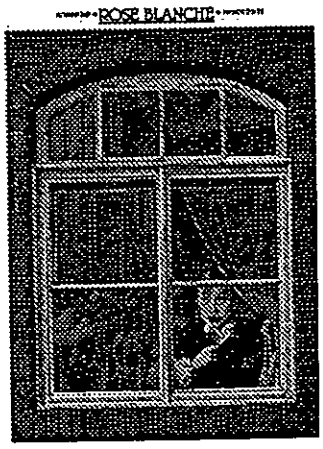
Narrative and Editing Choice in the Picture Book: A Comparison of Two Versions of Roberto Innocenti's *Rose Blanche*

Hugo McCann and Claire Hiller

It is not often that those interested in the contemporary picture book, or indeed literature in general, have the opportunity to see two very different versions of the same work. In 1990 the English version of Roberto Innocenti's and Christophe Gallaz' **Rose Blanche** was published in the United States and in the subsequent year the same set of pictures but with a text written by Ian McEwan, though based upon the Gallaz story, was published in the United Kingdom. The result is that we have two English language versions of **Rose Blanche** which, while using the same pictures, have quite different verbal narratives. Comparing the differences presents the reader-viewer with a number of interesting aesthetic, linguistic, and narrative questions.

The two versions of **Rose Blanche** offer an exciting and practical aesthetic setting for the student of the picture book to learn a great deal about the range of editorial decisions which contribute to the final presentation. The two versions show differing ways in which the verbal narrative treats the reader and interacts with the picture sequence. Among the questions one might ask is how does each version position the reader in relation to the events depicted and reported in the verbal text? Which of the versions brings us closest to Rose Blanche's story? How does the language, in combination with the pictures, effect this positioning?

Apart from the slight difference in



the colour tones, the visual narratives of the two editions of **Rose Blanche** remain the same in both versions. At a quick glance one can see that, in many respects, the two stories are the same. Though the verbal narratives are quite different, this does not mean that one book is to be preferred to the other. The pair gives the student of the picturebookist's arts the chance to explore the artistic consequences of making certain narrative choices. The consequences in both cases are very powerful but they are not identical. These differences are intriguing and reward careful attention.

The nature of the verbal narratives in both versions implies that a number of interesting editorial decisions have been made about how the reader is to be situated in relation to Rose Blanche's story. While the pictorial narrative remains the same, the verbal varies considerably and it is clear that, in terms of amount of words, the American (Gallaz') version leaves the pictures to do more narrative work than the British (McEwan's). The first half of the American version of **Rose Blanche** is a first person narrative which places the reader-viewer alongside Rose. In the British version the story is told totally in the third person and this places the reader as a spectator at Rose's tragic journey.

The latter is more verbally didactic, seeking to give the reader ways of generalising views on human life from this story. In effect, then, the British edition's editorial policy is to treat the reader to an authoritative commentary while the American remains more the story of an individual's journey about which the readers may form their own responses.

Both versions allow one to examine the ways in which language and depictive strands interweave with each other in contemporary multimedia narratives. The relations between word and images are many and complex in contemporary narrative arts — words modify the impact of pictures and pictures qualify the words in manifold, layered and subtle ways. In combination they place an audience at a particular angle to a work.

Rose Blanche in its two English language versions provides a very fruitful context for action and reflection. This is so because one of the narrative modes is kept the same. This makes it easier to see

just how the verbal impacts upon the depictions. It permits one to explore the different treatment of the reader and the ways in which narratives attempt to shape the reader's response by adjusting the reader's relations to the events presented.

Our attention in this paper is to focus on the differences between the two verbal narratives and how these affect the reader's possible interpretative relations with the pictorial narrative. Each of the editions, in a subtle but emotionally distinct way, places the reader in a different relation to the story of Rose Blanche. The verbal narratives give the reader a different setting in which to interpret the story.

The American narrative begins in the following way:

My name is Rose Blanche.
I live in a small town in Germany with narrow streets, old fountains and tall houses with pigeons on the roofs.
One day the first truck arrived and many men left. They were dressed as soldiers.
Winter was beginning.

Because the narrative is in the first person and initially situated in a particular present, readers are positioned as participants in a story alongside a storyteller who engages them in her life as it happens to her. She turns out to be a young girl learning about the world and not able to offer interpretative generalisations. Sympathy is immediately engaged with her and her experience. She recounts immediate details of the events which form part of her life story. In fact readers read and see the events from her viewpoint for more than half the story. From her language they can realise that she knows something significant is happening. Yet, the words leave them with a sense of her innocent involvement. Of course, because this first person narrative is situated within a pictorial sequence, readers can know much more than Rose herself. This duality is a feature of the picturebookist's arts.

The British version begins in the following words, using short, direct sentences with a staccato, almost menacing rhythm:

When wars begin people often cheer. The sadness comes later. The men from the town went off to fight for Germany. Rose Blanche and her mother joined the crowds and waved them good-bye. A marching band played, everyone cheered and the fat mayor made a boring speech.

There were jokes and songs and old men shouted advice to the young soldiers. Rose Blanche was shivering with excitement. But her mother said it was cold. Winter was coming.

This narrative, told using the more distanced third person and beginning with two sentences using a universalising present tense, presents readers with more information, presents them with philosophical views and situates the story in a larger, more general framework. The narrative insists that readers expect a sad outcome.

The American version brings the audience into the experience and the action more directly, more intimately. The narrative technique places the reader alongside Rose Blanche and gives a sense of living through the moral challenges of the time and her responses as if one were there.

Through the British narrative the reader is distanced slightly from the action, watching another time and place; a time and place in the throes of war, false hopes and its personal and community disasters. The language in the British version seeks to tell us a story while the American combines with the depiction to place the reader alongside Rose Blanche in the midst of the action. One might feel that the American version gives the reader a greater sense of freedom in interpretation yet it depends upon one being able to interpret the pictorial detail and combine it with Rose's words in a very informed way. The American version leaves more narrative and cognitive gaps.

In both versions **Rose Blanche** is a simple though poignant story set during World War II when a young German girl's curiosity leads her to discover something more terrible than the increasing and daily privations of the war and winter.

She finds a concentration camp in walking distance of the town where those bearing the yellow star of David are starving. She seeks to help them by finding food and bringing it to them. The story ends with the girl's death though this is never made explicit. Her personal compassion ends in her tragedy. In both versions one is left with the promise of spring being a kind of cure for the sorrow of her needless death at the hands of jittery German soldiers retreating before Russian tanks.

Until approximately half way through the American version is presented in Rose Blanche's own words, in the present tense and at that point it changes to a third person and past tense narrative. Despite the change, the third person narrative in this context does not give us a sense of distance since we have had a period of intimate, if virtual, experience alongside Rose. The American third person narrative is much more laconic than the British, leaving the pictures to convey a great deal more than the words. It is more open to the reader's own ways of reflective interpretation and connection.

The verbal-pictorial narratives establish that Rose's curiosity is based upon concern for an escapee, a little boy who is recaptured and taken away by soldiers as she watches. On foot, she follows the convoy which has taken the boy and she finds a camp with gaunt, prison-garbed children standing listlessly behind layers of barbed wire. From that moment the narrative changes to the third person. Still, we follow her actions with a sense of her compassion for others as she finds ways of bringing the prisoners food. For as long as it is possible we follow the story through her eyes and consciousness. We feel ourselves to be virtual participants in her story, in that moment in history.

In the British version with the same basic story but where a third person narrative is supreme, there are many more words and, while we can be concerned about Rose and her history, she remains a character from another time and place, at a distance from us. The British narrative comments on the action more and places the reader more deliberately in a more detailed intellectual and emotional framework. The words in the British version directly dictate to the reader.

The impersonal narrative indicates what the inmates of the concentration camp said to Rose Blanche. It tells what she said to them but the impact is different from that in which we have directly encountered Rose's own views. We are watching another's life and expression and we do not have the same immediacy of engagement.

The death of Rose Blanche is presented differently in the verbal narratives. In the American version there is a laconic, yet moving terseness, about the narrative. It is described in 21 words in the American version and in 37 words in the British. Neither says explicitly that Rose is shot but for most readers it is obvious that she is and she never appears again.

The subsequent scenes in the two versions retain this contrast between terseness and wordiness. In the American version the short sentences in which the death shot is described, and the return of life and spring recorded, have a poignancy which gives greater weight to the pictures to add to the emotional power of the story. The words are enough to move and invite the reader to invest emotional concern in a particular life at its moment of crisis. The language leaves more room for the reader to choose to note:

Rose Blanche's mother waited a long time for her little girl.

The crocuses finally sprang up from the ground. The river swelled and overflowed its banks. Trees were green and full of birds.

Spring sang.

The British version tells us:

Rose Blanche's mother never found her little girl.
As the weeks went by another, gentler invasion began.

The cold retreated, fresh grasses advanced across the land. There were explosions of colour. Trees put on their bright new uniforms and paraded in the sun. Birds took

up their positions and sang a simple message.

Spring had triumphed.

The first of these endings leaves the reader to decide about the juxtaposition of the loss of Rose Blanche, her useless death, and the arrival of spring which obscures the horrors of war and death which so recently scarred the landscape. The language is directly descriptive of the season's change. Spring may, of course, always symbolise hope and renewal but this is not directly emphasised in the words.

In the British version, the language is that of war used to describe the triumph of the spring in covering over the war-scarred landscape. Both winter and war are blanketed with the renewing power of spring life. The reader is presented with a sermon accepting the inevitability of war in the same way in which we accept the changing seasons. The pains of war and winter will always be with us. Rose Blanche's death becomes a human sacrifice to the cycle of peace and war which parallels the seasons. The text seeks to tell readers what to think and feel and, to a degree, denies the bitter-sweet irony implicit in the American version.

The ways in which the reader's ability is challenged are one of the crucial contrasts between the two versions. There is also a difference between the views of how the picturebook combined arts actually work. One of the two leaves the depictions to do their work and uses the words to refine what we see. The second sets greater store by the powers of language and certainly uses many more words.

In the American version the verbal text leaves the depictions and the reader's responses to combine to work their magic in creating the poignant anguish of the story of the death of a child who was better than her elders. The verbal narrative has a continuing implicitness and this allows the words and images to work in harmony so that the story is told and shown and the viewer-reader is allowed to use both narrative media to work in powerful combination. The verbal narrative augments the pictorial, extends and enriches it but does not seek to compete with it.

In the British version it is somewhat like watching a movie in which the film-maker is concerned to make the message impinge upon the audience. The reader is treated as someone who needs to be focused on aspects of the action and background. Everywhere there is greater use of authorial comment and direction.

The overall effect of comparing these two versions of the Innocenti story is to make one more aware of the artistic choices which are available and have been made. One can note the effects upon each other of these choices as well as upon viewer-readers. We can see how the verbal narrative places us in relation to the narrative sequence. Both versions are compelling and moving. They present Rose Blanche's story powerfully and invite the reader to reflect upon the child's unspoiled compassion for fellow human beings. In comparison, however, they effect this in different ways which, on examination, reveal a different kind of language and treatment of the reader. Recognising the choices available to the picturebookist alerts the reader and the aspiring editor to the ways in which mixed narratives in film and video manipulate the reader's attention and powers of reflection.

These two versions of **Rose Blanche** with their common pictorial narrative allow the aspiring student of editing and the picture book to see how the same visual images and symbols are modified by the accompanying verbal narrative. They lead the student of the picture book to explore the arts of juxtaposition and the subsequent impact such juxtapositions have on the meanings which can be discerned in a work. The two versions also show us how the combination of text and picture position the reader's encounter with the story.

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Biographical Note
Claire Hiller is a lecturer in language and gender studies in the Faculty of Education at Hobart. She has been a secondary English teacher and has studied teaching of literature in the United Kingdom and the United States. She is also interested in literature for children especially in the areas of narrative patterns and structures. She managed the DEET National Innovative Research Project — Romance and the Construction of Femininity which has been reported widely in the national press.

Biographical Note
Hugo McCann taught in several schools in N. Ireland — in Australia he has taught in Teachers College, CAE and University — Drama and Theatre Arts, Language Arts, Language and Literacy Studies, Philosophy of Education and Studies in Literature for the Young. He has contributed to the Tasmanian Primary Guidelines and co-authored the Department of Education monograph, **Everything's a Story** which deals with the use of narrative in teaching language and literature. He has been a judge of the Children's Book of the Year and has coordinated the judging for two years. He has also reviewed for **Magpies**.