The picture link: a panel of three illustrators

Ruth Heard (Moderator); *Maryann Kovalski; Ken Nutt; Ian Wallace*

Ruth Heard:
With joy (and some apprehension) I approached the task of moderating a panel of illustrators of children's literature: Maryann Kovalski, Ken Nutt (Eric Beddows), and Ian Wallace. They are not only wonderful artists but also dramatic presenters. They answered questions that must have been asked of them many times, with enthusiasm, and corroborated many points by reference to artwork they had brought with them. What follows are two recollections (by Maryann and Ken) of things discussed, and a reconsidered view (by Ian).

Maryann Kovalski:

A good publisher makes it a point to know as many illustrators as possible so as to act as a broker and be able to select a particular illustrator for a particular manuscript. Most illustrators have a style which the publisher thinks would be best for a given story. When called to illustrate someone else's story, I'm asked first to read the manuscript. The publisher has thought my style suitable and wants to hear my reactions and input. My first response is verbal — I give my immediate impression. Sometimes I will then sketch a character or two. I do this as much for myself as for the publisher or author. I have even plotted a book at this point: I break the book down page by page with rough sketches of what images will fall where. If the mix is right, we proceed to signing a contract.

When you've built up a relationship with your publisher over the years, as I've done with Kids Can Press, the early stages are very fluid and open. It's the most creative time. For me, whether or not the story and illustrations are going to work is decided at this time. Once, I read a manuscript, a story about an old Swedish man; the character I drew was clearly Sicilian. The author was kind but a little dismayed. Before long, I saw that he was right. I was simply not "clicking" with the manuscript. In the end the project was abandoned.

The linking of the creative imaginings of two artists, author and illustrator, develops into a unique relationship. Tim Wynne-Jones has called it a marriage — with all the joys and pitfalls and delicate egos of that institution. I think that's an appropriate metaphor. At some times I also feel like an actor trying our for a part — a "method" actor! I try to feel the story. I research it by going to the library, listening to appropriate music, movies — anything that will give me a greater "handle" on the story. When I was preparing for *I'll make you small*, I looked at stills from Fritz Lang movies as well as Hitchcock's "Psycho".

I find the manuscript itself dictates such things as period and style. Previously, to create background effects and detail, I used to work almost entirely from memory. I'm not sure if I was being terribly original or terribly lazy. I suspect the latter. These days, I research very carefully. With each project I'm noticing a definite increase in my research time. I worry that this is becoming a "new and improved " form of procrastination.

As an author/illustrator I can float back and forth from text to image and back again — and I do. At the moment I'm finding wearing both hats very satisfying.

I love cities and they will always feature prominently in my work. In *Brenda and Edward*, I tried to create an "Everyman" city. I did do location sketching for the subway scenes and I used Queen and Yonge (with modifications) for the spread where she thinks she sees him going down the subway stairs. For the rest, I actually used a lot of photos of New York in the 30's and 40's. But everyone does think of it as Toronto, which is nice, as it was done at a time when I finally decided to love Toronto. *The wheels on the bus* will have a different city as its location.

I never think of pleasing my audience anymore. It has always inhibited me and the results were disastrous. I simply try to make the best image I can. I use gouache and pencils with a final touch of pen and ink for definition. Colour is decided by the publisher. And they usually do decide on colour which is a bit of a shame as I adore black-and-white.

"Have I often used an open door or window as a technique of drawing the reader into the heart of a story?" I've never really thought about that and the question causes me to pause and think. One works subconsciously most of the time. I also try not to be overly introspective when it comes to my work, but there could be something in that. I can remember being absolutely fascinated with half-opened doors and windows in the picture books of my childhood. Perhaps it's left its mark.

As far as my development as an illustrator is concerned, I hope I'm getting better! I am trying to loosen up my style and concentrate more on

mood, aura, and impression. I want to achieve the kind of sophistication achieved by the "greats" I admire so much, people like Edward Ardizzone, William Steig who make it all look so light, so easy. In their "toss-away" images, one can see volumes of *real* understanding of draftsmanship, colour, form — the whole schtick! It takes years of keen observation and a lot of talent of course. I want to create great sprawling images that totally involve the viewer. I want my illustrations to tell the viewer what the place smells like — what it feels like. I want to take the viewer to the next step after I've shown what the place looks like — however carefully researched, that's simply not enough. I've got a long way to go but I am so enjoying the journey!

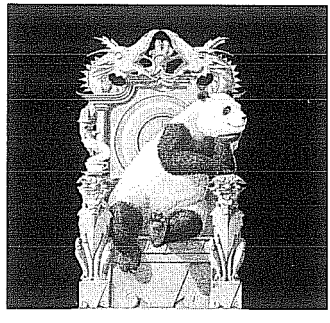
Maryann Kovalski *is author/illustrator of* The wheels on the bus; *she has illustrated* Brenda and Edward, I'll make you small, *andother picture-story books.*

Ken Nutt (Eric Beddows):

The first book I illustrated, *Zoom away*, was written by a friend of mine, Tim Wynne-Jones. It was Tim who showed me the script, not a publisher. As I read it all sorts of pictures came to mind, and I decided I would try my hand at illustration. Subsequent scripts have been sent to me by editors from different publishing houses. If I like the text and can "see" pictures in my mind's eye, I take on the project.

Because the editor has chosen to send the manuscript to me, she already has decided that my style or approach is appropriate for the book, so most of what I come up with will be acceptable to her.

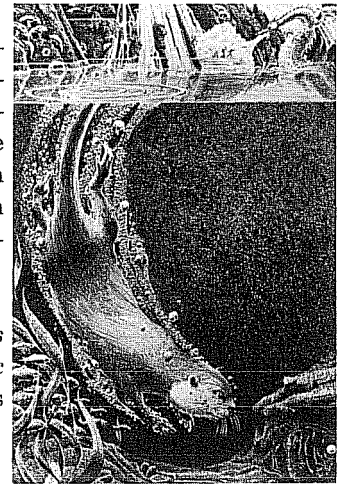
Except for minor details of dress, I have not yet had a conflict with an author. I think conflicts, or at least major conflicts, are few because an editor has "matched" illustrator with manuscript.



I do a lot of research, partly because it expands the horizons of how I think visually. *The emperor's panda* was particularly pleasurable to research because the beauty and inventiveness of Chinese art and artifacts were so inspiring. The throne at the end of the book, for example, is based on the real Imperial Dragon Throne in Peking, but because of Panda's lesson of balance, I replaced the dragons on Kung's throne with creatures of harmony:

rabbits, monkeys, and pheasants.

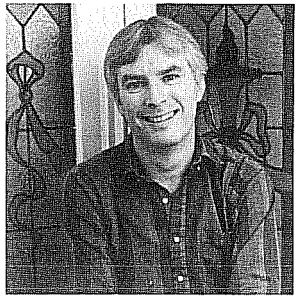
I work in pencil, pencil crayon, and watercolour. The final choice of whether the illustrations should be in colour or black-and-white is the publisher's. The great difference in cost of book production is a big factor in that decision. My fine art work is entirely in colour, and I look forward to working in colour on my next book.



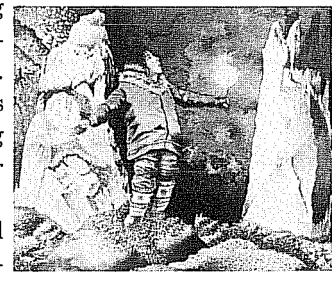
Ken Nutt *of Stratford, has on awards for his illustrations of the* Zoom *series. As Eric Beddows, he also illustrated* The Emperor's Panda.

Ian Wallace:

For the author and illustrator of picture books, the search to discover "the place where the story belongs" is a protracted one along a path littered with half-baked notions and false starts, fraught with exultant highs and dangerous lows. Rarely is a book born out of a single, resonant idea that emerges fully realized from the start. During the crucial period of the search, the author and/or the illustrator must keep a keen eye out for the emotional link to the reader. An elusive thing, this link — it almost never presents itself quickly, but rather appears only after scrupulous delving beneath the story's skin to its heart.



The emotional link is at the core of all book-making. Without it, the reader is left with an accumulation of words and a series of images. In the world of picture books, the fundamental task of the author, and on occasion to a greater degree the illustrator, is to develop an emotional link between the book's characters and the reader, drawing out the reader's response, not in a manipulative way, but through a natural evolution. The author's and the illustrator's touches must be so devilishly light — so sure, working in consort with one another — that the reader hasn't noticed the deliberate development.

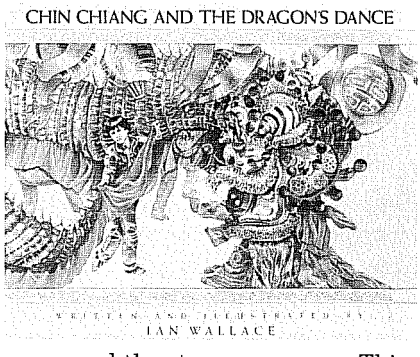


A larger percentage of authors understand the emotional component in text than do il-

lustrators in illustration. Far too often techniques and visual gimmicks take precedence over thought and careful consideration of the appropriate means and media to evoke a story's sensibilities. Thus the reader has been treated to too many books to which he has enormous difficulty relating on any level of understanding. The lack of an emotional link lies at the root of the problem.

Lovers of children's literature are well aware of "the beautiful book" — the book resplendent with illustrations, so overwhelming with its singular beauty that we stand in awe of its technical brilliance. The text quite frequently becomes a minor character in the bid for the limelight. Fortunately, time with its ability to yellow edges, affords the reader the chance to study, reflect, and analyze. This reader will ultimately realize that "the emperor has no clothes". The flash appeal of form over content will vaporize under closer scrutiny. An emotional link had never been established, and the reader had been cheated out of an enriching experience.

To discover the emotional link of a story, the illustrator must understand all the levels on which the story functions: intellectual, physical, psychological, and spiritual. This link is then made by a variety of means: appropriate media, colour, changing perspectives, shape of the illustrations, shape of the book, style of type, white space around the type and the drawings, position of each character in relationship to one another. Nothing must be left to chance.



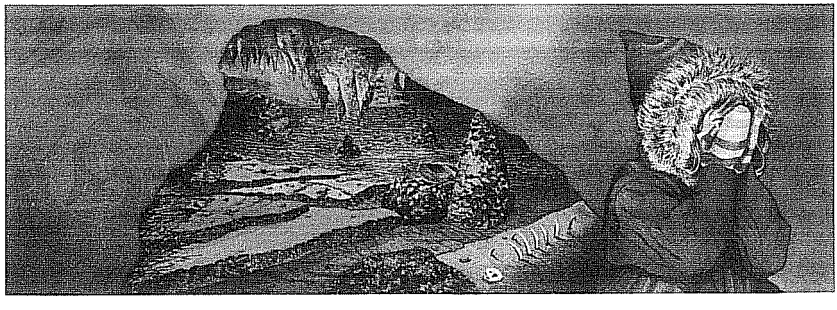
In creating the drawings for *Chin Chiang and the dragon's dance*, I employed colour as the emotional barometer of the text. This colour-barometer conveys to the reader the emotional link of the story — Chin Chiang's vulnerability and his lack of self-confidence. It also lets the reader feel Chin Chiang's conflict change as his confidence grows and the story progresses. This colour device was set within a format whose formal tone was elicited by the text, the design of the book, the dragon motif found in the border of each illustration, and the fine black ink line drawing. The colour unfolds from the opening of the story to its conclusion and evolves over the course of the day, from the soft earth tones during the post-dawn hours, progressing to stronger ones as night falls over the city. As the emotional conflict builds in Chin Chiang, the colour becomes more vivid, reaching its dramatic peak at the climax of the story when Chin Chiang and Pu Yee dance triumphantly through the gates of harmony under a brilliant red sky.

This emotional barometer is supported in its task by the changing perspectives. At two key points, the reader finds himself perched far above the protagonist: this perspective amplifies Chin Chiang's vulnerability and increases the power of the dragon and the reader. In the spiral staircase drawing, even though Chin Chiang is portrayed to be running away from his family and his responsibilities, he is in fact running straight along the back of the dragon, step by step, scale by scale.

Each of my books has demanded a different style of illustration. The intricate detail of *Chin Chiang and the dragon's dance* was inappropriate for *Very last first time*, an Inuit tale. The two cultures were totally different in character, history, and landscape. The style of illustration had to change to capture a different people and their story. I knew that the images had to conjure up distinct images that were truly Canadian — hence, the strong influence of our historical painters Maurice Cullen, J.W.Morrice, Cornelius Krieghoff, and the Group of Seven.

This tale presents a classic structure in children's literature — the use of two worlds. I employed two dominant colours to reflect the distinct, yet inseparable worlds entered by Eva Padlyat. The above-ground world is light, thus yellow (also the light from her candle), and the under-ice world is dark, thus purple. (The Inuit refer to the land in which they live as the Land of Purple Twilight.) These distinct yet inseparable colours are obvious to the reader upon picking up the book. The world of light (yellow) is captured within the squarish shape of the cover and contrasts sharply with the rectangular, claustrophobic world of dark (purple) of the end papers.

For books like *Chin Chiang and the dragon's dance* and *Very last first time*, research is essential during the creative process. Throughout the period of discovery in Eva's story, the significance of the spirit world to everyday life came clearly into focus. I would have been shirking my responsibility as an illustrator, a storyteller in pictures, if I had overlooked this aspect of Inuit life. My decision to incorporate this fundamental aspect into the under-ice world brought out the fact that the spirits contained



there had to be drawn from Eva's perception of what a wolf, bear, and seal sea monster would look like, not from mine. Further, they had to be drawn

as if by an artist of the Eastern Arctic, as Western Arctic artists draw in a distinctively different style.

The discovery of this world's spirits provided me with the emotional link of the story that took the reader far beyond the fear of the dark, the under-ice world, and the ominous, absent sea. The realization and acceptance of this "third world", as integral a part of the Inuit life as the regular landscape, gave Eva's miraculous circular journey a "third story" within the context of the illustrations's language. Readers are haunted and intrigued by the spiritual world as Eva goes about her routine task of shucking up mussels from the ocean floor. Beyond the inherent fear of enclosed spaces and the absent sea that sits just outside the edges of the book for the greater part of the story, the acceptance of the spirit world, found in the ice formations and the shadows, casts a disquieting spell over Eva's adventure, and ultimately over the reader who caught them there.

An author and illustrator's foremost responsibility is to the story, not to themselves or each other, not to their editor or publisher, and not even to the reader, although the latter stands next in line. This responsibility demands and deserves the best work each creator can do, conceived after careful thought, born out of scrupulous research, and realized in words and pictures natural to the story. Finding the emotional link is the key, and its discovery will make the search a journey worth taking for both the creator(s) and the reader.

Ian Wallace, *who illustrated* Very last first time, *is the author/illustrator of* The sparrow-song *and* Chin Chiang and the dragon's dance.