man indicates deep thought with a forefinger at his mouth. The obvious explanation is that she is telling him about her missing glove, while he is trying to think where it might be or what to do about it, and that it was her glove that the first woman saw on the ground earlier. But the text resists easy resolutions: the glove on the ground was red, and the glove remaining on the woman's hand is brown.

This discrepancy may be nothing more than the result of a printing error, and there are indeed several other colours in the book which clearly vary as a result of poor printing. But purposeful confusion is, in fact, more consistent with the book as a whole than neatly interlocking explanations: while the stories of the glove, the woollen trail and the mouth organ are missing a few details, there are other dislocated pieces of narrative that are too incomplete for any sense to be made of them. The world which Brenda and John enter when they go out is "a staggeringly bizarre world in which there are hundreds of fragments of narrative:… all of them involving adults doing unresolved things" (Hunt 1991a:179). These fragments are ends of stories, beginnings of stories, pieces taken from the middles of stories, but they cannot be forced into actual stories; they remain no more than hints of stories.

In the first opening, for example, one possibly expects to find out later why Brenda's mother is crying about the letter and the photograph that she shows John's mother. One may assume that there is a connection to the man who arrives at John's flat with a blue document in his hand when John's mother suggests that John and Brenda go and play outside.

But when the children leave the flat, the bizarre escalates to a point where it becomes difficult to hold all the narrative fragments in one's head, let alone to try to sort them into meaningful or plausible stories. On their way out of John's building, the children pass a woman carrying a large paper bag and talking to a man inside the building through a ground-floor window; why does she need the little girl with her fingers crossed behind her back to keep an eye on the policeman with the ice-cream cone?

When Brenda and John begin to argue about their teddies, what terrible item of news is it that makes the man in the blue tracksuit cast his paper dramatically to the ground behind him and clap his hand to his head in despair?

The opening that follows raises even more questions. Whose pink handbag is the man in the yellow coat carrying, and why? Does the tangoing couple in the window have anything to do with the majestic woman in evening dress on the balcony? Why does the man with the red tie wear two watches, and why is the woman in the spotted headscarf sneaking past him so carefully? Is the man who is asking him the time her ally, or simply a fortuitous distraction?

What is everybody but the children and one man looking at, as Brenda asserts that her teddy can also count, and why is this one man pointing excitedly in the opposite direction to where everyone is looking? What is the weary line of identically-dressed women with hands clasped in front of them, which the children pass as Brenda asserts that her teddy can also sing? And why is the bald, bearded man in the lobby of John's building so horrified at the possibility of being caught in someone else's photograph?

The photograph involved is of a family in Edwardian dress. The book is full of such incongruities of dress (think of the woman in an evening gown and the line of identically-dressed women), which add to its unsettled, indeterminate feel. Brenda and John wear jeans, tackies and bright striped tops, and many other characters are similarly contemporary in everyday suits, shirts, trousers, skirts, dresses, coats, jerseys, jeans, T-shirts, sweatshirts and tracksuits. But a large number of men and women of all ages are wearing hats; many dresses and women's suits are decades out

of date and several men are wearing braces or have the thick sidebars or handlebar moustaches of an earlier century.

Six men, who pass John as he says that he hates his teddy bear, have chosen to wear suits, ties, bowler hats and white laboratory coats to carry a huge hand to the exhibition. The page opposite theirs shows one man in lederhosen and another carrying a Disney suitcase with his pinstripe suit. Under the balcony of the woman in evening dress, a sports team in full kit is carrying another hand, while behind them a woman is painting in leotard and leggings. The next opening shows a man in slippers, trousers, hat and overcoat with no shirt, while the one after that has another in shoes, shirt, tie, coat and pyjama pants. The children then pass two dancers in strapless gowns, pearls and ostrich feather plumes. When they are called in for tea, a man and woman behind them are very formally and correctly dressed, except for his bright sombrero and her huge mask. Even on the landing outside John's flat there is a man in hunting tweeds and breeches.

The oddities which create such a hectic sense of confusion are, however, not only sartorial. To begin with, John's flat is a strange, unstable place. When Brenda and her mother arrive, everyone sits in a room that is empty but for a luridly-upholstered couch, a sun lounger and some packing crates. The kitchen, incongruously, is fully furnished and decorated, with fitted kitchen units, a table and chairs, a rose in the hand-shaped vase, a photograph and a potplant. From the landing outside the door, the flat appears to be quite small but, by the end of the book, it is spacious enough for everyone to have tea in a completely new sitting room, empty of furniture but richly curtained, carpeted and decorated. The atmospheres of the two sitting rooms are as

widely divergent as their décor. The first is disturbing, ugly, unsettled and unbalanced, with jarring orange-reds and lime greens and a mysteriously tearful mother. The second, however, is luxurious despite its lack of furniture, which creates a feeling less of emptiness than of the Zen-like harmony and simplicity suggested by the two mothers, kneeling barefoot opposite each other and drinking tea from small mugs as though performing a Japanese tea ceremony. Finally, the period of the flat's architecture is as unstable as its rooms. It has contemporary-looking window fittings and French doors, with a severely Modern-looking concrete balcony, but the front entrance to the building is an old-fashioned panelled double door with stained glass insets.

As if the inconstancy of John's flat were not enough when the children are in it, it seems to follow them around once they leave, in the form of John's mother's teaset. Her teapot appears in the park twice, once on one of the packing crates from the first sitting room, when John's mother calls them in, and once on a box behind the children as John asserts that his teddy can count. On this occasion it is accompanied by one of the cups from the set, which is resting close to hand for a painter in the background of the picture.

This painter is working on a large billboard depicting a blue rainbow in a blue sky, and the page before his shows a woman painting a brown rainbow on another billboard. The rainbow is a recurring motif. When the children arrive in the park, they are passed by a man in a rainbow scarf. At the climax of their argument, Brenda chases John angrily around a pond where a woman is sitting at the side of the water and knitting a (second) rainbow scarf so long that its end is lost in the water. And

when the woman in pink is nervously following the man with the mouth organ, he passes under a tall arch decorated with a curving rainbow stripe.

Another recurring theme is that of photography and photographs. The book begins with Brenda's mother crying over a letter and a photograph of a man. At the pond, two girls with a completed Rubik's cube are smiling and posing for a photographer who has his back to us and his head bent over what we assume is an old-fashioned camera. In the next opening, however, there is a similar-looking photographer, also bent over his camera, but this time we see him from the side. He is bent over his camera not because it is old-fashioned, but because he is taking a photograph of another photograph lying on the ground. This photograph is of a third girl, not one of the two who appeared to be posing for him in the previous opening. It is not certain whether this is even the same photographer because, although most of what we have seen of him from behind matches this man, there is one exception: the first photographer's shoes are brown, and those of the second are green. A third (or second) photographer is taking a photograph in a more conventional manner over the page, but his subject-matter, in turn, is less conventional, because the family posing for him is the one that is for some reason dressed in Edwardian costume. Only in John's flat, propped up on the kitchen counter or framed on top of the television, are photographs presented with no disturbing or confusing associations.

The final extended oddity of the book is possibly the most inexplicable of all, although it appears at first to be a pleasantly simple relief from the busy, inscrutable pictures: the verbal text. Unlike the pictures, it seems reassuringly ordinary and straightforward – even spare, bland, banal: "'My teddy can talk,' said John. / 'So can

mine,' said Brenda. / 'My teddy can count,' said John. / 'So can mine,' said Brenda." But it is the very simplicity of the words that make them opaque, because, by eliminating connectors to keep sentences simple, McKee removes even the bare linguistic contexts of words that have no others, since they are certainly not meaningfully contextualized by each other or by the pictures. The apparent meaningfulness of the verbal text is, in fact, nothing more than the superficial result of its coherence; it is utterly nonsensical and, as far as we can see, pointless.

The text offers no suggestion of either a point or substantiation for John's opening statement that he hates his teddy bear, or for Brenda's agreement that she, too, hates hers. The meaninglessness of John's ludicrous subsequent claims about his teddy bear's abilities – which seem to contradict his claim that he hates the bear – is forcefully highlighted by Brenda's regular, empty, "So can mine…. So can mine". The discovery, when the bears begin talking, that most of John and Brenda's ridiculous claims happen to be true does nothing to clarify their argument. The children ignore their teddies so completely throughout, that we have no way of knowing whether they are simply blasé about that which is commonplace for them, or whether they speak the truth inadvertently in their ignorance. Either way, there is still no visible reason for either their initial declarations of hatred, or their subsequent argument.

Just as Brenda and John's dialogue appears straightforward, but is actually indeterminate (to the point of meaninglessness), so their story appears simple, circular and traditional (so much so that it ends in a glorious "high tea"), but actually presents serious problems of resolution. It seems about to resolve itself, and indeed is resolved

– visually – by their safe return to a contented home, but before this resolution can be completed, their story segues into another story entirely with the teddy bear coda. By the time their journey is resolved, its resolution is thus no longer an important concern. What matters is that we stop focusing on Brenda and John's story and it ends – as far as our concentration on it is concerned – before it is finally resolved.

The resistance of McKee's book to resolution complicates a narrative structure already made complex by its multidimensionality and – if we see pictures as text – multivoicedness. The multiple strands of narrative, two circular and (more or less) resolved, the others fragmentary, indeterminate, unfinished and at times unbegun, both simultaneous and, in the case of the coda, successive, make it impossible to identify any one strand as either the central, focalizing narrative or the central, driving narrative structure of the book as a whole.

With the authority behind it of most of the verbal text and the front cover picture, Brenda and John's story would initially seem to be the primary narrative, their world the primary dimension. But, as I have suggested above, the verbal text is a dubious authority, mostly unrelated to the rest of the book and in no way a clarifying or focalizing key to it. Furthermore, with Brenda and John's complete obliviousness to all that surrounds them, theirs is a very small, narrow world, and its verbal and visual texts combined make up only a small, narrow portion of the total text. Even before it is summarily replaced by the coda, it is overwhelmed by the visual cacophony of multidimensional narrative fragments, and it is visually submerged by the style of McKee's art. Neither John nor Brenda has any significant visual weight: there is no tendency for them to be positioned centrally for our attention (or even on the left, for

our empathy), and they are, naturally, smaller than most of the other, adult, figures. Their clothes are colourful and quite bright, but the pictures as a whole tend to be colourful and bright enough that this draws no attention. Most importantly, they are placed in settings and against backgrounds that are so crowded that it is seldom that any one element of a picture stands out above any other; it is often something of a struggle to find Brenda and John among all the other, more interesting, figures.

What has appeared to be Brenda and John's story might thus be merely an introduction to the teddy bears' narrative, with the bears the focalizing observers throughout. They do, after all, also appear centrally on the front cover, and Moss writes that the narrative of the hands "is resolved on the final page as we find out through the focalization of the teddy bears (not the humans) that these hands form an outdoor exhibition of modern sculptures" (1992:61). In fact, however, the teddies appear to remain as oblivious of the bizarre world around them as do the children. The mystery of the hands is resolved on a page where the verbal text is theirs, and where they are indeed standing on a balcony that overlooks the exhibition. But their verbal text is concerned only with their own affairs, and their eyes are focused towards each other and back into the flat, rather than out over the balcony wall to the park; there is no reason to think that they notice the exhibition at all. Furthermore, there has been no hint of an ironic, focalizing presence, our attention has not been drawn to the teddies visually at any point before they begin to speak, we see no signs of their observing presence if we look back with hindsight, and they are, in fact, absent from a substantial portion of the book. Not only do they not focalize the story of the hands, but the teddy bears – as characters, rather than as the children's toys – have no intercourse with any other dimension of the book.

Instead of providing clarity through focalization, the teddy bears increase complexity by operating within an entirely new paradigm that is in conflict with that of the rest of the book, and requires a completely different perspective from readers. The bizarre characters and events of the rest of the book are all more or less psychologically improbable, but they are each, individually, possible. The teddy bears, however, belong completely in the realm of the magical or fantastic. They talk. They count (both forwards and backwards). They sing. They may not be able to fly, but they appear to have another magical ability, which is not mentioned. John throws his teddy aside as he begins the argument, and Brenda follows suit as she counters him. They then leave their teddies behind as they walk off, arguing, and the teddies are not seen again until the children retrieve them (unharmed) on their way in to tea. It would thus seem that the teddies, in addition to all their other skills, are telepathic, because their dialogue is a response to a conversation at which they were never present.

This kind of fantastic impossibility requires a willing suspension of disbelief from the readers. The bizarre improbability of the rest of the book may have given us pause, but the magical abilities of the teddies finally make it certain that Brenda and John and their teddy bears are in some other world than ours, and are governed by different laws of physics and biology to us. As readers, we know – and child readers are learning to know – that we cannot give ourselves completely up to the appreciation of the book if we do not make the leap of the imagination that will carry us into this other world (this is true when reading any book, but it is more obviously true of a fantastic book).

Kosinski, however, says:

> In the act of imaginative projection, readers remain aware that, however involved they may be in the act of reading, they nevertheless stand outside the depicted events. Such forced separation between reading and imagining can act as a catalyst for a formative realization: that the reader is a mediator, able to distinguish between false and true images, between appropriate and inappropriate responses. This goes beyond mental and aesthetic ability; it implies the power to judge, to see a novel's people and events in moral terms. And such judgement demands that the reader develop – or have already developed – a working ethical code. (1976:461)

But the work of Stephens suggests that while readers do remain aware that they stand outside the depicted events in a book, they may not remain aware that they are independent of the views reflected in a book. While Kosinski believes that readers exercise their own ethical codes in the judgement of what they read, Stephens's approach implies that when readers project themselves imaginatively into the text they align themselves with the ethical code of the text, not because they have judged it to be congruent with or better than their own, but simply as a result of their act of imaginative projection. Rather than being mediators themselves, they are subject to the mediation of the book in their distinction between false and true images or appropriate and inappropriate responses, as well as in their moral vision with regard to the book's characters and events.

The foundation of Stephens's view is the argument that readers, "in taking up a position from which the text is most readily intelligible, are apt to be situated within the frame of the text's ideology; that is, they are subjected to and by that ideology" (1992:68). This may happen particularly when unqualified identification with a main character, or focalizer, "attributes a coherent reality and objectivity to the world constructed by the text". This "constructs a false subjectivity and a selfhood which is actually mimetic of the focalizing selfhood in the text" (Stephens 1992:69), because in

"aligning themselves with a focalizing character, readers match their own sense of selfhood with ideas of self constructed in and by the text, not principally because of the inherent nature of events and characters described, but through the mode through which these are perceived" (Stephens 1992:68). Support for Stephens's argument can be found in Van der Merwe's reference to Hunt:

> Hunt (1991:46,47,82) explains that a children's book will imply a reader through its subject matter, its language, its levels of allusions, and hence 'write' the level of readership…. Hunt also points out that although readers are not obliged to accept the role of the implied reader, they usually do so in peer texts, or texts with a level of readership appropriate to the reader. (1993:74)

I Hate My Teddy Bear, however, refuses to imply a clear reader role. It asks us to suspend disbelief, as does any fictional text, and its bizarreness and indeterminacy invite our questions. ("Notably, many figures are pointing at something or looking upward, as if stressing that there are activities outside our field of vision" (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:19).) But the very questions that the text inspires about itself, with the vast number of estranging indeterminacies and multiple strands of narrative that I have identified, as well as its refusal to provide readers with a clear focalizer with whom to identify, situate readers firmly outside the text[*], where subjection to any one interaction with, response to or idea within the text becomes impossible. Indeed, the sheer number of distancing – and bizarre – elements may even push the limits of our very abilities to suspend our disbelief. *I Hate My Teddy Bear* thus tells us how to read itself only to the extent of refusing to tell us how to read itself, thus forcing us to decide how to do so for ourselves. Instead of subjecting us to a clear implied reader role, it thus implies a quite radical respect for both the rights and the abilities of child

[*] I have said that McKee's work does not lend itself to analysis in terms of the conventions of picture book communication. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the regular white margins framing all his pictures further this distancing of the reader, creating detachment by implying the separating off of a limited view of a world seen from outside.

readers to make their own literary interpretations and, with them, ideological choices. In doing this, it also flies very radically in the face of the conventional power structures that surround relations between adults and children in our society.

Although it is not immediately obvious that they are so, because they are seen by the vast majority in our society, and others, as the natural, commonsense approach, these relations are inherently ideological in nature. Eagleton explains that "ideology" means roughly "the ways in which what we say and believe connects with the power structure and power-relations of the society we live in", and refers "to those modes of feeling, valuing, perceiving and believing which have some kind of relation to the maintenance and reproduction of social power" (1983:14,15). Both what we say, in legislation, and what we believe, in terms of widely-shared public opinion, maintain current power structures in which adults are the dominant group and children are more or less powerless, by denying children the opportunity to enter the adult world and exercise any kind of social power, through large-scale and extreme conscription of their freedom of choice. Both legislation and public opinion are grounded in feelings, valuations, perceptions and beliefs about children, their cognitive and affective maturity, the relevance of such maturity to power and choice, and the cognitive skills involved in choice and decision. These feelings, valuations, perceptions and beliefs may well happen to be correct, and the exclusion of children from free choice – in areas as far-ranging as their own bedtimes and the political parties that lead their countries – may well be the best ideological choice for our society. But it would be either naïve or devious not to acknowledge that it is a choice, rather than a natural order, and that this choice is ideological, not removed by its benevolent intentions from questions of power.

However, this is exactly what most children's books, including – and perhaps especially – those that promote liberal or progressive values, implicitly do. As a result, when a book such as *Voices in the Park* actively encourages a redistribution of power along more equitable lines than are current, it reproduces and maintains the inequitable power structure that is most firmly entrenched at the heart of our society, in the very literary manipulations with which it promotes equality. *I Hate My Teddy Bear*, on the other hand, overturns this power structure by refusing to tell children how to read itself and what to think and who to identify with while reading it, thus actually realizing or enacting a more equitable distribution of power. Where liberal books such as *Voices in the Park* promote awareness of "invisible", disempowered groups, *I Hate My Teddy Bear* simply *is* aware of the group that, in terms of power, is least visible in our society.

Of course, most of us might well argue that we do not manipulate children into particular modes of thought in order to take away their freedom, but that we rather try to guide their systems of belief because they are a special group, and that we protect them from the manipulation to which they are particularly vulnerable because they are cognitively unequipped to make their own judgements. The fact that this is a species of argument that has frequently been used to justify the policy of Apartheid does not make it any less logical or well-meaning, but it does suggest that its foundation is as much ideological as it may be sensible.

Nevertheless, concerned adults may still feel that it is irresponsible of McKee to offer his child readers no guidance in the interpretation of his book. In the first place, they

should remember the status of the picture book as a shared literature. The younger the child reader, the less likely it is that his or her first exposure to McKee's book will be an unmediated one. Even more significantly, I would argue that *I Hate My Teddy Bear* does not simply cast children adrift on a treacherous ocean of choice because, instead of shielding them because they have no judgement and are vulnerable to manipulation, it helps arm them against manipulation, and equips them to make their own judgements, with improved creative thinking skills.

Chambers says that "our ability to make choices depends largely on the quality and range of our imaginal power" (1973:13). Creative thinking thus involves not only the ability to achieve insights and solve problems, but also to make judgements of one's own. It thus decreases children's dependence on the guidance of others, and provides them with a standard against which to judge the guidance that they do receive, so that they also become less vulnerable.

"However, the creativity of preschool children is, to a certain degree, still limited because of their low level of cognitive development and their lack of experience" (Botha, Van Ede & Piek 1991:263). Books may be able to help children in overcoming these limitations: Chambers suggests that what he calls literary experience is important because it "feeds the imagination, helping it come to grips with the astonishing amount of data and experiences which assail children in their daily lives" (1973:14). Doonan's experience in the classroom suggests that picture books may be particularly helpful, because, "while we might get the story told by the text in a matter of minutes, there are as many more stories waiting to be made as times we are prepared to re-search the illustrations" (1993:58). Doonan also writes:

> When we hold a picture book, we have in our hands a pictured world full of ideas. We play with these ideas and play our own ideas around the pictured world. The more skilful we are, and the more ideas the picture book contains, the more the ideas go on bouncing. And in the process we create something of our very own. (1993:21)

Similarly:

> Whether we are skilled or unskilled in interpretation, we make judgements as we move away from a painting or close the covers of a picture book. But the more ideas we have to play with, the more ideas we have found to play with, the greater is our understanding and the clearer our judgement. (Doonan 1993:8-9)

If Doonan is right, then there can be few children's books that stimulate creativity, increase understanding and clarify judgement to the extent that *I Hate My Teddy Bear* does: its polyphonic, multiple narrative strands and fragments, as well as its innumerable indeterminate oddities and incongruities simply provide more ideas to find, to play with and to bounce around. Tucker argues that picture book pictures "that do everything for a reader…do not really cater for the imaginative cooperation of a child" (1981:49). Doonan's work suggests that the converse is also true: pictures (like McKee's) that leave plenty for the reader to do cater particularly well for the imaginative co-operation of a child.

There may be some support for this idea from the field of developmental psychology. Vander Zanden suggests a number of ways to stimulate creativity in young children, including that of asking children "questions that make them think" (in Botha et al. 1991:264). I have argued above that the determined obscuring of the focalizer and estrangement of the reader of *I Hate My Teddy Bear* does force us to think of ways to read and make sense of it for ourselves, instead of simply obeying textual dictates, and my own experience as a tutor bears me out. When I read McKee's book to a Grade 1 English second-language pupil who spoke very little English, he responded

with by far the most English utterances I had ever heard from him, because he came up with the most ideas he had ever formed and wanted to express in our tutorials. *I Hate My Teddy Bear* inspired an unprecedented burst of creative thought in which he constructed meaning after meaning and story after story to explain McKee's indeterminate pictures.

I have also argued above that the bizarreness and indeterminacy of McKee's book invite questions about it. The sort of creative invention displayed by my tutorial pupil, in fact, implicitly questions the very role of the author as the determiner of meaning (a role that McKee, in this estranging text, appears very reluctant to accept). Accepting, and even inviting, this kind of questioning may be another stimulus to creative thought, since Vander Zanden also suggests that creativity will be stimulated if we respect "children's right to question, after serious consideration, the ideas of their caregivers" (in Botha et al. 1991:263). Hunt's view of the role of children's books and their writers in education (in its broadest sense) is once again relevant:

> It is arguably impossible for a children's book (especially one being read by a child) not to be educational or influential in some way; it cannot help but reflect an ideology and, by extension, didacticism. All books must teach something, and because the checks and balances available to the mature reader are missing in the child reader, the children's writer often feels obliged to supply them…. Children's writers, therefore, are in a position of singular responsibility in transmitting cultural values, rather than 'simply' telling a story. (1994:3)

It could, thus, plausibly be argued that McKee is, in effect, in the position of a caregiver for whatever numbers of children read his book. And through the indeterminacies and the multistranded narrative strategies that demonstrate his respect for children's right to make their own interpretations of his work, and invite them to exercise that right, McKee also respects their right to question the ideas he espouses in his capacity as mass caregiver.

Children's awareness of and sensitivity to their environment is a central theme in *I Hate My Teddy Bear*, and it is yet another issue that Vander Zanden relates to the development of creative thinking, suggesting that we can stimulate creativity if we encourage children "to become aware of and be sensitive to environmental stimuli" (in Botha et al. 1991:264). Whether Brenda and John are unaware of the bizarre world around them, or whether they are simply insensitive to what they are used to, their lack of attention may be a source of satisfying feelings of superiority to child readers who notice more of what goes on around Brenda and John than Brenda and John themselves do. Naturally, such feelings of superiority will not necessarily reveal their own lack of awareness to child readers. However, it is once again important to remember that the picture book is a shared literature. In such a context, *I Hate My Teddy Bear* creates an excellent opportunity for the adult mediator who wants to encourage awareness of and sensitivity to environmental stimuli in a child reader.

Vander Zanden's final relevant suggestion, in the context of *I Hate My Teddy Bear*, is that we should expose children to "problems, inconsistencies, vagueness and uncertainty" (in Botha et al. 1991:264). I hope that by now it will be clear that the problems, inconsistencies, vagueness and uncertainty that result from its sophisticated complexity would really seem to constitute the essence of McKee's book. In terms of form, it initially appears simply and conventionally circular, but closer reading that recognizes the textuality of the pictures discovers it to be not even simply and (for adults) conventionally linear, but perhaps rather spaghetti-like, and so experimental in form as to represent what Nikolajeva calls a "disintegration of traditional narrative structure" (1996:207). In its spaghetti-like multistrandedness, it cannot but be also

multidimensional and multivoiced (although the visual narratives do not have literal voices), not only in its multiple narratives, but also in the generic convergence of the fantastic teddy bears with the literal possibility of the rest of the book, and in the intertextuality of the Hansel and Gretel trails centred around the blue ball of wool. The ending is at least partially open, since we can never be certain whether Brenda and John know about the abilities of their teddy bears. Still more unconventionally, every page is also permanently open, rather than directed towards some eventual closure, because every page contains multiple, indeterminate fragments of narrative which we will either never see finished or never see the beginnings of. The book ultimately laughs at traditional resolution: spaghetti cannot focus and direct itself towards a conclusion, and the central mysteries of why all the narrative fragments are there, what – if anything – they have to do with each other and with Brenda and John, and why this strange book is the way it is, will never be resolved.

As a result of this lack of resolution, and of all the other sophistications and complexities that contribute to how the book is, it constantly raises problems of narrative and focalizer, and overtly inscribes and re-inscribes inconsistency, vagueness and uncertainty. In doing this, it not only helps prepare its child readers for life in the adult world by stimulating their creativity, but it also offers them the respect and the power of literary and ideological self-determination within the small, safe, sheltered and shared world of its covers.

CHAPTER FIVE

The amazing ambivalent adventures of Granpa:

Granpa

Where *I Hate My Teddy Bear* uses the safe, sheltered world of fiction to explore a wider world that is both alien and uncertain, John Burningham's *Granpa* (1984) delights in focusing on a safe, sheltered and intimate little world, and takes care to establish the close familiarity of this little world even before it begins.

The front cover shows an old man and a little girl with flushed faces and happy smiles racing down a hill in a go-cart. The informal, affectionate name for the grandfather in the title suggests a close and loving relationship that is confirmed by their obvious shared pleasure in and exhilaration at what they are doing and is imaged in the subtle visual links that create a sense of congruency between them: the matching ruddiness of their flushed faces, his brown jacket and white shirt and her brown and white dress, and the polka dots of her dress, which are echoed where the eddies of air before Granpa are shown as blue dots in the sky.

Significantly, the brown of the jacket and polka dots and the blue of the sky are the dominant colours of the picture. The blue sky surrounds the pair in tenderness, security and serenity, despite their wild ride, and Granpa is particularly associated with the security and protectiveness of brown through his large, bright brown jacket near the centre of the picture. The acid green highlight of the hill falling away behind them is a cheerful reinforcer of the impression of fun, but is also associated with

tenderness, security and serenity. Even the red of the cart evokes not only excitement and cheerfulness but also, toning as it does with the brown, warmth and protectiveness.

The back cover strengthens the sense of closeness, security and happy peacefulness established at the front, with a brown-coated Granpa holding the little girl's hand in a predominantly green landscape. The blue of the front cover is echoed in the little girl's shoes, and the red in Granpa's shoes and some of the autumn leaves. The only colour that is added to the original palette is yellow, in the little girl's pants and the leaves. (With very few exceptions, Burningham sticks to this protective palette of green, yellow, brown and blue, with red highlights, throughout the book.)

This picture adds a slightly magical quality to Granpa and the little girl's world, as they pass through a swirl of flying leaves shaped like stars, and she dances along waving like a wand a twig of golden yellow leaves, a few of which fly off behind them. The feeling of joy and pleasure is only strengthened by the title page picture of grandfather and granddaughter singing enthusiastically along to the radio, she dancing freely while he, the protector even in play, sits in a green armchair taking care of her doll and stuffed mouse.

By the time we reach the first page, the context created by the secure, affectionate relationship is clear, and the opening of the story is simply a confirmation of what we already know. Granpa sits in the green armchair, smiling broadly and leaning forward with arms outstretched as the little girl runs to greet him. Despite its odd lack of speech tags or quotation marks, the text is straightforward, with Granpa asking, "And

how's my little girl?"

In the second opening, the recto is a coloured picture of Granpa and the little girl in a greenhouse. Granpa appears to be transferring some young plants to bigger pots, while the little girl has pulled a worm out of the raised bed of carrots she has been forking up.

The raised bed and the potting tables run along opposite walls, so that Granpa and the little girl are nearly back to back. Yet the feeling is one of mutual awareness and togetherness, even though they are working separately. This is partly because of their physical proximity, and partly because they are both oriented slightly out from their workspaces, as though they resist turning their backs on each other completely although they are facing away from each other. It is also influenced by Burningham's particularly serene and tender palette of green, brown, yellow and blue. And it is very largely a result of the text, which is divided into two parts by two typefaces, suggesting a dialogue which bridges the gaps between both their backs and their separate tasks: "There would not be room for all the little seeds to grow./*Do worms go to Heaven?*"

The sentence in regular type seems to be spoken by Granpa, both because it is the usual role of adults to explain and of children to be explained to, and because the tone of the phrase "all the little seeds" is that of an adult addressing a young child. The italicized words seem to belong to a different speaker, with a different tone and a more abstract and inquiring mentality, and match our expectations of the childlike mind of the little girl. Nevertheless, what Hunt calls the "under-coding" of dialogue

(1991a:195) becomes more significant here, where, despite the division implied by the two typefaces, there are still no quotation marks or speech tags. Stephens accepts that the text is dialogue, but points out that, within the framework of dialogue, the "different typefaces are used to indicate not just the speech of different characters but their differing assumptions about the world" (1992:200). And Nikolajeva and Scott write that the regular type "sounds like Granpa" from the first page, and that

> the reader takes the italicized type to represent the words of the girl, and the book makes sense this way. However, the reader is assuming that the words are indeed spoken, for there is no narrator to interpret, nor are there quotation marks around any of the words, so it is possible that some of the statements or questions are unspoken comments. (2001:114)

The text, whatever it represents, heads the verso of this opening. Underneath it is a sepia line drawing of a shelf of seedlings, bulbs, seeds, pots and gardening implements. Nikolajeva and Scott feel that it is not only the text that is indeterminate, but that the "format itself also raises some questions, especially the nature of the line drawings" (2001:113). While they feel that the sepia gardening impedimenta give "additional current detail", they say that drawings such as the one in the following opening "clearly represent Granpa's memories" (2001:113).

The drawing in question shows an unknown man at a piano, with three children standing in a row behind him singing. That it represents "a scene from Granpa's childhood" is "clearly depicted [sic] by the children's clothing" (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:166). Both boys wear shorts and blazers and one a hat, while the girl has on a pinafore, and all three wear knee-high socks. The man at the piano, too, is dressed with old-fashioned formality in a waistcoat, and the boy with the hat holds an old-fashioned toy horse on wheels.

Granpa and the little girl, in the present day on the coloured recto, are also singing, and the regular type gives the words of a traditional song: "One man went to mow/Went to mow a meadow…". Nikolajeva and Scott make the logical implicit assumption that one or both of the characters on the recto is singing this song, because they say that Granpa's memory on the verso "is obviously prompted by the song" (2001:165).

The role of the italic text is significantly more opaque than that of the regular type, or of its italic counterpart in the previous opening. "*Little ducks, soup and sheep, sunshine in the trees…*" lacks the rhythm and the internal logic of a song lyric, but the picture shows the little girl singing with her grandfather, so it cannot be something that she is thinking while he sings. Whether it is something she thinks at some other point in time, or a song that she has made up and is singing in counterpart to, or even friendly competition with, him, the inspiration behind it is unknowable, because nothing else in this opening – or, for that matter, in the book as a whole – appears to be related to it. It is thus not only the nature and role of the sepia line drawings, but also "the relationship between the words and the pictures [that is] highly ambiguous" (Hunt 1991a:186).

The one thing that does remain clear and consistent is the sense of togetherness of Granpa and the little girl. They are standing in the middle of a rubble of toys that suggests that they have enjoyed a busy day's play: a ragdoll, a teddy bear, an elephant (on wheels, echoing the horse in the verso), dolls' clothes, scissors, blocks, a toy teacup and pram, a record, a ball, two books and a large, promising-looking box. The little girl is dressed up as a nurse. Behind them stands a side-table with pipe and

ashtray that was next to Granpa's chair on the first and title pages, suggesting that the chair has been pushed out of the way to make space for their games or their current performance. The busy mess implies a close involvement that is imaged by the near-mirroring of their arms, cast out dramatically as they sing.

Their arms are in similar positions in the following opening, too: Granpa cradles a ragdoll and teddy bear, and the little girl another doll. But, despite this suggestion of congruency, there appear to be some communicative problems between them in this opening. The text is in regular type only, and reads, "I didn't know Teddy was another little girl." Nikolajeva and Scott write:

> At the most obvious, this is Granpa reacting to something that the child has said, although this is one of the occasions on which there is only one speaker (if we assume that the words are spoken aloud). But the line drawing of the bear prettifying in front of a mirror carries an uncertain relationship to the dialogue and picture, and multiple interpretations of character offer themselves. The bear is not a girl but a woman, wearing high heels and powdering her face. Is this Granpa's vision of a toy (and the granddaughter) as incipient woman? The girl's face in the picture is colored redder than it usually is. Does that mean she is blushing, or is it just a quirk of the printing? If she is indeed blushing, then the look on Granpa's face also requires interpretation; he is looking at his granddaughter out of the corner of his eye, not directly. What is he thinking of? Or is this just a simple innocent comment, because teddy bears are genderless or perhaps male. [sic] In this case, the primping bear in the line drawing could be a statement of Granpa's surprise and his humorous conjuring of a very female bear, or even a humorous comment from the narrator on the notion of gender stereotypes. (2001:114)

Not only does the bear introduce a third role for the sepia drawings (even if we are not quite sure what this role is), but the opening as a whole is the first intimation of anything less that idyllic in Granpa and the little girl's relationship. They may well have seemed to talk (or sing, or think) past each other in the previous two openings. Nikolajeva and Scott go so far as to say that "the dialogue may often be considered two monologues, where the characters miscommunicate, or talk around rather that

[sic] directly to each other" (2001:114). But what Nikolajeva and Scott call miscommunication has never affected Granpa and the little girl's essential closeness; I would rather class their talking around each other as phatic communication than as miscommunication, since they talk primarily for the sake of social interaction and the connection it establishes, rather than in order to convey information or ask questions.

This opening, however, does introduce an element of discomfort between them, revealed not only by the girl's red face, but also by the stiff, unnatural slant of Granpa's neck and the recession of his chin that suggests a tensed jaw. This discomfort is not, however, a significant problem. The confusion surrounding Teddy's gender cannot really matter to either of them, and by the next opening normal relations are restored. Rather than indicating a problem in their relationship, their momentary discomfort, like the phatic/miscommunication of the previous two openings, simply prevents the magical relationship depicted on the back cover from being impossibly idealized or sentimentalized, and situates it firmly in the world of reality.

Offering relief after the difficulties and ambiguities of this opening, the next is one of the clearest and most straightforward in the book. The text reads: "Noah knew that the ark was not far from land when he saw the dove carrying the olive branch./*Could we float away in this house, Granpa?*" The pictures both create a context for this, the most direct communication so far, and explain Granpa's choice of story and the direction in which it leads the little girl's thoughts: the recto shows a house and garden on a wild, rainy night, with the silhouetted figures of an adult and a child visible through one lighted window, while the verso drawing shows a bedraggled

garden pond dimpled by rain. The pictures also carefully eliminate any sense of threat or danger from the opening, so that the little girl's question arises from a pleasurable sense of fun and imaginary adventure, rather than representing a serious fear; it is significant that she thinks of floating away, as on a pleasure cruise or lilo, for example, rather than of being carried away.

The line drawing plays an important role in the exclusion of threat from the opening. According to Hunt, "Burningham sets a standard for narrative which avoids the visual cliché" (1991a:186). The drawing on this opening, however, shows two eager-looking smiling frogs among the lily-pads of the pretty little pond, one of Burningham's only lapses into cuteness. But this cuteness is functional: it implies a world too sweet to allow either the little girl's or the readers' houses to float away in the rain, and it returns to the note of fairy-tale unreality that was suggested on the back cover, strengthening the association of any potential danger with the safe and amusing world of imaginary adventure.

The recto is not cute, but is saved from the sombre dullness or the evil and danger associated with its overall darkness both by Burningham's standard protective palette and by several light, bright highlights centred – significantly – on the home, and created – again significantly – by the light from its windows: the red-brown brick and green trim of the house itself, the acid green of the lawn where it is lit up by the house and, most importantly, the light yellow of the illuminated windows, through one of which we see Granpa and the little girl. They are at the epicentre of the light, providing overwhelming support for Nodelman's contention that darkness is not only sombre, but can also "allow the contrasting coziness of lighter spaces" (1988:67).

Granpa and his little girl are not part of the wild, rainy landscape. They are sheltered from the storm by their secure, loving home, and this is what makes it possible for them to look out at the storm and dare it with imagination.

A very different feeling is created in the opening that follows. Where the discomfort surrounding the question of Teddy's gender was insignificant, there has now been a disagreement which is serious, with a

> display of open hostility…where the little girl and the old man have turned their backs on each other….An unworked expanse of white background is the metaphor for this rare moment of spiritual and physical isolation in a world which otherwise celebrates the closeness of the two characters. (Doonan 1993:17)

The shock of the change is reinforced by the sudden and unexpected disappearance of the now-familiar design of text and sepia line drawing on the verso, with main, coloured, picture on the recto. Instead, Granpa is on one page and the little girl is on the other, self-contained units separated firmly by the fold of the paper down the middle of the opening; Granpa carries a newspaper, which will shut him off completely from her and cannot be a shared pleasure. The only bridge between them is the text, which crosses the page division, but provides no hope or comfort: "That was not a nice thing to say to Granpa."

As the pictures show that this opening depicts a complete change in the relationship of the central characters, so the nature of the narrative and the style of the narration-through-design indicate that this opening is a pivotal point in the narrative structure. With the introduction of a complication, the narrative changes from a study of character and relationship without a story-line, to a story with a plot. At the same time, the change in the set of relationships between the various elements of design and

their ways of communicating with us is comparable to a change of narrator in a more conventional story. All conventions of character, narrative and narration thus guide us to expect a change in the direction of the story after this watershed opening.

In fact, however, the most noteworthy thing about this opening turns out to be what it does *not* do structurally. Turning the page reveals that Granpa and the little girl's fight has been nothing more than one more moment, no more or less significant than any other, in the series of unrelated moments picked out of their lives, seemingly at random, for this story-which-appears-to-have-no-story: Granpa and his little girl are once again in happy, busy, yet essentially tranquil, harmony.

They are in the garden, having a dolls' teaparty, and they are surrounded by reminders of earlier pleasures because theirs are pleasures that are always with them: the greenhouse, the ball, the toy pram, the little girl's doll and teddy bear, a bicycle with training wheels that was standing in the rainy garden of the Noah opening. Despite the buildings that surround them, the scene is pastoral and lovely and happy in this pretty and cared-for yet casually overgrown garden. It must be warmer now, because Granpa has left off his usual yellow cardigan, and the little girl is comfortably barefoot. There is also something of a holiday feeling, because the little girl has changed out of the school uniform that she usually wears and is dressed in a T-shirt and a light skirt.

The contrast in mood from that of the previous opening is marked, and it is obvious that Granpa and the little girl have made up. More importantly, the previous opening has left no traces in this one. The fight has had no effect on either the story, or the relationship between Granpa and the little girl. Far from being a unique turning-point

in their relationship, it has been as insignificant and thus, presumably, as ordinary as their earlier moment of discomfort over Teddy's gender. Like that disturbance, this one serves merely to show that "the relationship between the two characters is not comfortable or sentimental" (Hunt 1991a:186). Rather, the

> subtlety of Burningham's presentation of this relationship derives in part from his capturing the essence of communication between the generations, presenting the special love between the two characters but also understanding that miscommunication is a fundamental part of this relationship. (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:112)

This miscommunication is evident even at the contentedly happy teaparty. As the little girl dishes a spadeful of mud into a bowl for her teddy bear, Granpa lifts a spoon of something brown to his mouth, and the text reads: "This is a lovely chocolate ice-cream./*It's not chocolate, it's strawberry.*" As with the worms and the seedlings and the two different songs, this misunderstanding is unimportant, because it is the establishing of a connection, and the sentiment behind this connection, that is the point of this conversation, rather than the content of the messages relayed. Granpa's compliment on his muddy ice-cream is an attempt to participate more fully in his and the little girl's shared game, and he makes this attempt not because he finds dolls' teaparties exciting, but in order to maintain and give expression to his emotional bond with the little girl. She has a smile on her face, and corrects him not in peevish irritation as though he has broken the spell of the game, but to allow him the fuller participation he seeks, and thus, in turn, to maintain and give expression to her love for him.

The doublespread design introduced with such unfulfilled significance in the previous opening is retained in this one. Thematically, this allows Burningham to reflect his characters' crossing of the division that existed between them while they were

fighting, by moving each across the page divide to the side occupied by the other in the previous opening. Structurally, however, the design appears to have no significance at all, instead creating a certain amount of confusion. It suggests that a new standard design has been set, but when the page is turned we see that this is not the case, because Burningham returns to the pre-fight design of coloured recto/sepia verso. Isolating the fight and the teaparty from the rest of the book by means of their unique design then appears to highlight an important link between them, but in fact they could not be more different in terms of both content and mood. There is actually far more reason to link the teaparty to the opening that follows it.

This opening builds on the holiday feel of the teaparty and, like it, is a lovely cheerful one. Granpa and the little girl are hurrying across the brilliant yellow dunes for a day at the beach. Each carries the equipment that promises for him or her a perfect day: she a bucket and spade, he a deckchair and basket of provisions.

The text is the first in which the little girl is the opening speaker, saying, "*When we get to the beach can we stay there for ever?*" Granpa's response is: "Yes, but we must go back for our tea at four o'clock." This is not a milk-and-water little joke constrained by reality. It is rather an expression of the joyous abandon of the summer holiday, followed by the promise of things to come, as we see in the sepia drawing (fulfilling yet another role) of the tea table with its tempting spread of cakes. Both at the seaside or later on, eating this delicious tea, the possibilities of this golden day are endless.

The next opening, presumably on the same day, is an opening where possibilities are

realized and hopes fulfilled. Granpa has dozed off in the deckchair, with a newspaper fallen to the sand beside him. The little girl is enjoying her bucket and spade, building a sand castle at his bare white feet and licking an ice lolly. Her words read, "*When I've finished this lolly can we get some more? I need the sticks to make things.*" The sepia line drawing again moves us a little forward in time, to when she has finished building. Her sand towers are decorated by no less than four lolly sticks, and a fifth lies unneeded in the sand beside them; the little girl herself has moved on to other pleasures, her bare footprints in the sand leading off perhaps to the water.

This opening shows us not only the satisfaction of Granpa and the little girl's desires, but also Burningham's mastery of his form. Stephens points to the "substantial gaps between text and illustrations" in *Granpa* (1992:200). These gaps create complexity in pictures such as the one of the teddy bear in front of the mirror, but in this opening they are a mark of Burningham's understanding of the functioning of the picture book and of his respect for his readers. The little girl's request for more lollies is the first time we see her speak alone. We do not see Granpa's response, because her finished sandcastle, with its series of sticks, tells us clearly what that response has been, and Burningham never underestimates his child readers by explaining twice, once in the words and once in the pictures; rather, he knows exactly when to use which element of his form to communicate what.

The opening that follows maintains the carefree holiday feel of the seaside pictures, but returns us to the house. It reads: "When I was a boy we used to roll our wooden hoops down the street after school./*Were you once a baby as well, Granpa?*" The little girl's sudden glimpse of the possibility that her grandfather may have filled more

roles in his life than only that of his relationship with her is possibly inspired just as much by his actions as by his words, as the recto shows a very sprightly Granpa skipping down the path in front of the house; the lively effect is increased by the expanses of bright lawn and sky.

The sepia drawing on the verso depicts an old trunk and a pile of cricket, croquet and lacrosse equipment. Nikolajeva and Scott write that, since it

> presents the sports equipment as old, broken and missing significant parts (for example, only one of the required pairs of bails, pads and gloves), the memory cannot be of Granpa's boyhood, when the equipment would have been in working order, but is either a later memory or simply a representation of the acknowledgement of time passing. (2001:112)

Their argument against the drawing's being a flashback is sound, but it should by now be clear that precedent is no authority in establishing the roles of the line drawings, and there is no other reason for their assumption that "the sports equipment drawings", like those of the three singing children, "clearly represent Granpa's memories" (2001:113). Granpa's memories of the equipment would be not only memories of it in working order, but memories of it in use, not packed away in storage. The idea that the drawing represents the acknowledgement of the passage of time is more convincing, but it is even possible that this drawing, like the one on the previous verso, moves forward in time from the text and recto, to an exploration by Granpa and the little girl of the artefacts of Granpa's boyhood packed away in an attic or storeroom.

It is as interesting to speculate on the tone of the little girl's question as on the nature of the line drawing. Is the bond between her and Granpa being strengthened as she realizes that Granpa was once a baby just like her? Is she testing a deduction from

knowledge of his boyhood to assumption of his infancy? Was he once a baby as well as being a boy, as well as being a granpa, as well as she was, as well as were other people who are not as special as he? This uncertainty is a reminder of how much we do not know and understand, even when the text is at its simplest and clearest. Yet the central text of the closeness of Granpa and the little girl's relationship emerges clearly from all the fragments and ambiguities, just as the essential phatic communication of love emerges clearly for the two characters from all the "miscommunications" that result from their wide gaps in shared knowledge, experience, understanding and perspective.

The next opening shows Granpa and the little girl fishing, with a sleepily blissful picture of the two of them on a river in a rowing boat on the recto. Granpa says, "If I catch a fish we can cook it for supper." The little girl's response is, "*What if you catch a whale, Granpa?*" The verso shows a gently humorous version of the same scene as in the recto, in which Granpa does, however, catch a whale. Once again, the function of this drawing is uncertain:

> Is the child fantasizing Granpa catching the whale with her help? Is Granpa laughingly visualizing what the scene would look like (intrepidly he reels in the giant fish while his granddaughter clutches his leg to be sure he doesn't go overboard)? Is this a shared vision? Or is this the narrator's humorous comment on the irony of the situation and the delightful imagination of children? (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:114)

What is clear in this opening is a sense of the personality of the little girl. Despite being an unnamed character in a disjointed, undirected and uncertain narrative, she is not simply a generic little girl, but has emerged as a recognizable individual. Her industrious attempt at fishing with a jam jar is to be expected from a busy little gardener and a resourceful user of ice lolly sticks to make things; her imaginative

expansion on her grandfather's words accords with her imaginative explorations of the expectations of the worm she digs up or the possibilities of the rain outside her window. This again reflects Burningham's skilful use of the picture book form. Without any narration and description, but purely through his choices of material to reveal and record, he creates a strong individual identity for this little girl who has spoken (or thought) only eight times thus far, and whose name we do not even know.

We should thus be prepared, by now, for the possibility of the role reversal that occurs in the following opening. Granpa remembers, "Harry, Florence and I used to come down that hill like little arrows. I remember one Christmas…". The little girl, however, notices only, "*You nearly slipped then, Granpa*" and reaches out to steady him. We know that it is Granpa who is in the role of protector and carer here, and the little girl's questions about worms and whales and floating houses, as well as her strawberry mud ice-cream, show her to be capable of very easy and deep absorption in the world of her own imagination. But her gardening and fishing, and her love for her grandfather, show that she also engages actively with the real world, while her correction of Granpa when he makes a mistake about the mud ice-cream should also tell us to expect confidence and leadership from her when her carer is on shaky ground (either literally or figuratively).

Furthermore, we have now moved on from the glorious high summer of the teaparty and the day at the beach, through the rich autumn of the whaling expedition, to a snow-covered, bare-treed winter. The little girl is now at least half a year older than at the beginning of the book, and at her age this implies a significant increase in knowledge, experience, understanding, capabilities and maturity. There is a

suggestion that she has also increased in confidence from the first pages, where we only ever saw her words as responses, to the beach, where we see her initiating dialogue and her words are even allowed to stand alone. At the same time, the traditional symbolism of winter makes us aware that Granpa is an old man, despite his sprightly skipping two openings back; that in the garden he pots rather than digs, that a day at the beach is, for him, a snooze in the sun.

Nevertheless, the opening that follows represents an escalation for which Granpa's active lifestyle has perhaps not prepared us. Despite the lack of explanation for the sake of the little girl, it is perfectly clear why "Granpa can't come out to play today." The verso shows a bottle of medicine, a jar of ointment, two pills, a thermometer and a hot water bottle. On the recto, Granpa is back in his chair, with a blanket over his knees and more medicines on the side-table that carried his smoking materials in previous openings. He is in purple slippers and dressing gown; we may have realized that the slippers have been a periodic exception from Burningham's protective palette, but it is only when purple becomes a dominant colour, covering the larger area of the dressing gown and being the darkest and most intense colour on an otherwise lightly washed page, that its association with symbolic darkness, with mystery and perhaps a frightening unknown, is likely to play a role in our readings.

There is thus a rising sense of unease about this opening; we may turn the page slightly faster as we look for a magical disappearance of this problem, like the magical disappearance of the problem of the fight. But the problem does not disappear on the next page. Granpa sits in his chair on the recto, with pipe in hand and medicines on the side-table replaced by matches and ashtray. He is once again fully

dressed, and all would seem to be well again. But this opening is nevertheless filled with disquieting elements.

Granpa and the little girl are watching television, which is an unexpectedly passive joint activity for them. She is sitting on his lap, and this is unusually demonstrative behaviour for her, since their relationship has, until now, frequently been characterized by companionable separate activity; it is disturbing that Granpa's mere presence is perhaps no longer sufficient security for her. The unnamed danger of losing Granpa has made him too precious to the little girl, so that she must cling to him and cosset him, asking, "*Tomorrow shall we go to Africa, and you can be the captain?*" Her generous offer that Granpa be the captain suggests a childlike awareness that he is in need of support or encouragement, but her hopes for both a proper day of play tomorrow and an imaginary journey of escape from their present situation also suggest that she herself is in need of comfort and reassurance. She and Granpa have never had to live in and for tomorrow before; the here-and-now of their todays has always been sufficient satisfaction in the past.

There is thus too great a dependence on hope in this opening. The line drawing of the envisaged trip to Africa shows a sturdy little boat steaming determinedly to its promised land. The boat is topped by a threatening bank of cloud that covers the whole sky, but above the clouds are rays of light and figurative hope. Not only the obviously symbolic clouds are disturbing, but the radiant glory of hope strengthens the worrying focus and dependence on tomorrow. Although the crisis in Granpa's health appears to have passed, there is no comfort to be had for either the reader or the protagonists in this opening, because it bears too many traces of what has gone before

it. In opening up the possibility of hope, it also opens up the possibility of despair: what might happen tomorrow if they do not go to Africa?

We find out in the next opening, the devastating realization of all the little girl's unarticulated fears. The little girl sits curled up on a hard dining chair on the verso, off-centre and decentred. According to Doonan, the "delicate, tremulous contour line in which Burningham draws the little girl who gazes at her Granpa's empty chair" on the recto is a "descriptive gesture" that tells us all we need to know about her feelings (1993:13). Nikolajeva and Scott add that the "fact that the girl is represented only in the line drawing and not in the coloured picture conveys a sense of complete separation", strengthened, I think, by the firm dividing line of the page fold (2001:115). "The absence of words…actually reinforces that [sic] the dialogue, though it may not always seem truly interactive to the reader, is a real communication to those involved, and that when one of the partners is gone, so are all the words" (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:114). "The sparseness of detail suggests a bareness and coldness, and the loss of Granpa's presence is overwhelming" (Nikolajeva & Scott 2001:115); the girl's very toes curl tensely around the seat of her chair in response.

I have heard postgraduate students of children's literature express outrage at what they have seen as the harsh, hopeless, even brutal, insensitivity of this portrayal of death, and condemn it as unsuitable for children. Egoff regrets changes in the picture book to a world where "children are not secure, but sad or alarmed", and where the adult world "is shown as fragmented" (1981:259). She questions whether "the picture-book format can really support the serious themes that are being attempted", saying that it is a formidable task, "very like trying to explain the *comédie humaine* in forty

words of one syllable", and arguing that "the picture book is too frail a medium to bear the burden of such a mysterious and irrevocable fact of life" as death (1981:261).

But the picture book is not so frail a medium if one remembers that it is, of necessity, a shared and mediated medium, and if one acknowledges its full communicative equipment of easily five or more times 40 words, 16 or more openings of pictures, a design, and all the relationships between each of these elements. So much of one's interpretation of Burningham's treatment of death depends, then, on one's reading of his final, wordless, page. This page, "in very bold colours, shows a little girl pushing a baby energetically in a very old-fashioned pram. Does life go on? Or is this Granpa's childhood?" (Hunt 1991a:195).

Nikolajeva and Scott refer to the previous opening as "the very last picture of the girl" (2001:166), and their implicit assumption that this final page does not depict her is, I think, borne out by the visual text. The girl in this picture has longer hair and longer, older limbs than Granpa's little girl, and is wearing an unfamiliar dress. Her dog is brown, rather than grey like the one with Granpa and the little girl on the back cover and at the dolls' teaparty. These details are, of course, changeable, not essential, but the pram presents a more impenetrable argument. In view of the little girl's prosperous-looking detached home, it is too old to contain a new sibling of hers. Yet it does not resemble the toy pram we have seen in several other pictures. The old-fashioned pram rather seems to suggest old-fashioned times. The girl, too, is wearing a hat with her quite old-fashioned dress. And the landscape around her is quite empty and pastoral, despite the bay in the background with its bit of shipping. Indeed, this landscape is emptier of development than the one in Granpa's memory of himself,

Harry and Florence coming down the hill like little arrows. If this is indeed, as Hunt suggests, Granpa's childhood, then it is his early infancy, and he is the baby in the pram. With the other flashbacks and references to his boyhood, this picture may then be a reminder of the full life that he has had.

Its palette is one of rich green and brown, with the cheerful symbolic highlight of a bright yellow, life-giving sun. Not only is this a determined return to the colours of security and serenity – in tune with the carefree, unrestrained joy of the picture – but the dominant combination of green and brown suggests a sense of growth and fertility. Perhaps this picture, then, also puts Granpa's death into the context of nature's endless cycle of birth, death and rebirth. The girl pushing the pram is centred on the page, but she is moving rapidly to the right, into a situation of risk and adventure: life, which implies the certain risk of death, but also the promise of adventure to make the risk worthwhile. The rest of the book, too, is full of material that would support this kind of focus on the cycles of nature: the visible passage of the seasons; the juxtaposition of the growth of little seeds and the passing of worms to heaven; the glimpses of Granpa's childhood and the little girl's realization that he was once a baby as well; the catching of fish to kill and eat and, ultimately, the fact that his little girl remains in the world when Granpa dies.

Nevertheless, the uncertainties of this ending continue to provide, as Hunt says, an "ambiguous approach to death" (1994:158). This is perhaps, however, no very bad thing. Egoff acknowledges that the "open-endedness of the new realistic picture book makes more sense, since life cannot be blocked off, even for a young child" (1981:260). Indeed, it is difficult to say what easy, clear-cut answers and closure we

can offer to young children in the face of death.

At the end of the book, three noteworthy things seem to me to have emerged from this reading of *Granpa*. The first is John Burningham's masterful manipulation of his form, with no superfluous repetition across verbal and visual texts, a well-integrated use of both for characterization through showing, rather than telling, and a balance of formal elements that reveals subtleties of relationship without mawkish sentimentality.

The second noteworthy point is that, despite his mastery of his form, Burningham appears to have done two very strange things in his design and narrative structure. While the very consistency with which the roles of the sepia line drawings are inconsistent removes much of the confusion that they might otherwise create, the inconsistency of the design follows no discernible pattern and is far more unsettling. Not only does there appear to be no communicative reason for the change in design of the fight and teaparty openings but, in view of the design and other differences about it that point to a pivotal change in the narrative, the fight, and its failure to affect the development of the story, can be said to set up certain structural expectations in its readers only to thwart them.

The third noteworthy point is that *Granpa* is a very difficult book. The structure is unconventional, with its resolute lack of complication and thus, it would appear, story, until we find ourselves unexpectedly in the middle of an unresolvable crisis just before the end. Its standard design is quite complex in itself, and the changing roles of the drawings and deviations from the standard make it still more so. The complexity

of the design is a mirror for the complexity of the central relationship, with its close devotion despite the differences in Granpa and the little girl's frames of reference that create so many barriers in their communication. This complex relationship is used to explore the challenging theme of death, and this theme is handled with depth in an open, indeterminate ending.

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of Granpa, however, is the minimal verbal and linguistic contexts it provides for any of the action, dialogue or characterization, which makes *I Hate My Teddy Bear*, with its wealth of quotation marks, speech tags and narrator explanations about visiting mothers and times for tea seem to spell things out almost too clearly by comparison. Burningham's neglect of so many of the conventions of both writing and storytelling means that readers face the multiplexity of the form and structure of his book, the linear narrative which emerges from apparent stasis to lead only to irresolution and ambiguity, and its difficult themes and psychological content, with very little guidance in their reading beyond formal signals that are confusing at best and, at worst, mislead.

But there may be another way of looking at the fight scene that causes so many problems, and at *Granpa* as a whole. If it is not the narrative pointers and the structure of the fight that are wrong, but my reading of them in terms of storytelling convention, then I am not left to struggle with the puzzling contradiction of a master of the picture book form whose form bungles his structure. Furthermore, if it is not the inconsistent, fragmentary multiplexity and undercoding of the text, but my reading of it in pursuit of narrative unity and guidance, that is wrong, then perhaps *Granpa* is not so difficult a book after all. Hunt writes of it that its

> fragmentation, the possibility of reading on several different planes, with, if anything, under-coding of conventional elements (like dialogue), may seem to be over-sophisticated for its audience. But I would argue that its very complexity, together with the relinquishing of any authorial control in the verbal text, makes Granpa closer to the comprehension patterns of an orally based reader than the vast majority of texts that set out to be 'for children'. (1991a:195)

It may, in fact, be that *Granpa* is over-sophisticated – and, indeed, difficult – not for its audience, but for us, for adult readers. We know, not just from specialized scholarly knowledge, but from what feels like instinct (although in reality patterns of story "have to be learned" (Hunt 1991a:192)), how storying works and how stories are structured. As a result, we expect cohesion and unity and struggle with fragmentation in *Granpa*; we expect to be guided by convention and are confused when left to choose between various planes on which we could read. Child readers (and, for that matter, child listeners), however, are still learning the "semiotic and literary competency" related to a "knowledge of conventions and genres and often of a memory of other books similar or related in genre, theme, or story" (Stephens 1992:84). They may not yet have acquired the expectations we share of stories – and if they have not been expecting cohesion and unity they may not register fragmentation as a challenge; if they have not been expecting guidance, and convention is not conventional for them, then there may be no difficulty for them in navigating the unconventional by themselves.

It may thus be only for us as adults that *Granpa* is difficult and challenging and perhaps even threatening. But it is not for us that *Granpa* is meant, and there is no reason for us to assume that our reactions to stories are in any way similar to those of the young children for whom it is meant. Hunt points out that both "reader-response theory and practice [show that] what children understand from texts is far from clear"

(1994:165), and Wall warns against "assumptions about quality in fiction for children which are based on the needs and responses of adults rather than on those of children" (1991:199). "Whether or not we have a literary upbringing, we adults are usually applying adult cultural concepts to children's books", and these concepts are simply "inappropriate" for these books (Hunt 1991b:11).

But it is not only our responses to stories that may be different, or even inappropriate in comparison, to those of children. The conventions of storytelling that *Granpa* breaks are our conventions, the conventions of adult storytellers. Our writing "for" children follows many conventions that are different to those of our writing for adults, but even those conventions that have arisen specifically in response to the child reader cannot but represent that which we judge desirable or enjoyable for children. Since "books are written by, and made available to children by, adults" they are likely to "contain what adults think children can understand, and this applies to 'literariness' as well as vocabulary or content" (Hunt 1994:3,5). In the context of stories, at the very least, "interaction is a matter of shared rules, and children play our game because it is the only game we allow them to play" (Hunt 1991a:193). The guidelines for reading offered by convention – from conventions of structure that lead readers both to expect certain outcomes and to find elements of narrative that prepare them for these outcomes, to conventions of punctuation that mark speech and dialogue – thus guide children to read in the way that we think they should.

Hunt writes that women readers read not as women, but "as women defined by men; for the value-systems and ways of perceiving prevalent in our culture are determined by males, even to the point of the way the language names things that are neutral",

and suggests that children, similarly, are forced to read as children defined by adults (1991a:191). Just as our conventions for their stories represent what we think they should read, so the way of reading we choose for children reflects what we think child readers should be. But in the same way that we do not know whether our responses to their books match theirs, we also do not know whether our image of them matches theirs; they are still playing the only game we let them play. "It is quite possible, then, that in playing the literary/reading game, children are progressively forced to read against themselves as children" (Hunt 1991a:192).

Although narrative conventions make reading easier for adults, they thus probably make it harder – and indeed more unpleasant – for young children. Conventions help adults to experience stories in the ways that they have learnt to want to experience them, but they force children to read in ways that are not yet naturalized within them, and that may, in fact, be particularly unnatural for them. The very relinquishing of conventional authorial control that makes *Granpa* seem over-sophisticated to adults would thus seem to make it a particularly simple text for children to process, because although it confronts them with various complexities of form, structure and theme, it leaves them to experience these complexities, and itself, in whatever the ways are that they, without learning, want to experience them.

This would seem to suggest that *Granpa* is a *children's* book in a way that most other books written for children are not, and I think that this is true, not only because *Granpa* is one of the only children's books that allows child readers to make it their own, but also because it is one of the few children's books that invite *only* child readers to make it their own.

One of the most important points that I made about *I Hate My Teddy Bear* in the previous chapter is that, as a result of its unconventional structure, it resists imposing a particular perspective on its child readers, and thus gives them choices in their reading of it. It is thus clearly possible for child readers to read it in whatever way they want, and my own experience has shown that they do take advantage of this potential.

But, whereas *Granpa* simply ignores conventions – for example, in the fight scene which convention would make significant but which the text does not – *I Hate My Teddy Bear* plays with conventions, for example, by setting up a traditional circular narrative so that it can comment on circular narratives by bumping it out of the way. This makes it also possible to read McKee's book in another way – a way which requires knowledge of (adult) storytelling conventions – as a sophisticated game played with narration. It thus has something for both the adult who has paid for it and has to read it to a child, and the child for whom it is said to be.

This "dual address", as Wall calls it, is a difficult thing to achieve, and usually succeeds only "because of the nature and strength of [the writer's] performance"; nevertheless, a concern "for something other than purely children's interests dominates [stories with a dual address]: pride in the artist's craft, perhaps, or commitment to an idea" (Wall 1991:35). David McKee, for example, makes no claim to a pure concern for children's interests, and says, in fact, that he does not feel that he writes children's books at all, but rather that he works on picture books, "things for both adults and children" (McKee 1993:65). Many interests other than children's

interests are valid artistically, and picture books that provide for the interests of the adults who read them to children are undoubtedly a blessing for many of these adults. But artistic values are very probably more attractive to adult critics than to child readers of children's books, and prioritizing the interests of adults reading children's books raises certain problems. Hunt writes: "How far we find books which are covertly aimed at adults a betrayal of the concept of writing for children or a natural concomitant is an ideological decision" (1994:14). The dilemma of books that are aimed at *both* adults and children is possibly a less uncomfortable one, but Wall nevertheless makes an important point about the role of adults' pleasure and admiration in the evaluation of children's books, when she says:

> The first test of a good chair for children should be, I suggest, that it suits children and not that it is comfortable for adults. Similarly the first test of a good children's book should be that it is genuinely for children and not that it is comfortable for and extends adults. (1991:233).

Unlike McKee's *I Hate My Teddy Bear* (or, according to Hunt, the entire "core of children's literature" (1994:14)), *Granpa* is not designed to offer anything to adult readers specifically. In "any text, the tone or features of the narrative imply what kind of reader – in terms of knowledge or attitude – is addressed" (Hunt 1994:12). *Granpa* implies more than simply a reader who can identify with a child protagonist; it implies a reader who is unfamiliar with the conventions of adult storytelling, and thus stands outside the adult culture of these conventions: a child. Wall argues that if "a story is written *to* children then it is *for* children, although it may also be for adults" (1991:2). *Granpa* is not only written to children, but it "speaks 'purely' to children", and does not care if it is "much misunderstood by adults" (Hunt 1994:15), in the way that it has been consciously, *but nevertheless unavoidably*, misunderstood by me in this chapter.

Adults who like it will thus like it because they have misread it and are taken with something that they themselves have imposed upon it, or because they just happen to like the difficult, the challenging, the threatening and the alien, and are the reader equivalents of the climbers of Everest or the circumnavigators of the globe. Such people may be seen as very clever or very confused, and as deeply admirable or a little bit crazy; they are not typical of the culture of adulthood. But this does not make them part of the culture of childhood, in which *Granpa* cannot be misread, and for which it is neither difficult and challenging, nor threatening and alien, because it allows itself to be moulded to any reading. Its appeal to certain adults, whether typical or not, can never make it "for" them in the way that it is – unusually, but surely commendably, in our postfeminist and postcolonial world – "for" children.

CHAPTER SIX

I spy a toad bathing the pirate captain's leg: complexity, sophistication and the children's book world

Voices in the Park, I Hate My Teddy Bear and *Granpa* have several broad types of sophistications and complexities in common. They all have experimental forms, and *Voices in the Park* and *I Hate My Teddy Bear* also take a multidimensional, polyphonic approach to narrative, use visual nonsense, and examine complex questions of philosophy. *Voices in the Park* is alone among the three books in its intertextuality, but shares its focus on the psychology of its characters with *Granpa*. *Granpa*, in turn, is alone in its thematic complexity, but shares its determined resistance to resolution and its essential unresolved ambivalence with *I Hate My Teddy Bear*, which is the only book of the three to represent generic convergence.

Despite these commonalities, however, they remain three very different books, because each uses its sophistications and complexities to completely different effect. *Voices in the Park* is a bright, fun book, with a consistent use of the codes and conventions of picture book communication and a strong element of surreal fantasy in its realism, and teaches an ideological lesson. *I Hate My Teddy Bear* is an overwhelmingly full, busy book, which works hard to distance its readers, and has a strong element of realistic yet surreal detail in its realism. It stimulates creativity, and creates a reading situation that enacts or realizes what it presumably regards as an

ideological ideal. *Granpa* is much quieter and gentler in the style of its artwork than either of these books, but has the most overtly experimental design and narration of the three. It resists both teaching and the imposition of any set reading situation, and leaves the question of how to deal with it entirely up to its child readers.

The books are thus so different that the criteria by which I have praised one may, in fact, easily imply criticism of another. *Voices in the Park* teaches children attitudes that the adults involved in their books want them to have. *I Hate My Teddy Bear* demonstrates its respect for children by leaving them to determine their own attitudes. *Granpa* highlights the alienness of the attitudes adults want children to have, as well as the outsider status of respect, by positioning itself within the culture of childhood, where respect for children – as distinct from self-respect – is meaningless.

Far from being embarrassed by the possible incompatibilities of my own arguments, I am relieved. I would have found it very hard to be convinced by any argument – even my own – that managed to discover a unified paradigm to represent three such different books. Smoothness and seamlessness seem to me to be less likely the result of inherent perfection than of a good plastering job, when one is dealing with such widely differing surfaces. And, while the limitations of a thesis such as this one leave no room for further analyses, even the most superficial of readings suggest that the diversity of complex and sophisticated children's books may only be confirmed more thoroughly if further research widens the sample from that of the three books that I have examined.

Stephens writes:

> By invoking multiple perspectives a narrative discourse encourages critical reading, building in 'distancing' strategies which enable the reading self to operate in dialogue both with points of view articulated within the discourse and with social practices. Excellent examples produced for very young audiences are John Burningham's 'Shirley' books, *Come away from the water, Shirley* (1977) and *Time to get out of the bath, Shirley* (1978), where the fantasy life the young protagonist opposes to her parents' unimaginative and restrictive existence depends heavily on intertextuality. (1992:117)

The same could be said of Janet and Allan Ahlberg's *The Jolly Postman* (1986), which also gives a voice to a different perspective in each of the letters from fairy tale characters that make up the bulk of its narrative, not only in the sense that each of the characters looks at the world from a different viewpoint, but also in the sense that the familiar characters are all presented from subtly different perspectives from the traditional ones: Jack and the beanstalk giant are friends, the three little pigs deal with the wolf with a firm solicitor's letter, and the generic wicked witch lives in a cosy little cottage and orders her witch supplies through mail-order catalogues. *The Jolly Postman* also interrogates the relationship between fiction and reality, by combining these intertexts with metafiction and printing the letters on loose leaves of paper which can be removed from envelopes in the book, and thus distance child readers further simply by slowing down and disjointing the reading process.

A similar effect is created by an I Spy game in another Ahlberg book, *Each Peach Pear Plum* (1978). Each opening depicts a well-known character from nursery rhyme, fairy tale or tradition, who is referred to in the first line of a rhyming couplet written in nursery rhyme style. The second line of each couplet reveals the presence of another character, playfully "hidden somewhere in the picture for the reader to find" (Berridge 1981:155-156). In one opening, for example, where the couplet reads, "Mother Hubbard down the cellar/I spy Cinderella", the picture focuses on Mother

Hubbard, but readers have to look for Cinderella's arm coming out with a feather duster from behind a pile of boxes. Ruth Brown offers her readers a similar game in *Toad* (1996), where the monster that is watching the toad and waiting to attack is camouflaged by water, vegetation and rock, as it would be in nature. A slightly more challenging I Spy game is found in Timothy Bush's *James in the House of Aunt Prudence* (1993), in which James is left waiting alone in Aunt Prudence's hall and is attacked by the vicious armies of the Mouse King. The game lies in finding which objects in the house of Aunt Prudence have been transformed and have come alive to create the bizarre creatures of the army; the reader is distanced further by the difficulties, introduced entirely visually, of determining either whether the focalizing character is James or Aunt Prudence or whether the war is real or imagined.

Colin Thompson's *How to Live Forever* (1995) slows the flow of reading down in a different way to that of the various I Spy games, through its incredibly detailed pictures, full of fascinating but irrelevant glimpses into other stories, visual jokes and allusions and verbal jokes such as the titles of the books in the library, including, for example, *Lady Chatterleys Pullover* shelved with *The Spy Who Came in from the Cold and Got a Warm Cardigan*, and *Lady Chatterleys Rover* with *Renault and Juliet*. *Toad* also uses intertextuality to distance its readers, although many children will fail to notice the subtle relation of its toad to Kenneth Grahame's Mr Toad of Toad Hall. But for those who do recognize Mr Toad's guiltily proud (proudly guilty?) or openly self-aggrandizing style of doggerel, either from the beginning, with "This is the tale of a monstrous toad,/a muddy toad, a slimy toad, a clammy, sticky, gooey toad," or when the monster "spits out the toad,/the happy toad, the carefree toad, the safe, secure, self-confident toad," Brown's focalizing toad is deflated completely into a figure of

fun.

Thompson and Brown's intertextual games may seem somewhat advanced for very young children. But Moss challenges the conventional wisdom (which I have invoked throughout this thesis) that posits picture books as a shared literature for the very young. She believes that there are many picture books that "fill the older child's need for humour, sophisticated word play, social comment and fantasy", and that such books are "largely misjudged (condemned because the books are indeed 'unsuitable for five-year-olds')", although they have much delight to offer "bright eight- to eleven-year-olds" (1978:67). It is not difficult to imagine a child of eight or eleven who has read *The Wind in the Willows* (1908) or can recognize allusions to the titles of *Lady Chatterley's Lover, The Spy who Came in from the Cold* or *Romeo and Juliet*, and if the eight- or eleven-year old is bright, it is not difficult to imagine him or her recognizing, even if only after a while, the similarities in style of Brown's and Grahame's toads. The harder question is whether Moss is right, and whether picture books can fulfill the reading needs of older children. McKee suggests that it is important for some of them to do so: "Children who have not yet developed their reading skills are sometimes not ready to make the change from picture books to word books. If they are made to feel picture books are too young for them they may not only stop reading picture books but stop reading altogether" (1993:66-67).

Burningham's *Come Away from the Water, Shirley* is an instructive example of what picture books might be able to offer older children. Its "fractured narrative satirizes adults' bland reality by placing on the left-hand page the parents' banal admonitions to Shirley, and on the right, the exciting adventures that Shirley can enjoy only in her

imagination" (Watkins & Sutherland 1995:313). This creates a complex dual narrative with room for some sophisticated counterpoint. Nikolajeva and Scott say:

> There is no direct correspondence between the visual fantastic narrative and the words of the realistic narrative, but there is some irony in their connection. When the mother says, 'Why don't you go and play with those children?' Shirley in her imaginary world is heading towards the pirate ship. The words 'Mind you don't get any of that filthy tar on your nice new shoes' match the picture of Shirley approaching the tarred ship. The order 'Don't stroke that dog, Shirley, you don't know where he's been' is especially humorous. First, the dog has been around for a while already, and the readers have undoubtedly noted him while the mother has not. Second, in the fantasy world, the dog 'has been' in Shirley's rowboat and is now on the pirate ship with her. Third, right at the moment depicted on the adventurous recto page, the dog is saving Shirley's life by biting the pirate captain's leg. (2001:193)

Where Stephens says above that the Shirley books are for very young audiences, Moss has taken *Come away from the Water, Shirley* into the school library where she works, "and used it with children from five years old right up to eleven", finding that there were "some *at every age* who did not manage to make the jump across the 'gutter' from left-hand pages where the parents sit…to the right-hand pages on which Shirley is seen", but that "far more children, again at all ages, did make the jump *and were intrigued*" (1978:68,69; my italics)

If picture books that are usually condemned because they are unsuitable for five-year olds can thus be enjoyed by older children, then there may be child readers who can appreciate not only Thompson's intertextual jokes, but also his philosophical theme, and even child readers who can cope with and find catharsis in the psychological depth and challenging themes of Raymond Briggs's often funny, but very bleak, nuclear holocaust cartoon, *When the Wind Blows* (1987). And Briggs's *Fungus the Bogeyman* (1977) may indeed fulfill all the needs of older child readers that Moss identifies above, with humour in the sophisticated word play of "puns, literary

allusions, and quotations and misquotations", social comment in its "critique of our own civilization", and the fantasy of Briggs's "alternative culture of kind, compassionate…Bogey people" (Watkins & Sutherland 1995:312).

The intertextuality of both *Fungus the Bogeyman* and *How to Live Forever* turn reading into something of a game, a literary version of the I Spy aspects of *Toad, James in the House of Aunt Prudence* and *Each Peach Pear Plum*, with similar distancing effects but also similar diverting effects. The idea of the book as a game is an even more noticeable feature of *The Jolly Postman*, with the envelopes and letters that turn the book into a toy.

Each of these books depends for much of its playful appeal on humour, not only the incidental humour of the postman's many cups of tea or the slapstick fall of the baby bear in *Each Peach Pear Plum*, which sets off his rifle and shoots Baby Bunting's basket from its tree, but also humour that derives directly from or contributes directly to the sophistication of the book, such as the jokiness of Briggs and Thompson's intertextuality, or Aunt Prudence's unexpected response to James's adventures, which increases the difficulty of determining which of them is the focalizing character. John Burningham's Shirley books and his *Where's Julius?* (1986) are also funny as a result of their sophistication, with the humorous counterpoints, in both, of the mundane worlds of the parents and the exciting adventures of Shirley or exotic travels of Julius. And all of Anthony Browne's work from his 1977 *A Walk in the Park*, which he revisited two decades later in *Voices in the Park*, abounds in visual jokes.

Many of these jokes are created by intervisual allusions and references to artists from

Van Eyck to Magritte. In Browne's "painting books", such as *Willy's Pictures* (2000), the humour of these allusions is combined with a certain amount of friendly instruction about the paintings or their artists. On a less narrowly didactic level, however, all the humorous or playful books, and all the books that satisfy the needs of older children, must be seen also as educational, if education implies the fostering of a love of books and reading by making books enjoyable or satisfying for children.

As with my analyses, my discussion here may be seen as contradictory: this is good because it appeals, that is good because it distances; this is good because it teaches, that is good because it does not subject children to its views. Again, I am not concerned. As it would have been unlikely to discover one argument that would validate all of the complexities and sophistications of each of these and other books, so it would have been unlikely to have found one argument that would convince all of the children's book world not to reject complexity and sophistication in children's books. With my slightly wider selection of arguments, however, there is the possibility that someone may find at least one that appeals, and if that happens then all that the arguments that are unattractive do is prove the diversity of the material and the responses it calls for.

In the face of this diversity, it is impossible to view sophisticated and complex children's books as a single, unified generic whole (just as it is impossible to view sophisticated and complex adults' books as a single, unified generic whole). It is thus also quite ludicrous to judge these books as a group, whether negatively or positively; resistance to complexity and sophistication, per se – whether in the form of dismissiveness; territorial or ideological suspicion; denial, such as that of Tallis or

Green; or open distaste, such as that of Egoff, Townsend, Rees or Bowles – has no place in a reasoned approach to children's books. And, if even one of my arguments in favour of even one of the complex, sophisticated books I have discussed has merit, then resistance to complexity and sophistication, in their entirety, has no place in a responsible approach to children's books. The approach that remains is almost embarrassingly simple: individual sophisticated and complex texts, like all other texts, must be evaluated individually.