

The Dot and the Line

This collection centers on printed materials in which images and texts work as collaborators (or in some cases, conspirators) to tell stories or to challenge traditional storytelling methods. Each work contains illustrations that are essential to the texts. The components (hand-drawn black-and-white illustrations, sometimes a few colors, and text) work inseparably to convey understanding. These works span many genres, from fiction and poetry to children's books and graphic novels. It also includes two books of mathematical theory and two vinyl LPs. It was collected over the past ten years or so of my life.

The British mathematician Oliver Byrne notes in the introduction to his work found below that "All language consists of representative signs" (in *Euclid ix*). Ferdinand de Saussure spoke similarly of language's representative signs, saying that the correspondence between a word's form (signifier) and its meaning (signified) for a given language is based purely on convention (he called it *l'arbitraire du signe*). When you say *dieu* but she says *Gott*, you're really talking about the same thing. In the same way, the lines used to create a text and the lines used to create an image are made of the same stuff. All that differs are the conventions surrounding each system. You could call it *l'arbitraire du ligne*, or perhaps more accurately, the duplicity of lines.

The illuminated manuscripts of the European and Middle Eastern traditions attest to this brilliantly. Their creators weren't interested in simply reproducing words. To them, how the texts were presented was just as important. The goal was to communicate transcendent religious experiences, and so they manipulated the shape, character and form of their lines to create a space of visual play. With language came pictures: pictures of gods or other holy figures, of flowers and beasts, or of nothing in particular. In many cases, these images served to tell the story contained in the text to people who were unable to read. We see this too in the churches of Europe, in which stories were told in stained glass for the benefit of those who could not understand the priest's Latin.

The works of this collection were compiled with this tension in mind. After all, what is an alphabet but a system of dots and lines? To me, each artist represented here understood the line's duplicitous nature—they play with line's ability to both compose a single letter or to draw a visual story. This collection is comprised of works in which the distinction between image and language is smudged, sabotaged, toyed with, or erased altogether. In some cases, line drawings and text combine to form a similar storytelling language. While in others, lines become characters of the story itself, with their own personality and volition. In some cases, text and images are set at odds with one another, creating meaning in the resulting conflicts, and in others, words lose their meanings altogether and take on the role of images. In yet others, images are stripped of text and stand alone, leaving language only implied.

The meaning of this collection:

When I was six years old, I got to meet my favorite children's book author, Florence Parry Heide. In my home, Heide's name was synonymous with bedtime and learning how to read. We consumed her children's books like Cracker Jacks. At that time she lived down the street from my grandmother in Kenosha, Wisconsin, and the two were best friends. I remember meeting her for the first time, in her home, and seeing the space where she lived and worked. We soon became friends and penpals, sporadically but earnestly exchanging stories, poetry and doodles.

Heide's work and life introduced me to some of my favorite artists, notably Edward Gorey and Jules Feiffer, whose illustrations shared the page with her words. I remember as a young kid staring wide-eyed at the unquestionable starkness of Gorey's depictions of Treehorn (known as Schorschi in the German translation found below) and his home life, and feeling all the more the character's situation. I knew Gorey's work too from his alphabet books such as The Gashlycrumb Tinies (see below), and I began to wonder about the nature of his collaboration with Ms. Heide. I imagined the two of them as friends and penpals, sharing story outlines and doodles for new characters, or talking about their obsession with cats. (Gorey's work features heavily in this collection, many of his books inhabiting multiple categories that I've outlined below).

From then on, too, I began to wonder about the other great author-illustrator collaborators I admired, such as Roald Dahl and Quentin Blake, or Lemony Snicket and Brett Helquist. To me, these artists were not some distant literary figures; they were real people, friends and collaborators. This collection has been compiled with this understanding in mind, that the author and the illustrator work as collaborators, visual and literary correspondents who create a bimodal language for the stories and secrets they wish to share, and that the collaboration between an author and illustrator was the same as the work of the friend who shares a letter or a poem.

The collection has also been helped by a friend and fellow Gorey enthusiast, the artist Jeanette Miller. Her own works bear striking similarities to Gorey: fine pen-and-ink drawings, a meticulous obsession with details, and a respect for preserving the visual culture of Victorian England and American 20th century Americana. My appreciation now for artistic works, and illustrated books in particular, stems from my relationship with the work of both Jeanette and Ms. Heide.

Contents of this collection:

For the sake of clarity, I've divided the works into four loosely-defined categories based on the different functions that the text and images take on. To be clear, the collection works as a unified whole, but within it I've decided to create a range of subcategories in order to put some of these works in dialogue with one another.

I. Lines as Storytellers

It starts with works in which images sit side-by-side with texts to help illustrate the text's meaning. Here, text and illustrations work symbiotically to tell a story, convey humor, and supplement the author's vision. The images also work to make a text more approachable, either to children and early readers, or to speakers of other languages, or to those too tired to read. This group contains many of the children's books contained in this collection, including one Heide book (the others in my life belong to my mother technically). This one is a German translation of her book Treehorn's Treasure, called in German Schorschis Schatz, and features the original Edward Gorey illustrations. There is also a Polish translation of a young adult novel by Tove Jansson based off her Moomin characters, as well as the children's classic The Phantom Tollbooth (Juster, Feiffer illus.). Lastly, I've included in this grouping an illustrated book of poems and short stories by Gertrude Stein, and the wordless graphic novel The Arrival by Australian artist Shaun Tan. In this work, there is no text-based narrative to speak of—the images speak for themselves. It is meticulous, both in its scale and in the seriousness of its subject matter. It tells the story of a man who leaves his wife and daughter in their poor country

to emigrate to an alien land in search of work. The absence of words is important: since economic immigration is an international narrative, the artist relies solely on pictorial language to tell one of the most common stories of our time.

II. Lines as Instructors

This group is made up of works in which lines (and line drawings) are implemented to illustrate concepts discussed in the texts, whether dealing with mathematical or even more esoteric subject matters. In a broad sense, however, any of the children's books can be said to play this role, since it's through children's books that kids learn new vocabulary or develop reading skills. Norton Juster's The Dot and the Line is an example of this. The text of this story makes heavy use of alliteration, and playful repetition of synonyms to help kids develop more imaginative lexicons.

This group also features texts that are meant to be instructional or educational, with illustrations serving to demonstrate and describe concepts, rather than to depict or decorate. This group contains some of my most prized books. In this group are two instructional books in mathematics, including the extraordinary The First Six Books of the Elements of Euclid, in which 19th century mathematician Oliver Byrne presents Euclid's Elements with colored diagrams. In this work, Byrne uses colored shapes, rather than series of letters such as CBA, to represent Euclid's angles and lines. These shapes exist and operate within sentences and function often times as words themselves.

This group also features two remarkable works by British artist Barbara Jones. In English Furniture at a Glance, Jones traces the history and development of furniture making in England by coupling a narrative history with hand-drawn images of furniture. Similarly, in Design for Death, Jones works to present the rituals and imagery of cultural practices surrounding death from across the world. In it she creates drawings to preserve this visual culture, showing us death masks made from human skulls found in New Guinea, or the different styles of shrouds from around the world. Similarly, Edward Gorey's Gashlycrumb Tinies (and Gorey's work in general) is meticulous in its recreation of Victorian fashion, decor and architecture. In this way, the work serves to help preserve the visual culture of Victorian England. Furthermore, the work presents itself as a sort of cautionary tale, a type of story popular in the Victorian era, and in which children find themselves in great peril. In addition, the work functions as a device for teaching the alphabet (each page and accompanying image describes the death of different children with names for each of the letters of the alphabet). I like to think that Jones' works on English decor as well as her matter-of-fact presentation of the materiality of death, served as a resource for Gorey to draw on.

III. Lines as Lines

In these works, the qualities of geometric form are essential to the plot or structure of the book, and in some cases, the line operates as a character on its own. For instance, Harold and the Purple Crayon tells a story of a boy collaborating with a line in order to create new environments. In The Dot and the Line: A Romance In Lower Mathematics, geometric concepts are personified: the protagonist, a line, describes himself "steady and consistent" while the antagonist, a squiggle, is described as "unruly." Richard J. Trudeau's heavily illustrated manual Dots and Lines removes the charming fictionalization seen in Juster's book, yet is similarly geared towards teaching. This is also true of Oliver Byrne's The First Six Books of the Elements

of Euclid. In a succinct and direct way, these books are all very aware of a line drawing being a line drawing.

IV. Blurred Lines

This section contains works that highlight the arbitrary nature of the line. Here, words lose their meanings and become images themselves, and vice-versa. In the two works by Edward Gorey, for example, the roles played by the text and the images get swapped, and the resulting works are ambiguous, absurd, enigmatic and spooky. In both, the texts are presented in Gorey's own handwriting, further emphasizing the kinship of words and images. The text of The Object Lesson is delightfully and fearfully enigmatic. It is presented one clause at a time, together with an image, and begins thus: "It was already Thursday," (and on the following page), "but his Lordship's artificial limb could not be found". The images are equally cryptic. Here, there is no story to be told, no beginning, middle and end. Instead, each page presents the viewer with the vague beginnings of a scenario. The text, in both its physical shape and its semantic content, works with the image to supply a mood. Similarly, Chris Van Allsburg's classic, The Mysteries of Harris Burdick, presents a series of one-line stories coupled with gorgeously rich pencil drawings. Here, the viewer gets to glimpse a massive and complex world and must imagine the rest of it to fully explore.

In much the same way, the cartoons of James Thurber couple images with short lines of conversation. The drawings are sophisticatedly juvenile, and usually depict men and women in sitcom-like scenarios. The accompanying one-liners, however, appear often as non-sequiturs, for which Thurber's work is often described as absurdist. In these works, humor is found in the apparent conflict of the image and the text. Likewise, David Stromberg's Saddies creates humor, albeit with a much more 21st century flavor to his absurdist comics.

The Parisian fashion collective Dévastée, whose work is represented here with the book Vous aimez beaucoup voyager, is a personal favorite of mine. Their sartorial work is characterized by chic tailoring, enigmatic silhouettes with stark black-and-white textiles featuring quizzically smiley-faced objects like gravestones, water bottles, lawn-furniture and trees. While known mostly for their fashion, in 2014 they teamed up with Franco-Lebanese writer Chloé Delaume to produce a book of poetry and images. In this book, like Gorey's work, features hand-drawn texts and images, smiling gravestones that invite the reader to investigate the more cryptic side of life. This is one of my most prized books in this collection.

This group also includes books where words act as images. Howard's Road from 3 to 71 Years: The Scrap Book of All Times: Howard Explains How to Make Folk Art (see Finster) contains pages filled with handwritten-text that creates a congested and frustratingly difficult work. Karl Holmqvist's What's My Name? uses text in a similar manner: stark sans-serif typeface is repeated and warped across pages to create visual patterns. I've also included in this category two LPs. The first is Talking Heads' Little Creatures, for which Finster designed the sleeve. The second, Tout seul dans la forêt en plein jour, avez-vous peur? is by Québécoise musician and visual artist Geneviève Castrée (known here as Woelv). The artist created an elaborate liner booklet in which the lyrics are presented with translations in dozens of languages (including Arabic and Korean), accompanied by Castrée's own drawings. These drawings resemble Jansson's Moomins in their cartoonishness, but with a gravity and graphicness unseen elsewhere in this collection. The images are often violent, since the music describes scenes of violence, both on a global and personal level, and serve to create a visual environment in which the viewer can more richly explore the acoustic world of the artist's music.

Bibliography

Delaume, Chloé, François Alary, and Ophélie Klère. *Vous Aimez Beaucoup Voyager*. Senlis: Les Éditions Du Cimetière, 2014. Condition: pristine. A first edition.

I bought this book while in Paris, after going to a fashion show for the brand Dévastée, which the illustrators Alary and Klère direct.

Euclid, Oliver Byrne, Werner Oechslin, and Petra Lamers-Schütze. *The First Six Books of the Elements of Euclid: In Which Coloured Diagrams and Symbols Are Used Instead of Letters for the Greater Ease of Learners*. Köln: Taschen, 2010. Condition: excellent.

Feiffer, Jules illus. Norton Juster. *The Phantom Tollbooth*. New York: Bullseye Books, 1988. Condition: very good.

This book has been in my family since before I was born. One of my favorite books growing up.

Finster, Howard. *Howard's Road from 3 to 71 Years: The Scrap Book of All Times: Howard Explains How to Make Folk Art*. Summerville: Self-Published, 1988. Condition: good.

Finster, Howard illus. *Little Creatures*. Talking Heads comp. and perf. Sire Records 92 53051, 1985. Condition: very good.

Pilfered from my dad's and my shared record collection.

Gorey, Edward. *The Glorious Nosebleed*. New York: Dodd, Mead & Company, 1974. Condition: very good. First edition.

This first edition was a graduation gift from my friend's mom Patrice Miller, who has one of the largest private collections of Gorey works in the world (she even owns some of Gorey's fur coats).

Gorey, Edward. *The Object Lesson*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1958. Condition: excellent.

Gorey, Edward. *The Gashlycrumb Tinies*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1991. Condition: excellent.

Heide, Florence Parry. *Schorschis Schatz*. Illustr. Edward Gorey. Trans. Hans Wollschläger. Zürich, Diogenes Verlag AG, 1982. Condition: excellent.

Birthday present from my friend Jeanette, who knows of my love for foreign languages.

Holmqvist, Karl. *What's My Name?* London: Book Works, 2009. Condition: excellent.

Jansson, Tove. *Moomin: The Complete Tove Jansson Moomin Comic Strip*. Vol. 1. Montreal: Drawn & Quarterly, 2006. Condition: excellent.

Alexander Relihan

Came across Jansson's work when I was thinking a lot about Scandinavia. I had started learning Norwegian in the 8th grade, and soon began reading about Finland. Jansson was herself born in Finland but belonged to the country's Swedish minority, and so her Moomins belong to that language. Unfortunately, this collection does not cite a translator.

Jansson, Tove. *Zima Mumminków*. Trans. Irena Szuch-Wyszomirska. Warsaw: Nasza Księgarnia, 1975. Condition: poor.

This is a Polish translation of Jansson's young adult novel originally published in Swedish, known in English as Moominland Mindwinter. I picked this up in a street book sale one morning in Warsaw.

Johnson, Crockett. *Harold And The Purple Crayon*. New York: Harper Collins, 1983. Condition: good.

This copy has been in my family for a long time.

Jones, Barbara. *Design for Death*. New York: Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1967. Condition: very good.

After encountering Gorey's work, I began reading about Victorian gothic imagery, which led me to the preservation works of Barbara Jones. This book was acquired at an antique book store in Boston.

Jones, Barbara. *English Furniture at a Glance*. London: Architectural Press, 1954. Condition: good.

Juster, Norton. *The Dot and the Line: A Romance in Lower Mathematics*. New York: Random House, 1963. Condition: very good.

Written by the author of The Phantom Tollbooth, I came across this work later in life, at an art book store in New York.

Stein, Gertrude. *The World Is Round*. Illus. Clement Hurd. San Francisco: North Point Press, 1988. Condition: pristine.

I've always loved Gertrude Stein, but only recently learned she wrote a children's book. Although this is much more than a children's book. I bought this at the gift shop of the Musee Picasso in Paris.

Stromberg, David. *Saddies: Or, You Never Know Who Might Give You a Black Eye*. Los Angeles: Jovian Books, 2003. Condition: good.

I came across this artist's work in some dark hole of the Internet late one night.

Tan, Shaun. *The Arrival*. New York: Arthur A. Levine Books, 2006. Condition: very good.

A very good friend of mine, an illustrator, showed me this work while she was working on a similar project, an illustrated book about migration. I bought myself a copy finally after stealing hers for so long.

Alexander Relihan

Thurber, James. *Men, Women & Dogs*. New York: Harcourt, Brace & Company, 1943.
Condition: good. (First edition).

Thurber, James. *The Thurber Carnival*. New York: Harper & Bros., 1945. Condition: very good.

Trudeau, Richard J. *Dots and Lines*. Kent: Kent State University Press, 1976. Condition:
excellent.

Van Allsburg, Chris. *The Mysteries of Harris Burdick*. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1984.

One of the best first dates I ever went on was with a boy who worked in a bookshop. He showed me this book and I was struck by nostalgia, since Van Allsburg wrote my other favorite children's book, [The Polar Express](#).

Woelv. *Tout seul dans la forêt en plein jour, avez-vous peur?* K Records KLP172, 2007. Vinyl LP. Condition: pristine.

I encountered the music of Woelv (aka Geneviève Castrée, aka O Paon) first. I bought myself this LP as a birthday gift in high school.