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The most common critical cliché about picture books is that the verbal and pictorial relate interactively; that is, a picture book comprises parallel semiotic systems neither of which comprehends the whole story, and certainly not the whole significance of the book. This is something everybody now knows, and understanding of the often more elusive principles of pictorial semiosis has long been promoted through acute theoretical and practical studies by, for instance, William Moebius (1986), Perry Nodelman (1988) and Jane Doonan (1992). Moebius reminds us that "the plain, the literal sense is the first we connect with in most picturebooks" (1990, p.136), and thence "we usually attribute a plain, literal point of view to the main characters". Nevertheless, he continues, "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 pictures or words" (p. 137). Moebius observes that it is common in picture books for characters to be represented as themselves coming "to recognize or to experience the value of the intangible over the tangible" (p. 137). In other words, story unfolds into theme or significance, and the characters model a pathway for readers. The main focus text of this paper, Allen Say's Emma's Rug, conforms to this pattern.

However, pictures seem surprisingly hard to talk about. When looking at a picture on its own, unrelated either to a verbal narrative or a pictorial sequence, a viewer's impulse is to give it a title and tell its story. That is, we narrativise it. With picture books — pictures in a sequence and linked with, and by, a verbal story — it is then easy to conflate narrative and represented content (what the book is about and what it means), and a consequence is that the pictures are reduced to elements of story and their function as visual semiosis disappears. Any tendency for picture book audiences to narrativise individual

1. This is often evident in reviews, and though enforced brevity no doubt often prompts an emphasis on content it need not be so. Three reviews of Emma's Rug illustrate something of the range. First, a review in Magpies 12.5(1997). p.31 (Annette Dale-Meiklejohn; 280 words) simply summarizes the verbal text, adding that "Say's illustrations are beautifully executed and support the text well". The assumption implied by the use of "support" perhaps explains the effacement of visual semiosis. Second, Janice M. Del Negro in BCCB 50.3(1996), p.114 (225 words) retells the story with quite generous quotation from the verbal text, and then offers a fleeting and unsupported evaluation of the visual — "The quality of the paintings is uneven, with some compositions more effective than others" [which? why?] — but otherwise concentrates on the story/theme content of pictures ("The juxtaposition of the tiny Emma against her adult surroundings ... sets her as one apart with her art"). Finally, a review in The Horn Book
pictures by concentrating attention on their content is bolstered by three other factors: the narrative dominance of temporality over spatiality; the tendency for a unified representational system to become transparent; and the privileging of representation over abstraction, so that the higher modality of verbal elements invests them with a primary focus for interpretation.

A crucial difference between pictorial representation and narrative language is that pictures are grounded in spatial concreteness but indefinite as to temporality, whereas verbal narrative pivots on temporal concreteness and may entirely exclude spatial representation (see, e.g., Uspensky, 1973: 76-77). The very principle of interaction in picture books exaggerates this difference, because representational functions are distributed precisely by allocating temporality to words and spatiality to pictures. *Emma's Rug* is a clear example. This book has fourteen pages of text (the even numbered pages, 4-30) and fifteen pictures. The verbal text is shaped by temporal markers, material processes and sequences. There are thirty temporals such as *when*, *now*, *before long*, *every time*, *the following morning*, *after a while*, and so on, and only page 18 is without one. Temporality is not merely a matter of temporal markers, however, but is embedded at the heart of narrative by the constant presence of material processes such as "she began to walk" (p.6) and by means of elements which bind actions and events into sequences — especially cohesive devices such as repetition, as in "Emma won the top prize. . . . Emma won more prizes. Every time she entered a competition she received an award." (pp.12, 14), and pervasive implicit causality, such as "[Mother] saw the rug . . . she took the rug downstairs and put it in the washing machine" (p.20). Say's pictures in *Emma's Rug* are exciting and subtle in the ways they handle space and light, often accentuating both their painterliness and their thematic implications by expressive dialogue with well-known paintings or stylistic traits of van Gogh, Vermeer, Munch, Bosch and Monet.

Nevertheless, because a story unfolds in time, and its crises and resolutions are

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Sept./Oct. 1996, p. 587 (Maria B. Salvadore: 170 words) attempts to go further in addressing pictoriality: "Each carefully rendered illustration conveys a sense of Emma's introspection and isolation ... Color provides an effective focus in each portrait of Emma". The first of these comments narrativises story in a way that suggests theme; the second, though, gestures towards a greater awareness of visual semiosis. Only the third of these reviews suggests any developed awareness that pictures involve more than their paraphrasable content.

2. The principle has more recently been expounded by Nodelman in various contexts in *Words about Pictures*.

3. Specific paintings alluded to are: van Gogh, *Vincent's Bedroom at Arles* (p.5) and *The Chair and the Pipe* (p.7); Vermeer, *Woman Holding a Balance*, a.k.a. *Woman Weighing Pearls*, (p.21) and *Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window* (p.27); Munch, *The Scream* (p.23). More allusively, the picture on p.19 of Emma overwhelmed by a crowd of adults evokes the upper half of Bosch's *The Crowning with Thorns*. Finally, the technique used on p.31 to depict Emma as a figure dissolved into landscape is distantly reminiscent of one of the *Monet's Garden at Vétheuil* paintings, or of Renoir in his
products of sequence and causality, pictures can become subordinated to narrative as an audience constructs story and meaning from its experiencing of the text. This tendency is further reinforced by a lack of confidence when it comes to talking about visual images: because we all have to learn how pictures work, and how to talk about them, it is [end p.45] often easier to limit interpretative engagement to content-analysis shaped by the verbal narrative, even when we think we are doing something else.

The second reason that pictures become subsumed into narrative is that most picture books employ a unified representational system throughout, and this can have the effect of blunting perception so that the pictures are looked at as if their function is merely referential, transparently conveying content without any further signification. In other words, the processes of inscription cease to signify in themselves. Many contemporary picture book artists, especially amongst those who produce both verbal text and pictorial images, draw attention to the processes of inscription by incorporating more than one representational system within a single book. Notable, familiar examples include the later books of John Burningham (the Shirley books; Granpa; Oi! Get Off Our Train), Anthony Browne's Piggybook and Zoo, David Macaulay's Black and White, and David McKee's I Hate My Teddy Bear. The effect of juxtaposing different systems is to imbue the images with different levels of modality, and hence to draw attention to the processes which inscribe referentiality. The effect can also be achieved within one representational system. One way is to draw attention to modality by extreme changes of palette between one opening and another, as in Chris van Allsburg's Just a Dream. Another is to foreground spatiality by varying the relative detail of background, by shifting between various principles of perspective, by somewhat exaggerated changes in angle of view, or by emphasising the existence of pictorial frames, whether by extending objects beyond the frame4 [or by using the framing edge to cut off figures or objects.5

Third, it is probably normal for the verbal text to be higher in modality than the pictures. Modality, a term from linguistics, refers to the truth value or credibility of

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4 The following section was inadvertently omitted from the printed version, which makes no sense at this point
5. It is easy to forget that within the Western artistic tradition this is a relatively modern tactic, dating from the late nineteenth century: the Impressionists — most notably Degas — learned from Japanese prints to challenge the principles of pictorial framing which were assumed in European painting, and which privileged knowledge over seeing, and hence they took over, amongst other things, the propensity in Japanese art for figures or objects to be cut off by the edge of the composition (see Gombrich, The Story of Art, pp.398-9). Japanese art also positioned spectators in relation to a very high horizon, another strategy experimented with in Impressionist art and frequently used in modern picture books.
statements about, or representations of, the world (see Kress and van Leeuwen, 1996: 160ff.)
Highest modality is expressed by factual expressions of actuality, with lower modalities
expressed by suppositions, hypotheses, future possibilities, and the like. Because the language
of picture books is often pared back grammatically to "factual" utterances about events,
actions, processes or states, verbal texts often seem more matter of fact and informational
than they actually are. The following sequence from Browne's Zoo illustrates this situation:

Then we saw the tigers. One of them was just walking along a wall of the cage, then
turning round and walking all the way back. Then it would start again.
"Poor thing," said Mum.
"You wouldn't say that if it was chasing after you," snorted Dad. "Look at
those nasty teeth!"

Without the gloss, "Poor thing", the utterance might seem primarily factual and attitudinally
bland, though a reader tuned to larger elements of textual cohesion, such as repetition, may
recall an earlier form of such an utterance two text pages earlier: "The elephant just stood in a
corner stuffing its face". Textual cohesion thus encourages a shift in focus from the factual to
the attitudinal. Attitudinal ambiguity in both examples pivots on the ambiguous reference of
"just": for the child telling the story, it points to a disappointment that this is all the animal is
doing; but the book's audience is expected to grasp the other meaning, that this is unnatural
behaviour resulting from the animal's confinement. The function of "Poor thing" is to make
the second meaning more explicit and to point on to a central theme of the book, its criticism
of the anthropocentricism which enables humans to perceive the natural world exclusively in
terms of their own interests.] The text shifts to a lower modality with Dad's rejoinder ("You
wouldn't say . . . if it was"). This crass breach of relation and interpersonal consideration in
sweeping aside Mum's expression of empathy both reasserts the anthropocentricism of the
story's male characters and opens a second theme, the mother's entrapment within an
androcentric "human zoo". This is fine subtle writing, flexible in its handling of modality and
attitude, but nevertheless grounded in the commonsense expression of material processes.

In discussion of visual images, modality refers to how representations relate to reality.
In Changing Images of Pictorial Space (1991: 227), William V. Dunning observes that
throughout the history of Western painting, "we can see that most painters think of
themselves as 'realists', though their images may appear drastically different because they
hold differing opinions about 'what is real,' or which aspects of reality are most important."
Western [end p.46] picture book art produces its realism within narrower parameters than does
painting more generally, particularly in its resistance to non-representational abstraction.
Nevertheless, the normal reference point — that is, the base modality — for picture books is not photorealism, but some degree of abstraction. The spectrum can be thought of as:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>hyperrealism</th>
<th>photographic realism</th>
<th>exaggerated or attenuated representation</th>
<th>abstraction</th>
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<td></td>
<td>&quot;life-likeness&quot;</td>
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Kress and Van Leeuwen argue that, "A certain standard of photographic naturalism . . . has become the yardstick for what is perceived as ‘real’ in images, even when these images are not photographs" (1996: 168). Small children, however, learn that for picture books a degree of abstraction, a modality somewhat lower than photographic naturalism, is the norm — that is, representations which are exaggerated or attenuated. Importantly, this lower modality is produced in a variety of ways: cartoon-type figures; absence of ground; flat colours, restricted palette (occasionally black and white illustration). The range of representational modes draws attention to the constructedness of the illusion. The widespread use of such media as watercolour, crayon or collage serves to reinforce the continuance of low modality as the yardstick. Hence, not only will instances of photorealism appear to be hyperreal, but also pictures will tend to stand at a greater distance from consensus reality than does language. Normal modality (realism) shapes and determines procedures for interpretation, and hence acts of interpretation performed in response to lower modality representation become subordinated to the higher modality. Where there are parallel semiotic systems, the higher in modality will tend to dominate the lower; in picture books, text will tend to dominate pictures.

I commented above that in picture books text and pictures have different functions, and so complement one another. The text is usually a narrative, and so exhibits the kinds of traits characteristic of narrative: it has a narrating voice, which belongs either to one of the characters or to an unidentified narrator; it will be marked by point of view and attitude; it probably belongs to a recognisable genre; it is framed by customary forms of beginning and ending; and it will [end p.47] structure and organise events, time, and space, usually doing this chronologically within the narrative schema of orientation-complication-resolution. What is in fact a highly conventional form is credited as a high modality system for transcribing reality, and the function of accompanying pictures is then to extend particular elements of content, such as specificities of setting in material time and space or physical appearance of the participants. They might also be granted the additional function of conveying mood and atmosphere.

Just as concealing the narrative voice is an important part of the illusion of realist
fiction — the text strives for the impression that the referent is speaking for itself, and hence the absence of a narrating I separate from the main, focalising character — so realist pictures naturalise scene by deploying a version of the classical one-point perspective evolved by the art of the Renaissance, but normalising this so that point of view is constructed as a position immediately in front of the centre of the picture (that is, parallel with the centre on the vertical plane and frontal on the horizontal plane), and on the "distal plane" (that is, the distance of the spectator from the represented figures) situated at what Kress and Van Leeuwen define as middle social distance. This is a general convention for picture books wherever the participants are contextualised against even a minimal background, to the extent that many major contemporary picture book artists — John Burningham or Chris Van Allsburg, are just two of many — can open up a dialogue with this version of reality by maintaining the unified viewpoint but now positioning the spectator more self-evidently: a spectator may now be high or low on the vertical axis, oblique on the horizontal, and far or close-up on the distal.

Plate 1: Emma's Rug, page 5
Shifting of spectator position is not as startling in *Emma's Rug* as in, say, Van Allsburg's *Jumanji*, but it is nevertheless continual. In the first opening (Plate 1), the viewing position is high on the vertical plane and so close to the baby's crib, which takes up most of the picture, that the end of the crib facing out of the picture is beneath the spectator's vantage point. It has been cropped by the bottom and right hand edges of the frame. Two-thirds of the eponymous rug, which the text says was laid "by the crib", has likewise been cropped by the bottom edge of the frame. The junction of floor and wall at the back of the room into which the spectator looks is unusually high, and this is further accentuated by the way the top edge of the frame cuts off just below the shoulder the figure of the mother in the act of closing the door. Yet this is not actually a high-angle close-up, as the baby in the crib is disproportionately small. If the picture is compared with its pre-text, van Gogh's *Vincent's Bedroom at Arles*, the extent of Say's departure from photographic realism becomes clearer. Van Gogh positions the spectator much lower and further away. Floor and wall meet only slightly above the centre of the vertical plane, and the nearer end of the bed is set well within the foreground, pushing the spectator back on the distal plane. As McQuillan says of the painting, it "constructs a domestic ideal, emphasising security without claustrophobia, filling coolness with warmth, and implying companionship in the duplication and interrelation of furniture" (1989: 172). Although Emma's bedroom is isomorphic with Vincent's — the same horizontal orientation, the same angle and massiveness of the beds, and objects placed in most of the same spaces — it lacks a comparable domestic warmth, and the moment depicted emphasises this, as both the primary light source and the mother's red dress are about to be shut out by the closing door. However, Say has rearranged Vincent's bedroom to make it signify differently. The main vector of the picture runs diagonally upward from the bottom right hand corner, taking in the bed, the door, and the mother's dress, and as such reinforces the isomorphism with the pre-text. But the room has been rotated 90 degrees so that Emma's crib occupies the position allocated to the spectator of *Vincent's Bedroom*; Emma's mother exits through the door which makes up the right hand edge of van Gogh's picture; and light falls on the crib through the six wood-framed panes of the now unseen window originally on the back wall of Vincent's room. And, of course, Say has added the rug in the left-hand foreground, at the spectator's feet. The picture's second vector, running diagonally left to right across the lower third of the picture, consists of patches of light made up by the rug, the top edge of the crib, and the outline of the window. On a first viewing, this vector lacks particular significance; what is more, it can only be narrativised in utterly trivial ways. In retrospect it signifies that this too is an artist's bedroom, where two kinds of light intersect: there is

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6 In the published version of this paper, the plates were inserted as mirror images, thus making nonsense of the analysis.
everyday, domestic light, and there is light within the conventional significations of vision, insight, perception, and creativity. To re-view the picture is to grasp [end p.49] figurative meaning expressed by pictorial form and traditional symbolism, that is, to move from a tangible to a conceptual and ideational apprehension.

The second openingforegrounds the crucial motifs of inspiration (light and the rug), while moving the spectator closer to a central and frontal position and middle social distance. The horizontal plane has been slightly rotated clockwise, but only by a few degrees. Floor meets wall angling across the centre of the picture, and the wall is blank, an off-white background for the figure of Emma, kneeling in meditative posture and gazing forward and down at the rug, which occupies the lower quarter of the picture. On the left, a large patch of light falls through the same unseen window on the corners of the rug. The accompanying text tells of Emma’s changing relationship with her rug and offers a cue for interpreting the picture:

Now she only stared at it [her rug], sitting perfectly still, for long periods of time. . . .

"What do you see in that fuzzy thing?" Mother asked.

Emma did not answer.

Again with the advantage of hindsight, we can grasp that Emma is training her inner eye, the power of the creative imagination which is the book’s principal theme, and which the adults around her do not comprehend. To answer Mother’s question would be to narrativise the visual imagination, and this the book refuses to do. As Say unfolds this complex theme, he keeps the spectator position on the move. Opening three maintains central position on the vertical plane, but rotates the scene to 45 degrees to the horizontal plane. By opening three, Emma has begun to draw, and the picture shows her sitting on “Vincent’s chair” to do so (the pre-text is now van Gogh’s *The Chair and the Pipe*). Opening four constructs yet another variant position, and so on throughout the book, as Say uses the available compositional structures to orient the spectator’s relationship to the world depicted.

Manipulation of spectator point of view, variations in the modality of representation, and self-reflective treatment of space and light are the main resources a picture book illustrator can draw on to reassert pictoriality as a signifying system and to subvert an audience’s addiction to realism and hierarchical modalities. I suggested above that the relationship between text and pictures in *Emma’s Rug* exemplifies the temporality-spatiality contrast particularly clearly. Say also explores the effect of different modalities, either through his allusions to other paintings, underlying his own pictures like [end p.50] palimpsests, or by embedding Emma’s childlike pictures within his own more sophisticated
art. The allusions to several well-known paintings throughout *Emma's Rug* confirm that the normal modality for picture books is the attenuated, because pictures which refer to known art works are oriented towards them from that point on the modality spectrum. The result is that allusions to van Gogh, Bosch or the Munch of *The Scream* will be significantly higher in modality than their pre-texts, whereas allusions to Vermeer will be lower. This is immediately evident in a comparison of Emma's and Vincent's bedrooms: Say uses his palette more realistically, and paints more literally and less subjectively than van Gogh. Merely examining how the floor is painted demonstrates the difference: the floorboards in Say's painting are closer to photographic realism than in van Gogh's, where the very material is less identifiable (is the floor made of boards or tiles?) and shape is suggested by an unsystematic use of thick green lines.

Modality was pushed higher still when Anthony Browne repainted *Vincent's Bedroom* as Joseph's bedroom in *Changes*. The spectator position is here lower than in van Gogh's painting, and the spectator is pulled further into the room (though not as far in as in Say's version). The foot of the bed is now seen in close-up — close enough to tell that it is made of radiata pine and to inspect the grain and knots in the wood. The edges of things are sharper than in van Gogh, and are defined by colour contrast and light and shade variations; the lines of the furniture are *not* roughly hand-drawn and edged with prussian blue as in van Gogh. The pictures on the walls of Joseph's bedroom are also precisely drawn, rather than drawn allusively. On the other hand, the bed-spread is a flat, bright red, with negligible colour modulation, and this points to a mixing of different levels of modality within the one scene. Such mixing is in fact not especially unusual, but it does here emphasise that the scene is not photographic realism, but a mingling of hyperrealism and surrealism. Crucially, the picture is more quotation than allusion — it is, of course, much more immediately obviously a version of *Vincent's Bedroom* than Emma's bedroom is. However, it goes further and flaunts its status as quotation by additional embedding, as the unidentifiable painting at the head of Vincent's bed is here replaced by a print of one of van Gogh's best known works, *Starry Night*. The self-conscious quotation and the movements between higher and lower modalities shift the representation into the domain of meta-art. Such quoted images may have a predominantly thematic function (as in Browne's *Piggybook*, for example, when Gainsborough's *Mr and Mrs Andrews* is [end p.51] reconstructed so that Mr Andrews has the head of a pig and Mrs Andrews is neatly excised and replaced by a white silhouette), but a primary function is to foreground the constructedness of the representational illusion, particularly, as in *Changes*, when the pictures constitute a dialogue between harmony and disharmony of a kind evident in postmodern art.

Because *Emma's Rug* explores art and creativity through the experience of a child as
artist, Say is able to introduce modality contrasts by embedding examples of work attributed to "Emma", and can also use this to draw attention to his own handling of space. To illustrate this, I have chosen the opening on pages 12-13. The text (p.12) reads:

In the first grade, Emma won the top prize in the art competition.

"What talent!" exclaimed the teacher.

"How do you know what to draw?" The children asked. "Where do you get your ideas?"

"I just copy," Emma told them.

No one believed her.

This moment relates some everyday responses to creativity — the gushy exuberance, and the naive conception that the mystery of creativity will somehow become explicable if the sources of inspiration are identified. In fact, Say here quotes what is probably the question most frequently put to authors by children, "Where do you get your ideas?", and he gently plays out the misdirection of the question through Emma's response and its reception. There is no answer to the question which can satisfy the interlocutors, because what they want is to be blessed with the same mysterious talent. In terms of the story, the exchange points to the enigma of Emma's rug: she finds her material by contemplating its blank surface; thematically, however, it invokes the large artistic issue of what is meant by the assertion, "I just copy", which problematises the relationship between reality and representation.

Complex, abstract ideas can be rendered narratively and so made available to young minds, but the best way to convey such ideas about art is, obviously enough, to use pictorial images. As I have argued above, Emma's Rug exploits the relationship between some of its pictures and earlier art works with considerable wit and panache, and young readers given an opportunity to follow up the comparison — for example, to compare the functions of image, line, colour and mood in the picture of Emma stuffing her paintings and materials into the rubbish bin with its pre-text, Vermeer's Girl Reading a Letter at an Open Window — will not only enjoy the wit, but will implicitly engage with the processes of pictorial semiosis and with key questions about the nature of representation. Likewise, to puzzle out how Say has rotated Vincent's Bedroom on page 5 involves reader's in thinking through the implications of spectator positioning, sources of light, and the signifying possibilities of vectors. Such "interpictoriality" is also present within a single frame in such pictures as that of page 13 (see Plate 2), which invites comparison between the picture Say has drawn (henceforth referred to as Say's picture) and the embedded child's painting of the cat, house and moon (henceforth the Emma-picture). Both pictures are surrounded by a white border,
but within the respective frames space is used differently. The objects in Emma's pictures are usually entire, centred, and framed (though the tip of the cat's tail here is cropped by the top border); Say's pictures in *Emma's Rug* are not always encompassed within the frame, but

![Plate 2: Emma's Rug, page 13](image)

often include something only partially represented, truncated by the framing edge (here it's a picture by one of the other children, though it is shown in sufficient detail to signal its conventionality in comparison with Emma's work). The position of the spectator is frontal and centred: the precise centre of the picture is in the space between Emma's right elbow and the prize ribbon, while the perspectival vanishing-point indicated by the floor-boards falls just above that spot, where her shoulder almost touches the corner of the Emma-picture. Say's picture is thus very overtly asymmetric, an effect further accentuated by the parallel verticals (ribbon and Emma), suggesting a disequilibrium. The repetition of the blue in the Emma-picture, the prize ribbon, and the jeans makes a strong diagonal vector which further unbalances the scene, especially in counterpoint with the other diagonal (the cut-off sun in the second picture, the yellow jumper, and the blank wall in the bottom left-hand corner. [end p.53]
In the Emma-picture, there is a disregard for volume and scale, which produces the disproportion between the size of the cat and the house, and there is no sense of the landscape convention that the horizon extends to the centre of the picture and gives it depth. Cat and house have been placed on the same plane, and the size difference presumably expresses their relative importance. In contrast, Say's picture explores how depth is conveyed within a shallow space. First, this is done through the conventional interplay of light and shadow in depicting the child (her shadow on the wall and the colour modulation in her clothing and face suggest a light source from behind the spectator's left shoulder). Second, depth is created by the witty play with Emma's positioning in front of the skirting board, on which part of her shadow falls, but which as a white strip exactly parallel with the bottom edge of the picture suggests a frame within the frame, and hence Emma appears to be placed in front of the pictorial space. So while in the other pictures Say uses the framing edge to crop anything which meets it, here he has constructed a visual pun on the idea of breaking the frame.

A second convention of representation engaged with by Say's picture is the relationship constructed between spectator and figures in the picture, the represented participants. This is the first of three occasions in Emma's Rug in which Emma is depicted looking out of the picture and making eye contact with the spectator. The normal orientation of spectator to participant in picture books is observational — that is, in Kress and van Leeuwen's formulation (1996: 126), participants are depicted as objects of contemplation, not subjects for the spectator to enter into an imaginary social relationship with. When a participant seems to enter into a reciprocal gaze with the spectator, the effect can be frame-breaking in a way which disrupts the pictorial and narrative sequence, or it can draw the spectator into a direct, reciprocal emotional involvement. The latter is dramatically exemplified in a sequence of three openings towards the end of Browne's Zoo, in which the mother, placed in a group on the left-hand page and ostensibly looking at the zoo animals depicted within a discrete picture on the right hand page, exchanges gazes with the spectator. With each repetition of this reciprocal gaze, the pain and anguish of her expression increases, so the spectator becomes more and more deeply implicated in the emotion expressed. The effect is an eloquent illustration of visual semiosis at its best, communicating without any need of verbal cues. [end p.54]

Say's depiction of Emma here seems quite the reverse, and viewers must feel teased by her almost impenetrable expression, by a reciprocal gaze which appears to refuse reciprocity. Say has eschewed any verbal cuing (the only part of the verbal text to which the picture directly relates is the informational statement, "In the first grade, Emma won the top prize in the art competition"). The task of interpretation is further complicated by the way Emma has been placed against the wall, beside her painting. The configuration and Emma's
slightly stiff posture suggest, fairly obviously, that she has been posed for a photograph, so that Say's picture is a version of that photograph and the spectator now views the scene from the position of photographer. Emma's face, however, is quite ostentatiously a painting: for example, there is no attempt at colour modulation on her right cheek; her eyebrows are clearly produced by brush strokes; and her hair is painted as solid masses of black, with the brush strokes on the top of her head flowing against the line of the hair and the lighter patches used to suggest shape produced by exposing the paper (the grain of the paper is even visible). The allusion to photography thus becomes another game with modality, as the picture now invokes three modes of representation (naive children's art; picture book modality on the cline from realism to attenuation; and photographic realism).

One way to interpret Emma's expression, then, is as the reluctance of a shy child to occupy the limelight and be photographed, and such a meaning contributes to the book's unfolding significance. A more overt moment of shyness occurs three pictures later, on page 19, where Emma is depicted crowded by overbearing, leering adults. This later picture evokes, through the configuration and specific quotation of shapes and expressions and hints of grotesquerie, the upper half of Bosch's *The Crowning with Thorns*, and makes a sardonic comment not just on adult exploitation of childhood culture, which is hinted at in the picture on page 13, but also on the alienation of the artist in a predatory and parasitic society. When we look at the picture on page 13, the main focus of our gaze shifts between the Emma-picture (and the cat, too, offers reciprocal gaze) and Emma's face, with its marvellous unreadable impassiveness. Perhaps we might recall that versions of this expression have appeared in other paintings, and that Emma's gaze here is virtually a quotation of the expression of the young woman in Vermeer's *Gentleman and Girl with Music*, though we may also like to make a comparison with the sorrowful, alienated barmaid of Manet's *A Bar at the Folies-Bergère*. Snow's comments on the gaze of the Vermeer painting are strikingly apposite to the picture of Emma. He suggests that not only does a viewer feel discomfiture at being looked at in this way by the painted figure, but the neutral quality of the gaze is itself disconcerting: "neither warm nor cold, hostile nor inviting, curious nor disinterested, fixed on an object it seems to find neither familiar nor strange, registering an

7. In an earlier picture book, *Grandfather's Journey* (1993), Say extensively explored the modality contrasts implicit in paintings evoking photographs. There, ten of the illustrations depict figures posed as for a photograph, with the range of photographic genres alluded to including formal portraits, travel photographs, and home snapshots.

8. The thematic connection between Say and Bosch here lies, I think, in the concept of *vicariousness*, rather than in any religious implication. Emma's attraction for adults is that she represents something they persuade themselves they once had but have lost.
intrusion it neither welcomes nor resents” (pp.45-46). Our discomfiture under Emma's gaze is also affected by Emma's painting, in which the arched back and alert posture of a creature of the night which dwarfs human habitation implies an inwardness and independence of mind which is the substance of Emma's being and imagination. Emma may be a small child who can be put against a wall and photographed, but she remains beyond the spectator's reach and control. The feeling evoked is akin to the discomfiture underlying the dialogue about the origin of Emma's ideas.

The crisis of *Emma's Rug* pivots on the processes whereby adult society seeks to own, contain and domesticate Emma's talent. A paradox of art is that it is a form of self-expression but is nevertheless subject to public attention and apt to be poorly understood. This paradox has an impact on Emma in two different ways: first, through the phenomenon of public adulation, as depicted in the two pictures dealing with Emma's visit to the Museum of Art (pages 17 and 19). When she is being carried off to the Museum (page 19), she exchanges a glance with the spectator for the second time. In a full-page close-up of part of a huge, black limousine, she gazes out of a rear side window, evidently excited, but almost effaced by light reflecting on the glass. The following, Bosch-influenced picture gives definition to this process of diminution by misguided aggrandisement. The second threat against her talent, unwitting but more devastating, follows immediately, when her mother finds and washes the rug (page 21), thus subjecting Emma to everydayness and domesticity. This picture of a woman standing at a washing machine is suffused with a delicious irony because it is closely patterned on Vermeer's *Woman Holding a Balance* (inverted and rotated by 45 degrees), and the connection enables a witty interrogation of how pictures signify (for example, viewers must ponder the effect of replacing an embedded painting of the Last Judgment with a hot water system!). There is some debate about the meaning of *Woman Holding a Balance*, and Snow, for example, rejects interpretations determined by reference to the Last Judgment, arguing instead that it is about the preciousness of life (1994: 158). This reading offers a more appropriate connection and contrast with *Emma's Rug*: the women in both paintings are handling forms of treasure, but that of the Vermeer is not putting her pearls into a washing machine. [end p.56]

9. A tantalising interpictorial relationship — perhaps serendipitous, perhaps aleatory — can be adduced here with van Gogh's *Daubigny's garden* (1890, Collection Rudolf Staechelin, Bâle). Here a cat, painted in blue and blue-black stripes, stalks across the foreground, and in appearance seems an imaginative precursor of Emma's black-striped cat suffused by its blue ground. The similarity may remind spectators that, like van Gogh's, Emma's painting projects emotion through represented external phenomena.

10. It may be only coincidental, but the painters most heavily quoted in *Emma's Rug* are van Gogh, notorious for never selling a painting during his life-time, and Vermeer, deeply revered for a mere 36 exquisitely wrought paintings.
After Emma’s mother has washed her rug, Emma must make the conceptual leap from assuming that the objects of the world are materially there to be copied to understanding that represented reality is mediated by intellect and emotion. Significantly, Say renders the fullness of this illumination through strong allusions to impressionism (p.31) and its capacity, as Dunning puts it, "to ‘see' the world . . . as flickering lights ricocheting off the surface of a variety of objects" (1991: 130). This painting, of Emma dappled with light and merging with the shrubs of the garden, constitutes the greatest modality contrast in the book. In the background, the white picket fence and windows of the house are quite high in modality; in the foreground, the boundary between Emma’s body and the surrounding leaves dissolves, and her face, hair and clothing are blotched with the green of the leaves. This lowered modality is further developed in a very un-impressionist move when the green, white and black of the shrubs is organised to represent images of living creatures, projected from Emma’s imagination. For the third time, too, Emma’s eyes lock with the spectator’s, now sharing a sense of awe and revelation conveyed by her intense glance and parted lips. To drive home the point, in a final, eloquent contrast of modalities, the book’s closing picture — now without text and "shifted" to the left-hand, text page — depicts Emma producing a childlike, black-and-white drawing of key elements of page 31. There is a strong narrative effect here, because the picture narrates the final happy ending for the story, Emma’s return to drawing. At the same time, pictorial image has superseded verbal text and expresses the more subtle thematic significance that a creative mind engages with its world not by merely replicating it, but by transforming it through the operation of imagination.

A measure of Say’s achievement in Emma’s Rug is that we can keep returning to the book and keep teasing out the multiple facets of creativity it discloses and illustrates. To a great extent this is so because a rather simple story about "the journey of a child who discovers that creativity ultimately comes from within", as the dust jacket paraphrases it, is matched with pictures that demonstrate creativity at work and explore the artistic process as it draws both on imagination and on tradition. By foregrounding aspects of modality and space, and through his dialogues with great works of the past, Say has shown a capacity in such strategies to transmit insights into human attitudes, feelings and values which would not only be extremely difficult for a child to grasp linguistically but may also lie beyond the reach of verbal narrative at this reading level. [end p.57]
References

McQuillan, Melissa, Van Gogh (London: Thames and Hudson, 1989).