

Article

An Analysis of the Auteurship of Oliver Jeffers

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A B S T R A C T

Visual storytelling is a part of everyone's life. Images, art, design are what we are exposed to from a young age be it, in films, videos, magazines, books etc. Picture books are one such medium that is an essential part of one's childhood. Everyone grew up reading their favourite book, which had vibrant and eye-catching illustrations to accompany the story. To read a picture book is to have a wholesome experience. It is one where we get to experience the coming together of design, storytelling, illustrations and so on. It is an art form that enriches the lives of not only young children but adults who have a keen interest in telling stories, who have a wild imagination and eye for beautifully made illustrations and visuals.

This study aims to explore and analyse the work of award-winning author and illustrator - Oliver Jeffers. The books "Here we are: Notes for living on planet earth" (2017) and "This moose belongs to me" (2012) will be used as samples for this study of auteur theory. A qualitative methodology and content analysis will be done on the characteristics of auteur theory as proposed by Andrew Sarris (1962) and will be applied to the illustrations in the books to find consistency in Oliver Jeffers's works. The resulting answer will help us to understand if Oliver Jeffers can be considered an auteur in his field of expertise.

Keywords: Auteur, Auteur Theory, Illustration, Oliver Jeffers, Picture Books, Visual Storytelling

Introduction

In the olden day stories used to be told visually with the help of marks drawn on papyrus, bamboo, or cave paintings. The development of paper came next, then the printing press and the commencement of mass production. After that, the craft of visual storytelling flourished. Picture books are very popular in the present era, especially among kids between the ages of three and eight. In a picture book, text and illustrations are combined to tell a story. To some extent, picture books also employ ethos, pathos, logos in their communication with readers. Oliver Jeffers is a prominent author and artist of children's picture books. He is also a well-known visual artist who works in the

fields of illustration, fine arts, bookmaking. He uses his art to comprehend the workings of the human mind, the majority of his pieces offer comic relief when dealing with serious subjects. Over 14 million copies of his widely praised picture books have been sold globally and have been translated into more than 50 different languages. So, to own and read a picture book is an enriching experience. It is one that a child will carry throughout their lives and pass it on thereafter.

Objective

The objective of the research is to discover a consistent pattern in the visual storytelling process of the author

and illustrator - Oliver Jeffers by analysing his illustrations through the application of auteur theory.

- To analyse the technical competence of the individual
- To evaluate the distinguishable personal style of Oliver Jeffers
- To analyse the inner meaning of the books

All these characteristics will be studied as proposed by Andrew Sarris (1962) as part of the auteur theory.

Review of Literature

This review of literature starts at the very beginning with the advent of literature and children's literature. The English language was first formally developed and used in the English Isles. As literature began to spread outside the borders of Britain, the Latin and Anglo-Norman texts were considered to be foreign. Then came the transition of literature from the Middle Ages to the Renaissance period which was around the fifteenth and sixteenth century. The period revolutionized literature and brought it to the academic light. As English literature as a language flourished many subgenres were born, one of which is children's literature as stated by J.B Beer (2022).

Initially, in the sixteenth century, there were no dedicated books that were meant for children, there were only fables, religious texts and instruction books made for adults which were also given to children to read, Adrienne Rivera, 2017. The earliest children's book to be published in America, "Spiritual Milk for Boston Babes," was written by John Cotton in 1656. The first picture book created specifically for children was "The Visible World in Pictures," (1658) published by John Amos Comenius. Then, John Newbery's 1744 publication of 'A Little Pretty Pocket Book' was groundbreaking since it had drawings, was compact, was written exclusively for children's amusement as stated by Kristin Masters, 2012 in her study. Then came the Industrial Revolution in the 1980s with the mass production of books. Children's literature first properly appeared in the eighteenth century. Since Randolph Caldecott was the one who initially created vivid illustrations to go along with the straightforward story of the book, he was regarded as the true father of children's picture books over Comenius according to Sylvia S Marantz and Kenneth A. Marantz, 2014.

Picture books, according to Lawrence R. Sipe, Sutherland, Hearn, (2002) are those in which the pictures are either the primary focus of the text or are given equal weight. According to Frank Serafini (2012) the physical characteristics of the book such as shape, size, paper texture, composition, colour, typography, the arrangement of the shapes etc on the page all contribute to the enjoyment of reading the book and its overall success among readers and so picture book should be viewed in its entirety to comprehend the book.

The auteur theory is one of the most well-known theories, especially in the film medium. As this study applies the characteristics of auteur theory it is imperative to understand the inception of the auteur theory and all the alterations that have been done to it since its inception. It was first talked about by the critics of the "Cahiers Du Cinema". According to the Cahiers, directors such as Hitchcock, Steven Spielberg, Renoir are ones whose works stand out amongst the rest. André Bazin, another critic said that it is not easy to apply this theory to a complex medium such as films, as it is highly collaborative in nature. It was Andrew Sarris through his work titled "Notes on Auteur Theory in 1962" that brought this theory into the academic world. He was the first to coin the term "auteur theory". As stated by Sarris, he says that for an individual to be considered an auteur he/she should possess the following characteristics says Paul Michael Sedenik (1975).

Although this theory is mostly applied to the film medium there are also auteurs in other mediums as well. Hideo Kojima is one such auteur in the field of video game media. He is known for making video games that are not solely focused on glorifying violence and ego-boosting the players rather he focuses on the emotional aspects of creating a video game. He is an auteur as well, as he was the first to introduce the stealth action genre as published by Jules Patalita (2018).

The auteur theory can also be applied to the animation medium. Although it is also a collaborative medium just like in the case of films, it requires the influence of one person majorly. This is the case when it comes to Miyazaki's work and the movies he has animated under the banner of Studio Ghibli. The auteur theory should be applied to animation films as well as it is seen as the "most auteurist of film practices" as stated by Kevin M. Moist and Michael Bartholow (2016). He is an auteur, as he is known for writing, directing his films and also is involved in making most of the basic frames in the cell animation process of most films. What also makes him different is the fact that most of his films deal with darker themes, unlike other animated films that focus only on entertaining children.

As this research is focusing on the works of Oliver Jeffers, it is only right to get to know him. He is a well-known and widely acclaimed author and illustrator of picture books. He has published over twenty books that are being sold in multiple languages worldwide. He has also won many awards such as the Irish book awards for "This moose belongs to me" (2012), British Book Design and Production Awards for "The heart and the bottle" (2009), #1 NY Times Bestseller

#1 TIME book of 2017 for "Here we are: Notes for living on planet earth" (2017) and many more. He is known for making books that deal with deeper issues such as love,

environment conservation, kindness, grief, ownership, death and so on. Through the use of mixed media, vibrant and contrasting illustrations, an iconic handwritten font and a conversational style he tells stories. The use of his conversation style of narrative provides comic relief. He considers himself more of a translator as he translates the essence and traits of being a human into wonderfully written and illustrated stories as stated by Eliza Berman (2022). Moreover, the Routledge Companion to Picture Books, chapter 32 by Martin Salisbury titled "The education of a picture book maker." states that the term "auteur" is the most appropriate definition to be used to describe picture book makers like Oliver Jeffers.

In the present times, we are moving into a digital era. As stated by the renowned American philosopher of contemporary art - Noël Carrol. He says in his article published in 1996 that every medium changes through the ages. This is the case when it comes to picture books as well. Through the years, picture books have gone from being a printed medium to "e-volving" as said by Stella K. Reinhard, 2014. Hence, whether society is ready or not, there is going to be a rapid change in the medium of picture books to a digital platform.

Methodology

The qualitative methodology will be used to do content analysis on the illustrations and text in the books "Here we are: Notes for living on planet earth" (2017) and "This moose belongs to me" (2012) by illustrator and author Oliver Jeffers. The study will also employ the characteristics of auteur theory which are technical competence, personal style and inner meaning as proposed by Andrew Sarris (1962). This methodology will help in understanding and identifying a common pattern in Oliver Jeffers's style of visual storytelling.

Variables Used in the Study

Independent Variables

An Independent variable is a variable that stands on its own and does not change or is not affected by other variables. In this study, technical competence, personal style and inner meaning are the independent variables.

Dependent Variables

Dependent variables change when the independent variable is manipulated. For this study, technical competence: composition and angle are the variables. Under personal style: shape, size, colour, line, texture are the variables. Under inner meaning: overall theme is the variable.

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework for the study will make use of the auteur theory founded by Andrew Sarris in 1962 which is.

Technical competence here refers to the skill and the resources that the individual has access to make his work of art. Personal style is one when the audience sees the film they will instantly be able to identify inner meaning is the interior meaning behind the making of any creative project.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for the study applies variables and the characteristics of the auteur theory as stated by Andrew Sarris (1962) which is technical competence, personal style and inner meaning as the independent variables. Angle and composition, colour, shape, size, line and texture respectively as the dependent variables to the works of Oliver Jeffers, specifically two books. "Here we are notes for living on planet earth" and "This moose belongs to me".

Data Collection and Interpretation

In this study, the researcher has taken illustrations from the books "Here we are: Notes for living on planet earth" (2017) and "This moose belongs to me" (2012) which include spot illustrations, single-page illustrations, double-page illustrations, cover pages and endpapers of both the books. In the data collected, in terms of technical competence, the angle and composition were focused on and when it comes to personal style shape, size, line, colour and texture are the variables that were analysed. Through this data collection and interpretation, it gives the researcher a clear idea of the signature style of Oliver Jeffers as a picture book maker.

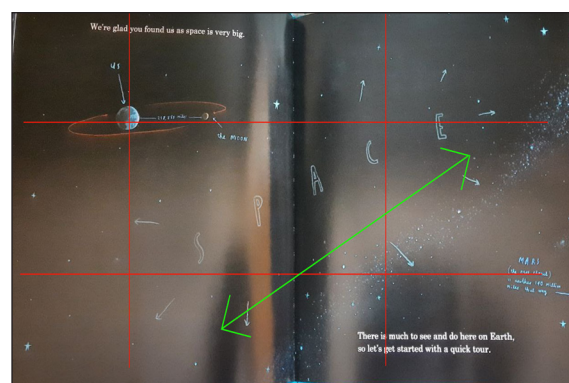


Figure 1

Source. Here we are: Notes for living on planet earth (2017) by Oliver Jeffers

Technical Competence

Angle

He has used a straight angle, to show the size and bigness of outer space. The angle allows the child to freely move through the page and imbibe the information which is present. The use of the straight angle in this visual helps to create a sense of freedom.

earth placed on the left-hand side and the word space written in Jeffers iconic, loose handwriting in the centre of the page in a light font. The composition is one wherein the word, space, is the first visual that stands out, followed by the tiny earth with the moon and sun close to it. The composition helps to portray the gigantism of outer space. It brings to the reader a sense of wonder, magic and mystery about the things that exist in the far galaxies that are not commonly known to us. The composition also allows the child to imagine and cross their thresholds into their very own world.

Personal Style

Colour

The background in this spread is almost a very dark black/ dark blue to represent the emptiness of space and how big it is. The almost black colour can mean that although there are a lot of wonders when it comes to space, there is also a lot of mystery and elements of horror. Contrasting to the black background the word space is written in a light blue colour that makes it stand out. The blue is used to reflect a sense of peacefulness and the natural nature of the earth. The earth is painted in the same blue colour so it can be emphasised and not get lost in the background.

Shape

A small circle was drawn to show the earth and a small circle to represent the moon. The realistic shapes help the child to understand how small the earth is in the big outer space. This helps to indirectly communicate to the reader how minute their existence is in the grand scheme of things. The small, circular shape of Earth brings a sense of solace as well.

Size

Both the moon and earth are drawn very small compared to the word "space" which is drawn bigger in size and takes up almost the whole page at the centre. The contrast between the actual drawing of the planets and the word space itself is used to represent the hugeness of space.

Line

Here there are arrow marks that point to the things that we need to see or read. The word 'space' has arrow marks pointing outwards all around it to show that the space is gigantic and occupies an inevitable amount of area. There are arrow marks that point at the earth and the sun. These lines help to direct a young reader to look at what must be looked at and provides them with a sense of direction.

Texture

The background has a texture that is created through traditional painting ink on paper. The texture helps to differentiate the background and helps the elements in the foreground to stand out.

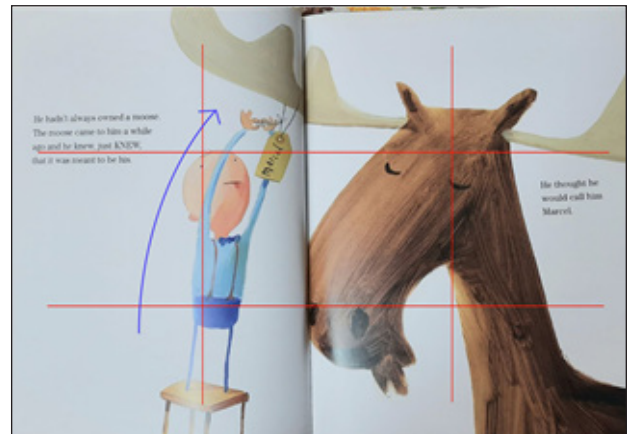


Figure 2

Composition

This is a two-page spread that uses the rule of thirds with Illustration 2

Source: This moose belongs to me (2012) by Oliver Jeffers

Technical Competence

Angle

A semi-worm's eye view is used for the illustration. In it, the boy is reaching up to tie a tag and the name is moose as "marcel". This action signifies that the boy owns the moose and it is now his. That now the moose must be henceforth only loyal to Wilfred. The angle used, however, communicates the opposite, wherein it shows again that the moose seems to be towering over the boy and hence, is a more powerful force than the boy thinks.

Composition

The rule of thirds is used for this two-page spread. The head of the moose is placed at the point of intersection. The moose is taking up most of the space in the composition, this is to show that the moose belongs to mother nature. It is an animal and cannot be caged, kept in someone's house or it cannot belong to someone. The composition puts the moose in the upper hand indirectly communicating that it is a wild animal that is not meant to be tamed and fulfil the needs of any human. 4.2 Personal Style

Colour

The colour brown colour is used for the moose. A lighter brown almost yellow colour has used the highlight, near the nose. A 2d illustration on the page is made to look detailed. A three-dimensional sensation is created only using different shades of colour. The horns of the moose are coloured in an off-white colour to show the purity and innocence of the animal. The blue, white and brown all stand out against the white backdrop. The backdrop also gives the reader a feeling of being safe and they are

allowed to feel intimate and get close to the characters.

Shape

An oval shape is used for the face and an elongated rounded rectangle shape is used for the body of the boy. The illustration of the moose or the boy does not have sharp edges, this is to show that they are soft-natured and approachable. The placement of shapes is more in the centre of the page drawing the immediate attention of the reader.

Size

The moose is the largest in size when compared to the boy. This is done to not only highlight the fact that the moose is the main star of the story but to also show the potential the moose has over the boy. The bigger size of the moose, not only shows its compliance but also, represents subconsciously the size of the entire animal kind and how it is made up of a countless number of species and can have any say over to take the homo sapiens.

Line

Simple lines are used to draw the legs of the boy and the legs of the stool he is standing on. Straight lines are used to represent some elements so that the concept can be simplified for a child to understand. The use of bold, thick and unwavering lines indicates power and dominance.

Texture

The same painterly texture is used for the moose that makes it look natural and hand-drawn. Similarly, there are no clean lines or edges in the illustration, which gives it a very traditional look, while also adding a feeling of aesthetic to the visual. The texture is also a reflection of the complexities of the natural things that are found in nature.

Conclusion

Everyone's childhood included having a picture book that they read over and over again. We grew up listening to these stories being read to us and looking at the charming illustrations. Making a picture book involves a lot of concentration and imagination, especially if the author and illustrator are the same people. When it comes to Oliver Jeffers, this is the situation. He is a renowned novelist, illustrator, fine art painter, more. Over twenty books that he wrote and illustrated have been published, translated into other languages, sold all over the world. His writings are widely read and cherished by many. His novels cover subjects like loss, sadness, love, acceptance, ownership, responsibility, other issues that are indicative of human nature and emotions. He is an auteur through and through because he is the primary creative force and the one who decides on all artistic choices, especially when it comes to creating picture books for which he serves as both author

and illustrator (The Routledge Companion to Picture Books, chapter 32 by Martin Salisbury). Even though the publishing house that will print and distribute the book can require that it undergo an editing and corrections process.

According to the study's specific objective, which is to evaluate the consistency of technical ability, we can see that this author primarily employs a straight-level viewpoint, as well as a semi-or bird's ant's eye view. He also frequently employs double-page spreads and the rule of thirds in his compositions. The picture stands out and extends beyond. It enables the reader to relate to the story's images and develop a connection with the characters.

Another explicit objective was to identify a trend in Jeffers' personal style. When it comes to having a unique style, it is without a doubt possible to recognise this auteur's work. He uses a variety of media in his projects, including watercolours, gouache, oil painting, coloured pencils. Thanks to a variety of mediums, his pictures have a rich depth and texture. He is well known for using vibrant, powerful, contrasting colours that never fail to stand out on the page and grab the attention of any reader, whether they be a child or an adult. Each of these texts displays a common theme. He is recognised for combining his beautiful detailed fine art painting skills with stylized illustration, which gives rise to a whole new, unique style, entirely his own.

Finding the deep meaning underlying the individual's creative endeavours was one of the study's other specific objectives. Inner meaning, the third feature, is also present in both of the books. The unfortunate political developments in the world at the time the book "Here we are: Notes for living on planet earth" (2017) was published are reflected in the book. Similarly, the ongoing climate crisis is also discussed metaphorically. The shared obligation that humanity has to preserve the planet is another topic covered. Likewise, the book "This moose belongs to me" (2012) refers to ownership and history. Older readers of Jeffers' work reflect and think more deeply since there is a broader level of understanding involved when it comes to his works. Young readers are also inspired to question, imagine, try to become better members of society by reading his stories. Light of the fact that the three components of the auteur theory—technical proficiency, individuality of style, inner significance—are all present, this makes Jeffers an outstanding individual in his field of work and worthy enough to be termed an auteur in his field of expertise.

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