

me that *A Humument* is full of windows." Through the phrase "it's been pointed out to me," Phillips acknowledged that any work of stature must have more and other meanings than those its maker intended. Not that Phillips "intends" in any rigid sense: one of the pages of *A Humument* reads "His aim was not to think his aim." The many windows depicted in *A Humument*, then, may be magic casements, opening onto a poetics of reading characterized by illusionism, visual stimuli, and dream reading—for one page even tells us "I am the window your dream stepped out of." And we recall that when Italo Calvino describes the initiatory moments of a novel, he begins with a window: "There is someone looking through the befogged glass." The vision of the reader seeks something that begins to appear only cloudily, like that cloudy shape we have seen rendered on Phillips's page. Phillips thus creates an art of double exposure (and at times double cross). While never letting us forget the material fact of print on the page, he also reminds us that the page can produce colors, shapes, and textures. As his transformed pages accumulate to correspond exactly to the number of pages in Mallock's original novel, they comment, with visual eloquence, on the transformative power of any novel.

That power is the explicit subject of Jan Sawka's *A Book of Fiction*. In his preface, Sawka announces that his book is about the "translation of written images into visual ones"; it is the process of translation, rather than its product, that intrigues him. His book consists of five chapters of five pages each, closely inscribed with a wholly imaginary language. These pages are overlaid with images, or they open up "into" these images; it is sometimes difficult to tell which is the case. Yet there is nothing vague or fuzzy about Sawka's vision: his colors are usually intense and pulsating, his lines meticulously engraved. While not illustrating any particular narrative, the pages convey a certain sense of narrative progression. The first page of chapter 1, for instance, seems to be about the establishment of the novel's protagonist. Where an illuminated initial might ordinarily appear, we have the depiction of a man's trousered feet, casting a shadow before them. Dominating the page is a cluster of images of different sizes, some framed, all seeming to exchange certain elements of color or line or subject matter; above all we see a large shadowy male head, whose sunglasses reflect a distant horizon; this scene of the horizon is repeated in a long band below. The implied question is whether we can "see" anything in a novel without at the same time seeing the one doing the seeing.

A Book of Fiction expresses the feel of reading through a variety of techniques: scattered, framed, and numbered vignettes that correspond, perhaps, to the stage at which the reader is still assembling scattered hints; arrows, diagrams, and geometrical correspondences as equivalents of sensed structures; windows and doors in the page as openings into illusion; and a persistent ambiguity as to what is in "front" of the page and what is "behind" it. Let's linger on one page (Fig. 8), the opening page of chapter 3.

James Beck, in a forward to the book, describes the scene depicted here as "a landscape with two rows of trees lying on a freshly plowed field; expanding branches block out the sky."³³ But the representation is more problematic than this. What Beck reads as furrows seem rather to be serried cutouts, with the trees expanding to wide bases, one behind the other. At the same time, these are illuminated at edges that seem to curve. The illumination appears to be moonlight; yet there is a band of intense rose and white at the horizon. Is the darkness above the tree branches, then, a lowering cloud cover? Its upper edge, though, is rendered almost as if it were shadowy foliage. The complicated interlace of the branches, the repetitive rows of trees leading us into the distance—these parallel and perhaps comment on the equally complicated interlace of writing above. As in the conclusion of Calvino's *The Baron in the Trees*, writing is like a forest, and a forest is like writing, writing that is also drawing. Here we can truly be said to see the forest for the trees; the visualized scene alludes to what generated it. And if what generated it is an interlace of words seen as branches, we sense beyond this the absent ground, the ground that is absence.

Allusive trajectories between what is visualized and the writing that generates it are found throughout *A Book of Fiction*. Serried and repetitive patterns are common in its pages, arising out of patterns inherent in writing: a crowd of men in dark suits, all facing away from us, cast shadows upon the page on which they stand, receding into the distance; mountain ranges overlap parallel with the waves of a sea scene below, and with written lines; purple grasses sprout from the page like sparse calligraphy, and thicken as we move up the page—though not so much that we cannot still detect the rows in which they have been sown; and at "The End," a beach of pebbles, in the foreground sparsely distributed on the sand, recedes into an endless pebbled texture cut across to reveal the top of the written page. In many of the scenes objects emerge out of this complex patterning: a snowy peak rises out of the rounded ranges, an island rises out of the

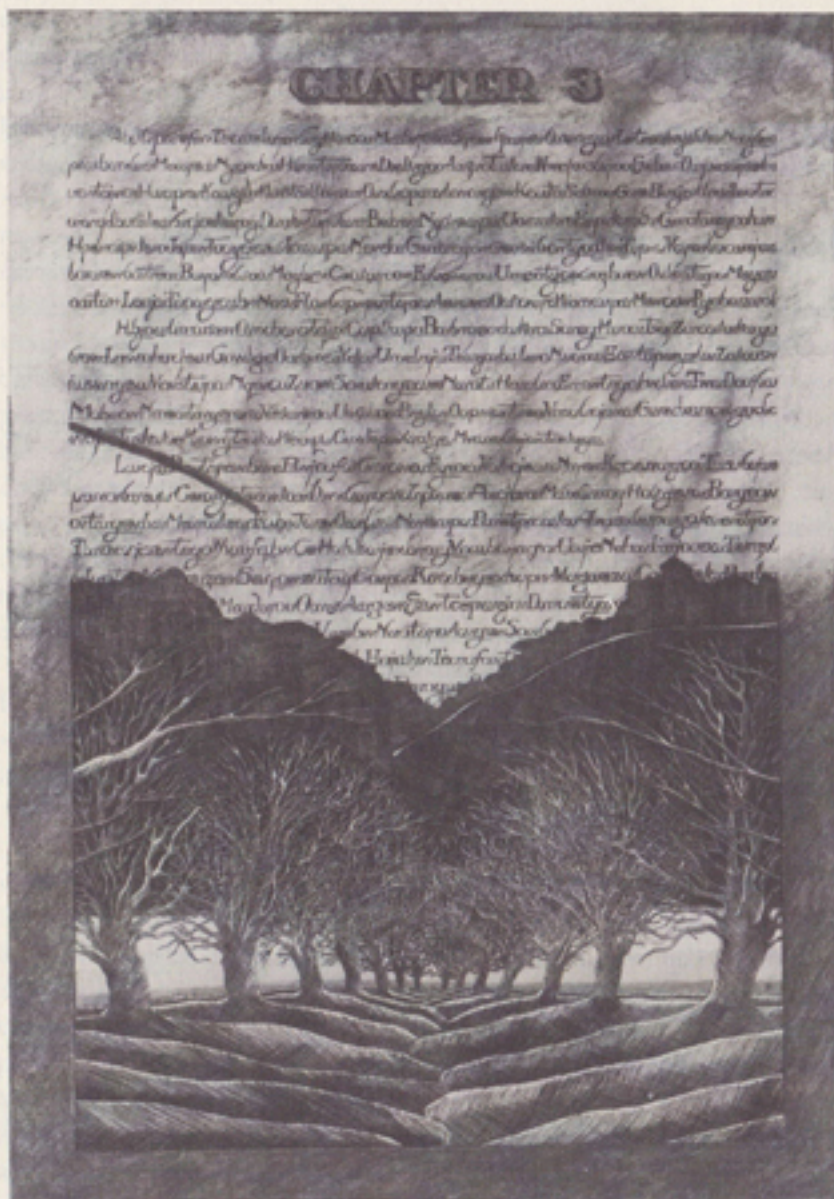


FIGURE 8. Jan Sawka, page from *A Book of Fiction*. New York: Clarkson N. Potter, 1983. Copyright © 1986 by Jan Sawka. Reprinted by permission of Clarkson N. Potter, Inc., a division of Crown Publishers, Inc.

waves, an intense chartreuse cube rises out of the purple grasses. These too are most likely allusions to Sawka's underlying obsession with the way that a visualized image can emerge out of lines of writing.

Motion / Pictures

A final example of painting reading must occupy a category of its own, creating its effects as it does with the Graphic Paintbox, a computer program. This is Peter Greenaway's *Prospero's Books*, a lushly visual film whose subject is the "magic" of books—a magic which is both figurative and literal. In the second scene of *The Tempest*, Prospero tells of Gonzalo's charity:

Knowing I loved my books, he furnished me
From mine own library with volumes that
I prize above my dukedom. (1.2.166–68)

Greenaway's reading of Shakespeare's play puts these books in the foreground; there are twenty-four of them, each itemized and described in detail. Their descriptions/visualizations³⁴ make up a variegated argument for the visionary nature of reading. *The Book of Mythologies*, for instance, is a huge volume,

open and slanted backwards like a raked stage. Sitting and crouching on the double spread of pages—with text and illustrations—are various mythological figures . . . accompanied by nymphs and putti who are endeavoring to turn the next huge page to free the occupants of the next chapter—fauns and hamadryads who are already struggling to get out.³⁵

Or take *An Atlas Belonging to Orpheus*, full of maps of hell: "When the atlas is opened the maps bubble with pitch. Avalanches of hot, loose gravel and molten sand fall out of the book to scorch the library floor" (20).

The film catalogs each of these books in turn and immerses the viewer in the reader's visionary experience. The vision of *The Tempest* itself—the experience of the play—arises out of these books. *The Book of Mythologies* is the "template" for the spirits that populate the island. Similarly, *A Book of Architecture and Other Music* operates "like a magnificent pop up book" whose paper models rise to triumphant music, elaborate themselves, and freeze into a mannerist architectural complex that makes