

Frames in Picture Books

絵本の枠に関する考察

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Abstract This paper examines the functions and expressions of frames in picture books. In section one, using *Crictor* as an example, the main functions of frames in picture books are explained. In section two, the frames that make use of characteristic expression were made in three picture books: *Come Away From The Water*; *Shirley, Where the Wild Things Are*, and *Flotsam* are introduced. Also identifying further examples that use framing devices effectively when drawing real or fantastical worlds. In section three, how the frames enhance the meaning and effects of *The Beast of Monsieur Racine* is examined. In so doing, this study highlights the diverse possibilities enabled by picture books.

Keywords : picture-book , frame, Tomi Ungerer

抄 録 本論では、絵本の構成要素のひとつである枠の機能と表現について、5冊の絵本をもとに考察した。第1章では *Crictor* (T. Ungerer, 1958) を例に、枠の基本的な機能を、第2章では、3冊の絵本、*Come Away From The Water*; *Shirley*, (J. Burningham, 1977), *Where the Wild Things Are* (M. Sendak, 1963), *Flotsam* (D. Wiesner, 2006) を例に、絵本というメディアの表現特性を活かした枠の設け方を、さらに第3章では、*The Beast of Monsieur Racine* (T. Ungerer, 1971) を例に、枠の表象的な表現を確認した。考察の結果、絵本において枠が果たしうる機能が多様であること、また枠をもちいた表現に豊かな可能性があることが明らかになった。

キーワード : 絵本, 枠, Tomi Ungerer

Introduction

When readers read a picture book, the standard approach is to turn the page and follow the story while checking the printed words as well as the actions and facial expressions of the characters. However, information and impressions from things other than the words and character sketches are taken without being realized it. And frames can also express and tell readers something in the different level expressed in the pictures. This paper examines the functions and expressions of frames in picture books and clarifies that.

First, as for the definition of the term 'frames' used in this paper. Jane Doonan explained the situations

where frames are created in picture books as follows:

"A picture smaller than the page on which it appears is framed by the white margins of the paper (an air frame). Pictures may also be framed by decorative borders containing complementary images or by straight ruled or free-hand drawn lines of varying thickness and style. The quality of the frame affects the psychological meaning of what it surrounds." (J. Doonan, 1993) *¹

There are times when frames not only enclose pictures, but words as well. However, frames in picture books are defined as margins and borders that enclose a certain area. Furthermore, the pictures

and words inside (or outside) the frame change the impression presented to readers with devices and choices of how pictures and words are enclosed and in what kind of frame.

Frames that appear in picture books are diverse in their types and how they are created. Using five picture books as examples, this paper studies in what way frames are created by necessity from the standpoint of function and expression. In section one, the main functions of frames in the picture books are explained. In section two, examples of the method of creating frames that make the best use of the special characteristics in picture books are introduced. Furthermore, section three takes a close look at frames which have a presentational function. Through these studies, the objective in this paper is to clarify the functions of frames in picture books and the variety of their expressions.

Section 1: The Fundamental Function of Frames —Crictor—

In this section, the fundamental function of frames in picture books are examined. In Tomi Ungerer's *Crictor* (1958), many pages present pictures in frames. Even on the title page, three frames and one ellipse are found (Fig. 1). The biggest frame is the one that surrounds the entire page. Besides this, there are two frames enclosing the title and the au-

thor's name as well as an ellipse enclosing a portrait.

The letters of the title are printed in green with an arrangement like the scaly pattern of a snake. The letters are inside a rectangular enclosure, which forms a continuing pebble-like pattern inside it with orange-colored handwritten lines. On top of the title is the author's name written in orange and this is surrounded by a frame with green lines.

The frame surrounding the entire title page is light green. This frame brings about a sense of stability in the picture and echoes the frames enclosing the title and author's name. Under the title, there is a snake with its body curled up in a circle. Inside of it, there is a woman. After identifying that frames are generally square, what the snake is forming might be something we should call an ellipse. But whether it's an ellipse or frame, when someone is encircled in something, there are times when we are relieved by the feeling that the person encircled is being cared for and protected. Conversely, there are also times where we are tense by the feeling that the person encircled has lost their means of escape and their actions are restricted. These feelings are determined by the relationship between the one being surrounded and the one surrounding the other, but on this page we have no way of telling the relationship between the snake and the woman. Ordinary people would feel terror and disgust if they were surrounded by a snake, but this woman is showing a calm expression on her face. Readers are captivated the page to turned to know why she is calm, and turn the page.

Now, the story begins. Scenery drawn with the composition of overlooking an old church appears together with the sentence, "Once upon a time in a little French town". This scenery is fitted into two frames, which can also be described as a 3 mm width belt surrounded by black outer lines and green inner lines. The scenery makes readers feel a spatial and temporal distance in what they see, like an old post-card.

Next, one of the main characters, Madame Bodot, is introduced (Fig. 2). She is the woman being encircled by a snake on the title page. She is standing in a frame that is a shade of light green. Readers can search for

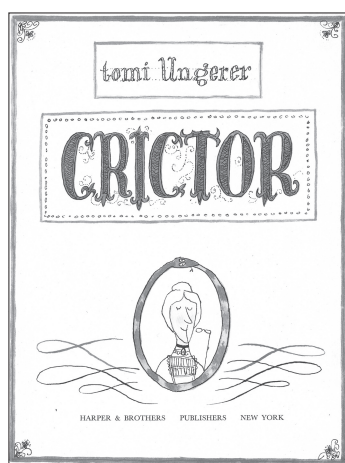


Fig. 1

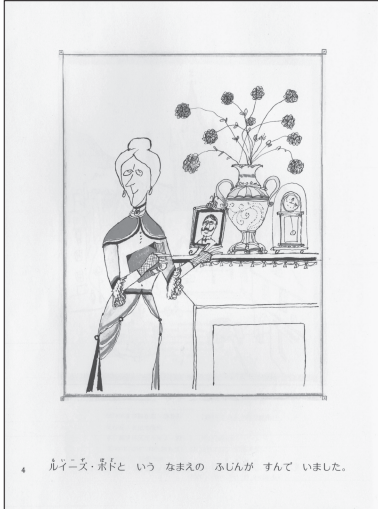


Fig. 2

information relating to her in this picture, as if looking at her portrait. For example, from the beautiful vase and well-tailored clothes, readers can guess that Mme. Bodot is stable and also lives economically blessed. Also, there is a black photo frame held in her left hand. The man with a mustache in the photograph must be Mr. Bodot. Closer look at the drawn objects based on iconography, the books on Mme. Bodot's right reveal her intelligence. The flowers in the vase and the clock ticking away the passage of time are

symbols of the fragility of this world. The fact that readers are able to carefully look at the pictures in this manner is not unrelated to the fact that the pictures are placed inside the frames. By being drawn in frames, Mme. Bodot becomes the focus of the readers and this picture gives a stagnant impression.

In his essay on discussing and treating the elements of picture books as a code, William Moebius explained frames as follows:

“The code of the frame enables the reader to identify with a world inside and outside the story. Framed, the illustration provides a limited glimpse ‘into’ a world. Unframed, the illustration constitutes a total experience, the view from ‘within’.” (W. Moebius, 1986) * 2

Ungerer must have also known of this effect. He made frames for pictures where he filled in information that he wanted the readers to observe calmly and carefully, but he did not draw frames in pictures with big motion. The effect of not using frame dynamically spread the entire picture (Fig. 3).

Up until now, by using *CriCTOR* as an example, what one can do by establishing frames in picture books has been examined. One function of frames is differentiating the contained information from those out-

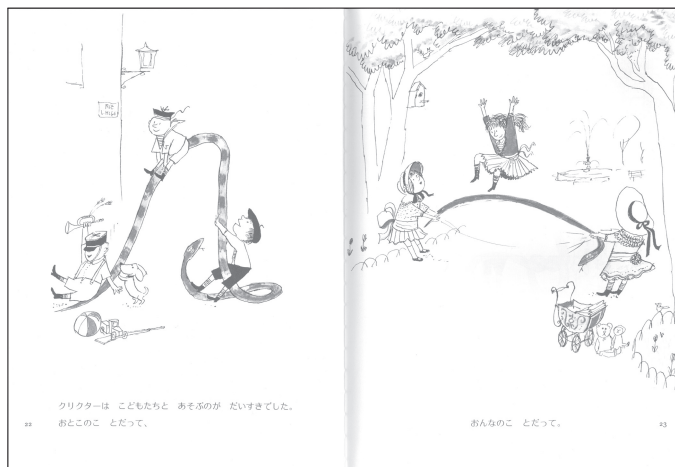


Fig. 3

side the frame. The reader's glance is guided to the title and the author's name which are drawn inside frames. Frames that divide areas also have a function of sorting information. By laying out frames, the artist can beautifully and attractively make pictures. The three frames on the title page of *Crictor* also bring about attractiveness and a sense of stability to the picture while producing a rhythm with the color, size, and arrangement. Furthermore, in *Crictor*, the author established frames in pictures where he wanted readers to acquire information, such as when the characters are introduced. However, Ungerer did not establish frames in pictures with motion, which would have given the impression that the author wanted the readers to enjoy the story from their hearts. This will be because Ungerer took into consideration the influence which existence of a frame has on readers.

Section 2: Interactions between Frames

The frames in *Crictor* cause an effect inside one picture and for the most part did not have any relation to the pictures before and after each other. Section two presents some examples of frames that exhibit a function across several pages.

1. Frames in two facing pages

—Come Away From The Water, Shirley—

Barbara Bader explained the form of presentation in picture books in her *American Picturebooks* as follows:

“As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning of the pages.” (B. Bader, 1976) *³

In *Come Away From The Water, Shirley* (1977), John Burningham drew a moment where a girl and her parents are spending time at the beach using a presentation of frames which made use of the characteristics of expression in picture books with facing pages. Inside a light brown frame on the title page, there is the image of a girl with a saber strapped to her waist and a big dog equipped with a pistol raising a pirate flag. The girl's name is Shirley. The name of the dog is unclear. They have come to the sea together with their parents. However, even though they are at the same beach, the worlds that the child and adults see are different. In order to express clearly this, on the right page Burningham drew Shirley and her dog's fantasy world of adventure. On the left, he drew parents relaxing while scolding their daughter at the beach (Fig. 4). Each picture is enclosed with frames that have the same sized thin lines. The left pages with the parents have dark brown or light brown lines and the right pages with Shirley's adventure have various colored lines. The two different worlds are drawn inside the thin frames that are the same size. By being placed side by side, the boring world of the adults and the child's adventurous world born from her imagination are contrasted and humorously portrayed. However, there is no frame around

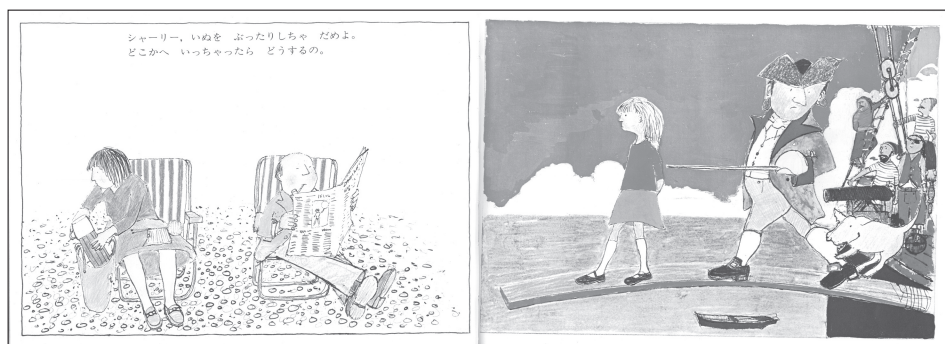


Fig. 4

the final picture, the drawn silhouettes of the back of the family. The parents must have enjoyed their time at the beach as adults do, and Shirley must have enjoyed her time as a child does. With happy feelings, the family sets out for home together. The family split by two pages is reunited and the image of them getting closer in a picture with no frame.

2. Frames which produce page-turning drama —Where the Wild Things Are—

The frames in Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) are the air frames, but the size of the white margins change depending on the page. What Sendak has drawn in this picture book is a story about a boy named Max who feels angry at his mother, who punishes him for his mischief. Using the power of anger, he sets sail to a fantasy world. Sendak represented how Max's fantasy world is expanding by changing the width of the frames. On several pages of beginning, the margins of the picture's borders take up a lot of space (Fig. 5). However, each time one turns the page, Max's fantasy expands. With that, the pictures get bigger and the width of the frames shrinks (Fig. 6). Thus the three pictures of the climax where Max is raising a racket with the Wild Things have no frames at all (Fig. 7). While reading the book with children, there are times when their feelings also being uplifted, and the children are seen get up and start dancing because of these three pictures. Surely it is because of: "Unframed, the illustration constitutes a total experience, the view from 'within'" (W. Moebius, 1986) *².

In the end, Max—who becomes the king of the Wild Things, plays to his heart's content, and allowed to let his feelings out—starts missing his family and returns to the real world. The process of going home is the pictures of when he faithfully set sail for adventure drawn in reverse order. This time, each time one turns the page, the width of the frames gradually expands and the pictures shrink. In this picture book, the readers are able to sense the momentum of the story because of the change in the area of the frames.

3. Frames which change the picture into multiple layers —Flotsam—

David Wiesner has created many picture books with a vague and mysterious impression of the boundaries between reality and fantasy. In *Flotsam* (2006), what readers observe is also a strange world where reality and fantasy are blended.

After finding an old camera on the beach, a boy happens upon a mysterious view of what lurks in the ocean. Wiesner uses frames to segment the scenes like in Japanese comic books, and the changes in the boy's actions and facial expressions are depicted with ample realism. Inside the developed film, there are pictures of a black haired girl who is thought to be the previous owner of this camera. She holds several photographs, and as expected one of the photographs have an image of a boy holding photographs in the same manner. The one who found this camera before the girl must have been this boy (Fig. 8). The photographs in his hand also show yet another child who was photographed. In one of those photographs is one where the nested images of the camera's successive owners have been gathered. The boy takes out a magnifying glass and peeks into the history inscribed in the microscopic world.

In this picture book, Wiesner divides the pictures using several frames with different shapes and sizes. By layering the pictures and making them consecutively parallel, there was a tense, detailed motion and depth in the story. The photographs in this picture book, which are an important motif, also have air frames. In the frames there are various views of different times and places filed. By organizing the pictures and cleverly laying them out on paper, Wiesner was successful in drawing a mysterious and multilayered world.

Now the interaction of the frames in several pages has been checked. In picture books, drama is told through several continuing pages. With two facing pages, two pictures facing each other are simultaneously displayed. By changing the sizes of frames, placing the same size of frames side by side and furthermore by creating several frames in one picture, the picture book authors succeeded in drawing and

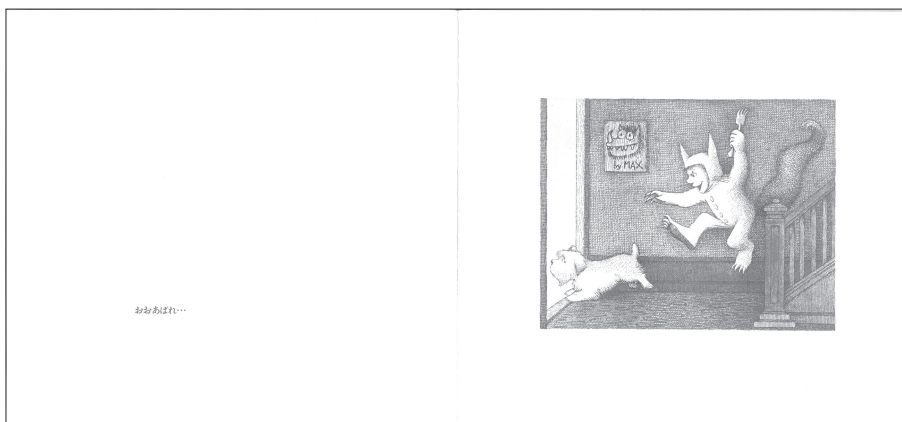


Fig. 5



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

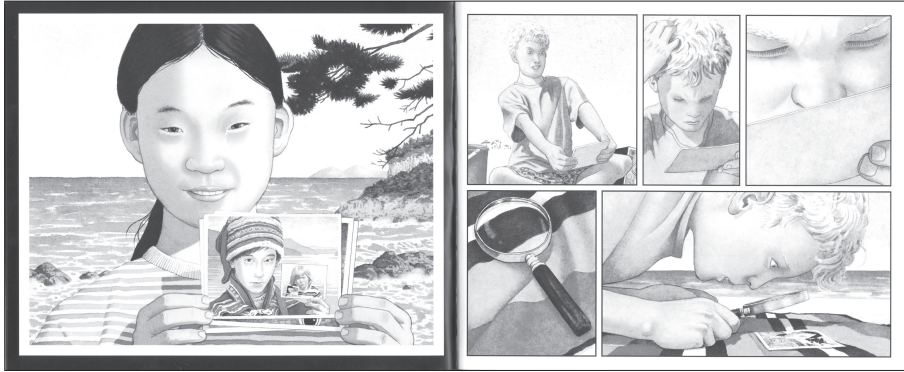


Fig. 8

distinguishing fantasy and reality as well as creating mysterious worlds which are composed of these two contrasting worlds.

Section 3: The Representation of Frames —*The Beast of Monsieur Racine*—

Lastly, the presentation of frames will be examined. Ungerer's *The Beast of Monsieur Racine* (1971) is about M. Racine, who is a retired tax collector who now immerses himself in growing pears. One day, the pears he took such great care to grow were stolen by someone. The culprit was a beast with a strange appearance. M. Racine is strongly captivated by this beast. He tames the beast and starts studying it. His studies are valued and one day it is arranged by the Academy of Science in Paris for him to present his findings. However on that stage, it becomes clear that the beast is actually two children in disguise. In this section, readers pay attention to the characteristics of the value-is-overthrown-type frames where drawn in this story are characters climbing over the frames and there are marks on the frames from open seams and mending.

First, in the award ceremony scene, the entire picture is a border-type frame with two black lines and the inside is colored moss green. The left hand of a child under the picture passes through this frame. The tail of a pig being held by a man wearing a hat also slips through the frame. In the image of M. Racine lying in wait to catch the pear thief and

dozing off, there is a black liquid passing through the frame, dripping from the pot placed on the table. In the scene where he holds out a macaroon to try taming the beast, there is a snail crawling outside of the frame in the upper-left of the picture. This snail has nothing to do with the story inside the frame. He travels along the border of the frame and is in a different place each time you turn the page. Furthermore, in bottom-right, there is a rabbit jumping over the frame and swooping down on a frog (Fig. 9).

In the scene where M. Racine and the beast are enjoying a picnic at night, the snail makes an appearance outside the upper right of the frame. Also, on the bottom left of the picture there is a wilted flower hanging its head towards the frame and dripping pink drops. On the wall in the scene where M. Racine and the beast are relaxing, there are empty picture frames lined up in a row. The frame is also narrowly bordered by a black line and the inside is dark blue. Further, in a section of the upper right frame, a gap in the border can be seen.

On page 17, the frames are established and there are two scenes drawn. Outside the frame, there is the appearance of M. Racine and the frolicking beast. Inside the frame, there is a swing fastened to the frame and the image of them playing together (Fig. 10). In the scene where M. Racine is in the middle of research, attached on the upper side of the frame surrounding the picture, there is a device which controls the tension. Also, the right side of the frame splits

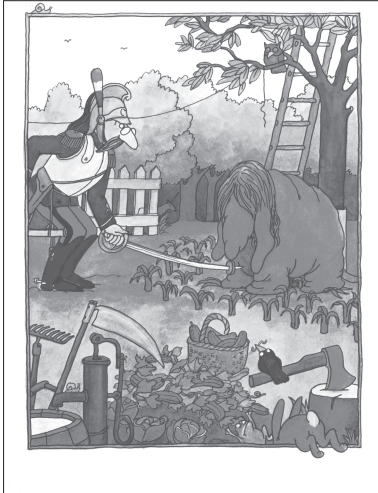


Fig. 9



Fig. 10

into two midway. One side takes on the shape of a frame, but the other side assimilates into the laboratory equipment.

On the 21st page, M. Racine is making a cage for transporting the beast to Paris, but the upper side of the frame surrounding this picture is cut off and it looks like there were temporary repairs done. He cut off a part of a mop's brush and is making the cage with it. A long splint has been affixed in a part where the frame was cut, as if he might have cut the pic-

ture's frame as well with his saw.

On the next page, the appearance of the beast being carried to the train station is drawn with one picture across two pages facing each other. The locomotive's smoke passes through the frame surrounding the picture and is rising up into the sky. In the scene where they arrive in Paris, a puppy's forepaws are wrapped around a frame with a black line that surrounds the entire picture. The station is crowded with people who have come to give M. Racine and the beast a friendly reception and the frame is wrapped by the previously mentioned puppy's forepaws. One can really feel the act of the puppy, which moves around to avoid the crowd for a short while.

The next frame that was established is the scene where the beast and M. Racine are doing the opening of their presentation. When they appear on stage, the audience's reaction is exaggerated. A fainted woman's hand and bag are sticking outside of the frame. Additionally, where the beast's true identity is revealed and there is an uproar drawn inside the hall, many things and people are crossing over the frame, showing the chaos of the ceremony. On the left of the picture, the ear of a man wearing suspenders is drawn above the frame. In the bottom left, the right leg of a man wearing a tailcoat is stepping over the frame. In the bottom right, the leg of a green chair is outside the frame. In the top right, a man is hanging from the frame with one hand (Fig. 11).

As stated before, the way frames are established in *The Beast of Monsieur Racine* are unique and have a visual playfulness to them. Also, there are many frames where the characters cross over the border of the frames. William Moebius explained the impression that the appearance of violated frames has on readers as follows:

"As the frame usually marks a limit beyond which text cannot go, or from which image cannot escape, we may associate a sense of violation or of the forbidden or of the miraculous with the breaking frame." (Moebius, 1986) * 4

In *The Beast of Monsieur Racine*, the fundamen-



Fig. 11

tal function of frames that maintain areas is threatened. The characters cross over the frames with ease. Frames, which we expect would have a transparent presence that helps the story's development, turn into a motif. The frame which we expected to close with four sides are violated. According to Möbius' statement, frames have a psychological influence on readers. Frames in and of themselves often contribute to the stories and narration of the pictures in picture books, and stop at having a transparent presence. However, the frames in *The Beast of Monsieur Racine* in themselves become motifs and bear that significance. The readers of this picture book not only enjoy the visual playfulness of the portrayal of frames which are repaired and jumped over, but also are aware of the presence of frames and start thinking about the boundaries of fantasy stories. Ungerer made use of frames and his works also involved the problems concerning boundaries in picture books.

In *Manga Genron*, Inuhiko Yomota pointed out that:

"In a system of representation, a boundary line is given a clear function. Something that frequently oc-

curs is that the boundary line, which was working as a common convention and as a transparent presence, suddenly starts to self-assert itself on some whim and brings about a unique bending in the entirety of the text. (Omission) Such experiments on the meta-level are in most cases motivated by awareness of criticism concerning the genre. While the boundary line's invasion causes laughter, it is a chance to make those accepting of the text (audience, readers) think about the characteristics and limits of the system of representation the text belongs to, and moreover, the foundation of the system." (1994. 1999 Paperback Edition) * 5

For example, the theater style that was called 'Happening' which developed through the late 1950s to 1960s in the United States, Europe, and even in Japan. The performances that were developed were not theatrical, in that they stressed improvisation, and extraterritorial performances. When actors step down-stage and involve the audience in a play, the audience, who are enjoying the play at their ease, are required to actively connect with the production. The world of picture books, with its being surrounded

by frames, is similar to the stage of a play. The characters who are performers step down-stage. When they continue the play, even when they involve the audience, the area of the story expands and begins to erode reality.

By going outside the frames, the characters of *The Beast of Monsieur Racine* encouraged readers to actively relate to the world of picture books. Or it can also be said that it is implied that even if they are cut, even if they are climbed over, even if the shape changes, the appearance of frames which have a sure presence will not disappear. Readers can also understand the message that how much we relate with that kind of framework is important.

Conclusion

This paper explored the functions and expressions of frames in picture books. In section one, using *Crictor* as an example, the main functions of frames in picture books were explained. Continuing in section two, using three picture books called *Come Away From The Water, Shirley*, *Where the Wild Things Are*, and *Flotsam*, it was ascertained how frames that make use of characteristic expressions in the picture book media are made. Furthermore, examples that effectively used framing devices when drawing worlds of reality and fantasy in picture books were identified. In section three, using *The Beast of Monsieur Racine* as an example, the representation of frames was considered. It has become clear that drawing the threatened frames which originally bear the function of maintaining an area can be another representation.

As stated before, by devising design and placement, frames serve the purpose of composing the world of a picture book beautifully and attractively. Also, depending on the pattern of how frames are made and the ratio of the picture book's spatial allocation, they can also help with telling the story, segment the scene, and draw a multilayered world. Moreover, it is also possible for frames to take an active role in the presentational significance they have

and establish an expression which relates with the picture book's theme. Frames are one element that makes up a picture book, but it has become clear that the possibilities of their functions and expressions are much more.

Notes

- * 1 Jane Doonan: *Looking at Pictures in Picture Books*, Thimble Press, 84 (1993)
- * 2 William Moebius: "Introduction to Picturebook Codes", *Word & Image*, Routledge, Vol.2. No.2 (April-June), 150 (1986)
- * 3 Barbara Bader: *American Picturebooks from Noah's Ark to the Beast Within*, Macmillan, 1 (1976)
- * 4 William Moebius: "Introduction to Picturebook Codes", 150 (1986)
- * 5 Yomota Inuhiko: *Manga Genron* (Manga Theory), Chikuma Shobo, 56 (1999)

Picture Books Used

- Tomi Ungerer: *Crictor*, Harper & Brothers (1958). Fig. 1, p.1.
- Tomi Ungerer: *Crictor*, Bunka Publishing Bureau (1974). Fig. 2, p.4. Fig. 3, pp.22-23.
- John Burningham: *Come Away From The Water, Shirley*, Harper Collins (1977). Fig. 4, pp.10-11.
- Maurice Sendak: *Where the Wild Things Are*, Harper Collins (1984). First edition 1963.
- Maurice Sendak: *Where the Wild Things Are*, Fuzanbou (1975). Fig. 5, pp.6-7. Fig. 6, pp.12-13. Fig. 7, pp.26-27.
- David Wiesner: *Flotsam*, Clarion Books (2006). Fig. 8, pp.24-25.
- Tomi Ungerer: *The Beast of Monsieur Racine*, Farrar Straus & Giroux (1971)
- Tomi Ungerer: *The Beast of Monsieur Racine*, Hyouronsha (1977). Fig. 9, p.9. Fig. 10, p.17. Fig. 11, pp.30-31.