

SHOULD A BE FOR APPLE  
OR ABRACADBRA?



An examination of the element of  
fantasy in late twentieth century  
alphabet books

Jenny Dempsey  
VC



THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART AND DESIGN

SHOULD A BE FOR APPLE OR ABRACADABRA?

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JENNY DEMPSEY

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# CHAPTER



Introduction



If we define reality as normal day to day living, and define pictures of reality as realistic representations of this living, then it becomes apparant that in the world of children's books this reality hardly exists.

Most children's books illustrate a fantasy world - a world that has taken things from the past, present and future to create its own quirky imaginative existence. Aproned ducks do the shopping while pixies learn the latest steps in aerobics. Magic is common place and illogicality the order of the day.

This fantasy world is illustrated in alphabet books also.

Alphabet books teach the ABC by drawing the child's attention to the words and pictures that illustrate each of the twenty-six letters. Most of these books are filled with strange people and places, and one wonders why the unfamiliar alphabet is taught through association with equally unfamiliar pictures.

The main question posed in this thesis is, should this lack of reality exist? It intends to trace the development of alphabet books and examine the approaches taken in the past. The main discussion, however, will centre around a collection of late twentieth century ABCs. These books represent the sum total of that which was available from the major Dublin bookshops between the months of October to December 1988. They are varied in their approach and the age group to which they are suited, but they all purport to be children's alphabet books. A list of the illustrators, book titles, and details of publishing are included below.

- (1) Angel, Marie Angel's Alphabet Pelham books ltd. 1986
- (2) Bishop, Gavin A Apple Pie Oxford University Press 1987
- (3) Broomfield, Robert The Baby Animal ABC Puffin Books 1964
- (4) Bruna, Dick b is for bear Methuen Children's Books Ltd 1967
- (5) Chamberlain, Margaret Ladybird Rhyme book Ladybird Books Ltd undated
- (6) Craig, Helen An Alphabet Aurum Press 1978
- (7) Dreamer, Sue Circus ABC Little, Brown and Company 1985
- (8) Gretz, Susannah Teddybears ABC Picture Lions 1980
- (9) Murphey, Mary A Dollop of Dublin Spellbound Books 1988
- (10) Oxenbury, Helen ABC of Things Picture Lions 1987
- (11) Paré, Roger The Annick ABC Annick Press 1985
- (12) Seuss, Dr. Dr. Seuss's ABC Beginner Books Series 1963

- (13) Scarry, Richard Teeny Tiny ABC Hamlyn Publishing Group  
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- (14) Ward, Bryan Ant and Bee Edmund Ward (Publishers) Ltd 1950
- (15) Ward, Bryan More and More Ant and Bee Edmund Ward  
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- (16) Ward, Bryan Ant and Bee and the ABC Edmund Ward (Publishers)  
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- (17) Witcomb, Gerald Ladybird ABC Ladybird Books Ltd. undated



## CHAPTER



The history of alphabet books

The history of alphabet books has a lot in common with the history of children's books in general. Both are closely related to the changing attitudes to children.

#### ALPHABET BOOKS CIRCA 14TH CENTURY

The early alphabet books contained no pictures. The alphabet was simply printed on a sheet of paper and placed beside a prayer. (see figure 1) These books appear far too sophisticated and dull to interest a young child and are indicative of the prevailing attitude towards children in the early centuries.





The child was regarded as a small adult and failure to behave like an adult was considered a fault. Reading was not a form of entertainment, as it is today; it was more a vehicle for instruction. Learning to read was looked upon as a task to be mastered as soon as possible, and so time was not wasted in making this 'task' appear attractive.

These alphabet books were called horn books, and may have been used as early as the fourteenth century. They were a single sheet of paper on which the alphabet was printed, and then covered with transparent horn for protection. The sheet was then mounted or encased in leather or wood. The alphabet was learned by tracing the shapes of letters, and saying each name until it was memorised. (see figure 2). (Interestingly, the shape of horn books gave rise to many bat and ball games - games which eventually became known as cricket).

#### NEW DEVELOPMENTS, 17th and 18th CENTURIES.

In 1657 Orbis Sensualium Pictus was published in Nuremberg by Johannes Amos Comenius. This was an important book, because it was the first to attempt to teach children by means of pictures.

In England John Locke had also discovered the appeal of pictures, realizing how important they could be in alphabet books. He wrote in Some Thoughts Concerning Education:

As soon as he begins to spell, as many pictures of animals should be got him as can be found with the printed names to them, which at the same time, will invite him to read and afford him matter of enquiry and knowledge.<sup>(1)</sup>

Despite these developments, however, alphabet books were still



Figure 2. by Jost Amman from Kunst und  
Lehrbüchlein

dull and often far too difficult for young children to enjoy. But in 1715 Isaac Watts published a book of songs for children. These songs were written with simple words and verse forms, and he discovered that children enjoyed rhyme and rhythm. Furthermore, Watts wrote about a child's familiar world. He was the first to appreciate that children are not the same as adults, and that the reading matter intended for them should be adapted to their capacities.

Watt's idea of using rhyming verses about daily life began to appear in alphabet books. This started to change the task of learning the alphabet into an enjoyable activity.

Alphabet jingles, like 'A was an archer' or 'A apple pie' were rhymes already in existence which had previously been recited to children as part of an oral tradition. The first printed version of 'A was an Archer' is found in A Little Book for Children by TW. The book is undated but is probably about 1712 (see figure 3). The book contains a number of alphabets and is educational rather than entertaining. But the author is the earliest on record to approach the task of learning from the point of view of the child.

Figure 3 also shows an example of an illustrated alphabet from A Little Book by TW. These woodcuts neither teach nor amuse. They are crude and poor. This type of illustration was common in children's books at the time, and it wasn't until wood engraving developed that the quality of image improved.

Thomas Bewick (1752-1828) became one of the finest craftsmen in wood engraving. The example shown (figure 4) is a horn book









	<b>C</b> ornups are good to eat, with store of Bread :	<h3>The Alphabet.</h3> <p> <i>A</i> was an Archer, and shot at a Frog ;  <i>B</i> was a Blind-man, and led by a Dog ;  <i>C</i> was a Curpurse, and liv'd in disgrace ;  <i>D</i> was a Drunkard, and had a red Face ;  <i>E</i> was an Eater, a Glutton was he ;  <i>F</i> was a fighter, and fought with a Flea ;  <i>G</i> was a Gyant, and pul'd down a House ;  <i>H</i> was a Hunter, and hunted a Mouse.  <i>I</i> was an ill Man, and hated by all ;  <i>K</i> was a Knave, and he rob'd great and small.  <i>L</i> was a Liar, and told many Lies ;  <i>M</i> was a Madman, and beat out his Eyes.  <i>N</i> was a Nobleman, -nobly born ;  <i>O</i> was an Otter, and stole Horses Corn.  <i>P</i> was a Pedlar, and sold many Pins ;  <i>Q</i> was a Quarreller, and broke both his Shins.  <i>R</i> was a Rogue, and run about Town ;  <i>S</i> was a Sailor, a Man of Renown.  <i>T</i> was a Taylor, and Knavishly bent ;  <i>U</i> was a Usurer took Ten per Cent.  <i>W</i> was a Writer, and Money he earn'd ;  <i>X</i> was one <i>Xenophon</i>, prudent and learn'd.  <i>Y</i> was a Yeoman, and work'd for his Bread ;  <i>Z</i> was one <i>Zeno</i> the Great, but he's dead.  <div style="text-align: right;">I save</div> </p>
	<b>V</b> ines yield good Wine, & Honey makes good Mead.	
	<b>W</b> indmills are used for to grind our Corn :	
	<b>V</b> ictres the Prince was great, and nobly born.	
	<b>T</b> he Youth is subject with a Gigg to play :	
	<b>Z</b> eno was learn'd and wise, as People say.	

figure 3

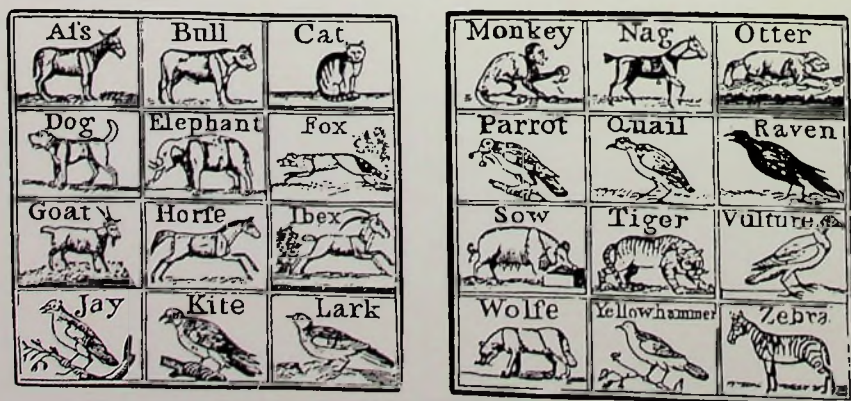


figure 4

a b c d e f g h i j k l m  
 n o p q r s t u v w x y z  
 w v x u y t z q n r p s o  
 j g k i l h m d a c e f b  
 b d f s p q r t f r f b n  
 A B C D E F G H I J K L M  
 N O P Q R S T U V W X Y Z  
 W V X U Y T Z Q N R P S O  
 J G K I L H M D A E C F B  
 æ ð ſ h ſ k ſ ſ ſ ſ ſ ſ ſ ſ æ œ &  
 a e i o u  
 ba be bi bo bu | ab eb ib ob ub  
 da de di do du | ac ec ic oc uc  
 la le li lo lu | ad ed id od ud  
 ta te ti to tu | af ef if of uf  
**J**E-SUS ſaid un-to his Diſ-ci-ples,  
 Suf-fer the lit-tle Chil-dren to  
 come un-to me, and for-bid them  
 not; for of ſuch is the King-dom of  
 God.—And he took them in his  
 arms, and bleſ-fed them.



Figure 5.

alphabet by him. It is undated, but would be late eighteenth century. It is interesting to note how his drawings for children differ from his highly finished engravings for adults. The illustrations are bold and lively and rely on suppleness of line rather than meticulous shading.

This horn book is quite a development from the first shown in figure I. A further development came with the battledore at the end of the eighteenth century. The battledore was made of cardboard and usually had the same components as the hornbooks (see figure 5). The text was pasted onto one side of the cardboard, while the other side was covered with woodcuts. The cardboard was then folded in two, or in some cases three. It was the fact that the battledore offered twice as much space as the hornbook that encouraged publishers to add illustrations. In the example shown, however, the illustrations are mainly decorative. They don't show all the letters of the alphabet, and they are not in the correct order.

#### SOCIAL CHANGE

The end of the eighteenth century and the early part of the nineteenth was a period of transition for many European countries. Events such as the French Revolution, the European Wars and the effects of the first stages of the Industrial Revolution all led to a dramatic change in social attitudes. Jean Jacques Rousseau, the philosopher, was important in bringing about the concept of a 'naturally' good child who is later corrupted by society. This type of thinking became the underlying attitude in many books of the time. Publishers began to pay attention to the fact that children were not regularly catered for.



Gradually all books, even those geared towards instruction, took on a sophistication in style and content.

#### EARLY 19th CENTURY ALPHABETS.

From 1800 onwards there was a stream of ABC's in various attractive forms. They were nearly always pictorial, and these pictures were usually clever and imaginative.

An example of this new type of alphabet book is shown in figure 6. It is called The Invited Alphabet, by RR, and published by Darton in 1808. It is a simple story in verse, which invites all the letters to assemble so that 'good' children may learn to spell and read. The illustrations are well executed, though bland. What is interesting about this alphabet is the thought behind it. The letters are treated as people. They call on each other, as people in the nineteenth century society did.

Another way that printers and booksellers enticed the child to learn the alphabet was through making a game of the task. Figure 7 shows an ABC from a collection of books published under the title Infants Library. It dates from 1810. The game element lies in the way that the picture referring to the letter is found on the following page. I personally find this confusing and unsuited to the learning nature of the book, but the fact that an attempt was made to enliven the alphabet must be considered as progress.

J. Harris & Son were a successful publishing company at this time. They succeeded because their books amused rather than instructed. Figure 8 shows an example of 'D danced for it' from A Apple Pie,

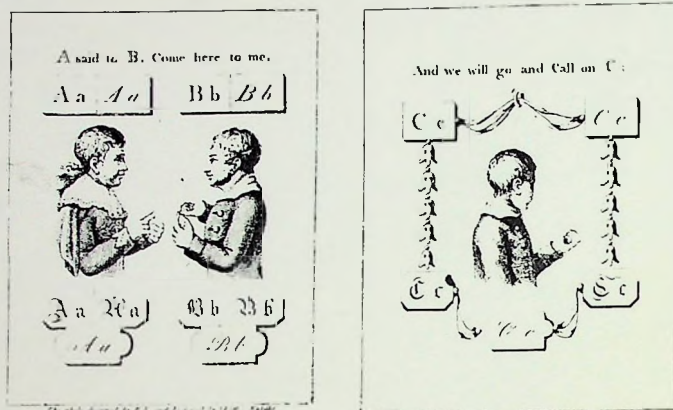


Figure 6.



Figure 7.

which Harris published in 1808. It is an appealing illustration, but it appears lifeless and static when we compare it to the 1820 version of the same alphabet (figure 9), also by Harris. Illustrators were trying to make their drawings more pleasing to children. Their line became bolder and colour began to appear. Colour printing was still being perfected, so most of the woodcuts or engravings would have been hand coloured. Harris also produced a version of A was an Archer in 1820, (see figure 10). This had a bold handcoloured illustration for each line of verse, and the letters were picked out in thick black type. If we compare this version with the earlier one from A Little Book by TW (figure 3), we notice just how much the attitudes to children had changed. No longer were they disobedient creates who had to be fed moral stricutres hourly, they were now being seen as merely younger people, who needed to be amused as well as instructed. .

#### SOCIAL DEVELOPMENTS MID-19th CENTURY.

This change in attitudes was further increased by various Acts passed in the early nineteenth century which improved the standard of education. This permitted learning to filter down the social scale and eventually resulted in less rigid class divisions. The development of the railway which brought a new mobility also led to a change in society's traditional values. The centre of gravity shifted from the upper classes to the respectable middle class family. The prosperity of the Victorian middle class in Britain was also accompanied by the idea of 'self help', a concept which encouraged and expected the intelligent worker to rise to a higher station in life.

These changes affected every facet of life including publishing,



**D** *danc'd for it.* **d**



figure 8

THE APPLE PIE.



**C**

**D**

**c** Cried for it.

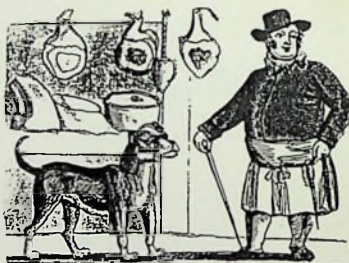
**d** Danced for it.

figure 9



**A a**

**A**—was an Archer,  
And shot at a frog.



**B b**

**B**—was a Butcher,  
And kept a great dog.



**E e**

**E**—was an Esquire,  
With pride on his brow.



**F f**

**F**—was a Farmer,  
And followed the plough.

figure 10.

K



K stands for *Kindness*,—our Saviour was kind.  
And to imitate him should our hearts be inclined;  
What a world this would be, if each one did his best  
To relieve the afflicted and cheer the distressed!

L



L is for *Lore*; in the Bible we learn  
That Jesus will never the little ones spurn,  
His arms to receive them are always unclosed,  
For of such is the kingdom of heaven composed!

Figure II.



and led to the development of entertaining children's books. These 'toy-books', as they came to be called, made some attempt to include didactic material but it was rarely done with serious intent. Five typical pictorial alphabets from 1850 -1870 shall be discussed in the following pages. These books are:

- (1) The Alphabet of Virtues - 1856
- (2) Picture Alphabet of Nations of the World - 1874
- (3) The Railway Alphabet - 1852
- (4) Little Harry's ABC - exact date unknown
- (5) An Alphabet of animals - exact date unknown.

#### THE ALPHABET OF VIRTUES

While it would be untrue to say that moral improvement was no longer an issue in Victorian literature, the books that were published dealt with the subject in a more gentle and matter-of-fact manner. The Alphabet of Virtues is a typical example and is shown in figure 11. It was published in London by Darton & Co. in 1856. The title itself is evidence of the change in attitude towards children - the word virtue seems to imply a standard of behaviour desired, but not expected. The virtues themselves are pleasant and not impossible to strive for. Compared to the hell-fire and brimstone sermons of the previous century, it might have been quite a relief for a child to be merely asked to behave in a kind and loving and fashion.

#### TRAVEL ALPHABETS - PICTURE ALPHABETS OF NATIONS OF THE WORLD AND THE RAILWAY ALPHABET

As the century progressed moral improvement became only one of a wide range of subjects that children were expected to know. Geography and travel became an equally important topic for the nursery. Joyce Whalley, author of Cobwebs to catch flies (1974)



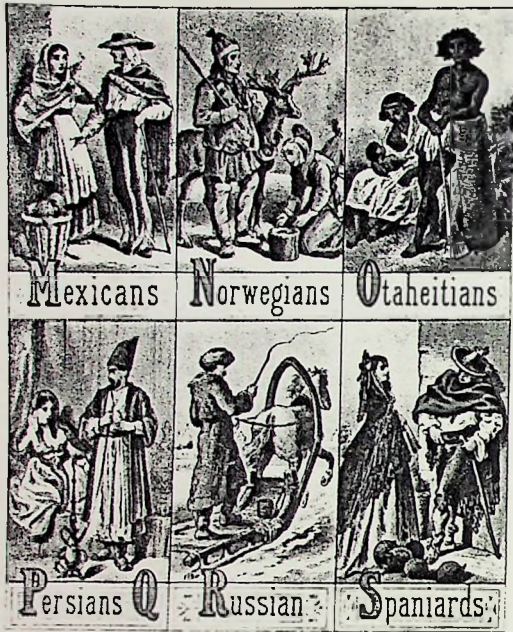
that, "World travel was becoming more accessible to everybody and all this knowledge and excitement about foreign places had to be passed on to the young." (2)

Some of the early travel alphabets were not realistic representations of other countries. They contained caricatured local figures in national costume, or vague representations of foreign towns. The lines of the verses were frequently uncomplimentary, as this example from The Overland Alphabet shows:

Q stands for Queer an epithet true  
Applied to the natives, brought here to your view. (3)

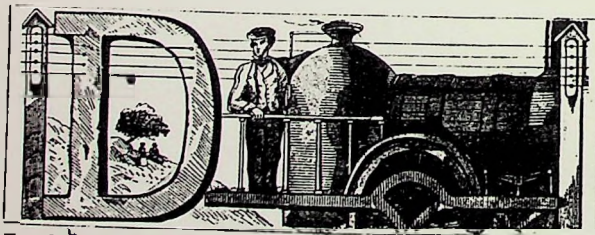
An alphabet entitled Picture Alphabet of Nations of the World, published in London and Edinburgh by T. Nelson & sons in 1874 (see figure 12) contains a more flattering approach to other countries. But even in this publication it is evident that foreigners are 'not British'. This attitude comes over through the illustrations where each figure has the same face and expression, and no-one is doing anything 'respectable' or familiar.

A type of travel alphabet that developed during the nineteenth century was the railway alphabet. Steam trains were new and exciting, and any publication that contained a railway engine was sure of popularity. Figure 13 shows an example from The Pailway Alphabet BY T. Dean & son from 1852. This book has a hand coloured woodcut for each letter with two lines of verse underneath. The pictures tell of a typical train journey and use each letter to make a particular point. Most railway alphabets followed this approach, but this book stands out for its design and layout. Each picture is framed by two signal posts with the wires above, and the capital letter stands on the left hand side. The illustration sits in the remaining space.

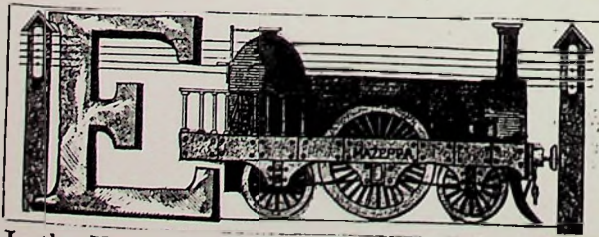


<p><b>THE MEXICANS'</b></p> <p>A golden land is theirs, a land Where Nature's gifts abound; But idle, ignorant, and proud The Mexicans are found</p>	<p><b>THE PERSIANS'</b></p> <p>A powerful race were they of yore, Now fallen to decay; Yet flowery Persia still can show A people free and gay.</p>
<p><b>THE NORWEGIANS'</b></p> <p>Among old Norway's piney woods They dwell, a people brave; The reindeer is their wealth, their friend, Their playmate and their slave.</p>	<p><b>THE RUSSIAN'</b></p> <p>Russia to one of England's sons Has given a charming bride; Her people in their country feel A just and noble pride.</p>
<p><b>THE OTAHEITIANS'</b></p> <p>Where waves the palm-tree's leafy crest, Where Southern waters smile, The graceful Otaheitiens till Their Heaven-favoured isle.</p>	<p><b>THE SPANIARDS'</b></p> <p>The Spanish dance around her form The rich mantilla draws; The Spanish cavalier his sword Wields in his country's cause.</p>

Figure 12.



Is the DRIVER, who drives without whip,  
And keeps up the steam as he takes you a trip.



Is the ENGINE, all puff, fire, and smoke,  
That is fed in a day with some bushels of coke.

Figure 13





I was an Idler  
and wasted his  
Time.



J was a Justice  
who punished  
all Crime.



M was a Milkmaid  
who carried a  
Pail.



N was a Navy  
and worked on  
the Rail.



K was a Knight  
fully armed  
cap-a-pie.



L was a Lawyer  
and fond of his  
Fee.



O was an Ostler  
who cleaned a  
fine Hack.



P was a Pedlar and  
called with his  
Pack.

Figure 14



The continual line of the wires and the long rectangular shape of the pictures lead our eye from left to right as we do when looking out the window on a train journey. While at the same time the frame created by the signal posts seem to stop each illustration for consideration rather like a train stopping at many stations. The woodcuts are simple and bold, and the lack of perspective suggests a Japanese influence. The verse is simple and lacks pretension, and even has the 'chickety-boom' metre of engine wheels turning.

#### OCCUPATIONAL ALPHABETS - LITTLE HARRY'S ABC

The railway alphabets showed people at work and gave glimpses of the jobs they did. This idea became popular in its own right and led to the development of street cries or occupational books. This type of alphabet is still found today and is ideally suited to young children who go out with their parents and later recall and name what they have seen. Nicholas Tucker, author of The Child and the Book (1981) suggests another lesson learned from this type of book:

By looking at illustrations that symbolise objects and events in the outside world, children will start developing their own reactions, and also share those of their parents, towards experiences already familiar with them, and other experiences to come. The scenes and figures of any picture book can always have a double significance, therefore, both for what such things mean objectively, and also for what they come to signify to the child in terms - for example - of safe or dangerous, nice or nasty, silly or sensible, funny or serious, or any other of the host of value judgements with which we monitor the world but which children have to learn from afresh. (4)

A was an Archer is probably the oldest of the street cry alphabets and many new nineteenth century versions appeared.

Little Harry's ABC (see figure 14) would be a typical example.

This alphabet contains a strange mixture of workers from different social classes and even different periods in time. All are cheer-

ful and healthy, even those doing unpleasant jobs. There even seems to be a subtle suggestion that is fortunate to be poor and have to work, for as the proverb says, 'the Devil causes work for idle hands'.

#### NATURE ALPHABETS - AN ALPHABET OF ANIMALS

The trend in alphabet books of illustrating scenes from daily life was popular, but daily life was not totally captured by city or street cry scenes. The majority of people in the nineteenth century lived in rural areas: Most of the gentry or the 'nouveau riche' would have had country estates, and the cities themselves were smaller then, and so nearer to the country. So most children would have spent much time in rural surroundings, and natural objects would have been just as familiar as the man-made or city ones. Many country-side or nature alphabets were produced that proved just as popular and educational as the street cries ABCs.

Another reason for the prevalence of nature books was the link they held with God and creation. Mrs. Loudon, a Victorian woman, wrote in The Young Naturalist's Journey in 1840:

Natural History has always appeared to me a particularly suitable study for young people as it excites the youthful mind to the contemplation of the infinite wisdom which has been shown in making creatures from one vast whole. (5)

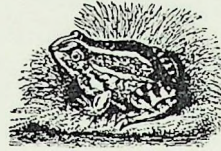
Figure 15 shows an example from An Alphabet of Animals. The author is unknown and it was produced in London by Simkin Marshall & Co.. The illustrations are wood engraved and show well known animals engaged in familiar activities. The verse draws attention to the creatures, then presses home a moral message.



**D**—is the Dog ;  
 He is faithful and bold  
 In watching the house  
 And guarding the fold.  
 Then come, faithful Keeper,  
 You're honest and true,  
 And we'll try to be faithful  
 And trusty like you.



**E**—is for Eagle,  
 Of birds he's the king ;  
 With a very sharp eye,  
 And a very strong wing,  
 He builds his rough nest  
 On the rocks high away ;  
 And there he is feeding  
 His young ones with prey.



**F**—is the Frog ;  
 He will soon leap away ;  
 How cruel to hurt him  
 In sport or in play.  
 On ground and in ponds  
 He can hop and can swim ;  
 He is frighten'd at us ;  
 We'll be gentle to him.

Figure 15



The above five alphabets are all interesting and attractive but they rely heavily on the real world and some are still concerned with moral improvement. The latter half of the nineteenth century saw a swing towards fantasy and nonsense. This coincided with the development of colour lithography and a new type of children's book was born.

#### DEVELOPMENTS LATE NINETEENTH CENTURY

The reasons for these new developments are many. Adults were beginning to think differently about the way children should be raised. The Industrial Revolution had created many labour saving devices, and this new leisure time could be spent with children. Parents began to get to know their offspring and people started to take the task of amusing children seriously. Lewis Carroll wrote Alice in Wonderland specially to entertain a young girl, Alice Lidell. Perhaps the fact that it was written for a real girl rather than children in general, accounts for its success. Alice in Wonderland published in 1865, is often taken as the beginning of the rise of fantasy and nonsense, and artists and writers were not slow to follow in this trend. Two artists in particular became famous for their work in this area - Walter Crane, and Edward Lear.

#### WALTER CRANE (1845 - 1915)

Walter Crane viewed the job of an illustrator as a responsibility not to be taken lightly. He raised the design of alphabet books to a high artistic level. He thought very seriously about what children liked and the way they saw things. "The best designing for children," he asserted, "is that the imagination and fancy may be let loose to roam freely." (6)

He devised a means of creating an eight page book designed from cover to cover, and was greatly helped by the printer, Edmund Evans, who perfected the process of colour lithography and had ideas on book design. Evans realised that it was not enough to combine illustrations and the printed word between a pair of covers - the two should be compatible and designed together. The Railway Road Alphabet (1865), was probably the first toy book produced by Evans and Crane. This was followed by the Farmyard Alphabet (1865 also). In 1874 Walter Crane illustrated two more alphabets, Baby's Own Alphabet and The Absurd Alphabet

Baby's Own Alphabet (see figure 16) is a very different type of book from the alphabets previously discussed. As well as possessing a high standard of design, it shows evidence of much thought about the way children see things. Crane wrote:

Children, like the ancient Egyptians, appear to see most things in profile, and like definite statements in design. They prefer well defined forms and bright frank colour. They don't want to bother about three dimensions. They can accept symbolic representations (7)

Figure 16 also shows Crane's approach to layout design.

Earlier alphabets had letter and picture side by side, and the pages laid out to be read from left to right. Baby's Own Alphabet has the letters placed down the page and the pictures placed across. The page is divided into four rectangles, with the illustrations designed within the borders. This itself is another new development: early illustrations tended to be blurred around the edges, creating a vague oval shape. Crane's work was influenced by Japanese wood block prints, and this is evident through his lack of perspective and use of surface pattern.



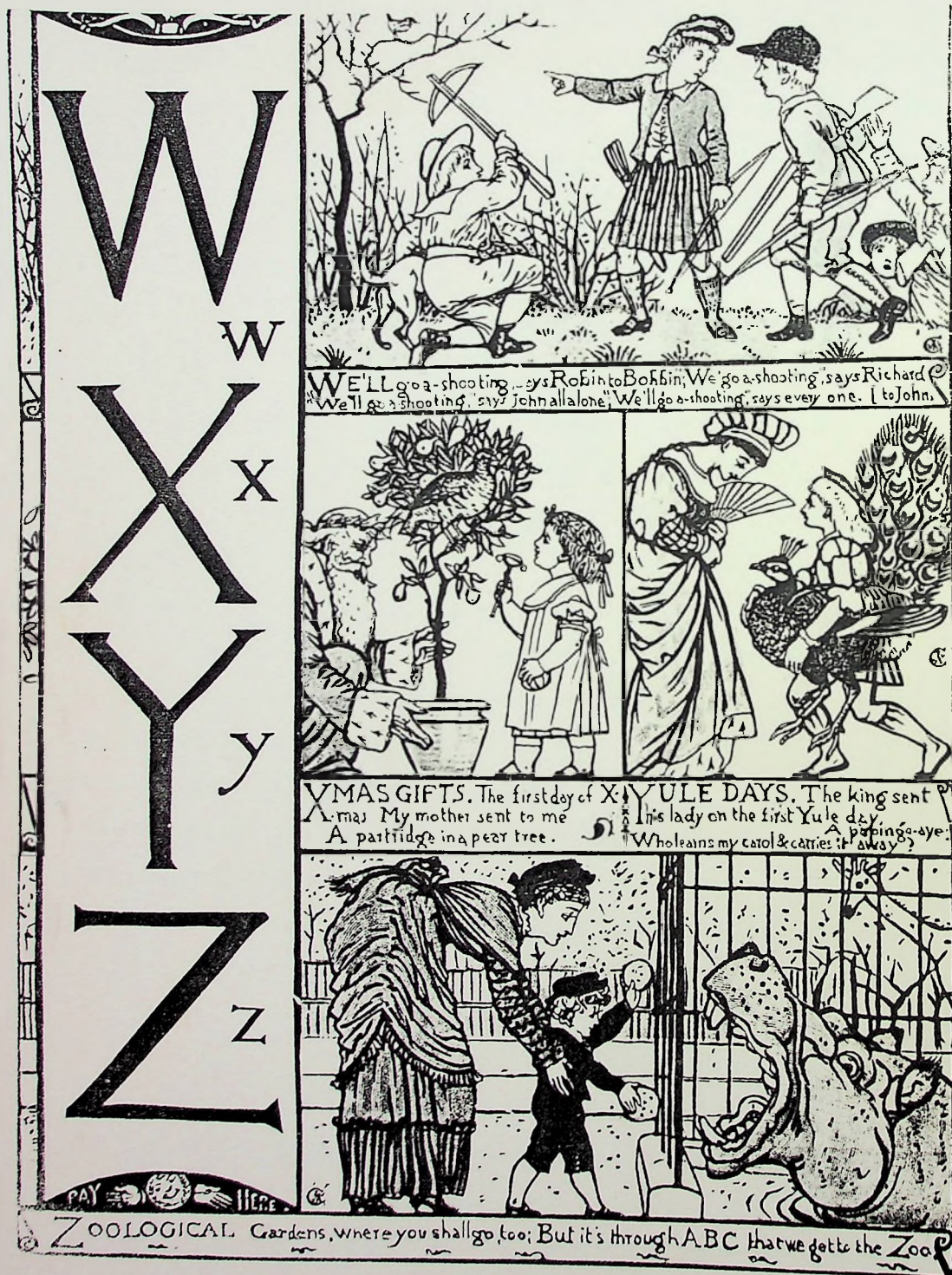


Figure 16.



Figure 17.



D a D d



D was a beautiful Duck  
With spots all over his back.  
He swam in a beautiful pond,  
And when he came out, said, Quack.

C. c Cc



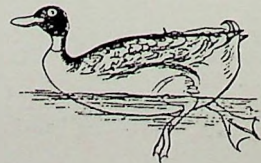
C was a lovely Pussy Cat; its eyes were large  
And on its back it had some stripes,  
and several on his tail.



C was a Cat  
Who ran after a Rat,  
But his courage did fail  
When she seized on his tail.

c!  
Crafty old Cat!

D



D was a Duck  
With spots on his back,  
Who lived in the Water,  
And always said, Quack!

d!  
Dear little Duck!

Another point of interest is the subject matter of the lines of verse. (see figure 16) Apart from being purely entertaining, they refer to other well known sayings and rhymes and are about imaginary and fairytale characters. Crane used this idea again in The Absurd Alphabet (figure 17). The layout of this alphabet is even more dramatic. Large figures coloured in red, yellow and white stand out from a flat black background, and elegant roman letters picked out in gold are placed within the illustrations. Infact each page is one large illustration with all the elements - text, letters and drawings - creating a unified whole.

#### EDWARD LEAR (1812 - 1888)

While Crane illustrated a world filled with nursery rhyme people, obviously set in the imagination, Lear took reality and broke the rules, and so through his nonsense rhymes created fantasy.

Figure 18 shows an example of a page from one of his alphabets. It was drawn about 1880 for a small boy who was staying at the same hotel as Lear. The illustrations were obviously drawn quickly but have a fresh lively appearance. Lear trained as a naturalist, and most of his drawings are of animals. However, they are caricatures rather than meticulously rendered zoological drawings. They have immediate appeal, which might have been greater in the nineteenth century when we consider the stiff drawings to which the Victorian children were used.

This quality was retained even when the illustrations appeared in print. The same two letters C and D are shown in figure 19, and are from Lear's A was an Ant nonsense alphabet printed in 1889. The cat, of course, is different but the line drawing



has the same fluidity.

#### DEVELOPMENTS EARLY 20TH CENTURY

The fact that Edward Lear's rough sketches were so popular might be further evidence of the relaxing of Victorian taste. But this itself became a drawback in later years. The decades that followed 1890 showed a slump in book production and this continued well until the 1950s. Robert Leeson, author of Reading and Righting (1985), suggests a reason for this slump:

One is drawn to the conclusion that what was lacking in the age was something that no single element of part of it could supply or restore. The spirit had gone. What to some people appeared a welcome development, the freeing of Children's stories from moral constraints may now be seen as the 'demoralising' of children's books. Those twin pillars of belief, in Empire and Christianity, were crumbling. A vacuum was left, which the new developing secular morality of the twentieth century was slow to fill. (8)

The two world wars also contributed to the decline of book production. Paper was scarce and the blitz of the 1940s destroyed warehouses containing 20 million books. The research of this thesis confirms this fact. It was impossible to find any alphabet books from 1900 to 1950. This brings one to the conclusion that not only were few books produced, but none of a standard worth saving for posterity.

The 1950s was a period of new beginnings. The lessons that Walter Crane and Edward Lear had learned had to be learned again. Publishers soon realised that they could not simply feed off the past. Just how this challenge was met, we shall see in the following chapters.



## FOOTNOTES

- (1) Eric Quayle, Early Children's books p20
- (2) Joyce Whalley Cobwebs to Catch Flies p85
- (3) Ibid. p92
- (4) Nicholas Tucker The Child and the Book p28
- (5) Joyce Whalley Cobwebs to Catch flies pp113-114
- (6) Susan E. Meyer A Treasury of the Great Children's Book Illustrators p19
- (7) Ibid. p88
- (8) Robert Leeson Reading and Righting p28

## CHAPTER



The alphabetical nature of  
the books under discussion

## INTRODUCTION

The alphabet is a collection of twenty-six characters each having its own distinct shape and sound. The sequence in which these letters are found is constant. The alphabet, being a definite entity, cannot be changed, but it can be portrayed in a variety of ways.

Alphabet books aim to familiarise the child with the ABC, yet each book is different from the next. Their individuality is achieved through different subject matter and styles of illustration, but also is due to the author's/illustrator's reason for producing the book: Some set out to teach the alphabet as a preliminary to reading; while others use the framework of the



ABC to portray any chosen subject.

Seven alphabet books will be discussed here. Bearing in mind the topic of this thesis - the lack of reality in children's books - this chapter hopes to discover whether or not fantasy hinders the task of learning to read. The seven books are:

- (1) The Ladybird ABC illustrated by Gerald Witcomb - undated
- (2) The Ladybird Rhyme Book illustrated by Margaret Chamberlain undated
- (3) Angel's Alphabet by Marie Angel - 1986
- (4) Ant and Bee and the ABC written by Angela Panner and illustrated by Bryan Ward - 1966
- (5) Circus ABC by Sue Dreamer -1985
- (6) An Alphabet by Helen Craig by Helen Craig -1978
- (7) Dr Seuss's ABC by Dr. Seuss - 1963

#### LADYBIRD ABC

This follows the typical alphabet formula. One object illustrates each letter and the word is included aswell (see figure 20). The ball is drawn realistically and the child would recognise it easily. There is nothing else on the page to distract attention, the message is clearly that b is for ball. Throughout the book we find familiar objects like pencils, newspapers, or ducks. They are drawn as large as the page will allow, and even when there are two objects shown it is clear which letter refers to which illustration (see figure 21)

There is a note at the beginning of the book advising parents as to the correct pronunciation of the alphabet, (that is a as in bag and not as in cave and so on) and the illustrations use

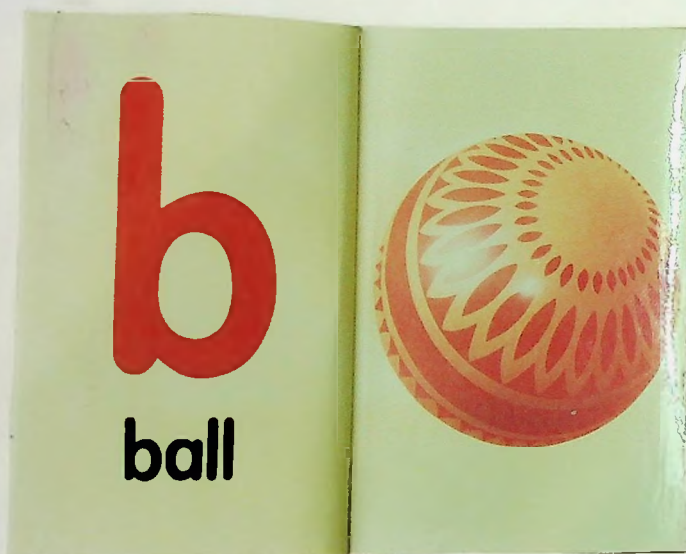


figure 20.



figure 21.

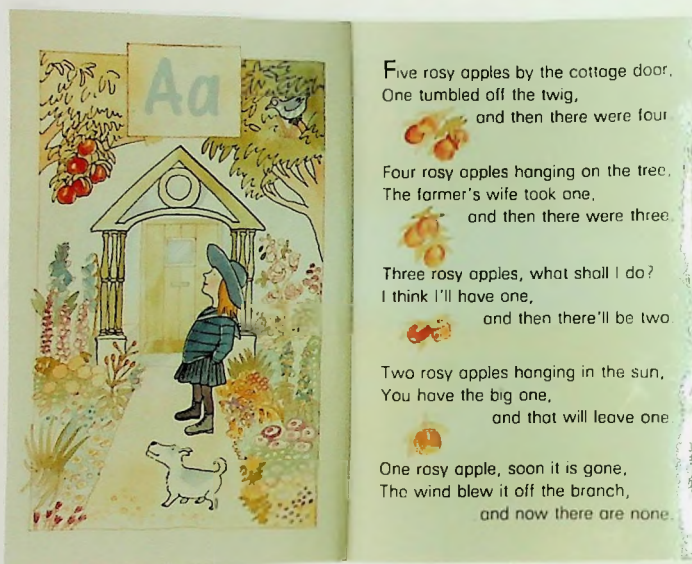


figure 22.



objects which follow this phonetic pronunciation.

This type of book is a good introduction to the alphabet. Its use of realistically drawn objects which are already known to the child, leaves him or her free to learn the concept of the unfamiliar alphabet.

### LADYBIRD RHYME BOOK

This book is a collection of songs and rhymes. It is meant to be used as an introduction to the alphabet, rather than a teaching aid, however the verses contain limited references to the individual letters, and do not highlight or emphasise the alphabet in any way.

Figure 22 shows an example of the A page. There is a rhyme on the right hand side, and the accompanying illustration is on the left. The verse is about a bunch of apples, but no attempt has been made to distinguish the letter A from the rest of the text. In fact the initial letter F has been set in a bolder type-face which seems to indicate that this is the most important character.

The apples in the illustration are not emphasised in any particular way either. They are drawn small in size and placed in a corner. The two letters A that are drawn in the picture are coloured in blue, which seems to link them with the girl rather than the apples. There might be a more obvious connection made if the fruit and letters were the same shade.

The Ladybird Rhyme Book is pleasant and attractive. A child

would enjoy the rhymes and illustrations, but would probably find it difficult to learn the alphabet from them. There is too much information, both in the text and pictures, for the individual letters to attract a child's attention.

### ANGEL'S ALPHABET

This book takes a more conventional approach to the alphabet, and uses pictures of various animals and their names to illustrate each letter. Marie Angel has chosen a wide range of animals, and includes familiar cats and dogs with exotic creatures such as olingoes, numbats and zorillas.

Figure 23 shows an example of the R page. An upper and lower case R are shown with the words rabbit and robin in a decorated border on the left hand page, and a picture of the two animals along with another letter R are shown with a similar border on the right. This book immediately seems more sophisticated than the two Ladybirds, and one would wonder if,infact, it is too advanced for a young child.

The letter R has been shown in three different typefaces: one large sans serif; one large Roman Capital; and one hand lettered almost calligraphic in style. The two large red Rs might pose no problems to a child, but the letter A of the hand drawn typeface would be unfamiliar. The inclusion of the word rabbit in the illustration is a strange idea, and appears no where else in the book, but the way these letters are placed is even more peculiar. One might think that when learning to read a child should be given information as clearly as possible, but this placement makes the word difficult to recognise, and is a direct contradiction to the placement shown on the opposite page.



figure 23.



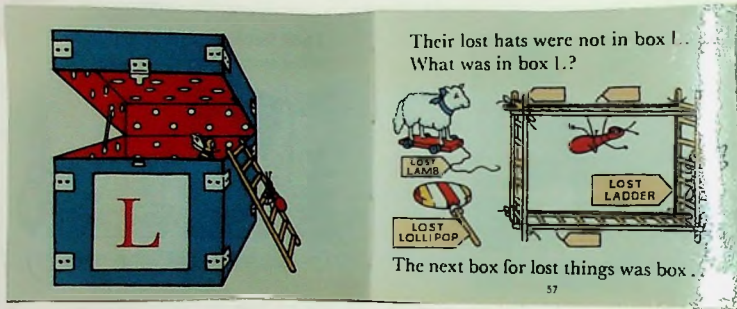


Figure 24 .

The fact that the animals are shown entwined around the letters also adds to the confusion. The letter seems to be part of the design and not the reason for it.

Angel's Alphabet is visually beautiful. The emphasis is, however, on the design of the book rather than its teaching nature. It seems to be a collection of designed initial letters rather than a child's ABC.

#### ANT AND BEE AND THE ABC

This book is more appropriate for a young person. It takes the child's inexperience with the alphabet as its starting point, and introduces the ABC within the framework of a story. The story is very simple. It tells of an ant and a bee who lose their hats and go to look for them. They search through a series of twenty-six boxes, each box housing items that start with a particular letter. The L box is shown in figure 24.

There is a picture of the box on left hand side with a large letter L drawn in red. The idea is that the child learns the letter as it appears on the box, and then recognises it when it is shown in the text on the following page. In this way the child participates in the telling of the story and at the same learns to recognise each letter of the alphabet.

The illustrator, Bryan Ward, has chosen a lamb, a ladder, and a lollipop as examples of words beginning with L. These objects would be familiar to most children. They are portrayed in a cartoon style, and have unnecessary details that take from the clarity of the drawing. For instance, why is the lamb on wheels?

Perhaps a picture of a real lamb would look less incongruous and be just as effective for teaching the alphabet.

Throughout the book Ward has used more than one object to illustrate each letter. The format of each page is the same as that shown in figure 24, with the letter on the left and the objects on the right. As each letter is considered in isolation it is easy for the child to work out which objects begin with which letter.

However the crowding of items on to a page inevitably reduces their size and this makes for small fussy drawings that at times are difficult to read.

The book shows an interesting approach to the teaching of the alphabet, but might be too contrived to help the child view the ABC clearly. However the idea of linking the individual letters within a story might hold the child's attention and this approach can also be seen in the Circus ABC by Sue Dreamer.

#### CIRCUS ABC

Sue Dreamer has drawn circus performers engaged in alphabetical activities. This varies from A is for acrobat, which shows a group of smiling leaping men, to K is for kiss, and we see a clown kissing a dog in a funny hat. All the figures are brightly coloured and drawn in a cartoon style.

An example of one of the pages is shown in figure 25. The initial letter of each word is treated in the same manner as the picture to which it is referring. This is necessary as there is so much activity on the page, but it does not totally solve the problem of easy recognition. If a child had never seen a unicycle or a violin, they might (when looking at this picture)





Figure 25.



Figure 26.

think they were a pair of trousers or a bow tie. The placement of the words on the page does not help matters either, for example the word unicycle is beside a picture of a giraffe, and this adds to the lack of alphabetical clarity.

The characters themselves are involved in unfamiliar and at times unrealistic activities, but as they are from a circus we can accept this 'fantastic' behavior. This element of fantasy, and the lively use of colour make the book a pleasure to look at. Indeed, as a piece of design it is very successful, but it does not work so well as a book aimed at teaching the alphabet, it is mainly a series of pictures loosely linked within the framework of the ABC.

#### AN ALPHABET BY HELEN CRAIG

Helen Craig, like Marie Angel, has treated the alphabet as a series of twenty-six initial letters. Each picture has a large capital letter, which is decorated and populated with mice. The letter is shown again in upper and lower case in the top right-hand corner of the page. They are small detailed drawings are rendered in bright pastel shades.

Figure 26 shows an example of the U and V pages. At first glance we see two mice sitting in a U shape and four other mice picking grapes from a V shape. Closer examination reveals that the first two mice are called Mr. Up and Mr. Under, and that the latter mice are really vine pickers. This is the only concession to the alphabet that Helen Craig makes, and in some of the illustrations it is virtually impossible to work out what the mice are doing, even though we are shown the letter with which the word is supposed to begin.



It is a pretty and whimsical type of book but would be impossible to learn the alphabet from. The next book, Dr. Seuss's ABC is also whimsical, but it manages to be educational at the same time.

### DR. SEUSS'S ABC

The Dr. Seuss book starts with an introduction to the alphabet. The first page shows two furry creatures looking at a big A and a little a and then asking themselves what begins with this letter. The next page then shows an example of words starting with A. This approach continues throughout the book, and every few pages it recaps on the letters learned so far before introducing a new one. In this way the child sees the alphabet as a whole, as well as a means of categorizing separate words.

The book concentrates on the sounds of the letters. Figure 27 shows an example of the M page. The use of alliteration helps the child to focus his or her attention on the letter in hand, and this repetition makes for fast familiarisation with that particular letter. The content of the rhyme is quite different from that usually found in alphabet books, but its nonsensical quality does not take from its educational purpose. In fact, Dorothy Butler, author of Babies need Books 1980 writes:

The Beginner Books series (Beginner Books is the trade mark of Dr. Seuss) is at its most useful when children are first learning to read. At this stage there is a shortage of material which is simultaneously entertaining, well presented, and easy to read. Beginner Books with their jaunty repetitive text and funny (if sometimes vulgar) illustrations ensure immediate attention. Many children seem to need this type of approach before they are prepared to involve themselves in the printed word and Beginner Books provide it to perfection. (1)

The illustration shown in figure 27 is a typical example of the Dr. Seuss style. Its simple line drawings and limited use of bright colour is bold and striking. The lack of scenery focuses our attention on the main characters, and these caricatures of

# BIG M

little m

Many mumbling mice  
are making  
midnight music  
in the moonlight . . .

mighty nice

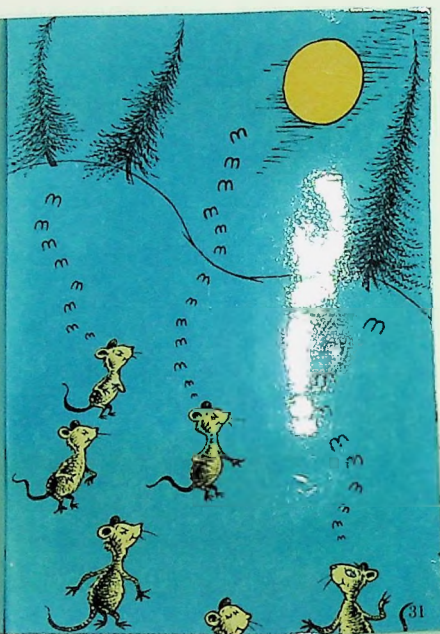


Figure 27.

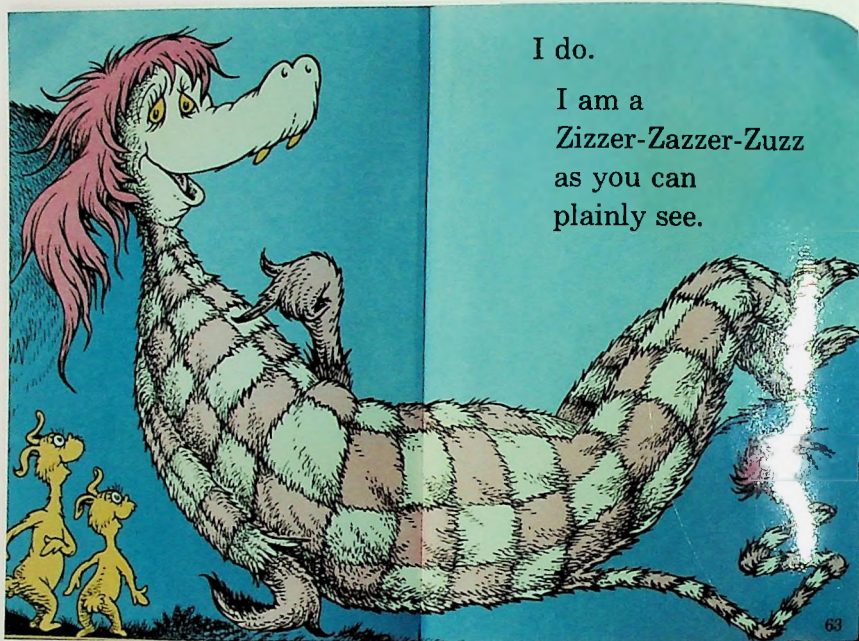


figure 28.



mice illustrate the nonsensical verse beautifully.

This drawing is based on the real world to a certain extent, but Dr. Seuss does not limit himself to reality. Intermingled with the normal and recognisable animals we find imaginary creatures like duck-dogs and Icabods. Figure 28 is an example of the Z page and the animal illustrated is a Zizzer-zazzer-zuzz. He is a furried chequered character, who seems to live a relaxed type of life, and despite his non-existence in the real world, he is just as able to illustrate Z aswell as a picture of a zebra or a zip.

#### CONCLUSIONS - DOES FANTASY HINDER LEARNING?

The first book discussed, the Ladybird ABC contains the most realistic approach to the alphabet. It is slightly bland when we compare it to the other books but its learning potential is undisputable. The Ladybird Rhyme Book is more attractive, but as this appeal lies in wordy verses and detailed illustrations, its value as an alphabet book is limited. Angel's Alphabet also seems to sacrifice alphabeticalness for the sake of design, and is consequently too sophisticated for a young child's understanding. These three books draw real life things in a realistic manner and the Ant and Bee and the ABC seems more imaginative by comparison. The characterisation of the two insects sets the book in the realm of unreality, but this does not interfere with the pages that introduce the letters of the alphabet. This slight element of fantasy might make the book more appealing to the child. The Circus APC is also an attractive book, and veered between fantasy and realism, but its design is too confusing for this approach to work as an early reading aid. The Alphabet by Helen Craig seems purely a string of pretty pictures. The fact that the mice are

shown behaving unrealistically neither helps nor hinders, as no attempt to teach has been made. However the fact that they are behaving in this manner adds to the charm of the illustrations. The Dr. Seuss's ARC is the most imaginative and unrealistic of the seven books discussed, yet it has immense educational value. The book is concerned with the sounds of the words and so, it is less important what these words mean. It is fun to look at and enjoyable to read, and is designed for easy understanding of the alphabet as a whole.

Bad design and layout of a book is what takes from its learning potential. It is not necessarily important for a child to recognise a picture before he or she can learn from it, but it is vital for he or she to understand and see clearly the letter to which that picture refers. An advantage that fantasy has over reality is that it is often more appealing. This is useful in a learning situation as a child will more readily embark on an exciting activity than he or she would a tedious one.

Taking that fantasy does not hinder the task of learning the alphabet, what other advantages does this approach have. Hopefully this question will be answered in the following three chapters where the contents of the books shall be discussed in greater detail.

## FOOTNOTES

- (1) Dorothy Butler Babies Need Books pp113-114



# CHAPTER



The treatment of animals in the  
books under discussion

## INTRODUCTION

The majority of children's books contain some reference to animals. This can range from a picture of the family pet, to a whole tale written about creatures who think, speak and dress like people. Whatever the treatment, animals in books have proved consistently popular through the years.

They appeal to children for many reasons. Obviously, these reasons differ from child to child but generally speaking,

children like the look and feel of animals in real life.

Family pets are always being picked up and stroked, and even large or wild animals become the subject of much staring and speculation.

Children have a special relationship with animals. Their time is used for play and discovery, and so they get to know the world around them, including the natural world as well as the man-made one. Animals, therefore, can have a special place in children's lives. They may act as a type of glorified toy, a companion, and another living creature to love.

Publishers, authors and illustrators are aware of this appeal, and so they continue to produce books with animal characters. Nature is also considered a fit subject for young people, both spiritually and educationally. Pat Wynne Jones, author of Pictures on the Page 1982 when writing of animals in children's books says:

This is one of the ways in which the whole book can convey to the child a sense of the total unity and harmony of the whole creation. (1)

The collection of alphabet books that will be examined in this thesis are filled with pictures of animals. Each book treats the subject differently, but they can be categorised under five separate headings:

1. those that treat animals as animals
2. those that give the animals human characteristics
3. those that treat animals as adult substitutes
4. those that treat the animals specifically as children substitutes
5. those that create imaginary animals.

Each category will be discussed separately with examples from relevant books.



## THE TREATMENT OF ANIMALS AS ANIMALS

There are two books that fall into this category, The Baby Animal ABC by Robert Broomfield 1964 and Angel's Alphabet by Marie Angel, 1986.

### THE BABY ANIMAL ABC

Robert Broomfield uses different pictures of animals and their offspring to illustrate each letter of the alphabet, drawing wild animals such as lions or tigers. These might be familiar to the child through television or trips to the Zoo, but prior knowledge of them would not be necessary for enjoyment of the book.

Figure 29 is an example of the T page. We can see that the animals are drawn realistically and have been coloured with pen and water colour wash. The inclusion of the baby animals is a clever idea. Children love small, cute living things and it serves as an excellent method for explaining the concept of small and capital letters.

However, the design and use of colour is rather tasteless. It is a dull, bland book. The animals have no interaction with each other; they are simply placed on the white page. These faults may be explained by the fact that the book is twenty-five years old, but I would have further criticisms that cannot be excused as easily.

Throughout the book, the animals look sad or vicious. It is quite depressing turning page after page and seeing all these mournful creatures. Many have a threatening expression which children could find frightening. When my brother was young, he used to read a book called The Giant Pancake.



figure 29.

One of the pictures showed a group of children, and this used to terrify him, as he thought one of the group had 'starey eyes'. He was so frightened by the picture that we had to cover the offending eyes with fancy cellotape. I am aware that children are different, and would not all be scared by the same images, but to my mind, the figer's eyes are definitely 'starey'.

The animals' placement on the page is also worth noting. Much of the book is laid out similarly to the page shown in figure 29. The tiger cubs are shown complete, but their mother is chopped in half by the edge of the book. What was a design element to the illustrator could become a point of confusion to the child. It has been discovered that young children recognize whole objects more easily than part objects. In fact, when faced with pictures like the tiger, some may worry whether the animal has any back legs at all. (2)

#### ANGEL'S ALPHABET.

Marie Angel also chooses to draw wild and exotic animals, plus the occasional domestic type as well. Again, like Broomfield, she has portrayed them realistically, but there the similarity between the two ends. The T page from her book is shown in figure 30.

There is a sophistication in this book lacking in the first example. The animals are drawn with more sensitivity, and the use of colour is attractive and striking. The layout is thoughtful and imaginative and adds to the charm of the illustration.

Throughout the book, Angel chooses more than one animal for each letter, and she shows them interacting with each other in a





figure 30.



figure 31.

realistic way - a frog looks hungrily at a fly, or a donkey and a dog sniff interestedly at each other. This allows the illustration to become a story in its own right, adding a further dimension to each page.

Figure 3I shows an example of the A page. Again the drawing is realistic and appealing. We can see how the pattern has been brought around the letters into the illustration, and this approach continues throughout the book. It makes for a lively design, but it hinders our view of the animals, and may render it difficult for a child to distinguish all the elements on the page.

Angel and Broomfield have drawn animals realistically. They have contented themselves with anatomically correct illustrations and placed them on a page. In the next category, we shall see how the illustrators took their drawings a stage further and imbued their animals with human traits.

THE GIVING OF HUMAN CHARACTERISTICS TO ANIMALS

This category will discuss A Apple Pie by Gavin Bishop, 1987 and Helen Oxenbury's ABC of Things 1971.

A APPLE PIE.

Gavin Bishop has taken the old apple pie rhyme and drawn animals competing for its attention. This adds to its alphabeticalness, for instead of unnamed children as used in the past, (see chapter 2), we have sheep skipping for it, kangaroos kissing it, rabbits racing to it, and so on.

Bishop has used wild animals throughout the book, but has



minimized the fear element often associated with them. Only gentle grasshoppers are allowed to growl, while lions are laughing with lilies in their mane.

The fact that the animals are behaving unnaturally gives them a 'humaness', and this is further enhanced by the clothes worn. However, it is an uncomfortable portrayal of animals. One gets the impression that they are performing tricks for our benefit, and really they can't wait to take off the silly dresses and shirts and get back to their normal lives.

The drawing is harsh and full of scratchy black lines as figure 32 shows, and this adds to the feeling of unease. I would find further fault with the pictures, in that each animal is drawn the same size. Looking at figure 32, a child would be excused for thinking that ducks are the same size as elephants. The B page, (see figure 33) is particularly <sup>distressing</sup> as it shows a giant evil bee towering above a bicycle.

Bishop's drawings are quite sexist. If we return to figure 32 we see his female duck preening herself in front of the viewer, while his male elephant is busy being energetic. There is a similar treatment of the sexes throughout the book. The males are shown engaged in activities, while the females are simply dressed in clothes and presented as static creatures.

The book's main appeal lies in its adaptation of the traditional applie pie story. The illustrations, despite their large size are secondary and unimaginative. By way of contrast, Helen Oxenbury's drawings have no linking text, but are drawn with such care and attention that they create their own stories.

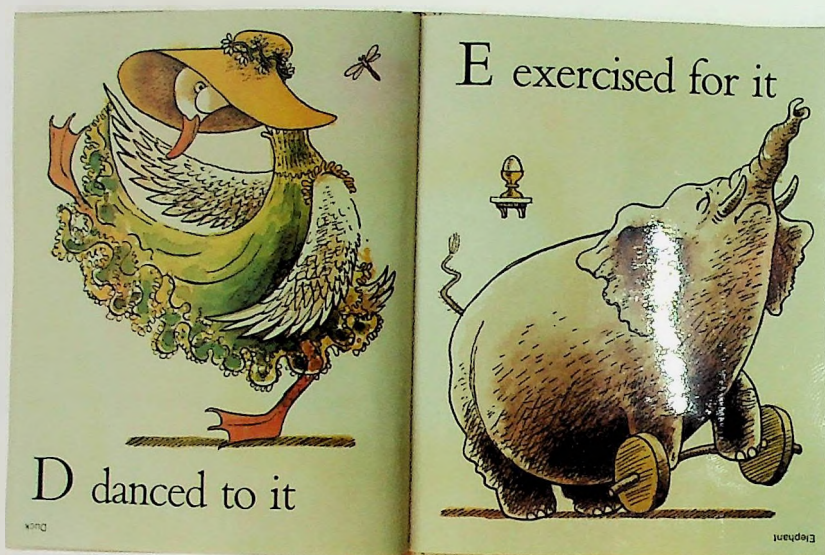


figure 32.



figure 33.



figure 34 .



## ABC OF THINGS.

Helen Oxenbury has drawn a wide variety of animals and some are more human than others. At times she is content to draw the animals as we know them, such as a group of impalas drinking happily from a pool, at others she gives the scene an imaginative twist, and we see a frog shyly offering a fish some flowers. They are all well drawn and coloured in fresh bright shades.

Figure 34 is an example of the H page. It is a picture of two animals in hospital, but it can become much more. When looking at this picture, one can begin to wonder about the characters: how did the hippopotamus break his leg? Did the hare give him the measles? Does he mind not having any grapes - stable hospital fare? Why doesn't he have a medical chart? Because of the details that Oxenbury includes, her drawings take us further than the page. She has illustrated real creatures who seem to have a separate life from the book. One can almost sense the past behind the pictures and the future ahead.

Oxenbury has used this treatment in a wide variety of situations - shopping, playing, school - and this increases the learning potential for the child. Pat Wynne Jones writes:

Stories of everyday life in which they (the child) can see their own familiar situations and lifestyle mirrored, give them some idea of what they might expect. They show how people tend to behave, how circumstances may work out, so that experience is immeasurably widened in the short time of listening. It is rather like looking through a window. You can ponder on the happenings outside without being directly involved. (3)

This concept of giving animals human characteristics is a widespread phenomenon in children's books. Its success is

probably dependant on the desire that humans have to make friends with other creatures and to have this friendship reciprocated.

This concept is taken a step further when the animals start to behave exactly like human beings. The animals become the heroes and heroines of a story, and people if they appear at all are secondary beings. In this situation the animal form becomes a mask for the human face. It no longer thinks and behaves like a creature, but like a substitute human.

#### THE TREATMENT OF ANIMALS AS PEOPLE SUBSTITUTES

Teeny Tiny ABC by Richard Scarry, 1985 and An Alphabet by Helen Craig, 1978 are examples from this category.

#### TEENY TINY ABC

Richard Scarry has drawn a world totally populated by animals. Cats, pigs, hedgehogs and mice live side by side and Lowly Worm is only down the road. They are entirely self-sufficient, and have no need of human intervention. Looking at one of Scarry's books is like getting a glimpse of another world through photographs.

Scarry's drawings often have a sense of pending misfortune. Figure 35 is an example of the I page. The ink is about to spill on the floor, the shirt is about to be burnt and the owl may fall through the hole in the ice. Children love this suspenseful type humour and would find the ill-luck amusing. Any anxiety caused is lessened by the fact that the subjects are animals, not people, so we need not identify with them too closely.

li

Ali Cat is drawing a lovely picture of his friend Squeaky. He is also making a lovely mess - he has spilled his ink!



21

iron



ironing-board



22

Figure 35.



However, there is one facet of an animal's character with which children can and do identify. Animals, like children, are at the mercy of adults and have to depend on them for their well-being. John and Elizabeth Newson write in Toys and Playthings 1979 about the child's powerless feelings:

Adults ability to foresee consequences must sometimes seem like magical powers to the child: 'careful, you'll hurt yourself!... There, I told you you would', cries the mother - did she make it happen? Adults have a mental scheme of what is planned for the next few days; children whose time sense is poor are constantly astonished by the arrival of events, in a way which would seem intolerable to adults. (4)

When a child is faced with drawings like Scarry's, and they see the animals coping by themselves, it tends to offer a sense of independence both real and potential.

There is a danger, however, in bringing animals convincingly to life. A child who learns to love animals through books might be faced with a dilemma when returning to reality. Professor Iseult McCarthy, Head of Education at the National College of Art & Design tells a story of just such an occurrence.

When Iseult's daughter Eimear was five, she had a particularly favourite book. It told the story of an animal who bought a duck for his dinner and while he was preparing the peas and potatoes, he started to talk to the bird. Eventually he became such good friends with the duck that he couldn't kill him and eat him. So both animals sat down to a meal of peas and potatoes instead.

While this book was still a favourite, Eimear and Iseult were invited to a friend's house for dinner. The meal was roast duck. When Eimear heard this, she turned to her mother aghast and asked

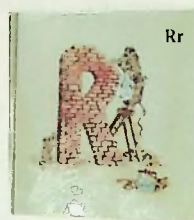
if it was dead duck. Not wishing to disturb her child or embarrass her host, Iseul explained there were two types of duck - a table variety and a real variety. Eimear ate her dinner.

Obviously all children won't make the connections that Eimear did. If so, many families would have to turn vegetarian. Illustrators are aware of childrens' thought processes, and they tend to keep away from very realistic drawings of animals so that upsetting situations do not arise. When looking at a book like Scarry's, a child might easily think that the animals are a different species from those in the real world. The way they are dressed and the activities they engage in, suggests a species based only loosely on animals from the real world.

The charm of Scarry's book lies precisely in the use of animals in these human situations. Perhaps the book would lose much of its appeal if he had used pictures of people instead. This is not the case with Helen Craig's alphabet. She too has drawn a world without people, but the illustrations do not depend solely on the animals for their attraction.

#### AN ALPHABET.

Helen Craig has used pictures of mice throughout her book. They are undoubtedly very loveable mice, and their actions are particularly endearing. We see them painting Rs red, knitting J-shaped jumpers and drawing lines on giant Ls, (see figures 36, 37 and 38. They look so serious and engrossed in these tasks, that we assume this is normal work for mice.



figures 36, 37 + 38.



j jumping



figure 39.

If Craig had used people, they would still be charming, but we might wonder why they behave so strangely. The use of animals creates a double absurdity that seems to balance into an appealing whole.

A further reason for the popularity of books like Helen Craig's and Richard Scarry's is the amount of small details that they show. When illustrators create a new world, its strangeness is increased by placing familiar objects in an unfamiliar situation. Thus an everyday iron becomes interesting when we see a rabbit using it, or a boring geometry set takes on a new significance when we know it is an essential tool for mice. Children love these apparent contradictions, and will examine each page until they have noticed even the tiniest of objects.

This substitution of animals for people gives authors and illustrators much scope. A development of this concept can be found in books which use animals as children substitutes.

#### THE TREATMENT OF ANIMALS AS CHILDREN SUBSTITUTES.

One book will be discussed under this heading, The Teddy Bear ARC by Susannah Gretz, 1974.

##### The Teddy Bear ARC

Susannah Gretz's teddy bears are an ideal child substitute. They behave in a playful naughty way and are drawn with the chubby, clumsy bodies that children have.

Figure 39 is an example of the J page. When studying this picture, I can remember vividly the great pleasure I used to get from jumping on beds and hurling myself at cushions. The bears are

having just as much fun. The happy atmosphere is increased by Gretz's bright colours and simple lively shapes. She has drawn the animals doing the things that children love to do. Some are feasible activities like climbing or swimming or hiding under a table, while others would be unacceptable, through probably dreamed about secretly, like keeping kangaroos in the kitchen or 'mucking about in the mud'.

Figure 40 is an example of the W page. Again there are the little details that children love. One teddy bear wears sunglasses and an umbrella under the shower, and another naughty bear pours water over his friend who has just dried himself. There is also a yak being washed iwth them. Gretz has interspersed other animals behaving as animals throughout the book, making the bears more human by comparison.

In the above four categories type illustrators have taken real animals as their starting point. Some have been content to draw them realistically, while others have added their own personal attributes. In all cases the animals are familiar and can be seen in the world around us. The next category leaves this world behind and looks to the imagination for its characters.

#### THE CREATION OF IMAGINARY ANIMALS

Dr Seuss is probably the most successful illustrator in this area, and so the Dr Seuss's ABC, 1963 has been chosen for discussion in this category.

#### DR SEUSS'S ABC.

Since his first Beginner Book in 1957, Dr. Seuss has been





figure 40.

BIG F

little f

F... F

Four fluffy feathers  
on a  
Fiffer-feffer-feff.

16



17

Figure 41.

T... T

t... t

What begins with T?

Ten tired turtles  
on a tuttle-tuttle tree.

16



17

Figure 42.

immensely popular with children. There is no illustrator quite like him and his appeal is summed up beautifully by this quote from Steven L Brezzo, director of the San Diego Museum of Art.

He writes of his own childhood feelings about Dr Seuss:

Dr Seuss accepted for a fact our own youthful artistic openness. We were longing for stories that imposed no limitations on our creativity and imagination. Like us, Doctor Seuss explored a boundless terrain of silliness and illogic.... Without ever meeting him, we knew that here at last was a grown up who probably hated carrots, napped in the afternoon, doodled in the margins and secretly sported a skinned knee. (5)

Figure 41 is an example of the F page. We see a fiffer-feffer-feff, with four fluffy feathers growing from his head. He is unlike any animal ever seen in the real world, but he is happily unaware of this fact. He looks terribly proud and pleased with himself, and might bow to us at any second. I remember reading a book of children's letters to God once, and the child wrote asking God to create some new animals as she was bored with the old ones. With Dr Seuss her prayer is answered.

Dr Seuss uses a selection of real and imaginary animals, but he has drawn them all in a similar style, so there is no discrepancy between the two. The fiffer-feffer-feff obviously lives in the same land as the ten tired turtles, (see figure 42). They have the same smug expressions, the same loose-limbed bodies and most probably eat the same food for dinner.

The Dr Seuss style of drawing has a lot of advantages for children. His books enable the child to discover the great pleasure in reading and show how they can escape the pressures of reality through the channel of imagination. The pictures are often funny and, as Pat Wynne Jones writes:



Laughter in their stories provides a growing point for the sense of humour that can be such an asset when life gets difficult. (6)

### CONCLUSIONS.

Out of the eight books discussed in this chapter, only two used animals in a realistic manner. Was it coincidence that the majority of alphabets veered towards the fantasy approach? Did they gain anything through their lack of realism? I would suggest they did.

The realistic approach has limits. Once you have learned to draw the animals and designed them on the page, you have to stop. The approach is limited also from the child's point of view. After looking at an animal and learning its name, there may be little more to say and the page will be turned.

But with even a small amount of imagination, as in the case of Helen Oxenbury, the pictures of animals, can start to tell a story. This approach is taken further with illustrators like Richard Scarry and Susannah Gretz. Their pictures have many details which leads the child to more thought and so more learning. These type of books are usually read with an adult. If the pictures are stimulating, then some conversation will usually follow, and this companionship between adult and child increases the enjoyment of reading. Nicholas Tucker, author of The Child and the Book, 1981 writes:

Whatever the books a child gets, however, the intimate experience of sharing them with a parent is probably the most basically satisfying of the lot. From this safe vantage point, children can look at pictures that have the effect of slowing down normal experience so that a child can take an isolated image on the page and then absorb or discuss it at leisure, gradually learning its obvious characteristics. Next time the child looks at the book the same object will still be there and in that way a tiny part of the child's life will have already become potentially manageable. (7)

One might ask why illustrators bother to use animals at all. Surely people in the same situations would be just as effective? But we saw how humanised animals added to the charm of a picture, and how this treatment tapped into a desire most of us feel, to relate to all living creatures. On a more commercial note, animals have a wider appeal. They cannot be pinned down to a particular sex, age race or social class. So one book can be targeted at a large section of the community without alienating any class in society.

## FOOTNOTES

- (1) Pat Wynnejones Pictures on the Page p30
- (2) Nicholas Tucker The Child and the Book pp24-25
- (3) Pat Wynnejones Pictures on the Page p15
- (4) Nicholas Tucker The Child and the Book p79
- (5) Steven L. Brezzo From Then to Now p13
- (6) Pat Wynnejones Pictures on the Page p17
- (7) Nicholas Tucker The Child and the Book p28



## CHAPTER



The treatment of people in  
the books under discussion

## INTRODUCTION

The treatment of people in alphabet books is more complex to analyse than the treatment of animals. There is still the contrast between fantasy and reality, but the borders are not so clearly defined. This is because man's capacities are virtually limitless. We can show pictures of people doing things they do not normally do, but to show pictures illustrating what people can not do is difficult as people can do so much.

The lack of reality is, therefore, less obvious. However, the very nature of alphabet books leads to stereotyped and one-dim-

ensional people. As there are no stories surrounding the characters, we rely totally on the picture to tell us who they are. People are often shown in their commercial roles, for uniforms are easy to recognise. The pictures are mainly of adults as children do not work, but the people seem stereotyped and unnatural. We might be told that B is for baker and S is for sailor and shown a picture of two men in dissimilar clothes. The uniforms are all important and because they are different, the men seem different. It would appear the bakers and sailors never meet or share a common interest. In fact they both seem to have no interests outside their jobs. Bakers bake and sailors sail, and they do not do anything else. (While the treatment is stereotypical it may be useful in linking the fictional role character with its real life counterpart for the young child.)

In the same manner as the chapter on animals, one has tried to categorise the treatment of people under various headings. There are two categories:

- (1) Those who show people in commercial situations.
- (2) Those who show people sepeparated from their occupations and show them in normal life.

#### THOSE WHO SHOW PEOPLE IN COMMERCIAL SITUATIONS

Helen Oxenbury's ABC of Things and The Annick ARC by Roger Paré, shall be discussed in this chapter.

#### ARC OF THINGS

Helen Oxenbury has drawn a number of professional people that a child would find familiar. We saw in chapter two the amount of learning that can be gleaned from street cries or occupational alphabets and the twentieth century child would appreciate these



lessons also.

Figure 43 shows an example of the N page. The nurse is wearing a smart uniform and carrying some hospital supplies. She appears a hard working and practical woman. The black rings around her eyes indicate lack of sleep, while her shoes are sensible and ideally suited to long working hours. She is even too busy at this moment to meet our eyes and smile.

This attention to detail raises Oxenbury's drawings above those usually found in alphabet books. She has created further interest by varying her subject matter. Mingled among the everyday bakers and grocers are exotic jugglers, cowboys and musicians.

Figure 44 is an example of the J page. A happy juggler wears a fancy shirt and bares the obligatory hairy chest. Above him strawberry jam and jelly fly through the air. This type of man is obviously more flamboyant and interesting than the shopkeeper down the road and, as such, might have more appeal for the child. Children can rarely envisage themselves as adults, but when asked what they are going to be when they grow up, they usually reply with the most exciting occupation they can think of.

Like Helen Oxenbury, Roger Paré has catered for children's need for excitement. His drawings are also filled with details which build a story around his characters.

#### THE ANNICK ABC

Figure 45 is an example of the A page. We are told, "An acrobat on an airplane is juggling apricots", but there is a picture of three men - which is the acrobat? There is no one in particular

Nn

nurse



Figure 43.

Jj

jam  
jelly  
juggler



Figure 44.

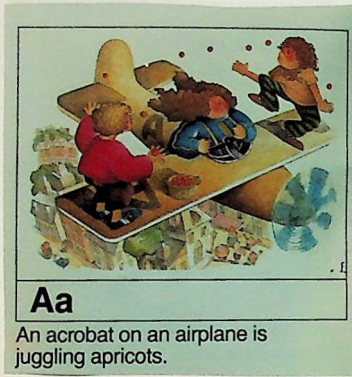


Figure 45



Figure 46 .



wearing shiny show-biz clothes so we are free to draw our own conclusions. Perhaps the acrobat is teaching his friend to juggle, or maybe they both somersaulted on to a passing airplane and are now entertaining the pilot. It is nice to see them out of uniform and away from a working situation. It seems that these acrobats get so much job satisfaction that they even juggle in their spare time.

Paré has drawn his figures with floppy squashy bodies. Their expressions are naïve and even their actions are childlike. Figure 46 is an example of the T page, and shows a new side to Tarzan. It is a lighter view of the jungle hero and quite a human one. It shows him behaving childishly. This happens often in the children's books that only show adults and this makes them easier for the child to identify with. Nicholas Tucker further suggests that when adults are shown behaving like children it makes them easier to understand. (1)

Before leaving the category of people with occupations, the subject of stereotyping will be discussed further. It was mentioned how uniforms were necessary for the reader to recognise who the person is, but at times the illustrator must create a uniform to aid this task of recognition. This point is very striking when we examine how some of the books tackled Q for queen.

No book has shown queens as we see them today. The British Queen, for example, is the subject of much press coverage and lives a glamorous life, but she looks the same as any other woman and rarely wears a crown. A child, however, would not recognise a normally dressed woman as being a queen. They need

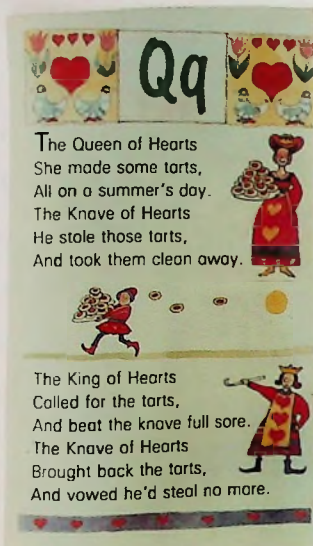


Figure 47

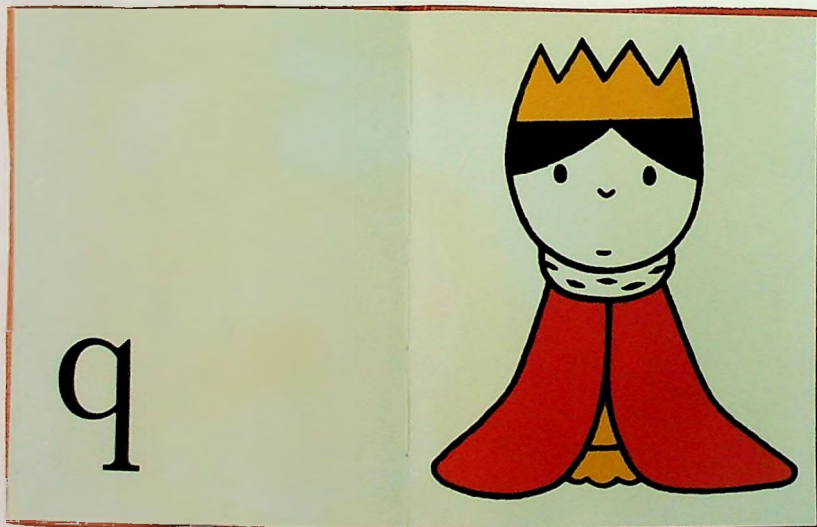


Figure 48

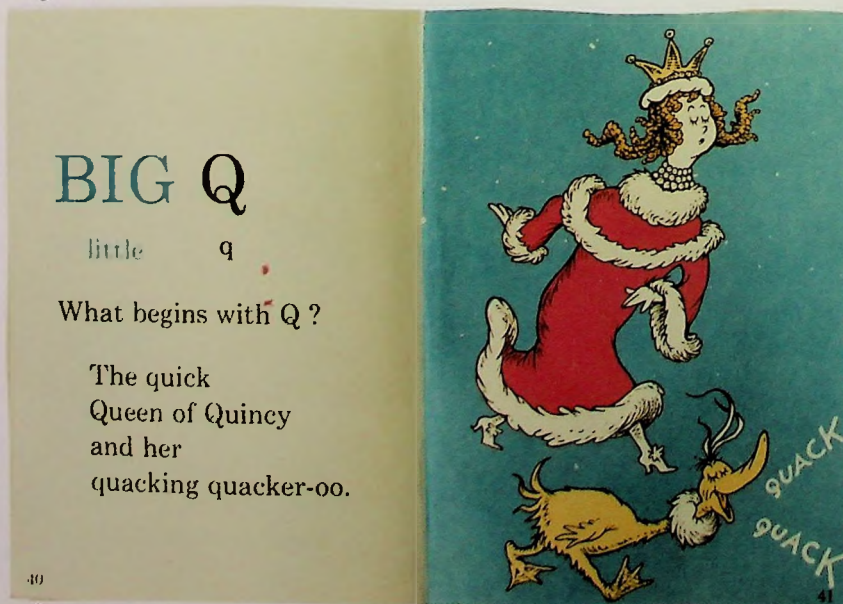


Figure 49

the aid of pomp and splendour. The alphabet books have supplied this in various ways.

Ladybird Rhyme Book - undated

Figure 47 is an example of the illustrator, Margaret Chamberlain's queen. She has chosen the Queen of Hearts. The rhyme takes up much space so the drawing becomes less important. We can see she is a form of card queen reminiscent of the Alice in Wonderland story. She seems to be wearing a gothic type of headress and her robe is oldfashioned too. But despite her antiquated appearance this type of queen is not from the past. She has never existed, except within the land of fairy tales and imagination.

b is for bear Dick Bruna - 1967

Figure 48 shows an example of Bruna's queen. It is a toy or child queen. Bruna seems to have distilled all the symbols of royalty into a gold crown and an ermine lined red cloak, and placed them on his figure.

Dr. Seuss's ABC - 1963

Dr. Seuss has also used a crown and fur lined clothes but he has created a very different character. Figure 49 shows an example. We are told she is the "quick queen of Quincy", and like all Dr. Seuss's characters she has a very definite personality. We can imagine her rushing here and there but never getting anything done. She looks too scatty to be regal, but would probably try her best. Dr. Seuss's queen has more dimensions than the above two. The clothes add to her 'queenness' but she does not depend on them. However, like all of his creations she is not a real person, but belongs to a species loosely based on people.





figure 50 .



figure 51

### ABC of Things Helen Oxenbury - 1971

Figure 50 shows Oxenbury's queen. This is perhaps the most realistic representation of all the books. It could be a picture of a queen from the past, or it could represent twentieth century royalty at some important function.

### The Annick ARC Roger Pare - 1985

Roger Paré's queen is perhaps the most appealing. He has drawn a fairy tale queen and it is shown in figure 51. We are told she is a quiet queen, and is running away quickly. This short line brings the picture to life. Who is she running away from? Is it the man with the bull rushes? Where is she going? Will she ever come back? Why is she quiet anyway? She is a plump little queen perched in a sedan chair, waving happily goodbye, and one would love to know what happens next.

The next category of books show people away from job situations and illustrate adults and children in the rest of normal life.

### THOSE WHO SHOW PEOPLE IN NORMAL LIFE

Three books will be discussed under this heading: More and more Ant and Bee written by Angela Banner and illustrated by Bryan Ward (1961); Ladybird Rhyme Book illustrated by Margaret Chamberlain (undated); A Dollop of Dublin by Mary Murphey (1988)

### MORE AND MORE ANT AND BEE

The Ant and Bee book takes the form of an alphabetical story. It tells how an ant and a bee babysit a young girl and are visited by a nurse and an uncle. The story deals with the unpleasant situation of the girl's parents going away, but the pictures show what a happy time she can have without them. This type of book



figure 52.

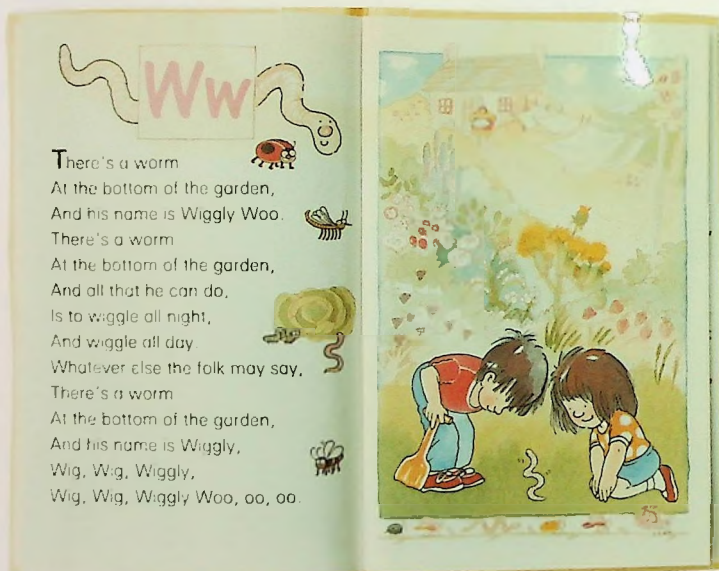


figure 53



has obvious learning potential. Pat Wynne Jones writes:

Stories that show people doing the sort of things young children see going on around them, behaving as their own grown ups behave, or which enable a child to visualise a situation before he meets it himself can contribute to the growing feeling of assurance and overcome various apprehensions. (2)

Figure 52 is an example of one of the pages from the book. The uncle plays his violin for the other three. We can tell the music is lively because the notes are brightly coloured. But the audience are hardly jumping out of their seats. This stiffness is probably due to the age of the book. The use of colour is dated and the layout of the figures is uninteresting. They are all stuck at the front of the page with nothing going on behind them. They look like dolls or cardboard cutouts. The girl is particularly stereotyped. Her yellow hair and 'girlie' clothes are too perfect to be natural and throughout the book her docile obedient behaviour strikes one as being abnormal. The situation shown in the picture is slightly strange, - perhaps children in the 1950s spent evenings with uncles and nurses and violin music, but one might have one's suspicions. The next book for discussion, the Ladybird Rhyme Book, is similar to the Ant and Pee book in that it shows people in real life situations, but it is a more modern version, both in characters and activities.

#### LADYBIRD RHYME BOOK

The Ladybird Rhyme Book is interesting as it shows pictures of children from the point of view of the child rather than the adult's. Figure 53 is an example of the W page. We see two children examining a worm. They are at the bottom of the garden and we can see their mother hanging out clothes in the background. Most children are fascinated by small wiggly creatures and could probably identify with this picture. The illustrator Margaret



figure 54

Chamberlain, has handled the children well. They have big heads with scruffy hair and soft childish bodies. She has drawn both without being unduly stereotypical: The boy is wearing bright colours, and the girl is not unnecessarily pretty.

The layout of the page is effective also. The children are large and placed in the foreground and a domestic scene goes on behind them. The inclusion of the house and the mother gives the picture a sense of emotional security. Without them, the children might be lost or neglected, but this way one feels they can run to their parent any moment and show her the worm too.

Chamberlain's use of colour is fresh and lively. The feel of a bright windy day is captured beautifully by the soft blues and greens. Figure 54 is an example of the V page, and this page is coloured by warm reds and yellows. There is a different atmosphere on this page which is entirely due to the use of colour.

This figure shows a boy and a girl sitting side by side. The girl is sitting upright and smiling invitingly at the boy, while he is blushing and trying to hide himself in his book. It is an accurate and sensitive portrayal of the situation between the sexes with young children. Children would get great enjoyment out of this type of picture. As much as they sneer at the idea of liking the opposite sex, they love being placed in a situation where they can give vent to this sneering. This pre-school activity is almost a rehearsal for adolescence.

This book's alphabetical nature was discussed in chapter three, but a further point on the subject might be made about these two pages. The page shown in figure 53 uses a picture of a very



small worm to illustrate the letter W. The V in figure 53 is not emphasised at all. The rhyme treats the letter R as the important character, and there is no inclusion of violets in the illustration.

This portrayal of real life that is seen in More and More Ant and Bee and the Ladybird Rhyme Book has a lot of obvious advantages, but it has one inherent problem. If a book sets itself up to be an accurate representation of real people it can exclude certain sections of society. In the case of the Ant and Bee book there is a lot of sexual stereotyping, and both books are filled with pictures of white middle class children.

It could be argued that these books cater for the majority , and this is probably true. On the subject of sexual stereotyping Nicholas Tucker writes:

over simplified sexual stereotypes are probably inevitable at the very beginning of understanding, and can be found in the early games that children play, where they merely continue to act out traditional roles. (3)

However, these 'traditional roles' are changing, but books continue to include stereotyped images. These pictures seem to act as visual symbols. Most children do not see their mothers as aproned beings chained to a kitchen sink, but they would have little hesitation when faced with a picture of such a situation, in calling that woman a mother. If shown a picture of the same woman away rom a domestic scene - out walking for example - she would stop being a mother and become a woman out for a walk, in the eyes of the child. So this stereotyping has become necessary for recognition, but in so doing has created a vicious circle.

A Dollop of Dublin has attempted to break this circle. It claims to be a 'non-sexist' A-Z of Dublin, and is produced by Spellbound books. The illustrations are by Mary Murphy and are black and

T  
↑



Travellers in our communities

Figure 55.

white line drawings. We see pictures of boys happily knitting and girls out jogging with their fathers. Perhaps it is an indictment on the real world, but these androgenous figures wearing unisex clothes look just as unnatural as the stiff girl in the Ant and Bee book.

Figure 55 is an example of the T page. The picture shows a happy travelling family. The mother is pretty and well dressed and seems to share the burden of parenting equally with her husband. All three children look clean and happy. The caravan is neat and tidy with flowers at the window and the ground is free from litter. However, this scene seems just as fantastic as one that shows talking animals.

A more typical view of a travelling family might be one where the father is not particularly interested in his children, and the characters do not seem as happy with their lot. Also, due to the lack of sanitation and hygiene facilities, the caravan sites of the travelling community are not usually as neat as the one shown in this illustration.

There might be a subtle attempt at education through this type of picture. If a child believes that travellers behave like this he or she might treat them with more respect in later life. This in turn might enable the travelling people to change their own behaviour.

## CONCLUSIONS

Unlike the previous chapter that showed animals in obviously 'fantastic' situations, the books in this chapter illustrated people in a realistic manner. We saw from books like More and



More Ant and Pee how a child can learn through studying pictures that portray real life situations. However the reality shown in all the books is an edited version, This editing occurs for a few reasons:

- (1) Reality is often unrecognisable. The books' treatment of queens illustrates this point. Illustrators resort to symbols and stereotypes to help clearer understanding of their pictures.
- (2) Reality is often boring. The Annick ABC and Helen Oxenbury's ABC of Things are filled with exotic acrobats and jugglers who, while they do exist in real life, do not play such an important role.
- (3) Reality is often unsuitable. All the books mentioned showed happy people in pleasant surroundings and at times, as in the case of A Dollop of Dublin, this is unrepresentative of the true situation.

So, even though the books illustrated real life, it is a designed and stylised version of life, that in itself becomes fantasy.

## FOOTNOTES

- (1) Nicholas Tucker The Child and the Book p36
- (2) Pat Wynnejones Pictures on the Page p54
- (3) Nicholas Tucker The Child and the Book p37

## CHAPTER



Subtle methods of deviating  
from reality found in the  
books under discussion



## INTRODUCTION

Some of the books discussed in the previous chapters have been obviously filled with imaginary characters and situations. However there are subtle ways of deviating from reality found in nearly all the books.

Most children's books, certainly all those discussed in this thesis, are illustrated by drawings rather than photographs. In this way the illustrator has full control over his or her portrayal of reality. Objects can be included or excluded. Scale can be distorted, and colour can be used for atmosphere. Styles of

illustration can be used for different effect, and the characters can be shown doing anything the artist wants them to do.

Five books shall be discussed under the heading of this chapter.

- (1) b is for bear by Dick Bruna - 1967
- (2) A Dollop of Dublin by Mary Murphey - 1988
- (3) Circus ABC by Sue Dreamer - 1985
- (4) Teeny Tiny ABC by Richard Scarry - 1975
- (5) Ant and Bee written by Angela Banner and illustrated by Bryan Ward - 1950

### R IS FOR BEAR

Dick Bruna has used his power as an illustrator to full effect. He has developed a stylised form of drawing where his figures stand out against a flat colour background. Detail is kept to a minimum. His drawings are simple and easy to read. In fact surveys have been carried out which show that young children find it easier to visualise strong definite shapes against a plain coloured background. (1)

When speaking about his work in an interview with journalist Anne Dempsey, Bruna says:

I always felt that children's books were too complicated and had too much in them. I wrote a very simple story of everyday things with simple clear pictures, that children could copy themselves, in strong colours. (2)

Figure 56 is an example of the R page. Rather than drawing a realistic representation of a rabbit, Bruna seems to have created a symbol for the animal. We can tell it is a rabbit because of the long ears, but the shape of the head and the drawing of the body are not consistent with the mental image we have of the real life creature. The placing of the rabbit on a

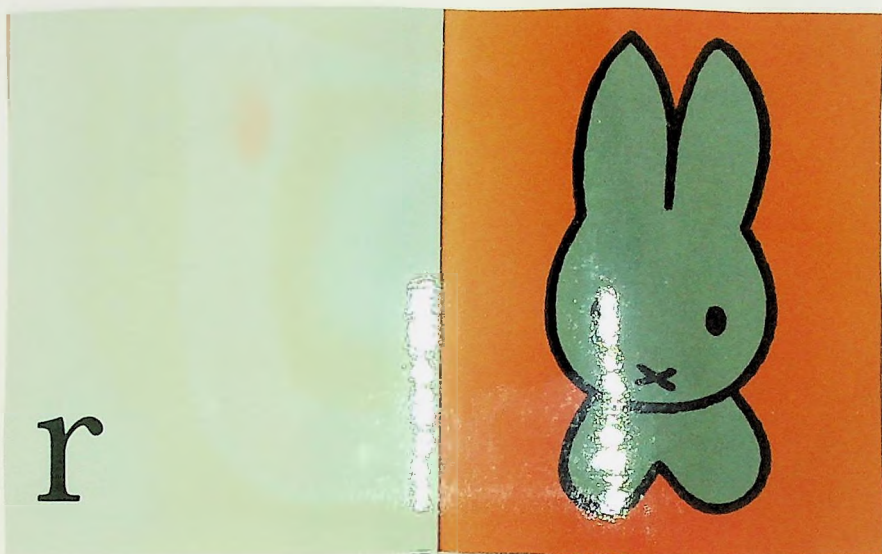


figure 56



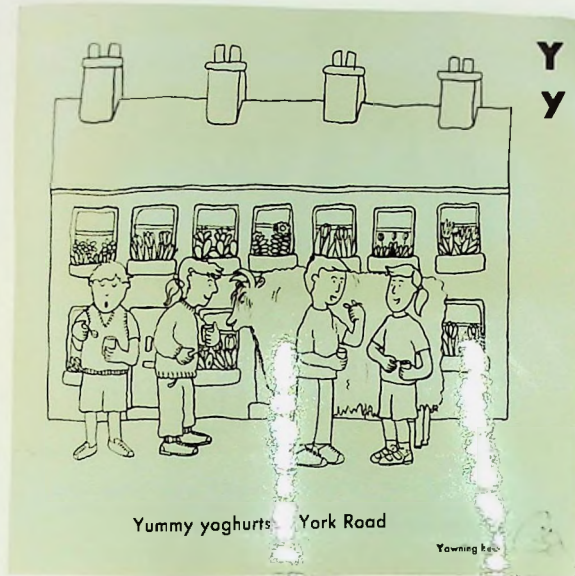


Figure 57

on a flat red background helps the child to see it clearly, but this lack of 'natural-rabbit-environment' increases the picture's separation from reality.

### A DOLLOP OF DUBLIN

Mary Murphy's style of illustration is less designed than Bruna's, but she has used other methods to distort reality. Figure 57 shows an example of the Y page. We see four children enjoying some yoghurts on the street. They are drawn in proportion but much larger than real children - they are even taller than the doors of the houses. It is obviously a design feature to focus our attention on the figures, but a young child might find this confusing. Nicholas Tucker writes:

Even school age children often show surprisingly unsophisticated responses to illustrations: It may take a child up to seven years of age before he or she understands that the size of a character in a picture is not always a determinant of age. So that a baby if drawn large scale in the foreground of a picture may still be thought to be older than its parents pictured in small scale in the background. (3)

However, whether the child sees the figures as old children or giant-sized children, he or she is seeing them as something different from real-life children. Because of this distortion of scale the illustration becomes a picture only based on real life, not a realistic representation of it.

We saw in chapter 5 how Mary Murphy's illustrations tended to show a romanticised view of life. This itself is a subtle form of fantasy and also appears in Sue Dreamer's Circus ABC

### CIRCUS ABC

Figure 58 is an example of one of the pages from this book.

A giraffe is listening to some bears playing music. A clown is juggling with an elephant, and small dogs are scattered here and there kissing people and playing with balls. It is a bright happy and colourful picture and as such is a total misrepresentation of a circus. This book has no mention of the cold Big Tops and hard wooden seats, the endless stream of horses going round in circles, and the discomfort one felt after a period of watching animals behaving unnaturally.

The treatment of situations and objects in a unrealistic fashion is also found in the Teeny Tiny ABC and the Ant and Bee book. In the cases of these books the element of unreality lies in their treatment of mechanical and technical objects.

#### TEENY TINY ABC

Figure 59 shows an example of the A page. The illustrator, Richard Scarry, has used a picture of an early 20th century biplane. This seems a strange example of an aeroplane for a book from the mid 1970s, but this looking to the past happens often in children's books.

Two reasons can be suggested for why this happens. Firstly, children's books are usually written and illustrated by adults. These adults quite often look back to their own childhood books for inspiration, and thereby end up illustrating a life that is at least twenty years old. However, if the illustrators form their childhood sought inspiration similarly, then the world they are remembering might be forty or sixty years old, or even older. This process creates a means of treating certain objects, which has now become removed from the reality of these items.



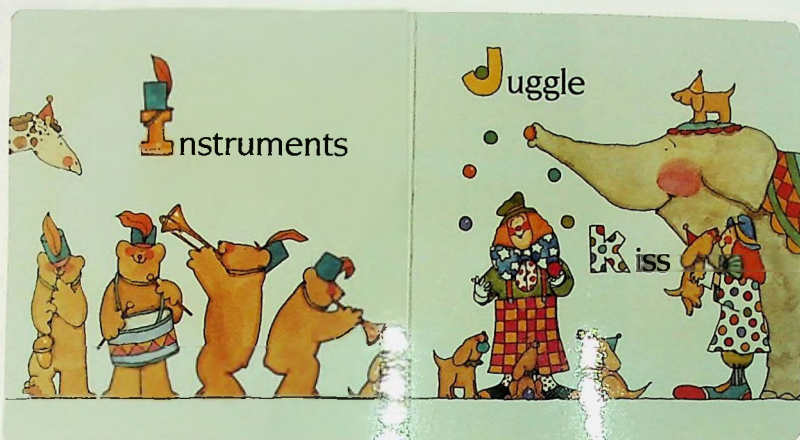


figure 58 .

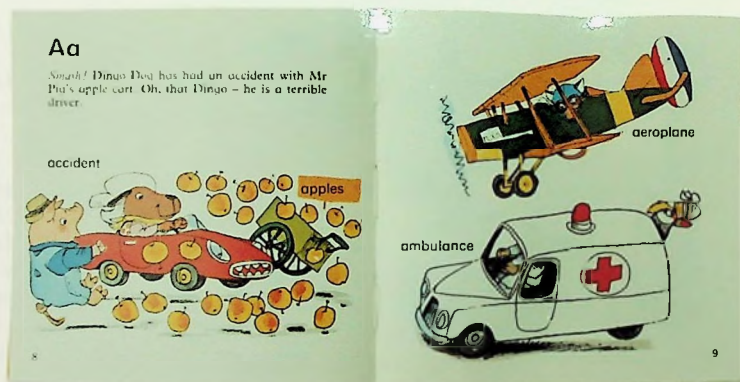
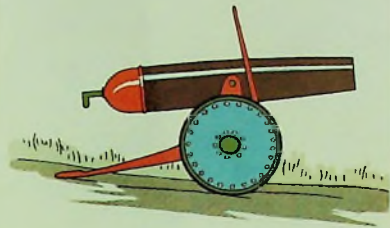


figure 59 .

gun

30



31

Figure 60.

The second reason for this nostalgia might lie in the illustrators need to make his drawings recognisable. The latter half of this century has led to developments and improvements in all forms of man-made creations. The appearance of most things has become streamline and unfussy, and consequently there are no dramatic differences between the look of one thing from another. For example it is difficult to distinguish between a picture of a DART train and a single decker bus, but we would have no problems when faced with a steam engine and a tram. Also, from the illustrator's point of view, it might be more enjoyable to draw all the quirks and details that are found in old fashioned objects.

#### ANT AND BEE

Figure 60 shows a picture of a gun taken from this book. Admittedly the book is twenty-eight years old, but this gun dates further back than that. The points mentioned above would apply to this picture also, but there might be a further reason for nostalgia when the picture has violent overtones. A gun like this would have been used at the turn of the century when wars were fought for national pride and there was a sense of glory attached to man's defeat of the enemy, but a more up to date picture of a nuclear war missile or a sub-machine gun would conjour up quite different feelings. In this age where war is mainly considered with fear and horror it would be unthinkable to mention it casually in a children's book.

#### CONCLUSIONS

In each of the five books mentioned, the illustrators deviated from reality for different purposes. Dick Bruna created visual



symbols for reasons of clarity and easy understanding. Mary Murphey's use of distorted scale increases the importance of the children and focuses our attention upon them. Sue Dreamer concerned herself with the happy side of life, but in so doing portrayed it in an unrealistic manner. Richard Scarry's drawings are nostalgic to increase their charm and aid recognition, while the book by Bryan Ward looks to the past for social reasons.

So subtle forms of fantasy, or the distortion of reality, is used when the illustrator wants to make a particular point or create a certain atmosphere. Through different artistic styles and the inclusion or omission of objects, he or she has full control over what the viewer sees and how they perceive the picture in question.

## FOOTNOTES

- (1) Nicholas Tucker The Child and the Book p25
- (2) The Irish Independent 7 July 1976 p8
- (3) Nicholas Tucker The Child and the Book p37

## CHAPTER



Objective criticisms of the  
books under discussion



## INTRODUCTION

The various topics discussed so far seem to indicate that fantasy plays an important role in children's books. Not only does it increase the enjoyment of reading but it adds to the learning potential of the book, and at times is necessary when the reality of a situation is considered unsuitable for a child.

So one might assume that the less realistic a book is the more popular it might prove to be. The collection of alphabet books were discussed with seven sets of people concerned with children's

literature. All were coming from different view points and were consequently looking for different things from the books.

The people were:

- (1) Anne Dempsey - mother
- (2) Rachel Marr - mother
- (3) Jillie Vernon and Philip Stanley - a couple expecting their first child.
- (4) Karen O Connor - book buyer for Dublin book shop
- (5) Paula Glasgow - teacher
- (6) A group of children aged 5-7 from a school in Gardiner street, Dublin 1
- (7) A group of children aged 4-5 from a national school in Greystones, Co. Wicklow.

#### ANNE DEMPSEY

Anne Dempsey is a mother of two children who are now grown up. When they were younger she took the task of parenting seriously. She involved herself with their games and stories and tried to make each an enjoyable learning experience. The criteria by which she examined the books was that they offered a starting point for discussion, thus allowing interaction between book and reader. She believes that children can learn more than one thing at a time, and so a book that teaches the alphabet can also be the vehicle for many other lessons.

Anne considered the Ladybird ABC to be a good book for early learning of the alphabet. She liked the simplicity and the familiarity of the pictures. However, she thought it was not a book that you could do much with, it exists simply as an alphabet book.

Books like Helen Oxenbury's, Susannah Gretz's, and Richard Scarry's were considered useful as they provided material for discussion with the child. These books are filled with details that can be examined and learned from. There are the obvious lessons like picking out different items from the picture in order to increase vocabulary, and the more subtle lessons that can be learned about life through the discussion of situations from it.

Anne was interested in the different styles of illustration used in the books. She liked the muted colours in Helen Oxenbury's drawings, and the condensed detail found in the Annick ABC. The Ant and Bee books and Gavin Bishop's A Apple Pie, however, were recieved well for their texts, but Anne would not have bought the books as she did not like their illustrations. She thought the Ant and Bee drawings were badly executed and that the pictures from the Apple Pie book were harsh and unappealing. However Anne made an exception in the case of Dr. Seuss's ABC. She did not like a lot of the drawings and found the animals unattractive, but admired the philosophy behind the book. She believes that the metre and cadence of the rhymes would prove enjoyable for a child, as would their zany content with the matching illustrations. She liked the way the sounds of the words were considered, and the building up approach that the book took to the alphabet.

## CONCLUSIONS

Anne believes that the inclusion of fantasy increases the value of children's books. It makes them more enjoyable and adds to their learning potential.



Rachel Marr is a young mother of a two year old child. She examined the books bearing in mind the things her daughter knew and liked. Rachel was not particularly interested in their alphabetical nature, but was concerned with whether or not her daughter would find the pictures appealing and familiar.

The Ladybird ABC came first on Rachel's list. In fact she said she would buy this book before she even looked at it. She liked the simple approach of word and picture and the large clear illustrations. She was pleased with Dick Bruna's b is for bear for the same reason, and thought that the less realistic and cartoon type drawings would have more appeal for her daughter.

Rachel was not as interested as Anne in making reading an imaginative activity. She took the books at face value and did not consider how she could use the pictures further. She realised, however, that children need to be stimulated and for this reason she was attracted by the Ant and Bee books, as they have already made the task of learning the alphabet interesting through including it in a story.

Rachel liked illustrations that only show a few things at a time. The books with lots going on, like The Teeny Tiny ABC, The Teddybear's ABC, and the Circus ABC, she found too cluttered and confusing.

Rachel liked the Helen Oxenbury ABC of Things as the drawings were large and distinct. She thought there were enough examples of the familiar to hold her daughter's attention, and that the inclusion of objects previously unseen, would help to increase her vocabulary.

She thought her daughter would like the Dr. Seuss's ABC for its bright colours and simple shapes. She considered the fantasy element found in the drawings, and said it was "not a problem". She said her daughter would relate the pictures to their nearest realistic comparison.

## CONCLUSIONS

Rachel, as we see through the Dr. Seuss book, did not consider fantasy a problem. However, she did not consider it an asset either. She prefers to give her daughter simple drawings of real things that do not involve unnecessary explanations.

## JILLI VERNON AND PHILIP STANLEY

Jilli and Philip are a young couple expecting their first child. They are both taking it very seriously and have thought long and hard about what is necessary to be a good parent. They were interested in the approaches that the books took to the alphabet, and thought that simplicity and clarity were needed for learning while bright colour was important for enjoyment.

They liked the Ladybird ABC, the Ant and Bee books, and the Baby Animal ABC by Robert Broomfield, for the way that these books illustrated the alphabet. They admired Bruna's style also and liked it for the bright colours and simple shapes. Sue Dreamer's colourful illustrations from the Circus ABC were also popular.

Both Jilli and Philip were very influenced by their own childhood experiences. They immediately loved the Richard Scarry alphabet as they had enjoyed it when they were younger, but both had found the Dr. Seuss illustrations frightening and would not show

them to their child, despite the book's excellent approach to the alphabet.

They thought that a book aimed at teaching the alphabet should limit itself to this task. Books like A Dollop of Dublin that were teaching social values were giving a young child unnecessary information.

## CONCLUSIONS

Jilli and Philip thought books should contain pictures that would appeal to children. They did not mind whether these pictures were realistic or fantastical, as long as they were pleasant and clear.

Through talking to these four people it became obvious that the reasons for buying books vary. The table in figure 61 shows the number of editions in which the books have been printed, but does not act as a clear gauge to their popularity as the dates of the books alphabets vary, and some do not include this information at all. The books were shown to Karen O Connor, buyer of children's books for Fred Hannah Ltd. Dublin, to get a clearer impression of the situation.

## KAREN O CONNOR

Karen chose the two Ladybird books as being the best sellers from all the other alphabets. She said that few people are familiar with the different authors and illustrators of children's literature, but everyone knows the Ladybird series, and when faced with the wide selection found in book shops, most customers immediately look for the titles they already know. The Ladybird books also have a clear simple approach that appeals to those



TITLE	FIRST PUBLISHED	NUMBER OF SUBSEQUENT EDITIONS
Angel's Alphabet	1986	0
A Apple Pie	1987	0
The Baby Animal ABC	1964	unmentioned
b is for bear	1967	5
Ladybird Rhyme Book	undated	unmentioned
An Alphabet	1978	unmentioned
Circus ABC	1985	0
Teddybears ABC	1974	1
A Dollop of Dublin	1988	0
ABC of Things	1971	1
The Annick ABC	1985	unmentioned
Dr. Seuss's ABC	1963	unmentioned
Teeny Tiny ABC	1975	11
Ant and Bee	1950	1
More and More Ant and Bee	1961	1
Ant and Bee and the ABC	1966	1
Ladybird ABC	undated	unmentioned

Figure 61

who are just looking for a book to teach the alphabet. However, Karen said the books' greatest attraction was their price. Ladybirds only cost about £1.00.

She said the Dr. Seuss's ABC is quite popular also, but as less families have heard of the Beginner Books series, few buy them. The sales of the Helen Oxenbury, and the Richard Scarry alphabets, are also related to the general public's familiarity with these books. Karen said that the Ant and Bee books were slow to sell as they were oldfashioned, and were dependant on those who had the books when they were young to buy them for their own children.

She said that while Dick Bruna's b is for bear used to be popular, not many buy the book these days. It costs around £6.00 and there are other books with similiar illustrations available for half the price.

## CONCLUSIONS

Karen thought that fantasy has an important role to play in children's books. She said that children love imagination and are always making up things themselves. However, she said that when buying alphabet books, people do not necessarily examine the contents, they look for the books they already know and good value for money.

So the man on the street is impressed by familiarity and value. The books were discussed with Paula Glasgow, the assistant director of St Nicholas Montessori Society of Ireland, to get a teacher's point of view.

PAULA GLASGOW

Paula has been involved with the teaching of young children for many years and is a follower of the Montessori school of education. This school founded by an Italian educationalist, Maria Montessori (1870 - 1952) believes that young children do not distinguish between fantasy and reality, and that reality is necessary in an educational situation.

Paula liked the approach taken by the Ladybird ABC, the Baby Animal ABC, and Dick Bruna's b is for bear. These books presented the information clearly with well drawn pictures. She made the point that a child could read and understand these books on their own, and this lack of adult intervention would increase a child's confidence and reading ability.

She thought that Helen Oxenbury's ABC of Things, and A Dollop of Dublin were useful when read with an adult. Oxenbury's alphabet provided large clear pictures and a collection of words which would increase a child's vocabulary, while A Dollop of Dublin could be used as a lesson in geography and social values as well as an alphabet book.

She thought that Sue Dreamer's Circus ABC was too abstract for teaching purposes, but when used as a story the pictures might give pleasure. Richard Scarry's alphabet was criticised as being "too small, too condensed, and too fussy".

Paula considered the Dr. Seuss's ABC to be useless for a child when learning to read. She says that children can only cope with one idea at a time, and that the fantasy in Dr. Seuss's illustrations would distract a child's attention. She thought that the



concept of the alphabet was difficult enough to swallow without the introduction of 'Camel on the Ceiling' and 'Fiffer-feffer-Feffs'.

## CONCLUSIONS

Paula feels that fantasy has no place in a child's alphabet book. She thinks that these books should limit themselves to straightforward realistic information and lay it out as clearly as possible. The concept of an alphabet is difficult enough without the introduction of unreal and unfamiliar objects.

## THE CHILDREN

The books were shown to two groups of children to get their views. Two dissimilar groups were chosen to see if opinions varied due to age and background. One set of children were from the Irish Sister's of Charity convent school in Gardiner Street Dublin 1. These children were quite proficient in reading both the text and illustrations and were aged between five and seven. The other group were four and five year olds and were from St. Bridget's convent school in Greystones co. Wicklow. They were only learning to read and had a limited understanding of the drawings.

The children were shown a few pages from three of the books. Robert Broomfield's Baby Animal ABC and the Ladybird Rhyme Book were chosen as realistic representations of animals and people, and Helen Oxenbury's ABC of Things was also shown to provide a contrasting unrealistic approach. The children were asked the same questions about each book and these with their answers are shown below.

Robert Broomfield's alphabet was shown in its entirety, and figure 62 is example of the T page from the book that was discussed earlier. The questions asked about this ABC were:

- (1) Do you recognise these animals?
- (2) Do you like them?
- (3) Are they happy/ sad/ angry/scary?

Both groups said they recognised the animals but often failed to identify them correctly. However they derived great pleasure from calling out the various names whether they were right or not. They all liked the animals, and some said they would like to have them as pets. It was interesting to discover that both groups thought the animals were happy as their offspring were near them. The children from Gardiner Street even maintained that the pictures were not frightening for this reason, but the group from Greystones were slightly scared, but only slightly as they said it was just a book.

Figure 63 shows the A page from the Ladybird Rhyme Book. The questions asked about this illustration were:

- (1) What is happening here?
- (2) Is this what the country looks like?
- (3) Is the girl happy?

The older group said the girl was hungry and wanted to eat the apples, while the younger children did not notice the fruit and said the girl was in her garden looking at the flowers. The children from Dublin recognised the picture as being of the country and said they would like to be there. The group from Greystones, who live in more rural surroundings, did not consider this an illustration of the country. The Dublin

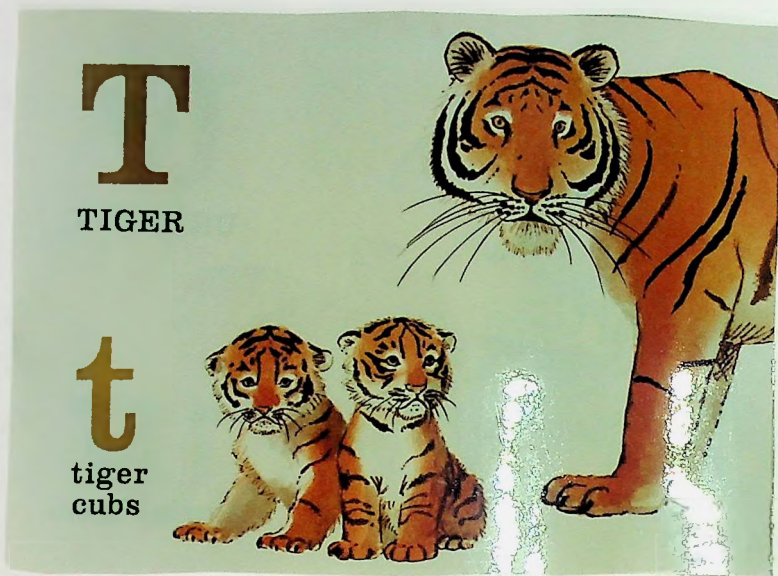


Figure 62

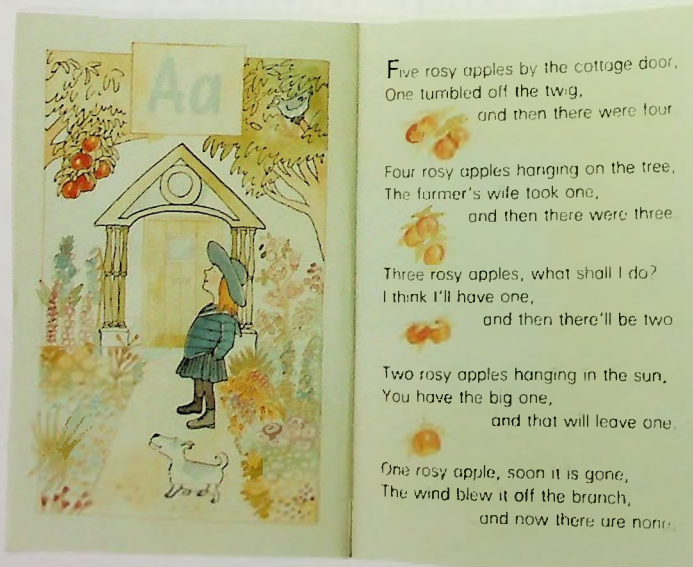


Figure 63





figure 64



figure 65

children said she was happy because of the flowers, while the Greystones children said she was happy as the scene was pretty and she had a pet sheep. (They insisted that the white dog was a sheep).

Figure 64 shows another page from the Ladybird Rhyme Book. The questions asked about this page were:

- (1) What is happening here?
- (2) Would you identify with these children?

The older group of children at first glance at the illustration, said the pair were just sitting and that the girl was happy. Then they read the rhyme and said the two were going out with each other and that was why the girl was happy. The younger Greystones children said the pair were watching television, despite the fact that the boy was reading. Neither group identified with the picture, although one child mentioned that her aunty had a vase like the one shown in the illustration.

Figure 65 shows an example of the D page from Helen Oxenbury's ABC of Things. The questions asked about this page were:

- (1) What is happening here?
- (2) Do animals go to school in real life?
- (3) Would you like them to ?

The children did not understand what was happening. Neither group saw that the animals were having a test and that one was trying to copy the other. In fact it was a while before they realised that the animals were in school at all. When asked do animals go to school in real life, they all took the question literally and replied that they did. They said that they had

a fish and a budgie in their classroom, and that dogs often come into the school yard. The older children from Gardiner Street were content to leave the question at that, but the younger Greystones group thought that animals probably went to a special animal school and were taught by an animal teacher. They all would like to take their pets to school but thought their teachers might not like it.

Figure 66 shows the G page from the Helen Oxenbury alphabet. This was also shown to the children and the questions asked were:

- (1) What is happening here?
- (2) Does the man think it strange that there are animals in his shop?

The children from Gardiner Street said that the animals were shopping and that the goose was wearing an apron as she was female. The children from Greystones said that the animals were shopping also, but when they saw the goose was wearing an apron they insisted that the pair were cooking. (They also maintained that the goat was a horse) The group from Dublin said that as animals do not normally go shopping the man was probably frightening. The other group were not particularly interested in the question and said that the man was smiling so he must be happy.

Finally the children were asked to compare the treatment of animals in Robert Broomfield's and Helen Oxenbury's drawings, and to state their preference. Half of the children, both boys and girls, liked the Oxenbury's ABC of Things as they said it was funny and would cheer you up if you were sick, while the other half liked the Broomfield alphabet. The girls liked this book



# Gg

goat  
goose  
grocer



Figure 66.

for the baby animals, and the boys liked it as it was naturalistic and contained wild creatures.

## CONCLUSIONS

If we consider the book's ability to teach the alphabet then it must be admitted that the children found the straightforward approach of the Baby Animal ABC the easiest to understand. However the other two books provoked more smiles and animated discussion, and the element of fantasy in Helen Oxenbury's ABC of Things was considered very amusing.

## CONCLUSIONS OF CHAPTER

The seven sets of people discussed in this chapter had different views on each of the books. However, they all seemed to agree that the realistic approach found in the Ladybird ABC and the Baby Animal ABC was best for young children when they are first learning the alphabet. Views varied when the element of fantasy was considered. Anne Dempsey thought that fantasy was useful, while Paula Glasgow considered it a drawback, and others like Rachel Marr, Jilli Vernon and Philip Stanley did not particularly mind either way. The two groups of children were divided equally in their preferences.

One must then conclude that reactions to unreality will differ from person to person, and despite the appeal of fantasy and its inherent learning potential it would be untrue to say that the less unrealistic a book is the more popular it might prove to be.

## CHAPTER



Conclusions



This thesis has examined the place of fantasy in alphabet books, and asked the question should fantasy be there at all? The alphabet books discussed were a the sum total of late twentieth century ABCs available at the time of writing.

Fantasy in children's books is a relatively new concept. An examination of early ABCs in chapter two, found that they dealt mainly in realism and fantasy became popular only within the last hundred years as society's view of children and their needs developed.

In chapter three the thesis reviews the alphabetical nature of some of the books, and questioned the role of fantasy. The

chapter concludes that children learn best when material --real or fantastic -- is presented clearly. Picture recognition is not necessary for learning but clear links between image and letter is vital when mastering the alphabet.

Chapter four examines how animals are used in children's books, and concludes that a creative and imaginary use of animals increases a book's learning potential.

Chapter five deals with the treatment of people in alphabet books, and shows it is necessary to edit reality to appeal to young readers. This point is developed further in chapter six, which discusses the power of the illustrator who creates his or her own form of fantasy through the images he or she chooses.

In chapter seven this thesis discovers how a cross-section of adults and children evaluate the books under discussion. It concludes that people react to books subjectively depending on their age, expertise, and background.

When the findings of each chapter are examined collectively two different opinions, as to the place of fantasy in alphabet books, emerge. On one hand it appears that children need clear realistic drawings in order to learn the ABC, while on the other hand, fantasy is appealing and its inclusion increases the wider learning potential of a book.

On the subject of reality G.K.Chesterton writes:

When we are very young children we do not need fairytales. Mere life is interesting enough. A child of seven is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door and saw a dragon. But a child of three is excited by being told that Tommy opened a door. Boys like romantic tales; but babies like

realistic tales - because they find them romantic. (1)

But it is important to remember, however, that fantasy is not a new concept for a child and that often imaginative tales acknowledge rather than initiate typical childhood daydreams.

Nicholas Tucker writes:

There is a nice story told by Chukovsky, of a Russian educationalist who tried to protect her son from 'unrealistic literature', only to find that he was spinning the wildest fantasies for himself, involving a red elephant, a friendly bear, and a hearth rug that could also turn into a ship. At table he would converse with an imaginary companion, in this case a baby tiger, and insist that he himself, and even more gallingly, his mother, had the occasional capacity to transform themselves into little birds. (2)

It must also be remembered that while ABC books familiarise the child with the alphabet, they also serve as an introduction to reading. When we consider that many of the books a child will go on to discover are filled with fantasy and imagination, it might be useful for the child to have already associated these concepts with books and reading.

So the question of fantasy's place in alphabet books must be answered according to how one views the purpose of these books. Fantasy has no part, if one looks for a book that familiarises the child with each letter through simple picture and character association. But one must say yes to fantasy if one considers a child can learn more than one idea at a time and can use the book as a vehicle for many lessons. And yes again, if one is interested in promoting reading as an enjoyable stimulating experience, and considers the book as a collection of thought-provoking pictures and ideas. And yes, if one is reluctant to show a young child mundane or unsuitable scenes that might be found boring or distressing. And finally a resounding yes, if



one is interested in teaching a child about the individuality of each human being, and our ability to create personal images with words or pictures.

## FOOTNOTES

- (1) Nicholas Tucker The Child and the Book p69
- (2) Ibid.

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