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ILLUSTRATING FOR CHILDREN

Graphis: children's book illustration, Walter Herdeg, ed. Illustrated. Hurtig, 1979. 147 pp. $27.50 cloth. No. 156; ***Ways of the illustrator, visual communication in children's literature,*** Joseph H. Schwarcz. Illustrated. American Library Assoc., 1982. 202 pp. $22.50 cloth. ISBN 0-8389-0356-8.

The fourth volume of *Children's book illustration* published by the Graphis Press of Switzerland is an expanded version of a jubilee issue of the magazine *Graphis* (No. 200), from a regular series begun in 1971 (*Graphis* No. 155). Since, like most books on this subject, it appears to be intended for adult consumption, it logically begins by listing the Rights of the Child as they had been approved just twenty years earlier, in 1959, by the General Assembly of the United Nations. But it also recognizes the specific year of publication, 1979, as the Year of the Child. The first concern is consequently that children's books should respect the child's particular personality, an interest that is taken to mean both the strengthening of what is regarded as a natural sense of justice, and the endowment of the young with the basic ability to promote friendship and solidarity in later life.

Because this edition is aimed at an international audience, however, it not only can afford to be lavishly illustrated, often in colour, but it is produced in three major European languages, English, German and French, in that order, with separate chapters on Russian, American, British, French, German, Swiss, Japanese, Polish, and Czechoslovakian examples. The selection has presumably been made with regard to the amount of publication in each country, as much as to the quality of the work produced, while there is a very serious attempt to recognize the ability of the most gifted artists in each case.

Yet it is only in connection with a discussion of Japanese publications more than half-way through the book, that a good illustrator is broadly defined as a person who emphasizes the narrative force of a story, with the prime consideration of conveying the essence of its meaning. As the chapter on Poland points out, on the other hand, the fact that art for children is not an island of its own means that it is widely open to the influence of larger pictorial trends

as well, a quality that the "Arts and crafts" character of the lyrical illustrations by the great Russian artist Ivan Yakolovich Bilibin (1876-1942) vividly shows. For this reason, it is readily understood that pictures in children's books may not be far removed from easel paintings, so that in Poland for instance, illustrators, like painters, tend somewhat romantically to appeal to warm moods and spontaneous attitudes, rather than merely to describe objective facts. Naturally their ability to convey something of the historical childhood of all mankind also includes the sense of humour and fun that is a consistent ingredient of Polish art.

In such cases, the printed book itself becomes a direct means of influencing the senses, and through them the emotions, providing the pictures function as a deliberate embellishment of the written text rather than being only incidental to it. In this respect, Slovakian artists have been noticeably experimental, whereas the Americans, British and French have been inclined to cling to established traditions and sources of inspiration, or at least their publishers have, apparently because of a commitment to the quantity of sales. This would seem to indicate an uncritical receptiveness on the part of the teachers and librarians who make up a crucial portion of the adult buyers in these regions. Such key things as an appropriate balance between word and picture have, therefore, tended to be overlooked, despite the fact that French books in particular have risen in quality to such an extent that even the paper they use is good, not to mention the excellent photoengraving, which normally includes as many as four colours. Because books without any text at all have always had a low turnover, however, the imaginative appeal of the story alone is judged to be an important element. Possibly for this reason, German tales have had an especially large number of successful illustrators, a great boon in light of the fact that even the visual interpretation of pictures can be a strong attraction, quite apart from any borrowed artistic tricks such as a reliance on Japanese drama or a debt to Magritte's illusionism. Swiss publications, on the contrary, have been particularly impressive simply on account of the high quality of the photoengravers and printers in that part of the world. The wealth of examples included by Graphis, who are continually careful to give the name of the artistic originator in question, amply demonstrates the truth of this claim. Their book is a special delight for the numerous illustrations it includes, many in colour.

Though Joseph Schwarcz also manages to include a significant number of at least black and white reproductions in his book *The ways of the illustrator*, published by the American Library Association, his title indicates that his chief concern is the theory behind what he has rightly referred to as visual communication in children's literature. For, unlike the editors of *Graphis*, who openly flaunt an adult approach, this author attempts to get inside the attitude of the child. He is consequently almost as involved with the story itself as he is with the method of its illustration, already stating in the introductory chapter

that the cooperation of word and picture is so basic that they cannot be dealt with apart from each other. As a result, while his work is broadly divided into two halves, the first dealing with the numerous approaches possible in visual expression as a whole, and the second with the many variations of it found in relation to a single theme, he takes such a pronounced attitude from the outset to the effect that the subject and its illustration are totally inseparable that his second chapter is exclusively devoted to this subject. Thus, despite the universal realization that children's literature intrinsically involves moral issues, he has been able to organize his study around questions of formal design, by thoughtfully considering the many varieties of composition that will ultimately prove capable of merging educational with aesthetic values. Although his book emphasizes the international principles behind all book illustration for children, therefore, there appears to be a special appeal to the potential visual artist.

Every type of object is capable of visualization, even sound, so that visible sound is also the subject of an entire chapter. Graphic shapes, signs and symbols can readily represent accoustical sensory perceptions received by the ears in the form of spoken or sung languages, musical instruments, animal sounds, or other natural noises. The general intent of the illustrator must be to transform these aural impressions or associations into visual configurations. For example, changes in the size of printed words as much as the use of tonal values, may be used to indicate alterations in the degree of loudness. Onomatopoetic words, such as those describing a train in motion, are sometimes depicted in fragmented form. The German story by Elizabeth Borchers of *The red house in a small town* (*Das rote Haus in kleinen Stadt,* illustrated by Günther Stiller, Ellermann, Munich, 1969) contains an appropriate picture of laughter (Schwarcz, Figure 42) that even uses the colours red, yellow and blue in a diagonal series repeating the word "ha," above and below a row of laughing human faces, in order to express the mindless regimentation of a town that, according to the account, has been ordered not to weep.

In contrast to this approach, however, puppet story books seem to be largely reminiscent of expertly arranged displays. For, although in the photographs of such a book, as in the staging of a theatre, the marionette can be manipulated into life, these wooden dolls are not the same as the toys with which children themselves play. They must be animated by both the puppeteer and the draughtsman, a combination from the stage and the producer of the picture book. Aesthetically and psychologically lacking in authenticity, the result loses the illusion of movement that comes from the imagination of either the dramatist or the illustrator. In other words, this medium is very limited in its ability to articulate a life-like message.

The aim of art in general is nevertheless the expression of an idea, in the case of children's art one couched in terms that the very young will be bound to understand. Despite the fact that the individual capabilities of children of

the same age may very considerably, therefore, it seems to be true that more literal or realistic metaphors tend to accompany the poetry of younger children. When the aesthetic information included in an illustration is deliberately vague, however, the artist implies an open invitation to the child to experience some empathy with the author of a story, so that the final descriptive representation can differ markedly from a realistic portrayal. Thus, through the use of metaphor, the information offered becomes a game intended to help the child to grasp something of the nature of figurative language. The well-illustrated poem or story consequently allows the child to develop the power to derive satisfaction from the figurative modes of human communication characteristic of art.

After a consideration of several different forms of expression like the continuous narrative, as well as the role of natural landscape in Part One, Part Two examines a number of variations on a single theme, such as Cinderella or the story of Jonah. But in the latter, the element of fantasy is also explored in relation to the dream of a social Utopia, with a view to the empathy created by the illustrator for a particular point of view. As a result, the examples illustrate the principles enunciated in the first part of the book. Klaus Dorderen has claimed that art for children should have the effect of liberating the child from what might seem to be the excessive coercion of reality. Schwarcz appears to conclude more specifically that whether or not an illustrator is able to employ the contemporary styles of mature society, his role should be to present some facet in the thoroughly humanizing process of mastering life. In this, however, he should demonstrate the consistency that creates the unity a child properly seeks in life. While wholeness is a quality admired in art as much as in the rest of experience, therefore, the illustrator, according to this study, seems to have the unique opportunity of exposing the child to both.

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