

9-1-2004

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Recommended Citation

Desai, Christina M.. "Weaving Words and Pictures: Allen Say and the Art of Illustration." *The Lion and the Unicorn* 28, 3 (2004): 408-428. http://digitalrepository.unm.edu/ulls_fsp/87

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Weaving Words and Pictures: Allen Say and the Art of Illustration

It is hard to imagine literature for young children today without pictures. The genre is almost synonymous with the term “picture books.” To show the interplay between illustration, text, and meaning, this article explores some examples of the wealth of possibility in picture book dynamics by comparing three works by illustrator and author Allan Say. It examines the equal importance of illustration and text to meaning in several of Say’s works, showing his use of artistic techniques and different text/illustration relationships to convey meaning. It explores the balance between the two ways of communicating and its appropriateness in each case. The article will focus on three stories illustrated by Say: Dianne Synder’s *The Boy of the Three-Year Nap*, and Say’s *El Chino* and *Emma’s Rug*. In all three examples, readers must make sense of both the pictures and the words just as the characters must make sense of the events in their lives.

Uri Shulevitz makes a distinction between “children’s picture books” which use pictures to help tell a story, and “storybooks” which use pictures to supplement a text that could be understood without reference to the pictures (15). However, while some storybooks can be understood without them, pictures undoubtedly color readers’ reactions to the story. Art and text are inextricably linked to create meaning that could not be communicated any other way. Joseph Schwarcz invokes this link in defining the illustrated children’s book as a separate art form, “in the sense that it communicates its message in a way which is untranslatable into any other form of aesthetic expression” (*Ways* 195). In a theoretical analysis of the relationship between text and illustration,

Lawrence Sipe asserts that “. . . visual texts are on an equal footing with verbal texts. It seems necessary, in the logocentric society that we live in today, to make this point” (107).

Writers like Joseph Schwarcz (*Ways, The Picture Book*), Perry Nodelman (*Words, “The Eye”*), William Moebius (“Introduction to Picturebook Codes”), and others have contributed important insights to our understanding of picture book illustration and the dynamics of its interaction with text, but much remains to explore. Schwarcz attempts to catalog some of the ways in which text and illustration may interact, basing his scheme on the degree of redundancy in text and illustrations. He describes the two major interactions as congruency and deviation. Under congruency, he includes variations such as elaboration, alternation, amplification, and extension; under deviation are opposition and counterpoint (*Ways* 14-7). Nikolajeva and Scott take Schwarcz’s classification as their starting point and further subdivide many of the categories (*How Picturebooks Work* 24-5). They preface their study of picture book dynamics with the observation that existing studies “do not recognize or explore . . . the wide array and diversity of the dynamics that picturebooks embody” (“The Dynamics” 225). Nodelman maintains that interaction between text and picture in all picture books is “ironic” to a greater or lesser degree, since there are “inherent differences between verbal narration and pictorial depiction” (*Words* 229).

In the hands of master artists, graphic art in children’s literature has gone beyond mere embellishment to make the books more attractive or salable. The art is an integral part of the story without which much of the meaning and mood would be missing. Whether the plot of the story could be understood without the illustrations is therefore an

irrelevant question since the illustrations do have an impact in either case. As Schwarcz notes, “illustrations can never be a neutral delight for the eye” (*Ways* 94). They cannot, then, simply mirror the text. Since they cannot be totally redundant, it follows that they should receive far more attention in the critical literature and in the classroom than is currently the case. Perhaps because of their very (nonverbal) nature, we fail to talk about them.

The stories examined here are not the author’s best-known works but they demonstrate his mastery of illustrative styles. Because of his upbringing and subject matter, Allen Say’s books are often used in the classroom to broaden students’ exposure to other cultures. Say was born in 1937 and is half Japanese, half Korean. His Japanese grandparents immigrated to the US, raised their daughter (his mother) in California, then returned with her to Japan, where she married. Thus Allan Say was raised in Japan by a Japanese-American mother and a Korean father, an orphan raised in Japan by a British family. Say himself migrated to the U.S. as a young man, thus retracing his grandfather’s steps, as he describes in his Caldecott Award winner, *Grandfather’s Journey* (1993). As he experiences the wonder and discovery of the immigrant experience, the narrator of this story comes to appreciate his grandfather’s complicated cultural identity and his ultimate sense of displacement in both worlds. Say’s exploration of cross-cultural encounters reached its peak in *Grandfather’s Journey*, but was also evident in one of his earliest stories, *The Bicycle Man* (1982). In this story, two American GI’s in post-war Japan frighten some schoolchildren with their strange appearance but end by entertaining them and demonstrating their common

humanity. Several other of his stories highlight the meeting of two cultures, including *Tree of Cranes* (1991) and *Tea with Milk* (1999).

Because of the current emphasis in the U.S. on multiculturalism, appreciation for Say's work tends to focus on his insights into living in two cultures. Yet his works treat a wide range of subjects including intergenerational relationships, harmony with nature, and artistic inspiration. Attention to the cross-cultural aspects of his books has somewhat overshadowed appreciation for his innovative uses of illustration and other (non-cultural) influences on his characters' development, such as their artistic drive. The three stories analyzed here have little in common. They were chosen rather to represent the diversity of Say's themes and techniques. In *The Boy of the Three-Year Nap*, the artist plays with the Japanese folktale genre, contrasting idyllic scenes and reader expectation of lofty themes with crafty action and cartoon elements to heighten the humor of the story. In *El Chino*, he uses visual metaphor to reveal his protagonist's mental processes as he frees himself from the restrictions of a narrowly defined cultural identity. In *Emma's Rug*, he paints Emma's isolation to show the inadequacy of words and the unique dimensions of visual art. The dynamic between illustration and text is different but appropriate in each example.

Allen Say began his career as a cartoonist. Cartoons are a much more pervasive medium in Japan and their use is not limited to children's comics. Comic books and even complete cartoon novels, *manga*, as well as animated movies are very popular with adults. The artistic level of this Japanese art form far surpasses the ordinary comics commonly circulated in the U.S. (See examples in Vas, e.g. 17, 19, 25, 28, etc.) Though cartooning was and is an extremely popular medium in Japan, the profession of

cartoonist was not considered respectable by middle class Japanese society when Say was growing up. Yet driven by an overwhelming desire to master this art, Say left home at the age of twelve to apprentice himself to master cartoonist Noro Shinpei. Say's time with Shinpei, remembered as one of the happiest times in his life, is chronicled in his young adult novel, *The Ink-keeper's Apprentice* (1979). Ironically, this early work was not illustrated, but Say soon tried his hand at illustrating other children's books such as *Once Under the Cherry Blossom Tree* (1974) and *The Lucky Yak* (1980).

Thus from the beginning of his career, Say has been interested in narrative. Though quoted as saying that the illustrations free him from having to compose more text: "What the pictures say, I don't have to write" (Peck & Hendershot 305), he has been an author of children's books for as long as he has been an illustrator. Say's artistic sensibilities undoubtedly reflect the mixture of cultures in his upbringing and his artistic training. His works show mastery of the cartoonist's command of line, action, and comedy, the Japanese artistic sense of harmony, simplicity, and suggestion, and the Western artist's sense of expansiveness, realism, and color. Say uses all of these talents to create the moods and extend the meaning of the texts in ways most appropriate to each work. His work indeed bears out the truth of David Lewis's assertion (109) that the picture book is an endlessly elastic genre whose dynamics we are only just beginning to appreciate.

In the first of the stories to be examined here, Say contrasts the Japanese reverence for nature and beauty with the humor of his characters' very human behavior and readers' expectations of the folktale genre.

The Boy of the Three-Year Nap (1988)

The story, told by Dianne Snyder, is a Japanese folktale about a poor widow with a lazy son, Taro. The boy, smitten by the daughter of the rich merchant, uses trickery to fool the merchant into arranging the marriage. The widow has the last laugh, however, as she also uses trickery to force the merchant to build her a new house, give her son a job, and make him take it. The setting is a quiet fishing village, the time, indeterminate. Snyder's text is lively, full of action and dialog. The characters are the uni-dimensional type common to folktales, but the details of the setting, which provide a window onto their daily life, the use of metaphor and rhythm by both author and illustrator, the humorous action, and the lively conversation endear these characters to the reader.

From the opening pages, Say mixes comic cartoon elements and traditional Japanese nature painting style to introduce irony and humor into the tale. Comic strip art emphasizes "economy of line, visual exaggeration and immediate wit" (Von Blum); it excels at action and exaggerated emotion, rather than serious portraiture. A cartoon character may be more recognizable by his cap than by his facial features, for example. Though not always used in the service of humor, these elements contrast with the qualities associated with Japanese nature painting, especially as seen in Japanese book illustration, with its emphasis on composition, simplicity, harmony, and beauty (Okamoto 8; Brown 25). The title page in this story presents a serene moon and gentle nightfall, on one hand, while the silhouette of a boy with a funny haircut and huge yawn introduces the comic element on the other. This opening, through illustration alone,

hints that this will be not a romantic or epic folktale, but a comic one. Our hero will be no Sleeping Beauty.

Serenity is the opening mood. The first line of text and the first illustration within the story set the stage for a serious tale about a stereotypical poor (*ergo* we expect, a good, gentle) widow and her son. In the long, flowing opening sentence, nature predominates. The illustration supports the majestic, reverent mood by picturing a quiet fishing village at dusk against a backdrop of mountains in a traditional Japanese nature scene. The following illustration echoes the text's soporific rhythm ("her head bobbed up and down") in the wavy lines of the roof tiles. The closeness of neighboring houses and the broken tiles of the widow's roof emphasize her poverty, while her industriousness lends it dignity. So far text and illustration agree and support each other.

As Betsy Hearne notes in her review, some of the illustrations resemble well-known Japanese woodcuts (169). The pictures showing the poor widow at her tedious work recall myriad paintings of elegant Japanese women engaged in their more artistic domestic occupations (For examples, see Brown 56-63.). Yet the gentle rhythm of the bobbing fishing boats on the first page tilts ever so slightly toward the comical by the second page, with its simile of the bobbing cormorant: though not a "fish wife" this widow is not elegant; she will begin to nag and does go fishing for gold.

Abruptly the mood changes with the scowl on the mother's face and the ludicrous position of the son (7). The verbal metaphor ("lazy as a rich man's cat") is echoed in the illustration by the boy's sprawling cat-like position. The lulling text and serene illustrations of the opening lead us to expect a tale about a long-suffering, kind hearted widow and a dutiful son; instead both widow and son connive to outwit each other and

the merchant to attain their own ends. Contrast between the reader's expectation, set up in the opening pages, and the sudden shift to irreverence creates the irony that makes this tale so humorous.

Throughout the story, the illustrations contrast the beauty and harmony of nature with the comedy of the characters' behavior, using the exaggerated facial expressions and body language and lack of background detail common to cartooning. The paradise scene in the merchant's garden (9) is marred by the haughty expressions of the rich merchant and his wife, a haughtiness not mentioned in the text. This detail sustains the comic mood, which strengthens in the following pages. The text begins to take on the comic tone of the illustrations as the widow nags and the merchant scolds. The drawings become even more cartoon-like as the story becomes more comic. The text tells us Taro looked "fierce as a samurai warrior" (12), but the reader, with prior knowledge of his character, perceives him as funny-looking rather than fierce. Who will be punished, the rich merchant or the lazy boy? The text provides no hint that the proud merchant may be in for a fall, but the illustration (14) shows him scowling, haughtier than ever. His impertinent advice concerning Taro, to "kick him on his bottom," is a passage sure to elicit giggles from young children. In contrast, all the other townspeople in this illustration are in harmony, with pleasant facial expressions. These visual clues build suspense toward the merchant's inevitable humiliation. In the shrine scene (15) his cane and Taro's staff are used metaphorically to convey the relative strength of each character. Both are upright: at this point the two appear evenly matched.

The rhythm is broken again by the sudden close-up scene at the climax of the story (16). Again text and illustration diverge; the text could be read as solemn decree,

but the illustration emphasizes the comic. Comic strip style takes over completely as Taro overpowers his prospective father-in-law. Exaggerated facial expressions and body language are at their peak. All background details are excluded. The merchant's buckteeth, popping eyeballs, and deflated cap add to the humor and confirm his defeat. The dialog shows that though Taro may be lazy, he is quick-witted, with an answer for each of the merchant's objections. Note that Taro retains his staff while the merchant loses his grip on his cane. The following scene (19) marks the beginning of the end for the merchant. His cane lies on the ground while Taro's staff remains upright. The merchant also lies prostrate, as Taro used to do, while Taro trips away, feet flying. The moonlight mockingly recalls the earlier serenity, now unrecoverable.

Say's artistic techniques throughout the work confirm the Japanese origin of this folktale. The colors are subtle and often flat; the Japanese reverence for nature is apparent in the majestic backdrops and harmonious composition. The detail, for instance in the construction of the widow's new rooms, is painstakingly executed, with an eye to beauty and composition (See especially the beautifully choreographed figures and open backgrounds of pp. 24 and 25.). These elements lend a note of depth to the tale that would not be possible with cartoon alone, thereby preparing us for the lazy boy's eventual maturation. The humorous ending with tongue-in-cheek acknowledges wit and wealth as great equalizers, but also sees laziness punished and work rewarded.

Nodelman notes that irony develops in picture books when "writers and illustrators use the different qualities of their different arts to communicate different information" (*Words* 222). As a master cartoonist, Say is able to use irony to poke gentle fun, not only at the characters, but also at the genre. The tale itself derives much

of its humor from the ironic difference between Taro's scheming and the ultimately even cleverer scheming of his mother and Say develops these humorous possibilities to the fullest. However, Say further develops the irony by playing on readers' expectations of seriousness evoked by his finely painted natural settings, only to contradict that seriousness with his cartoon-like rendering of the action. Folktales may contain fine moral lessons, he seems to be saying, but they may sometimes take themselves too seriously. At the same time Say avoids trivializing the tale. He tempers the humor with delicate sympathy for human nature, by incorporating the harmony of composition, open space, and serenity of traditional Japanese painting style. He locates his characters firmly in their Japanese cultural element while showing readers glimpses of wider dimensions by placing them at a distance, in a majestic natural setting.

The next story, *El Chino*, takes the protagonist out of his cultural element. Here the irony is of a more serious sort. The main character is a Chinese American coming to terms with his identity in Spain. The text is used to provide a straightforward chronology, while the illustrations reveal the significance of events and convince by their metaphoric impact.

El Chino (1990)

In this story, both written and illustrated by Allen Say, we find a very different dynamic between narrative and illustrations. This is not a folktale but rather a contemporary realistic story containing almost no humor. In *El Chino*, we find the classic structure (or trite formula) of the sports story for children. According to this formula, an

initially inept character or team competes but fails miserably at first, overcomes obstacles (in this case the hero's height and ethnic origin) through perseverance, learns to excel, and finally wins the championship game to wild acclaim. Many series novels and countless children's films have demonstrated the popularity of this story line. Yet few critics would place *El Chino* in the same genre as Disney's *The Mighty Ducks*. Instead of fast-paced action, this story spans many years. Many of the illustrations are stills and portraits. There are scenes full of action as well, but the mood is such that action is far less important than the personal development of the main character.

The text is almost devoid of poetic device. The illustrations offer no startling contrasts to the text, no ironic subtleties. The "doubleness" of first-person picture books referred to by Perry Nodelman ("The Eye" 1), consisting of varying degrees of contradiction between the first-person perspective of the narrator and the third-person perspective of the illustrations, and varying distance between narrator and reader, is not altogether lacking but it is limited in this example. However, though text and illustrations agree, they perform very different functions here. The text propels the reader forward into the plot, as in any sports story. The illustrations, on the other hand, slow the action. They serve to create the mood of introspection that allows Billy's emotional transformation to reveal itself as the central theme of the story. They distinguish this story from the generic sports story. Unlike the previous example, in which Snyder's text delights the reader with humorous dialog, imagery, and action, Say's text presents a straightforward summary of the action, an almost facile account of Billy's quest for identity. Say's use of text in this way can probably be traced to the order in which he creates.

“Usually I paint first.” This statement by Say describes his creative process, in which the story and its meaning emerge in his mind first as visual images, not as words or a sequence of events (Peck & Hendershot 304). Say prefers to write as little as possible, thus creating tension between what the words reveal and what the images reveal. The crux of the story revolves around Billy’s self-discovery. How can he succeed at basketball as a short, Chinese American? Should he test his father’s assertion that “In America, you can be anything you want to be” (6) and is this true in Spain as well? Just as Allen Say discovers the meaning of the story by contemplating the visual images that emerge from his mind and hand, so the hero of this story discovers who he is not by thinking or reasoning (using words), but by entering fully into the stream of life and seizing opportunities. Just as Say discovers the meaning as he paints the story, so his character discovers it as he lives it, and readers discover it through the illustrations. While the text represents the factual sequence of events, the illustrations represent life in all its color. The imagery deliberately lacking in the text is therefore present in the illustrations.

The first hint of these separate roles for text and illustration comes from the use of sepia portraits and black and white “snapshots” in the opening pages to describe the past life of the pre-awakened hero. This device heightens the impact of the full-color illustrations later in the story. The death of Billy’s father, jeers of his siblings, and his own self-doubt form a dark prison from which he must find a way to break out. Say acknowledged the prison motif in an interview in which he described Billy as attempting to “break out of his cultural mold, or bondage” (Marcus 301). The only hint in the text of the prison theme is the quip by young Billy that “none of us wanted to be a grocer” (6).

But it shows up repeatedly as a metaphor in the illustrations, most forcefully in the beginning when Billy's father dies. The "bars" of the paneling and the bareness of the room suggest a prison cell (8). Here and in the following two illustrations, strong vertical lines (bars) tie the hero to his current location. Yet even here hope is expressed symbolically by the open window, open door, light from an unseen source, and the father's picture/presence. Billy's father represents belief in limitless possibility. That hope dims with his death but is not extinguished. The prison theme continues in the scene showing Billy as engineer. The vertical lines of the corrugated industrial building and the twisted iron bars in the concrete point downward toward Billy, shown in a lowly position, still in black and white. His inner conflict is reflected in his obvious discomfort and the incongruence of his dressing in hardhat and tie.

Change begins to occur when Billy reaches Spain. He is shown in front of a fort, possibly a prison tower, but Billy is outside the tower, and free. After witnessing his first bullfight, Billy is pictured on a balcony, but this time the window has no bars; it is wide open and he is outside. The bars of the balcony railing do not confine him but rather allow him to survey from on high new scenes and new possibilities. Flowers soften the scene and draw attention to the nearby drainpipe, the classic escape device. Billy's final success is foreshadowed in the alley scene (24) in which tall dark, tunnel-like buildings crowd the group but also frame the way out. The alley offers an exit and provides direction, with its curved path and literal 'light at the end of the tunnel.'

Another recurring motif is the presence of the spirit of Billy's father, who believed in the American Dream and unlimited possibilities even for Asian immigrants. His portrait is the only personal touch in the bare prison-like scene on p. 8. His vision frees

Billy from a confining identity as a Chinese American, restricted to the few safe professions chosen by his siblings and approved by society. But it does not point him toward alternate goals or means of achieving them. And what an immigrant may accomplish in America may not be possible in Spain. The inner conflict this dilemma creates is graphically reflected in the scene in which Billy contemplates giving up on his dream (21). This scene is loaded with visual symbol. Here Billy is standing still on the road, going neither forward nor back, as he mentally converses with his father. His face is in shadow, painted without eyes, without identity. The sky looms dark. The landscape, however, is wide open, evocative of an American Midwestern landscape, and the road is bright. The painting style is completely unlike the delicate Japanese style of the Snyder book. Say uses decidedly Western realism here to show his character's American roots. This proves to be the turning point in Billy's life. He finds that to succeed he must acknowledge, even take pride in his heritage, but realize that it does not comprise the whole of his identity, which is his to create.

Say has described this illustration as pivotal in his own understanding of the meaning of the story. Only while painting it (and before writing the text) did the meaning of the story become clear to him (Say, "Interview"). Because it is so pivotal, Say fills this illustration with metaphoric clues to its meaning. While the text takes Billy as far as the realization that he has been trying to be something he is not, the illustration places him at the crossroads. The text invokes Billy's father's memory once again, but stops short of answering "what would Dad have said to me now?" (20). The eyeless illustration shows Billy's dawning understanding. In the next scene, Billy faces his audience, eyes

wide open. There are no further references to his father; Billy has achieved manhood. While the text tells, the illustrations convince.

In most of the illustrations, Billy appears alone. There would be no reason to offer repeated portraits of the same character unless some important change had occurred. This series of portraits therefore invites the reader to pause and dwell on the changes wrought by time. They reinforce the slow pace of self-discovery. They are, in effect, offered to the viewer as objective evidence of the truth of this first-person narrative. For example, we know from the text that the Chinese costume gave Billy power. And we learn later that this was indeed the turning point in Billy's career. But it is the portrait showing Billy's new confidence and pride that reveals why it made such a difference. The text relates Billy's final triumph, while the final portrait shows also the time and pain it took to reach the state of self-knowledge evident here.

Parenthetically, it should be noted that both Nikolajeva and Scott (*How Picturebooks Work* 124-5) and Nodelman ("The Eye") have written on the difficulty children must have in reconciling a first person narrative with the necessarily third person perspective of illustration. They believe that young children, with their imperfect understanding of self, must find these narratives confusing. Yet none of us can see through others' eyes. We all form impressions of others' experience that may not match the subjective experience of the storyteller; such are the limitations of language and self. Yet children's own drawings, which frequently include objective (third person) representations of themselves in various situations, show that this dual perspective is not at all problematic for them.

In *El Chino*, Say uses the power of color and symbol and visual metaphor to supply the poetic imagery omitted from the text. If “a poem should not mean, but be” (MacLeish 106), and a story should not tell, but show, the illustrations in *El Chino* perform their function very well. The carefree child under his father’s wing in the first picture is transformed gradually and convincingly into the sullen teenager and unhappy engineer of the middle illustrations, to the eyeless wanderer of the climax, then finally to the confident adult of the final portrait. It may be charged that the text of this story is guilty of “too little distinction between explanation and narration . . . Expository descriptions of how a character feels and why his behaviour follows are not a very subtle narrative device. They amount to rough sketches for a later painting” (Hearne, “The American Connection” 151). Say in *El Chino* provides both the “expository descriptions” and the painting. At times the explanations in the text may come too easily, perhaps because they were written *after* Say had distilled the meaning of the story by painting the pictures. But this story is biographical in nature, told from the point of view of an older, wiser Billy who has had time to reflect on the meaning of his experience. Text and illustration complement each other closely, but the illustrations change the very nature of this story from action formula to character study.

The young protagonist of the final story is still far from the understanding achieved by *El Chino*. Emma is a child artist misunderstood by all around her. The narrator can offer no explanation for her behavior. Illustration must do even more to illuminate this character’s psychology. Readers must study the images as Emma studied her rug for inspiration.

Emma's Rug (1996)

Emma is the story of a child artist who draws inspiration from a small carpet given to her as a baby. As she grows she stares for long periods of time into the beloved rug. As her talent develops, she lives to draw, and begins to attract the notice of teachers and other adults. One day her mother washes the rug, thereby destroying the images Emma has always been able to draw from it. Her world crumbles until she opens her mind and learns to find inspiration from the world around her.

In this story, Say relies even more heavily on artistic elements to tell Emma's story. Visual symbolism and metaphor, book design, and differing points of view for text and illustration carry the meaning lacking in the laconic text. Again Say is both author and illustrator and here demonstrates his mastery of the balance between the two media. The story calls upon the reader to understand the feelings of a small child whose talent grows more quickly than her understanding. The text relates the facts and sequence of events, but like Emma when questioned, it offers no explanations. It is therefore left to the illustrations to supply the meaning. Where does her talent come from? Why is she so unlike other children? What does she see in the rug? As William Moebius observes, "the best picturebooks can and do portray the intangible and invisible, ideas and concepts such as love, responsibility, a truth beyond the individual, ideas that escape easy definition in picture or words" (146). Like a well-wrought poem, this story uses its tools in the way best calculated to convey those invisible concepts. What cannot be easily explained is conveyed by contrasting the adult point of view in the text with Emma's point of view in the illustrations.

The text is spare, an unemotional narrative in which Emma, the main character, has little to say. It relates her inexplicable behavior from the adult detached observer's point of view. As Emma's skill grows, adults talk about her and children question her, but don't believe her when she explains, "I just copy" (12). She is isolated by her talent from her social world. Her voice is expressed only in her art and so her emotion is shown only in the illustrator's art. This silence in the text corresponds to her lack of understanding of her own feelings. Emma uses words only when her rug is gone and she puts her art behind her as "Kid stuff" (26). Twice in the book she cries out, once when she discovers the loss of her rug and once when she recovers a glimpse of the images it once provided her and thereby recovers her inspiration. Surrounded by admiring adults (19), she does not answer and cannot seem to comprehend their questions about celebrity. She is literally at a loss for words in the face of the artistic inspiration that defines her. Just as words fail Emma, text alone cannot convey the meaning of this story.

Subtle clues in the illustrations, such as Say's use of light, are used to trace the progress of Emma's artistic development. To quote Moebius again, ". . . frequent depiction in picturebooks of gates, doors, windows and stairs, of roads and waterways, and the changing representation of light, artificial and natural, to accord with different degrees of character understanding, are not accidental or fortuitous phenomena, but downright basic to the symbolic force of the story" (146). Here light symbolizes Emma's artistic inspiration. Light enters baby Emma's room from a nearby window and an open door, but it does not fall on her directly. Her eyes are closed and the sources of light hidden. Stars painted on her crib reflect some of the light. In the following frame the light

is brighter and approaches much nearer as Emma stares intently at her seemingly blank rug. As she begins to draw, light from two windows intersects and falls directly across her paper. When she discovers the destruction of her rug, she is surrounded by a dark void. When she later trashes her drawings and medals, the garage is dark despite a large window shedding light directly on her face and discarded drawings. Inspiration, returning in the final frames, takes the form of images made of light.

Emma's remoteness is conveyed in many ways. The formal framing of all the illustrations distances her from the viewer, as does the fact that she seldom smiles and never looks directly toward the viewer. Throughout the story, others stare at her, gaze at her in polite wonder, or converse above her as if she were not present. She gazes not at them, but into some distant scene only she can see. Her unrelaxed body language conveys her determination to tease out the images hidden in the carpet (7). A few unheeded wooden blocks call attention to the bareness of the room except for the encroaching blocks of light. Only the penultimate frame, in which she recovers her inspiration, shows her in harmony with her surroundings, smiling. Yet even here she is not connected with her community but rather with nature and the pictures in her imagination. The fact that she is finally able to step outside is not coincidental. Till this point Emma is always pictured indoors. The text tells us that she "saw eyes watching her" and that "She had thought she would never see again" (30). To Emma, being without the artistic sense is like being blind. After her release from her rug ("Kid stuff"), Emma begins to broaden her horizons, both figuratively and literally. Her mother's interference with her source of inspiration in the end forces Emma to look around her for her inspiration, to stop "copying" from the rug. The final frame needs no text as the

author leaves Emma to her drawing. And as Emma “reads” her newfound inspiration, so the reader/viewer must “read” these illustrations to understand how she arrives at that inspiration.

Book design reinforces the separate roles of text and illustration. Text is framed formally on the left pages, confined within its borders and taking up only a fraction of the available space, while the illustrations completely fill the frames on facing pages. This arrangement signals the greater importance of the illustrations. The pictures are shown from a child’s eye level, interspersed with views of the upper reaches of the room, looming in situations where adults hover. In this way, Say emphasizes the child’s experience as a small creature in an adult world. At the mayor’s reception, for example, Emma is the center of attention. Her red jacket and dark hair stand out, while the leaning position of one adult, the stripes in the dress of another, the diagonal lines in the shawl of another, and the nodding posture of the tall gentleman all point toward Emma. Yet for all this attention, she is dwarfed by the adults and the empty space above them. The ceiling looms overhead, its spotlights making of Emma an object on display. Though the adult world showers praise on her, it also objectifies her, emphasizing how different she is. Emma is not comfortable with the praise. Reflective readers will understand from this picture that Emma does what she does for reasons unrelated to prizes and praise.

Unarticulated messages force the reader (or viewer) to think, to construct their meaning. As Piagetian research shows, active cognitive engagement triggers true learning. This principle operates often in literary works in which the main character undergoes a process of personal development. Both the main character and

consequently, the reader must discover the meaning by pondering the personal experience described in the narrative. In *The Stone Book*, by Alan Garner, for example, Mary, the stonemason's daughter, longs to learn how to read, and wants to own a book, but her father, too poor to send her to school, gives her instead a "Bible" carved out of stone. She must discover the meaning of this gift by remembering how he has taught her to "read" stone in the caves of her region. Her understanding is implied but never stated. Rather, the author sets the stage, paints the mood into the setting of the story, describes the incidents leading up to the gift, and then allows his character, and hopefully, the reader to draw the correct inferences. For older children, capable of reading "chapter books," this is not an unfair expectation. In picture books for young children, less well versed in the subtleties of language, illustrations provide an additional avenue for the discovery of meaning. Yet, as Stewig points out, "The ability to receive, process, reflect on, and respond to pictures is a critical but often overlooked aspect of children's response to literature" (35).

In several of Say's stories, children too young to articulate their feelings reveal them through facial expressions and body language in the illustrations. Cases in point are *Allison* (1997), in which a child copes with learning that she is adopted after noticing her Asian features do not match those of her Caucasian parents, and *Tree of Cranes* (1991), in which a small boy tries to understand the inaccessible feelings of his mother, who was raised in another culture. In Emma's case, it is not only age that prevents her from explaining herself through language. The artists, both Emma and Say, are faced with the impossibility of translating from the visual to the verbal medium. By creating one tone and point of view for the text (the adult view) and another for the illustrations

(Emma's view), Say has chosen a most appropriate means of conveying the disconnect between Emma's inner world of artistic expression and her outer world dominated by adults and words. This disconnect creates the cognitive gap needed to encourage the reader/viewer to reflect on the meaning of the story, just as Garner's character Mary reflects and learns to read her stone book:

“And Mary sat by the fire and read the stone book that had in it all the stories of the world and the flowers of the flood” (60).

The final illustration, showing Emma drawing once again (32), performs the same function as Garner's final sentence about Mary.

Conclusion

Attempts by various writers to classify the ways in which text and illustration may relate in picture books offer excellent starting points for analysis of picture book dynamics. These categories provide a useful organizing principle for analysis and many are broad enough to include just about every relationship possible. But they are far from representing the many nuanced variations of interaction possible within those broader categories. It is precisely these forms of interaction that make this literature so exciting. Schwarcz believed any attempt to develop definitive categories to be futile because “changes happening in this field are so swift and far-reaching that any such classification will not hold its ground for more than a few years” (*Ways* 6-7). This study

attempts to demonstrate, in three examples, several differing ways in which one illustrator has chosen to relate pictures to text.

In the first example, Say gently mocks the serious tone of the opening text, plays with reader/viewer expectation, parodies the classical art forms, and alternates between comic and sober tones. He chooses to place the reader outside the picture by framing his scenes from a distance, thus echoing the distance in the text between reader and ancient folktale. Building on the poetic imagery of the text, Say adds additional layers of imagery and symbol into the illustrations. He plays cat and mouse with the text, anticipating its humor, sometimes contradicting its serious tone, sometimes more serious and artistic than its characters. His stance is that of wise old storyteller, relating a funny and very old story, but one that has relevance and wisdom still for a young audience. The traditional Japanese artistic elements of harmony with nature, gentle suggestion, and simplicity, alternating with the humor of some of the cartoon-like illustrations are, therefore, entirely apt.

In the other examples, *El Chino* and *Emma's Rug*, in which Say is both author and illustrator, the artistic techniques are completely different. These are contemporary and much more serious tales; here the minimalism of the text and the realistic contemporary illustrations are called for by the subject matter. In *El Chino*, despite an action filled plot, the action lines and exaggeration of cartooning are left behind. Flat color gives way to the black and white evocative of the past and then to more vivid and emotion-laden watercolors. The precise, refined Japanese landscapes of Snyder's tale are replaced with wide-open colorful prairie-like landscapes suggestive of endless possibility. The more conventional, congruent dynamic between text and illustration

supplies action and explanation while the illustrations reveal character transformations. In this way Say succeeds in creating both a sports story and a maturation story.

In *Emma's Rug*, the themes of identity and character development are also present, but the introspection of *El Chino* is lacking. Again Say again uses realism, symbolism, the distance of framing, and the slowing effect of portraits in the illustrations to create the mood of isolation, but here he uses a much more laconic text to goad the reader into constructing the meaning. This time the protagonist is still in-the-moment; she has yet not reached the maturity to look back on or analyze her feelings as Billy has in *El Chino*. Only the reader/viewer will understand why she has been so isolated, why the destruction of the rug has such a liberating effect on Emma's artistic imagination, and why some human interference is necessary even in the lives of the most inspired artists. Emma herself understands only that she is again able to paint. Thus, though the realistic look of the paintings is very similar in *El Chino* and *Emma's Rug*, the relationship between text and illustration in the two stories is very different.

This analysis supports Nodelman's contention that all text/illustration interaction is ironic, that is, text and illustration by their very nature cannot be totally congruent. The analysis above includes three examples by a single illustrator. Two of them are also authored by the illustrator and use the same artistic style. Yet all display different text/illustration dynamics. Even in the most congruent example there is irony, in that text and illustration perform very different functions and convey different information. In real life, we gather information and impressions and experiences from many diverse sources, including the spoken and written word, as well as the sights and sounds and smells of the world around us. The best storytellers also provide diverse sources, but

select from all the possibilities those elements most reflective of their stories' meaning and characters.

Personal development is the inevitable project of childhood. Personal artistic development is the path of the artist. Both are intensely connected to culture, but culture is not a straightjacket. Rather it is an atmosphere in which identity can be explored and developed. It is the artist, immersed in one culture but aware of the cross currents, who shows us the milieu that is all around us but is often so pervasive as to be invisible. While exploring the dynamics of personal and artistic development, Say encourages his audience to consider along with him the importance of reading more than words.

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