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Back to the Tableau or the Gerontoscopy of Wounded Men

To read a picture book for children in the name of the imaginary of childhood is to subscribe to a particular construct of the *album de jeunesse*, or what in English is called the picture book, which is, after all, just a kind of book marketed to children. In this construct, the picture book for children models an alternative to the imaginary of grown-ups, an imaginary "once removed" yet somehow housed in the imaginary certified as adult, and which, through its difference, affirms *the* imaginary of readers who don't happen to be children. One of the powers of the adult imaginary is to invent a speculative childhood, and to fill it with toys, books and fiestas, just as we have filled other "ages of man" with iconic paraphernalia like canes and walking sticks.

It has not been concealed from us as functioning adults that we are usually the ones who make picture books. To lay emphasis on another zone of the adult imaginary found within the covers of the picture book, I explore here what we might call gerontoscopy, the way elders look at the world, and more specifically, a gerontoscopy of the wounded adult male, leaving aside the gerontoscopy of women picture book makers like Elzbieta, herself author of an illustrated autobiography of herself as a picture book artist, *L'enfance de l'art.* For this essay, gerontoscopy is not necessarily wisdom, but rather the aggregation of inclinations, attitudes and ways of configuring

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shared by those who are approaching their sixties, seventies, or beyond.[1]

It goes without saying that the creator of a picture book for children must be able to simulate or represent the experience of childhood, but that simulation or representation owes a great deal to conventions of picture book design which have conditioned our notions of childhood experience for more than 80 years, practices now fairly well understood.[2] The notion of picture book codes has helped scholars grasp a practice that took part in the dynamic modernism of montage, in which image and text were always in active dialogue, sometimes in dissonance, and in which "the drama of the turning of the page" was an article of faith.[3] Such interplay, whether in picture book or comic book, emerged during the concurrent development of the cinema and well before the arrival of television; picture book makers could borrow the close-up or panorama shot, time lapse and stop-motion shots, aerial views, dissonances between what one saw and what one heard, and even the vacillation between black and white and colour. Today, more than two decades after the picture book codes were

[1] The "ages of man" undergo constant redefinition, but Daniel J. Levinson's groundbreaking *The Seasons of a Man's Life* (New York: Ballantine, 1978, 1986) points to agreement among three ancient sources (Talmud, Confucius, Solon) that "late adulthood" in men occurs around age 60, the age he and his fellow researchers also identify with that stage (324-326).

[2] Since the first appearance of "Introduction to Picturebook Codes" in *Word and Image* (1986), the codes proposed there have come to constitute a sort of base for those who would study the aesthetics or poetics of the picture book, whether in Asia, South America, Europe or the U.S. See most recently, *How Picturebooks Work*, of Nikolajeva and Scott (New York: Routledge, 2000), or more recently, *Norton Anthology of Children's Literature* (New York: Norton, 2005).

[3] Barbara Bader drew this phrase from the choreographer and picture book maker Rémy Charlip in her survey of American picture book art, *American Picture books: From Noah's Ark to the Beast Within*. (New York: Macmillan, 1976).

proposed, those conventions of picture book design, which no doubt corresponded with ideas of the fluid and transitory nature of childhood in the "here and now," ideas circulating in the world of artists such as Marjorie Flack, Margaret Wise Brown, Maurice Sendak, Leo Lionni and Dr. Seuss, must be seen as part of a modern era that is no longer quite our own. Conventions nourished for example by be-bop and modern jazz, and later by MTV, jittery and jumpy, may be giving way to a need to slow things down, to make a pause, even to invest the individual picture book tableau[4] with the dignity of a temple of reading rather than the excitement of a race track. Although the market for the zany and the accelerated will not disappear anytime soon, I would propose here that picture book making, in the hands of the generation now in late adulthood, may be in the process of taking a step back, moderating the nervous dynamism of words and images, and drawing closer to the rectangular tableau of an earlier age, one of which the framing establishes a firm horizontal line. This inquiry into the imaginary of more or less sexagenarians will draw us towards an aesthetic less agitated or agitating, marked by a return to the tableau in three picture books published within the last decade, a return which brackets the history of the European and North American 20th century as the history of a wound and establishes the face of the child as the hieroglyphic mark of moral consciousness. One could describe it as the imaginary of a childhood reclaimed, perhaps, but one which betrays its own gerontographic construction.

In 1999, at the age of 68, the Alsatian artist Tomi Ungerer produced a new memoir[5] in picture book format, yielding

[4] In a comics format, what I am calling a "tableau" might be regarded as a "splash page."

[5] As a picture book memoir, *Otto* (Paris: l'école des loisirs, 1999) dramatizes certain incidents already recounted in both the French original and the English language revised and augmented edition of Ungerer's autobiography *Tomi: A Childhood Under the Nazis* (Niwor, Colorado: Roberts Rinehart Publishing, 1998).

putative authorship to a teddy bear named Otto; according to his teddy bear autobiography, Otto himself had enjoyed some notoriety in the press after World War II. In 2002, three years later, at the age of 56, Yvan Pommaux delivered to the public a picture book entitled *Avant la télé*, a book which recalls the childhood of a boy born, like Pommaux himself, in Vichy in 1945, and which earned him a Prix Goncourt Jeunesse in 2003.[6] Three years later, in 2005, Allen Say, an artist and storyteller born in Yokohama in 1937, and originally a commercial photographer in Japan, put, at the age of 68, before the attention of American readers, his *Kamishibai Man*, which tells of the return to a city in Japan of a traditional picture-reciter long retired to the countryside, a so-called paper theatre man, whose professional tradition precedes by millennia the advent of the picture book or of television.[7]

Picture recitation, or the art of telling a story while deploying either a scroll of papyrus or paper or a set of painted tableaux, belongs to a venerable tradition, one which has recently received critical attention. Victor H. Mair, a sinologist, in his *Painting and Performance: Chinese Picture Recitation and its Indian Genesis* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1989), argues convincingly that picture recitation began in India, spread to China and Japan, and arrived in Europe during the European Middle Ages; in 1989, according to Professor Mair, this practice could still be found in Japan, Tibet, Iran, and in Europe and the Middle East.[8] Jan Ziolkowski, in his 1993

[6] Yvan, Pommaux, *Avant la Télé*, colors by Nicole Pommaux, Paris: L'école des loisirs, 2002.

[7] Allen Say, *Kamishibai Man*, Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 2005.

[8] In the Rajasthan region of India, the tradition of the *bhopas* who deliver their traditional epics before a giant textile screen, called the sacred *phad*, is still alive. "It was like a fresco transferred to textile: a vibrant, apparently chaotic seventeen-foot-long panorama of medieval India–women, horses, peacocks, carts, archers, battles, washermen and fishermen, kings and queens, huge gray elephants and herds of white cows, many-armed demons and blue-skinned

pathfinding work on animal fables, *Talking Animals: Medieval Latin Beast Poetry 750-1150* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1993), does not neglect the contribution of the painted image in the transmission of the fables, at least a thousand years before the invention of Powerpoint. Reliance on tableaux to demonstrate or tell a story on the streets has not always merited respect: in Diderot's *Le neveu de rameau* of 1782, the nephew confesses: "le lendemain, je songeais à me faire peindre un de ces tableaux attachés à une perche qu'on plante dans un carrefour, et où j'aurais crié à tue-tête: Voilà la ville où il est né; le voilà qui prend congé de son père l'apothicaire; le voilà qui arrive dans la capitale, cherchant la demeure de son oncle; le voilà aux genoux de son oncle qui le chasse; le voilà avec un Juif, et caetera et caetera."[9] [the next day, I was thinking of getting painted for me one of those tableaux attached to an easel that one puts up on a street corner, and where I would have screamed out: 'here's the town he was born in; that's him taking leave of his father the pharmacist; that's him at the feet of his uncle who's kicking him out; there he is with a Jew, etc., etc.'"]. Such a debasement of the oral picture recitation tradition can only be compensated by elaborate critique and sometimes an "absorptive" kind of written recitation of paintings, as practiced by Diderot himself as, in his Salons, he comments and expands in true picture-telling tradition on particular tableaux of Van Loo, Chardin, Fragonard, Vien, Greuze, and most famously, Vernet.[10]

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gods, all arranged around the central outsized figures of Pabuji, his magnificent black mare, and his four brothers-in-arms. This, I knew must be the *phad*." The Rani (a Rajashthani Princess) explains that the *phad*s are all that remains of the tradition of the monks and storytellers who would have used paintings on scrolls." See William Dalrymple, "Homer in India: The oral epics of Rajasthan," *New Yorker*, 20 November 2006, 48-55, esp. 52.

[9] Denis Diderot, *Le neveu de rameau*, introduction, notes, chronology, dossier and bibliography by Jean-Claude Bonnet (Paris: Flammarion, 1983), 124.

[10] See Michael Fried's treatment of Diderot's fictional "entering of

Although, of the picture books discussed here, all allude to traditional painting as a sign of cultural heritage, as one sees even on the cover of *Kamishibai Man*, or in two framed paintings of female nudes in *Otto*, or in a revealing moment in *Avant la télé* where a classroom blackboard ("tableau" in French) becomes a colourful tableau (Nicole Pommaux, artistic as well as marital partner, has added the colours to this picture book), none of these three is devoted to art history as consecrated in art museums, as in, for example, *Lulu and the Flying Babies* of Posy Simmonds (New York: Knopf, 1988), a sort of museum in picture book experience and a genre all of its own, about which Sandra Beckett has given a definitive reading.[11] Despite the inspiration of photojournalism, which lends their narratives a quasi-documentary dimension in the treatment of an earlier era, the creators of the three picture books before us adopt at first glance design strategies that recall the "modern" tradition of 20th century picture or comic books and would seem to confirm the conventions of picture book codes. A longer look may incline us to consider these books as marking a return to the tableau. Pommaux, the youngest, has expressed his admiration for the work of Sendak and Ungerer,[12] and the "ligne claire" of Hergé, but the work of Sendak, Ungerer and Say goes back to both the caricaturists as well as the romantics and realists of the 19th century in Europe, a tradition anchored and invested in the tableau, for which one major justification (beyond its exchange value as high art) would have been to constitute historical or political documentation of an epoch,

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paintings" in *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago, 1980),122-132.

[11] Sandra Beckett, "Parodic Play with Paintings in Picture Books,"*Children's Literature* 29 (2001), 175-195.

[12] Sophie Chérer, *L'album des albums*, (extract) *POLAR, AMOUR ET BANDE-DESSINEE*, available from http://onl.inrp.fr/ONL/travauxthematiques/livresdejeunesse/ouvrages/auteurs/pommaux/pommauxPommaux. March 15, 2008.

whether in family scenes, individual portraits, or battle scenes from the colonies of empire.

At sixty years of age, Sendak himself had announced this return to the tableau with *Dear Mili*,[13] a picture book created, according to Hamida Bosmajian, at a moment when the celebrated producer finally came to terms with the loss of his family in the concentration camps, a fact which he had hidden from himself for more than forty years.[14] Let it suffice here to note that both style and presentation in this picture book take us back to books of the 19th century illustrated with fine engravings; according to the practice in this period, we find normally just a single image on a given page, sometimes laid in, often printed on only one side. Although Sendak's *Dear Mili* has a 19th century look, its production offers a single image or text on both sides of the page. To add more images on a single page would be to take part in the dynamism of modernity, but would play a more subversive role in diminishing the weight of each image, and even reduce the importance or power of the subject in the image. Multiple versions of Mili within the same picture space would undo the dignity of her quest. In "Introduction to Picture book Codes,"[15] I had called this strategy the law of diminishing returns, but whatever the validity of this law or code, it is one of those codes that more or less collapses in the picture books in question. Just Pommaux's work exploits the multiplicity of images on a single page, but not always or consistently, especially at the beginning and end; in the work of Say or Ungerer, we normally see no more than

[13] Maurice Sendak, *Dear Mili*: an old tale by Wilhelm Grimm, Ralph Manheim, tr., New York: Michael de Capua/Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1988.

[14] Hamida Bosmajian, "Memory and Desire in the Landscapes of Sendak's *Dear Mili*," *The Lion and the Unicorn* 19.2, December 1995, 186-210.

[15] William Moebius, "Introduction to Picture book Codes." *Word & Image: A Journal of Verbal/Visual Enquiry*,Vol. 2, No. 2. April-June 1986, 141-158.

two, but often just one image per page, and often in tableau form, following Sendak's praxis in *Dear Mili*.

In what follows, I examine the function of the tableau at the entrance of each picture book, interrogate the symptoms of masculine gerontoscopy, particularly those that seem to express a pre- or post-feminist turn of mind, and finally, take up the return of the tableau at the end of each picture book as a kind of sublime envoi. The works in question abound in the exposure of human vulnerability, like that seen in *Dear Mili*, and may be considered crowning achievements of men born before the advent of television and before a major world war. Whether the signs of male vulnerability are part of an agenda that would highlight male suffering in particular will remain an open question. The tableaux which mark the incipit and closure of the three picture books share a plenitude of colours which extend to the four corners, within a framework which remains resolutely horizontal and vertical. We encounter, at the centre of each picture book, tableaux which are, so to speak, unfinished, degraded, faded or yellowed, cut off or pasted over, and which in this context, in my view, constitute a hermeneutics of the wound, but which otherwise in other contexts might simply, too simply in my view, be interpreted according to the norms of a modernist dynamic.

For the incipit, the picture book must, I have argued,[16] establish a stability between word and image (on the level of presentational process) and between character and environment (presented world) that has the appearance of stability, based on

[16] In two related unpublished papers, the first delivered in Paris in July 1998, "'Este é um livro como a vida," a book like life: Towards an Aesthetics of the Picture Book" at the biennial congress of the International Society for Research in Children's Literature,' and the second at Stockholm University in October of the same year, "Axes of Transformation in the Picture book," a plenary session lecture for a Symposium on Aesthetics of the Picture book, funded by the Wenner-Gren Foundation.

alleged facts, an assertion and proof of identity of the object such as one finds at the beginning of *Little Blue and Little Yellow* of Leo Lionni[17]: "This is little Blue," the caption for a blob of blue. In 20th century picture book practice, this initial stability between word and image must break down; the name of little Blue doesn't work when the subject blob turns green. This breakdown in the word/image relation places in doubt our trust in their mutuality, and obliges us to treat the two as parallel, but not at all as possessing a complementary identity. To follow this pattern of breaking down in instances where a particular picture book is evoking a specific historical period or moment presents a bigger challenge, I believe, than in those which incline towards fantasy, without historical references. Let us take a closer look at the incipits of these three picture books.

Ungerer's *Otto* proceeds as if on a factual basis. Otto, a rather common masculine name in German, and a homonym in French for the word "auto" or "self," a play on words which doesn't work in the original English version of the picture book, captions a front cover portrait, in the "ecce homo" tradition, of a teddy bear; the name "Otto" names the figure in the image, and transforms a bear, an "it," into a "he" or an "I." The portrait is saturated with light brown colours on the figure; in that limited spectrum, the blob of purple over the bear's left eye and ear is disconcerting. Is this a scar? Is this a birthmark? Can a teddy bear bleed? The title page shows the same bear, framed, bent over a book without images: can he read? The first pages of narrative in the voice of the bear himself indicate that on the one hand he knows how old he is, how he was constructed and his purpose as a gift, and on the other that he recognizes his friendship with David and Oscar, for whom he serves as a play-object. Thus we hear the voice and read the writing of an unheard-of witness, a self-animated bear without ventriloquist. That this toy bear has learned to read and write is "explained" as a part of a joke engineered by the

[17] New York: Astor-Honor, 1959. Rprt. N.Y.:Wm. Morrow. 1995.

boys who play with him, yet it is he, the teddy bear, who tells us the tragic history of a war (WWII) and of the persecution of Jews, as a part of his autobiography. The tableaux that follow the first often lack a horizontal line at the bottom; those that lack it have a tendency to put into play a diagonal, cardinal mark of instability and change. All of these tableaux set forth images from a well-documented historical phenomenon even as the verbal commentary is attributed to a bear, a creature of fantasy. Thus the stability of word/image is marked from the beginning as fragile, perhaps even unsupportable according to the laws of historical discourse.

Like Otto, the Kamishibai Man is out in front, on the dust jacket. There is no mistaking the connection between the man portrayed and the man named. His calling as a man of the "paper theatre" is iconized in the curious form of a large wooden chest mounted on his bicycle. On top of the desk, as if folded up for a viewer, is a wood-framed picture of a figure facing outward, not unlike Otto. Unlike Otto in self-portrait on the cover of his book, the Kamishibai Man does not look at us, but seems, like many figures in 18th century French painting treated by Michael Fried, to be absorbed in his work. Since the kamishibai profession is already announced on the dust jacket, we check the title page for confirmation and sure enough, it's there! One of the painted images on paper from his "paper theatre" awaits us, an image of children bearing down on us, without caption, perhaps a broadside from one of the events in a traditional story to be told by the Kamishibai Man. After these metonymical confirmations of his profession as Kamishibai Man, the narrative begins in what seems a stark retreat from this tradition, giving us an elderly couple, the woman inside a simple dwelling-place, the man sitting on the stoop, not quite either inside or outside; we are in a picture story, on paper, of this couple, but the story appears to be about the couple, and not about the paper theatre practices we admired at the beginning. The elderly man speaks of how much he misses "going on (my) rounds," but we have no details. Instead, the

narrator takes pains to give the couple the names they use for each other: Jiichan and Baachan, Grandpa and Grandma, curious epithets for these two who, we learn, have never had children. The breakdown of the sturdy link between the word and image becomes even more charged when Jiichan enters the big city he has long avoided: his disorientation before the grand façades of modernity leads him to silence. These are not images from his theatre chest, or from his tradition. The elderly figure who bears down on us on his bicycle is not the waving child of the painted page on the cover, but an old man. What he actually sees or says is kept from the reader. By erasing all the contextual details and by placing in sequence in one climactic opening, the one in which on the verso Jiichan begins to call for public attention, his face behind opaque glasses (we cannot see his eyes), followed, on the recto, by the *painted* image of children rushing forward, which we recognize as that on the title page, children he may believe are responding to his call to listen, Allen Say will have realized a total breakdown in word/image reference; for Jiichan, real child auditors are nowhere to be found; what stands before him is no more than a painted image and the mental image of a memory.

On the cover of *Avant la télé, (Before TV)* three children run headlong towards the reader, like the children who hurdle towards the viewer in the title page illustration of *Kamishibai Man*; the two boys grip their swords, the girl carries the emergency kit of a nurse, and the whole offers a tableau rich in details; what would be the connection between this image and the book's title? Are the image and title compatible with each other, are they mutually referential, one to the other, as the name Otto applies to the image of the teddy bear? If we imagine the world before television as a space for play no matter where, rather than a space reserved for television viewers, the children before us proclaim a world before TV in which the nobility of valour and compassion is incarnated in young and dashing boys and girls. We might imagine the alternative, the image of the world after TV: children slouched on a sofa before the

screen, swords broken, emergency kit soiled. The title *Avant la télé*, which is not innocent, announces itself above an image, almost confrontational, of the two warriors, one of whom seems to be looking us in the eye. We have to keep this young man's look in mind, for he will be our *"fils" conducteur*, as we shall see on the title page. He will take us through his story. But the brief legend on the double page spread which follows this young man's look cuts the thread that ties the image to the word. In one composite image in this single opening, we face six years of European history without any allusion at all to any of the children's faces just registered on the cover or the title page. The stability of the cover and title page breaks down in a panorama of violence and suffering, marked by the sparest of terms; while the number of images superimposed on this page devoted to war may seem luxurious, the number of words is subject to a severe economy. It is not possible to balance a war painted in 24 images with a war confined to twelve words, all but four of them (*c'était la guerre*) referring to certain dates. In the openings that follow, the horizontal line of a frame that would establish stability is gone; a cat o' nine tails lies horizontal in a blank space. A vertical line on the page actually designates a horizontal line in the presented world of the apartment, here in cross section. We are thrown into a whirlwind of images and words, names and faces.

In short, the strategy of the incipit as an established convention within the 20th century picture book, which takes us from an illusory stability between word and image to a state of specular and verbal disorientation, serves the interests of the three contemporary picture book artists under consideration. Our disequilibrium, our disorientation in the face of the non-aligned mirrors of text and image render us vulnerable and attentive at the same time. Such a challenge is a part of play itself; play provokes risk, play messes up language in favour of new usages.

Given the picture book's tendency towards the sublime, as I have proposed elsewhere,[18] culminating moments in the three picture books here are neither too surprising nor too common. After all, in the era after Foucault, Braudel and Nora, who embrace the possibility of multiple histories, even those we call "herstories," all three of the picture books offer a fairly explicit masculine writing, or one could add "wounded masculine" either in the text or in the so-called dynamism of the image. I develop here this line of inquiry and begin by reminding us that the straight horizontal line invokes the imperial and even martial progress of the logos on the page and validates a masculine trait, the penchant for straight lines.

Those who situate their dramas in the period before television, as these picture book artists do, also put into brackets the feminist revolutions of the past 50 years. In each of these picture books, we see women in secondary roles, women who satisfy the needs and interests of men. In *Otto*, for example, it is Oscar's mother who has to explain the circumstances that oblige David to wear a yellow star, and do not require the same of Oscar. During a period of recovery from the war, Otto is adopted by a young American girl, who takes care of his every need, but who does not have the power to protect him from street kids, who toss him in a garbage can, where he is rescued by an old beggar-woman who sells him to an antique dealer. Women thus serve as transitional figures for the male leads. In the final scene of the reunion of the old friends David and Oscar, the paintings of female nudes on the wall behind the two elders suggest the usefulness of the woman as spectacle to masculine eyes, a woman/spectacle *en tableau*. In *Kamishibai Man*, the only woman upon whom a semi-proper name is bestowed is Baachan ("grandma"), a name uttered by her husband Jiichan, who also bears the name of Kamishibai Man. She is not Kamishibai Woman, even if she makes the little sweets that he sells, and she stays home waiting for his return and his report on his excursions. In *Avant la télé*, the

[18] See note 16.

woman is on the scene if she is useful; in the cover image where she stumbles along beside the boys and in the scene where the boys play at being warriors, Michèle supplies the bandage for Alain's knee from her emergency kit (but her name does not appear on the page; their relation is that of subject/hero and backup adjuvant). Figures of adult women such as Alain's mother show themselves useful as telephone operators or as charming cigarette-sellers in the cinema, but we are not encouraged to trust these women. The women shown in movie ads and in the films themselves are objects of reveries for father and son, who go to the cinema without the "wife/mother." On almost every page of this picture book images of men are overwhelmingly present. One has to wait through most the book to discover the interests of women such as the mother and grandmother.

In the male gerontoscopic view, women have a tendency to complicate, to expose the vulnerability of men. In *Avant la télé*, Alain is put off by the graffiti left by a young girl in love with him. He is mortified when he loses his balance on board a little rowboat with Michèle, and tumbles into the water, his Sunday clothes spoiled in front of both Michèle and his mother. For Alain, even that which approximates a *tableau vivant* is associated with the feminine. Going on visits to a park to witness a "concours d'élégance" [elegance contest] disgusts him: "Alain déteste ça. Il déteste surtout que sa mère aime ça, qu'elle admire ces dames qui se pavanent." ["Alain hates that. He hates especially that his mother loves it, that she admires these women who display themselves."] For Alain, this spotless tableau, unburdened of commentary or speech bubbles, is wrong; this perfect tableau is not in accordance with the pastiches and fragments of comic strips within which his life has been depicted on the preceding pages.

The figure of the young woman speaks of modernity, and of the mechanisms and media for which they are the consumers. In a flashback, which occurs at the very centre of the picture

book, the Kamishibai Man recalls the moment when a young girl "poked her head out the window and shushed me. 'Imagine, a little girl shushing me.'" The shushing girl, needless to say, is now glued to her television set. It's important to note here that the chromatic richness of the tableaux, like this one at the centre of the picture book, is compromised in favour of a yellowish tint, like that of old paper. The tableaux in the middle of the book suffer from a lack of vibrant colours, even what we might experience as a lack of vivacity itself. The Kamishibai Man's memory of painful moments in the past is rendered in faded yellows or blues. The incident of a young girl converted to the cult of TV, which designates the woman as an enemy of old-fashioned picture reciters and as an aggressive consumer of television, exposes a man's sensibility and vulnerability to the power of new media. This vulnerability is also shown in the other two picture books, whether in Grandma Gabrielle's bedroom, piled high with newspapers or illustrated magazines in *Avant la télé,* or in *Otto*, whose narrator mentions only the printed word (in the press) and never allows reference to electronic media like television. The modern press, always inferior to books, plays a female role in Oscar's masculine space, the press which offers a full page illustration of Otto and which signals to David the existence in New York City of both Otto and Oscar. The press, like the cinema in Pommaux or the TV in Say, is only auxiliary to the exploits of men, and normally of value only in transitional moments. In these picture books, all feminine presence can be suspect; some female figures depicted are deemed incompatible with a masculine subjectivity which despises all that does not complement or echo the masculine ego.

Of male friends, mentors or disciples, as in the world of Tintin, one sees a lot in these pages. David and Oscar are drawn to each other in mutual admiration; Otto's existence, and his writing, depend on them. Alain needs the Loubianovs, father and son; he admires very much his schoolmaster, whose tenderness is extended to all of his (male) pupils; he has no

female pupils. Alain receives medical treatment from a priest after a fall on the ice; he learns something about the history of war from his grandfather, who forbids him to make friends with children of collaborators. The Kamishibai Man a long time ago had an audience of boys and girls, but in his last public performance as a Kamishibai Man, only one boy is left, who watches him tell but without looking at the tableaux on which his story is based. Kamishibai is a job for the man on the street. Girls don't take part in the production, and just one single boy, perhaps Allen Say as a youth in Yokohama, remains as a witness.

Homosocial bonds of friendship in the aftermath of war, holocaust or feminist revolutions need not raise eyebrows. In these three albums, masculine figures hold on to a lost era, a deep past that is theirs and no others'; none of the masculine figures portrayed on the page is shown to participate in some national heroism, some rhetoric of courage, victory or exploits in the domain of the public good. What commands our attention in these picture books is the pathos of the masculine figures, and it is within the logic of a wounded tableau itself that we are invited to assess the value of this appeal.

Thus, as we turn to the final stop on each narrative's trajectory we cannot speak with assurance about conclusions. This is partly because, as I have tried to show earlier, in the best picture books, one often arrives at the impossibility of representation of "that which counts." What counts may not be visible. In *Where the Wild Things Are* of Sendak, for example, the last page consists of five words on a white page: "And it was still hot." The word "it" does not have any visual signifier, and the word "Hot" modifies what Roman Jacobson would call a "verbal shifter" as tangible as the cup of soup on the table shown one opening before, as intangible as a mother's love, thus a kind of sublime. But all three picture books before us end with a grand tableau. What is happening here?

In Pommaux's *Avant la télé*, the final tableau sets before us a playground with a dozen or so children engaged in their games. The caption, which accords with a spirit of linguistic delectation that runs throughout the picture book, offers a roll call of more than fifty children from several linguistic and cultural traditions. But there is more. The figure of Alain, the focalizing figure, does not appear among these children, even as he was seen sound asleep on the preceding page in a classic bedroom scene. Where is he? What has he become? In the thickness of a single page, he has become a grandfather to Lola, whose playmates are those on the "roll-call." The final opening of a picture book often puts on stage a group, an assortment of reconciled friends, in the grand tradition of *opera buffa*. But there are no *operas buffas* of which I am aware in which the tenor ages and becomes a basso profundo at the last minute! What this final tableau would seem to suggest is that the indefinable qualities of experience are the most powerful, even in a children's picture book. And this final tableau is not, as many of the preceding openings, loaded up with other images; it lets us imagine the impossibility of foreseeing the experience of those who follow us, an impossibility realized in the gerontoscopic view of Alain, who now surveys his granddaughters' playmates, naming them, but unable to tell their stories.

Although the story of Otto pretends to be a self-revelation, the autobiography of a teddy bear, the plot revolves around the relation between the bear and the two boys/ancestors who put him into play and whose mischief has led to the birth of the author: David and Oscar. A Jew, David and his family are sent to the camps, while Oscar's father will die as a soldier, and Otto himself will bear witness to his own suffering on the battlefields of Europe and in the alleys of New York, where he's thrown into a trash can, and ends up in the window of an antique shop. Oscar, recognizing the teddy bear, purchases him, discovers that David is still alive, living in New York. A remarkable reunion follows. The two old friends, in the protected space

of a sitting room, and in a full rectangular tableau not vitiated by a competing image or a missing side or corner, tell their stories: "What I heard pained me enormously." For the final tableau (recto), Otto looks up at us from his typewriter; he affirms for us that the David-Oscar couple will live out their last days together. Naked, in a state of "nature" on the knees of the two men in the preceding tableau verso, in this final tableau recto Otto is dressed in a shirt and tie and is wearing glasses. His anthropomorphic appearance reinforces his final declaration: "To keep myself busy, I've written this story by typing it on David's typewriter. And here it is..." We need not overlook the thought bubble over Otto's head: the thought is represented as an image, one that recalls the brutal destruction of families and their dwellings during the war. Otto invites us to share this unwritten memory, this unspeakable awareness of the past. As on the cover, the fixed regard of the historian/bear evokes something severe and authoritative such as one sees sometimes in the painted portraits of family ancestors. In the preceding opening, we have noted the physical aspect of the life of the two old men, David's body in a wheelchair, Oscar's arm extended over David's shoulder, and behind and above, the two paintings of naked women. The look of Otto the author, bent over his typewriter, speaks also of the gerontoscopic and draws our attention to that which, sometimes forgotten, must be reckoned with, and for which a concrete signifier, visual or verbal, does not suffice.

All of the scenes in *Kamishibai Man* except the last take us outdoors, in either rural or urban spaces. Outdoors is where the paper theatre takes place, until that fatal moment when television invades the domestic space; from this moment, the Kamishibai Man, the star attraction for children, becomes an intrusion on the private rights of television viewers as we saw in a previously discussed tableau at the centre of the picture book. Before the story is over, we are treated to the warm reception that the adult children of another era would now grant to the Kamishibai Man as he stands before a storefront

in a mall. His audience seems to treat him with veneration, a relic of a bygone tradition, an historic figure worthy of a stranger's documentary film. It is only in the last tableau that we find ourselves in an interior space, protected, not open to the public; the Kamishibai Man has returned home. The so-called grandma and grandpa kneel at the table in their customary way; they are wearing simple kimonos in muted colours, in a room so bare as to evoke the ascetic life, but not without a television set. The conversation between these two loving spouses, as before, is laconic and chaste, a masterpiece of minimalism. Baachan had been watching the evening news: "'I see you had a busy day.' 'It was a good day,' Jiichan nodded. 'Will you be going out tomorrow?' 'Umm, yes, and the day after.' 'Then you will need more sweets.' 'That would be nice. Umm, would you make make it twice the usual amount?' 'I'll see if I have enough sugar,' she said and shut the television off." This spare dialogue elides all of the television news broadcast, and suggests that the picture book's theme has little or nothing to do with the renewed celebrity of the Kamishibai Man with his fifteen minutes of fame, but rather with the dignity of the two who have lived and worked together as icons of simplicity and economy, who have nothing to do with *fama*. Nothing is said of this simplicity or of this economy; no word is wasted. The tableau offers a resolution without repeating what the words say (the television is shown shut off and the "grandma" does not stand up in the tableau). That the elderly couple are having supper does not appear in the text. Once more the author of the picture book prefers to keep until the end the possibility of a sublime beyond words or images.

A last look at each picture book will allow us to consider what each seems to be asking of the reader, an interpellation based not so much on what is said as on what is depicted. We see in the "ecce ursus" pose the teddy bear, who looks out on us with something of a look of the wounded male, a fixed stare. His two wounds, the spilled ink on his forehead and eye, the bullet hole where his heart is, are palpable. Or

we are before Alain and his buddy as they charge towards us, looking right at us. We are the object of the fixed look on Alain's face as he stares out alone on the title page. For the title page of *Kamishibai Man*, again it is children who charge at us. These fixed looks seem to be anticipating a response, they expect attention, concurrence, a kind of reflexivity in the sense accorded it by another elderly male.[19] But in the end, the Kamishibai Man minds his own business and ignores us; David and Oscar, old friends, seated, reunited, ignore us, while Otto, behind his typewriter, renews this penetrating look, as does Alain in the recto of the penultimate opening of his story. What interested the little boy who stayed behind at the end of the Kamishibai Man's last story was the man himself, not his stories. The boy is staring at the old man. These fierce interrogations that appear in the tableau lack complements in the text, as if the visual universe consisted of stares only the individual reader can answer. The world of the tableau remains an open book, an unfinished text, a story to tell, a bubble in which both Pommaux and Ungerer have each inserted an image instead of a text. We could read completion in the figures of the reunited friends, or of the elderly couple at home, or of a generation of children as seen through the eyes of a grandfather, but such a completion is not granted to readers for whom the single tableau serves as point of departure, first attracting, then arresting, and finally enthralling.[20]

We are back to the question of picture recitation, where it is not just about the stories men tell or write, which would adhere to a rhetoric all by itself, independent of any story cloth or

[19] I refer to a speech by George Soros given April 26, 1994 in Washington, D.C. at the "MIT Department of Economics World Economy Laboratory." He called it "The Theory of Reflexivity." He returns to that theory in his recent book, *The Age of Fallibility: Consequences of the War on Terror* (New York: Public Affairs, 2006).

[20] I borrow from Michael Fried's useful summary of the tableau painter's task as understood by Diderot and his colleagues (92).

storyboard, but about a particular reader's grasp of a secret in a tableau that arrests her, a hermeneutic which permits but does not control the logos, and depends altogether on the reader's response. The effective pathos of the masculine figures in the principal roles of these picture books can be found not in their failures or their narcissism but in their position of complete subordination to the tableau, a tableau which is often itself "wounded" but like a warrior's shield, depicts, protects and conserves its own, stopping us in our tracks as it does. The tableau inevitably puts the reader in charge; the painter outlives the storyteller, for as long as it takes the reader to imagine and construct his own moral and social response. After all, whether it has to do with the assaults of war, as in the picture books of Pommaux and Ungerer, or the onslaught of modernity, as in the work of Allen Say, the wound belongs as much to the spectator/reader as to the figures represented, and remains fundamentally beyond words: it is the tableau which in our youth soothes and protects us, and in our old age calls us to judgment.