

HELQUIST'S AND SNICKET'S ALL-SEEING EYES: PANOPTICISM AND THE
ARCHIVE IN A *SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS*

By

LAUREN TURNER

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by

Lauren Turner

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Lauren Turner

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A Series of Unfortunate Events is a juvenile fiction series—currently second only to the Harry Potter series in sales—that chronicles the lives of three orphans as they move from one guardian to another. The twelve published novels of the planned thirteen installments each include eighteen to twenty images by illustrator Brett Helquist. This thesis examines the interactions between the images by Helquist and the text by Lemony Snicket, the nom de plume of author Daniel Handler. Beginning with a consideration of the eye iconography established in Helquist's and Handler's collaboration, the images and texts are read against Michel Foucault's reading of the Panopticon from his 1975 *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, a key text in theorizing surveillance issues. The Snicket novels are seen to challenge some of panopticism's basic tenets, proposing alternative ways of conceiving surveillance in relation to the physical body and the archival tactics needed for managing data. The combined effect offers its readers a mode through which institutional power may be weakened and destroyed.

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

A diabolical, fortune-seeking count, a secret society, and an all-important sugar bowl: these are the elements that belong in (at worst) an historical thriller or (at best) a parody of a Merchant-Ivory film. Instead, these items are all contained in juvenile fiction's most complex new series, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket. This series chronicles the lives of three orphans in a pseudo-Victorian, pre-digital setting. While much attention in the realm of contemporary juvenile fiction has been given—and is increasingly being given—by journalists and academics to J.K. Rowling's Harry Potter series, less consideration has been allocated to the literature produced in the boy wizard's wake.¹ Rowling's efforts have produced both imitative novels and works written in reaction to the stronghold of her Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry.

I propose that *A Series of Unfortunate Events* comes to terms with Harry Potter's success by incorporating some of its predecessor's more attractive elements while simultaneously establishing it as the rebellious sibling. I do not wish to construct this thesis as a critical interpretation of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* through Harry Potter, nor do I intend to mention the Harry Potter novels past this introduction. I do, however, believe that it is important to make a brief note of it to fully comprehend the phenomenon that is Snicket's world. *A Series of Unfortunate Events* is, like the Harry Potter novels, a

¹ This oversight needs to be corrected, especially in light of claims by scholars like Jack Zipes that Harry Potter leaves young readers with “functional literacy,” and a yearning only for books similar to the Harry Potter series. Jack Zipes, *Sticks and Stones: the Troublesome Success of Children's Literature from Slovenly Peter to Harry Potter* (New York: Routledge, 2001), 188.

best-selling series that could be criticized as merely a textual franchise, an exercise in consumerism labeled as literacy. Each new novel is heralded by pre-ordering campaigns, and they have been the source of a movie adaptation and merchandising tie-ins.² Like books marketed to explain the mythological allusions in the Harry Potter novels, *So You Think You Know Lemony Snicket* and *The Truth Behind A Series of Unfortunate Events: Eyeballs, Leeches, and Hypnotism – Exploring Lemony Snicket’s World* have emerged to test and catalog the extensive canonical literary references in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*.³ Unlike Harry Potter, though, Snicket’s series presents its allusions less as code-breaking exercises than as markers of its own literary pretensions and status. *A Series of Unfortunate Events* finds its protagonists with little control over their own lives and the puppets of a cruel fate, a far cry from the savior-savant status of Harry Potter that enables his many miraculous escapes within his own world. Put simplistically, *A Series of Unfortunate Events* is the Dostoevsky to Harry Potter’s Dickens. Both may be enjoyed by the same pool of readers, but not as an effort to replicate exactly the reading experience of one another. Snicket’s works maintain their appeal and evade accusations of off-putting highbrow sensibilities with his liberal use of silly and even ludicrous aspects in his darkened, contemplative world.

While much is deserving of research in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, this paper hopes to bring to light and examine the exemplary fashion in which it utilizes the

² For the film, see *Lemony Snicket’s A Series of Unfortunate Events*, dir. Brad Silberling, 1 hr. 48 min., Paramount Pictures, 2004. Books that accompanied the film and the series include *Lemony Snicket’s A Series of Unfortunate Events: Behind the Scenes with Count Olaf* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), and *Lemony Snicket’s A Series of Unfortunate Events: The Puzzling Puzzles: Bothersome Games Which Will Bother Some People* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

³ Clive Gifford, *So You Think You Know Lemony Snicket?* (London: Hodder Children’s Press, 2004). Lois H Gresh, *The Truth Behind a Series of Unfortunate Events: Eyeballs, Leeches, Hypnotism, and Orphans – Exploring Lemony Snicket’s World* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2004).

repeated collaborative efforts of its author and illustrator. Although the American editions of Harry Potter also offer a continuous matching of J.K. Rowling and illustrator Mary GrandPre, their interactions of text and image lack the ambitious undertakings found within *A Series of Unfortunate Events*.⁴ Brett Helquist uses his illustrations for Daniel Handler, the pseudonymous Lemony Snicket, to heighten and enrich continued themes of surveillance culture and archival techniques found embedded within the novels. Helquist's and Handler's work is a rarity of illustrative collaborative efforts. Traditionally, art historical concerns do not tend to acknowledge illustration as an area worthy of extended study, especially the illustrations found in juvenile fiction. To research a particularly accomplished illustrator within the genre is task enough, but pairing him or her with an author over extended efforts is especially trying. Lewis Carroll and John Tenniel worked in concert for both *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* and its sequel *Through the Looking Glass*, but no further Alice books followed, and their partnership ended there.⁵ L. Frank Baum and W.W. Denslow made it through a single Oz installment, *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*, before parting ways.⁶ Roald Dahl's texts are often matched with works by Quentin Blake, but none of them could qualify as a true series. Maurice Sendak's and Dr. Seuss's illustrations receive considerable notice, but the fame of each is the result of picture books which they authored themselves. Brett Helquist and Daniel Handler have not simply paired up for repeated installments in an ad

⁴ For very limited information on GrandPre, see Deepti Hajela, "Artist makes Harry Grow," *The News and Observer*, 9 March 2005, sec. E.

⁵ For more on Carroll's and Tenniel's correspondences, see Martin Gardner, "Notes," *The Annotated Alice: The Definitive Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000).

⁶ For more on Baum and Denslow, see Michael Patrick Hearn, "Introduction," *The Annotated Wizard of Oz: Centennial Edition* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2000).

hoc sequence of works utilizing the same protagonists. Instead, they have worked together for thirteen books, a collection conceptualized from the start as a continuing series.

Because, in their collaborations, Brett Helquist illustrates Handler's works after the completion of the texts, it is tempting to attribute to Handler the lion's share of the series's success and intellectual daring. In the following paper, I hope to present Helquist not only as an illustrator whose images are worthy of particular attention, but also as a crucial force in presenting the theoretical discussions at work within the series. I examine his and Handler's inclusion of the organ of the eye within their iconography as an engagement with and, ultimately, a rejection of some of the basic tenets in Foucault's panopticism. I then consider the illustrative methods through which they negate the permanence and indexicality of the physical body. By demonstrating its malleability and the inability to rely on documentary processes to record the body, they separate it from its role of identifying personality. I conclude by locating an anxiety about the institutional archive, an unavoidable concern in the face of the premium that Helquist and Handler place on subjective knowledge, understanding, and presentation. Therefore, I examine some alternatives to the institutional archive that the books present, but they are tentative solutions also fraught with complications.

CHAPTER 2 RIOT IN THE PANOPTICON

The Series of Unfortunate Events is an intended series of thirteen books for juvenile to young adult readers.¹ The first novel within the series, *The Bad Beginning*, makes it clear that the series was conceived as a type of ongoing project with its first edition's subtitle, *Book the First*.² One may assume that the series will conclude with the thirteenth book, as the most recently released twelfth novel is entitled *The Penultimate Peril*.³ In addition to these eventual thirteen novels, there has been a supplementary text, *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography*.⁴ This study will focus primarily on the actual book series entries with an additional examination of *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography*, but it should be noted that the film and merchandising tie-ins are all noteworthy in that they maintain the idiosyncratic, postmodern ironic tone of the series. The twelve novels available thus far have been released over a period of six years, from 1999 to 2005. Many of them have reached best-seller status, spawning pre-ordering campaigns, special bookstore displays, and fan websites. In fact, with 46

¹ However, its success, and the very fact that this thesis is being written about it, could easily suggest that many adults are reading the books also. Nonetheless, it is published by the children's imprint of HarperCollins.

² Lemony Snicket, *The Bad Beginning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999). If the subtitle is not convincing enough, it may help to know that Daniel Handler reported that he "wrote down the first chapter of *The Bad Beginning* and summaries of the first three books and she [his editor] went into HarperCollins and I received a contract to write four books." Anne Marie Tobin, "Series of Unfathomable Triumphs; With 46 Million Sold, Lemony Snicket Books Leave Principal Conspirers Giggling," *The Record*, 28 October 2005, sec. D.

³ Lemony Snicket, *The Penultimate Peril* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005).

⁴ *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002).

million copies sold and distribution to over forty countries, they have been heralded as a “phenomenon within children’s literature.”⁵

The series is presented as reports on the welfare of three orphaned siblings: Violet, Klaus, and Sunny Baudelaire. The narrator of the texts is also the alleged author, Lemony Snicket. The true author of the texts is Daniel Handler, a man that can only be identified as Snicket’s “representative” on HarperCollins’s website and through later newspaper stories and books written when the series attained widespread fame.⁶ As such, Lemony Snicket is presented not merely as a pseudonym, but as a pseudopersona, a concept which will be considered at length later in this study.

Snicket claims he is investigating the whereabouts and fates of the Baudelaire children whose parents perished in an unexplained fire. The mysterious Count Olaf is assigned guardianship of the Baudelaires, but they are removed from his care when it becomes known that he only seeks access to their inherited fortune. He and his henchpeople continue to darken the Baudelaires’ doors in various disguises as they are shunted from one ineffectual, incompetent guardian to another, none of whom they recall their parents ever actually knowing. As the series progresses, the Baudelaires begin to suspect that the fire that killed their parents and destroyed their home was a case of arson, especially as they continue to encounter other victims of such acts. Their confusion increases when they learn of the existence of a secret organization known as the V.F.D. which they discover stands for “Volunteer Fire Department.” In the midst of their

⁵ For figures, see Tobin’s article. “Phenomenon in children’s literature” is found in Fiona Looney, “Profile: Snicket’s Tell-Tale Heart Exposed,” *The Sunday Tribune*, 26 December 2004, 14.

⁶ There are countless news articles that can be referenced here. For the full selection, see the Bibliography. The website may be found at *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, <<http://www.lemonysnicket.com/index.cfm?border=classic>> (7 March 2006).

uprooted lives and woe-filled existence, they attempt to understand the V.F.D.'s connection to these many fires and Count Olaf's role in relation to the crimes. Their investigation is complicated when they learn of their parents' past membership in the V.F.D. and the organization's great schism. Throughout the series, Snicket interjects allusions to his sorrowful history that includes his personal involvement in the V.F.D., a deceased love, and the deterioration of his own family so that the reader perceives that this figure has a vested interest in the Baudelaire's fate. By the twelfth novel, the Baudelaires are juggling the tasks of escaping from Count Olaf's evil plans, proving his guilt, finding a home, joining a faction of the V.F.D., and understanding their family heritage and history.

It is Snicket's voice that is especially unique. Alternately confiding and didactic, it plays upon its protagonists' unparalleled suffering. The tongue-in-cheek lightheartedness that Snicket sometimes displays, serves to simultaneously parody such a style. On *The Bad Beginning's* back cover, the reader finds a letter from Snicket that reads:

Dear Reader:

I'm sorry to say that the book you are holding in your hands is extremely unpleasant. It tells an unhappy tale about three very unlucky children. Even though they are charming and clever, the Baudelaire siblings lead lives filled with misery and woe. From the very first page of this book when the children are at the beach and receive terrible news, continuing on through the entire story, disaster lurks at their heels. One might say that they are magnets for misfortune.

In this short book alone, the three youngsters encounter a greedy and repulsive villain, itchy clothing, a disastrous fire, a plot to steal their fortune, and cold porridge for breakfast.

It is my sad duty to write down these unpleasant tales, but there is nothing stopping you from putting this book down at once and reading something happy, if you prefer that sort of thing.

With all due respect,

Lemony Snicket

While Snicket lends a certain degree of ridiculousness to his tale in likening itchy clothes and cold porridge to be on the same level of tragedy as a “disastrous fire,” he nonetheless honestly outlines the expectations of the story. Throughout these twelve novels, the Baudelaires have yet to find safety and security within the adult world. In explaining that the young reader who prefers happy tales should pursue another novel, Snicket implies that one who reads these books prefers tales of misery, woe, and unpleasantness. It is a sort of challenge to the young reader: she who consumes the text can claim an unflinching ability and maturity to handle sad stories, or at least stories in which her peers are struggling against adult law. Alternatively, she is calling Snicket’s bluff, adhering to the narrative to see if Snicket eventually breaks his promise and delivers happiness.

In *The Bad Beginning*, the reader is introduced to Count Olaf and his accoutrement of the eye. Olaf has an eye tattooed on his left ankle, and his home contains decorations which include the eye. Brett Helquist’s illustrations follow this lead and bring attention to the eyes in a variety of guises, be it the extreme focus on Olaf’s own eyes, the lack of eyes in a deceased fish, or the synecdoche of Olaf using just his tattooed ankle, to name a few (Figures 2.1, 2.2, and 2.3, respectively).⁷ Of the two hundred eighteen illustrations created thus far for the series, there are at least twenty-six illustrations that contain this peculiar eye disembodied, alone, and in human form. At least an additional eighteen show the eye in extreme close-ups or include objects unnaturally anthropomorphized with eyes. These selections make for forty-two illustrations, over twenty percent of the

⁷ Figure 2-1 may be found on Snicket, *The Bad Beginning*, 27. Figure 2-2 may be found on Snicket, *The Bad Beginning*, 41. Figure 2-3 may be found on Snicket, *The Bad Beginning*, 133.

entire series's selection. These numbers also do not include illustrations that draw attention to the eye by blocking it from view using eye patches, masks, or helmets.

While the rapid developments of technology of the past century may enable societies in reaching new levels of surveillance, a respect for the power behind vision—the basic practice and concept of surveillance—is age old. The evil eye and its enduring hold in European folkloric habits should be proof enough of a long regard for the aggressive power of the organ of vision.⁸ Vision, or the lack thereof, is also used as a powerful impetus in literary narrative traditions. The ancient Greek myth of Oedipus finds its hero blinding himself in his moment of absolute helplessness and desperation. It takes a temporary curse of blindness to transform the persecuting Saul into the preaching Paul in the Christian tradition. Of course, these two examples involve only episodic mentions of the eye's potency; they do not address the effects inherent in a sustained campaign of watching. Even the evil eye offers a consideration of only a malignant glance.

Art and literature are not without their references to the omnipresent gaze, however. Major literary works of the past century use the eye as a touchstone for moral judgment, irresponsible power, and inescapable enemies. F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925) has its characters' actions monitored and, in sharing the role of the reader, judged by the eyes of the billboard advertisement for optometrist Doctor T.J. Eckleburg. Winston Smith of George Orwell's *1984* (1949) finds little opportunity for escape from the visage of Big Brother, the public relations poster boy emblematic of the technology that actually can track Winston's actions. J.R.R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy

⁸ For general information on the evil eye in folklore studies, see Amica Lykiardopolous, "The Evil Eye: Towards an Exhaustive Study," *Folklore* 92, no.2 (1981): 221-230.

(1954-55) offers a spin on Winston's persecutor in its figure of Sauron, the primary antagonistic force that is often described in his present form as only an eye that was, "rimmed with fire, but was itself glazed, yellow as a cat's, watchful and intent, ... the black slit of its pupil opened on a pit, a window into nothing."⁹

These literary examples linking the eye and surveillance are important to mention in light of the fact that they precede Michel Foucault's hypothesis of surveillance and its effects on society in his 1975 study *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*.¹⁰ In examining the Enlightenment and Jeremy Bentham's Panopticon, a plan for a modern prison, Foucault understands the effectiveness of surveillance to lie in an uncertainty in its operation. The Panopticon was a prison that was to be constructed with its cells facing a central tower. The central tower's windows were to be set at angles so that the prisoners would be unable to determine if they themselves were under scrutiny at any point in time. This plan would eliminate the need for the chains and dark dungeons of the past which attempted to translate power into physically repressive measures.¹¹ If there is always a possibility that one is the subject of a gaze, then one will modify his behavior accordingly. Foucault writes:

He who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play simultaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection. By this very fact, the external power may throw off its physical weight; it tends to the non-corporeal; and, the more it approaches this limit, the more constant, profound, and permanent

⁹J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1994), 355.

¹⁰ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995).

¹¹ Foucault, 200.

are its effects: it is a perpetual victory that avoids any physical confrontation and which is always decided upon in advance.¹²

This thesis does not possess the breadth needed to do justice fully to the nuances of Foucault's argument, nor does it necessarily endorse them all. It does need to be mentioned, though, that in considering the gaze as an uncertain or invisible presence, Foucault removes the potency of the physical organ of the eye in the surveillance discussion. It could be argued that, because Helquist uses the eye to give surveillance a physical presence and serve as its constant reminder in illustrative form, this iconographical campaign fails to meet Foucault's model on its basic argument of invisibility. I do not wish to confuse or equate the eye with the gaze. However, I do believe that the continued illustrative inclusion of the eye serves as a symbolic reminder of the surveillance cameras, permanent school records, and Internet cookies that the young readers of the series encounter on a daily basis. While Foucault might object to an acknowledgment of the presence of this form of disciplinary power, I do not know that he would scoff at its use symbolically in illustrated literature. Of course, this argument is a double-edged sword; the illustrations are depicting the world of the Baudelaires, which would suggest that, on the level of the narrative, some of them are not functioning symbolically; they are physically present in that world. However, the fear that they first inspire in the Baudelaires, and the eye's initial ties to Count Olaf, the embodiment of power and discipline in their lives in the first few books, smacks so much of Foucault's theories that I believe they are meant, in the beginning, to suggest his surveillance society.

¹² Foucault, 202-203.

Where the novels begin to stray from Foucault's model actually occurs with the introduction of various institutions that the Baudelaires encounter. At the heart of Foucault's theory is the idea that the invisible mechanisms of power function so efficiently because they flow together from institution to institution. For example, immunization records may be required for schools, academic records may be required for employment, and wage documentation is required for taxation. Foucault explains that

On the whole, therefore, one can speak of the formation of a disciplinary society in this movement that stretches from the enclosed disciplines, a sort of social 'quarantine', to an indefinitely generalizable mechanism of 'panopticism'. Not because the disciplinary modality of power has replaced all the others, but because it has infiltrated the others, sometimes undermining them, but serving as an intermediary between them, linking them together, extending them, and above all making it possible to bring the effects of power to the most minute and infinitesimal distribution of the power relations.¹³

Foucault uses this observation to end on the note, "Is it surprising that prisons resemble factories, schools, barracks, hospitals, which all resemble prisons?"¹⁴ The Baudelaires do encounter a variety of institutions: school, a lumber mill, a hospital, a scout troop, to name a few. However, each institution they enter is penetrated by some force of the V.F.D. The V.F.D., in its infiltration of an array of institutions, serves as an embodiment of panopticism and disciplinary society. It observes individuals across institutional boundaries, it gathers and organizes data, and it attempts to impose its codes of conduct within society. Despite its symbolic potential, though, one cannot ignore that the V.F.D. has a physical presence in the world of the books. It is a secret society combined with a volunteer fire department. Nonetheless, at the moment in the tenth book that the V.F.D.

¹³ Foucault, 216.

¹⁴ Foucault, 228.

is revealed to the Baudelaires as a volunteer fire department, the imparter of this information admits that it still “seems to stand for many things.”¹⁵

While the V.F.D. rules the Baudelaires’ world as the net holding together the factories, schools, barracks, and hospitals, its function as a secret society does impart to it some potential to continue to function as Foucault’s invisible net of disciplinary relations. In the combination of a somewhat secret organization with the image of an eye, one must consider the obvious parallel that this melding has to Freemasonry. Freemasonry is, according to Clement M. Silvestro, Carol E. Gordon, and Barbara Franco in *The Masonic Tradition in the Decorative Arts*:

An oath bound fraternal and benevolent association of men whose purpose is to nurture sound moral and social virtues among its members and all of mankind. Freemasons use the simple tools of the ancient stonemasons – the square and compass, trowel and plumb, among others – as symbols in their teachings. Morality plays, rich in allegory and symbolism, form an important part of their ritual. Belief in a Supreme Being, the Brotherhood of Man, and compassion towards others are primary requisites for admission to the Craft.¹⁶

Freemasonry can sometimes be tempting to dismiss. Its ties to ritual, its uncertain practices, and even its connections to spiritualism can appear to remove it from the realm of sound argumentation.¹⁷ However, its influence within history, especially in the development of the United States, is without question, and the V.F.D. brings to mind aspects of generalized knowledge of it. Freemasonry provides a link between the historical world and the books’ fictional V.F.D. in its veiled practices, its secret

¹⁵ Lemony Snicket, *The Slippery Slope* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 166.

¹⁶ Clement M. Silvestro, Carol E. Gordon, and Barbara Franco, *The Masonic Tradition in the Decorative Arts*, (Utica, New York: Munson-Williams-Proctor Institute, 1980), 5.

¹⁷ For more on its ties to spiritualism particularly, see C.W. Leadbeater, *Freemasonry and Its Ancient Mystic Rites* (New York: Gramercy Books, 1998). For general information on Freemasonry in American history, see Silvestro, Gordon, and Franco.

membership, its symbolic appropriation of the eye, and its pervasive presence. I am not suggesting that Handler and Helquist are making Freemasonry a direct referent of the V.F.D. or using this series as commentary on its “Great Architect.” I am simply suggesting that this fraternal order makes an effective parallel to the V.F.D., not because the V.F.D. has in its literary realm any dogmatic agenda, but because Freemasonry and the V.F.D. share iconography and influence in a variety of institutions. The Freemasons possessed the symbol of the All-Seeing Eye, and this symbol continues to function as a reminder of the power they once held in its appearance on the American dollar bill and the United States Great Seal.¹⁸ In fact, “Masonic ties and patriotism were so closely entwined in the period following the Revolution that they virtually merge in popular usage.”¹⁹ Decoding the eye within *A Series of Unfortunate Events* will not offer new clarity towards the Masonic All-Seeing Eye. Like the preponderance of allusions within the novels, though, the eye within the series allows for a blurring between internal and external histories. The mystique of Freemasonry, coupled with its incredible influence on multiple social planes during the Enlightenment, illuminates an argument for seriously attributing great potential power to a fictitious volunteer fire department. Because the Panopticon, the model from which Foucault begins building his argument, is an Enlightenment idea, it is noteworthy to connect it to other Enlightenment forces that helped to build nation-states. I do not wish to belabor the potential similarity of the V.F.D. to Freemasonry, but acknowledgement is necessary that there may be actual

¹⁸ For explanation concerning the All-Seeing Eye, see Silvestro, Gordon, and Franco, 22.

¹⁹ Silvestro, Gordon, and Franco, 16.

precedents of alleged institutions which function, whether intentionally or not, as a type of invisible disciplinary net.

It is crucial to establish the V.F.D. as the central institution within the series because of its association with the eye. While in the first half of the series, the two only seem suppositionally paired. However, the ninth book, *The Carnivorous Carnival*, reveals that the eye may also be used as an insignia, an insignia that is shown throughout the supplementary book *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography* that was published in the same year (Fig. 2-4).²⁰ Snicket relates in *The Carnivorous Carnival*:

At first glance, the painting on the fortune-teller's tent seemed to depict an eye, like the decoration on Madame Lulu's caravan and the tattoo on Count Olaf's ankle. The three children had seen similar eyes wherever they went, from a building in the shape of an eye when they were working in the lumbermill, to an eye on Esme Squalor's purse when they were hiding in a hospital, to a huge swarm of eyes that surrounded them in their most frightening nightmares, and although the siblings never quite knew what these eyes meant, they were so weary of gazing at them that they would never pause to look at one again. But there are many things in life that become different if you take a long look at them, and as the children paused in front of the fortune-telling tent, the painting seemed to change before their very eyes, until it did not seem like a painting at all, but an insignia.

An insignia is sort of a mark that usually stands for an organization or a business, and the mark can be of any sort whatsoever. Sometimes an insignia can be a simple shape, such as a wavy line to indicate an organization concerned with rivers or oceans, or a square to indicate an organization concerned with geometry or sugar cubes. Sometimes an insignia can be a small picture of something, such as a torch, to indicate an organization that is flammable, or the three-eyed girl outside the House of Freaks, indicating that people who were unusual in some way were on display inside. And sometimes an insignia can be part of the name of the organization, such as the first few letters, or its initials....

It [the painting on the tent] was not an image of an eye, as it appeared at first glance, but an insignia, standing for an organization the children knew only as V.F.D.²¹

²⁰ Lemony Snicket, *The Carnivorous Carnival* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002). Figure 2-4, just one example of the insignia, may be found on *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 33.

²¹ Snicket, *The Carnivorous Carnival*, 119-121.

Preceding this excerpt is the beginning illustration of the chapter depicting the tent itself. Instead of assuming the form of the organ, the eye is now shown as a graphic that spells out V.F.D. The eye cum insignia is rendered so as to be easily disguised within the folds of the tent, an important visual concession on Helquist's part since he must re-image some of the eyes that had previously appeared when he repeats them in his later illustrations (Figure 2-5).²² For instance, the eye becomes the insignia in later renderings of its appearance on Count Olaf's ankle (Figure 2-6).²³ While this elision does not negate the surveying power of the eye, it does make plain that the surveying is a specific tactic of the V.F.D.

Singling out a single institution is not the only method through which *A Series of Unfortunate Events* differs from Foucault's panopticism and the disciplinary regime for which it stands. The key difference that it demonstrates is the reaction that the Baudelaires hold towards the eye in the series's second half. At a point, they realize they must take their lives into their own hands and break rules to pursue justice. They set out on their own, and they make decisions according to their consciences and not societal laws. They become pursuers; they become watchers; they even become arsonists themselves on one occasion. They stake their claim on the Panopticon, as part of its effectiveness is the ability of anyone to partake in its disciplinary potential. However, they are no longer internalizing its mechanisms. They are not binding their decisions to a fear of societal retribution. Granted, their decisions leave them outcasts in the world of the books. They are framed for murder and pursued by the police. Their lives lack any

²² Figure 2-5 may be found on Snicket, *The Carnivorous Carnival*, 101 and 103.

²³ Figure 2-6 may be found on Lemony Snicket, *The Slippery Slope* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 205.

form of stability. On the level of the reader, though, they are heroes. The books, in placing the Baudelaires against the nefarious Count Olaf, naturally position them as sympathetic characters. And if enough of the readers can accept the Baudelaires' rejection of panopticism and the sacrifices involved therein, then it is possible that the seeds of a revolution will be sown, or, at the very least, a heightened awareness and wariness of surveillance society.

Because the novels revolve around a time when the V.F.D. is almost destroyed by internal feuding between those who start fires and those who put them out, the Baudelaires realize instead that they must gain the upper hand not by rejecting surveillance entirely, just by rejecting panopticism. Although they no longer internalize the expectations of the eyes watching them, they must go on a campaign of watching for themselves, for purposes that will be outlined in the later "Lost in the Archive" chapter. Nowhere is their need made more clear than in Helquist's cover illustration for *The Penultimate Peril* (Fig. 2-7).²⁴

The cover illustration is framed like all of his full-page illustrations. The frame is rectangular with a rounded arched top. Like all the covers, but unlike his full-page illustrations inside the book, the upper left and right corners show circles in which the Baudelaire children and a burning house are pictured, respectively. The frame's borders are filled with red and orange flames and thorny, curving lines. Two banners announce that the book is part of *A Series of Unfortunate Events* and that this installment is *Book the Twelfth by Lemony Snicket*. The effect makes for an entranceway into the world of the illustration—an invitation to join the narrative, but, as the flames and thorns would

²⁴ Figure 2-7 may be found on Lemony Snicket, *The Penultimate Peril* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), cover.

suggest, not too inviting a greeting. The red and orange of the frame is echoed in the orange of the spine and in the Baudelaires' uniforms in the illustration. While the frame may serve to distinguish the illustration as part of a separate plane, the consistency of coloring maintains an integrated effect between the cover image and the book itself.

In the image, the Baudelaires stand waiting at a hotel concierge desk surrounded by eleven suspicious-looking passers-by. The people depicted, Baudelaires included, typify Helquist's caricaturing approach to the human form. To accentuate the children's chubby cheeks, their mouths and chins are almost non-existent. If a stranger, such as the one in the lower left foreground, has a square chin, then Helquist depicts it so square as to seem physically impossible. The Baudelaires dominate the image in terms of color. Their exactly matching uniforms allow for their dynamic red and orange to be repeated three times, whereas the surrounding guests are decked primarily in mute blues, browns, and roses, and none have their wardrobes duplicated. The Baudelaires' skin tone suggests that they are in the peak of health, while the other figures tend to have death-like gray skin colors. Because they rule the softer, brighter palette colors, the viewer is drawn to the Baudelaires first, despite their presence in the middle ground.

The true accomplishment of this cover illustration is the detached effect that Helquist achieves. The image is bustling and almost overcrowded with figures. However, none of them are interacting. They may be glancing suspiciously away from themselves, but their lines of sight rarely seem to go anywhere specific. This is a sustained campaign of watching, but nobody seems to understand what they are meant to seek. The Baudelaires participate in this endeavor, but they escape such criticism because Helquist illustrates them wearing sunglasses. There is no way to determine if

they are viewing the “correct” happenings. Of course, as the cover illustration, one encounters this image before the plot is experienced and repeatedly throughout reading, so there is no way of knowing upon the first examinations of this image what the “correct” happenings can even be. Helquist places a reminder of the world that they inhabit—and a commentary on the Baudelaires’ attentive state behind their sunglasses—in the feather of a hat. The feather comes from a woman wearing a magenta hat on the right of the illustration, but the feather terminates immediately in front of Sunny. Imprinted on its end is another of those ubiquitous eyes. It is a further sign that the figures in the image are not simply milling in the lobby; they are engaged in a contest of attaining power through surveillance.

The end effect of the cover illustration and the Baudelaires’ rejection of panopticism is a weakening of the institution’s disciplinary powers. However, with it comes a fragmenting of society. The V.F.D., for all the inference that a reader may draw from the plots, is as fraught with mystery as it is complexity. Often, its members are unidentifiable unless they reveal themselves or are given away. Its goals are inscrutable, especially as the organization is broken into factions at the time of the tales. As the illustration illuminates, there is not a force uniting together unwitting members; at the very least, if there is such a force, it must be sought and found. Participation within the V.F.D. is dictated less by its institutional guidelines in its moment of weakness. There is a new attention to the individual and the power that the individual must now exercise. The following chapter will consider presentations of the individual and agency within *A Series of Unfortunate Events*.

CHAPTER

Three



I don't know if you've ever noticed this, but first impressions are often entirely wrong. You can look at a painting for the first time, for example, and not like it at all, but after looking at it a little longer you may find it very pleasing. The first time you try Gorgonzola cheese you may find it too strong, but when you are older you may want to eat nothing but Gorgonzola cheese. Klaus, when Sunny was born, did not like her at all, but by the time she was six weeks

Figure 2-1 *The Bad Beginning*, chapter illustration, p.27

C H A P T E R
Four

The Baudelaire orphans copied the puttanesca recipe from the cookbook onto a piece of scrap paper, and Justice Strauss was kind enough to escort them to the market to buy the necessary ingredients. Count Olaf had not left them very much money, but the children were able to buy everything they needed. From a street vendor, they purchased olives after tasting several

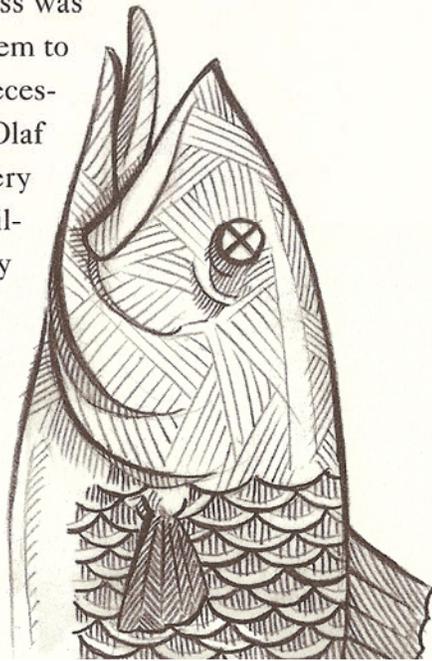
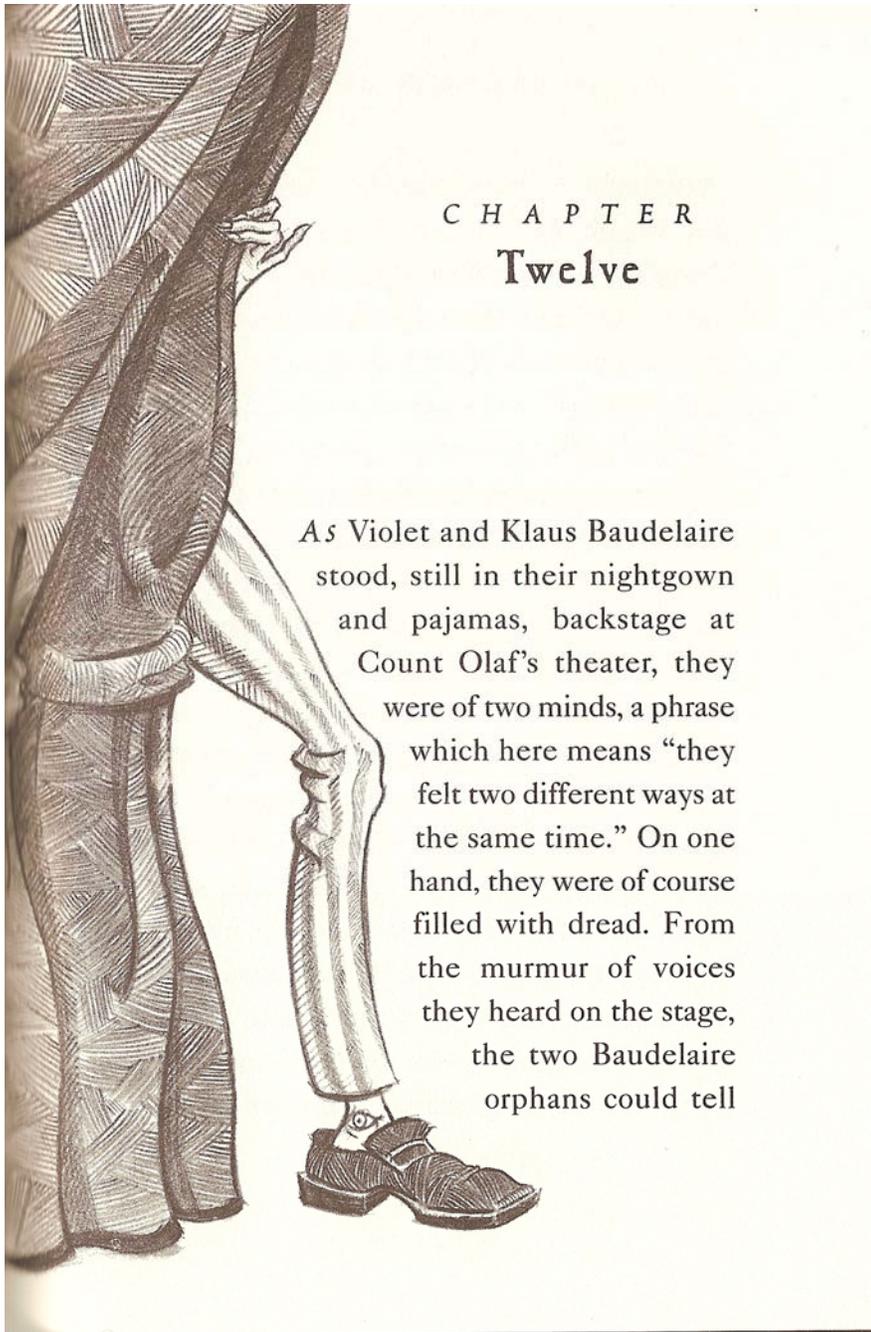


Figure 2-2 *The Bad Beginning*, chapter illustration, p.41



C H A P T E R
Twelve

As Violet and Klaus Baudelaire stood, still in their nightgown and pajamas, backstage at Count Olaf's theater, they were of two minds, a phrase which here means "they felt two different ways at the same time." On one hand, they were of course filled with dread. From the murmur of voices they heard on the stage, the two Baudelaire orphans could tell

Figure 2-3 *The Bad Beginning*, chapter illustration, p.133

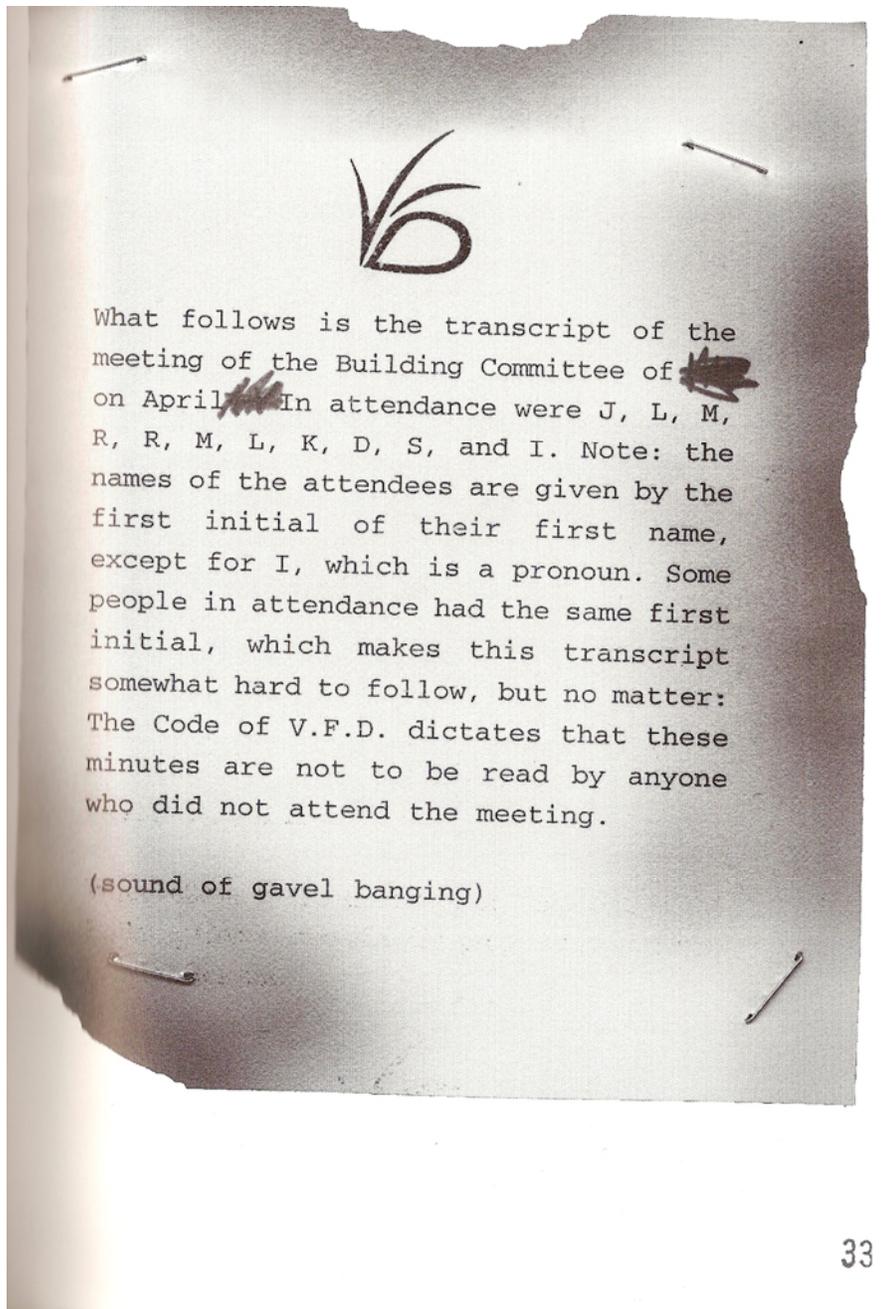


Figure 2-4 *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography*, p.33

C H A P T E R
Five

If you have ever experienced something that feels strangely familiar, as if the exact same thing has happened to you before, then you are experiencing what the French call “déjà vu.” Like most French expressions—“ennui,” which is a fancy term for severe boredom, or “la petite mort,” which describes a feeling that part of you has died—“déjà vu” refers to something that is usually not very pleasant, and it was not pleasant for the Baudelaire orphans to stand outside the freaks’ caravan listening to Count Olaf

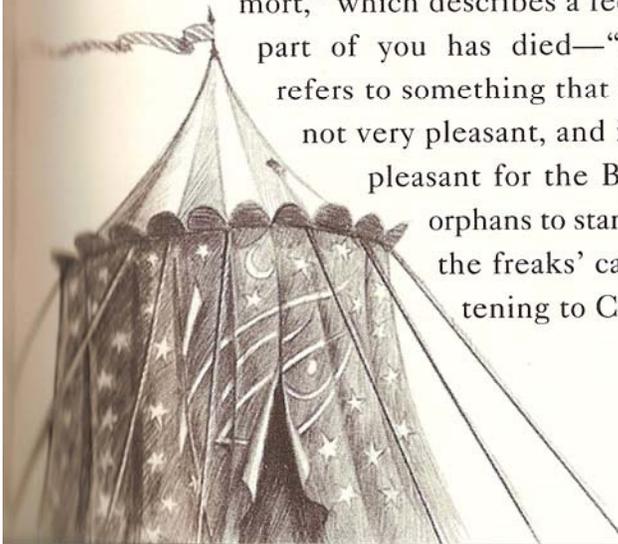


Figure 2-5 *The Carnivorous Carnival*, chapter illustration, pp.101 and 103

C H A P T E R
Ten

Violet and Quigley walked carefully across the frozen pool until they reached the bottom of the waterfall. "Good luck!" Klaus called, from the archway of the ruined library. He was polishing his glasses, as he often did before embarking on serious research.



Figure 2-6 *The Slippery Slope*, chapter illustration, p.205

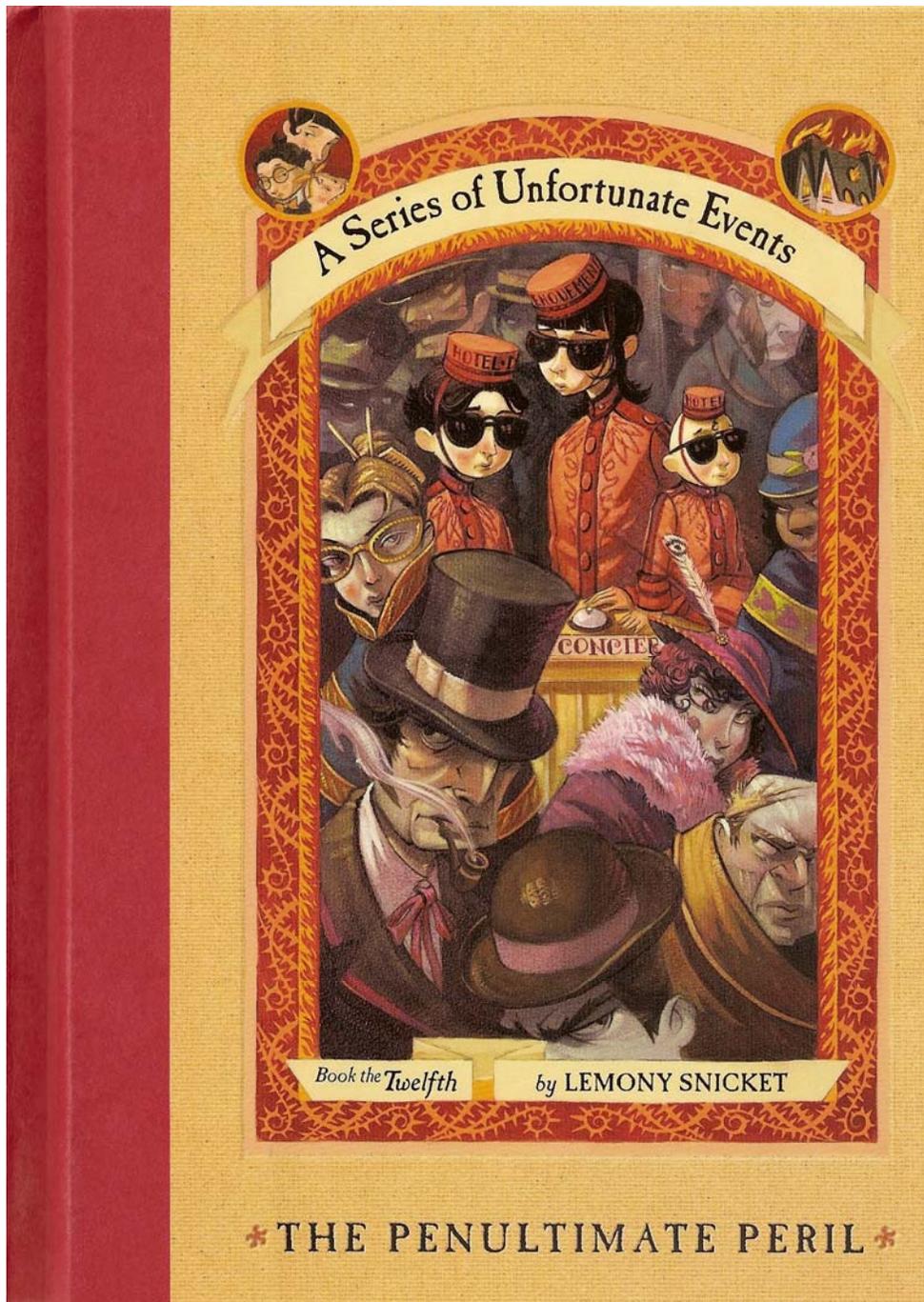


Figure 2-7 *The Penultimate Peril*, cover illustration

CHAPTER 3 INVISIBLE MEN

The Author Versus the Illustrator

Earlier in this examination, a claim was made for Lemony Snicket being not a pseudonym but a pseudopersona. Daniel Handler acknowledges in an interview the problematic nature of referring to Lemony Snicket as a pseudonym. He explains, “I should say that I’m not sure pseudonym is exactly right, because the character of Lemony Snicket, this man who speaks directly to the reader and also who is tangentially involved in the stories he’s telling, is really more of a character.”¹ Adrian Room, in his *A Dictionary of Pseudonyms and Their Origins*, states that the word pseudonym makes its earliest appearance in *The Oxford English Dictionary* in 1846.² He goes on to report that the most recent definition of it is a “fictitious name, especially one assumed by an author,” adding that “fictitious” is defined elsewhere again as “assumed.”³ It is interesting to note that in a treatise concerned exclusively with pseudonyms, Room is wary to denote the pseudo- of pseudonym as in any way false or fictitious, perhaps because it implies a separation from the “original” author. Stating that it is simply an assumed name on the part of an author suggests that the power and talent in the assumed

¹ Daniel Handler, interview by David Bianculli and Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*, National Public Radio, 10 December 2004.

² Adrian Room, *A Dictionary of Pseudonyms and Their Origins, with Stories of Name Changes* (Jefferson, North Carolina: 1989), 5. As interesting as it would be to complete a study of why the word appears so late in history, it is not the place of this paper to do so.

³ Room, 5.

name is still inherent in the “original” personality, for it is merely another facet of that figure, usually employed for utilitarian purposes. Sometimes the purpose is to escape gender prejudices, as in the case of the Brontë sisters’ Currer, Ellis, and Acton Bell.⁴ In other instances, the name is used to ridicule or lend weight to an argument as with Benjamin Franklin’s journalist personas Silence Dogood and Busy-Body.⁵ In the case of juvenile literature, pseudonyms are sometimes used because the books are, as Annie Russell Marble writes, “the work of writers for adults, in serious vein, who have found relaxation in these juveniles.”⁶ While Marble may sugarcoat what would be better described as a necessity when experimenting within a belittled genre, her recognition of separate personalities within the genre is fair, as seen in the Oxford don/mathematician Charles Lutwidge Dodgson turning to the name Lewis Carroll for his *Alice* books and other nonsense-centered fiction.

It would be tempting to ascribe this rationale to Handler’s adoption of Lemony Snicket, as Handler has penned novels for adult readers.⁷ To do so would be to describe Lemony Snicket as merely a nominal artifice. However, Lemony Snicket is the centerpiece of the series’ program. He is a character, a tragic hero, a “documenter” of the innocent. Snicket is as much at the mercy of Handler as any other character within these literary creations. Following the success of the series, Snicket has even become

⁴ These names refer, respectively, to Charlotte, Emily, and Ann Brontë. Room, 89.

⁵ Welford Dunaway Taylor, *The Newsprint Mask: The Tradition of the Fictional Journalist in America* (Ames, Iowa: Iowa State University Press, 1991), 7.

⁶ Anne Russell Marble, *Pen Names and Personalities*, (New York: D. Appleton and Company, 1930), 162.

⁷ Daniel Handler, *The Basic Eight* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 1999). Daniel Handler, *Watch Your Mouth: A Novel* (New York: Thomas Dunne Books, 2000). Daniel Handler, *Adverbs: A Novel* (New York: Ecco, 2006).

synonymous with a writing style: the false cautionary voice designed to drag a reader into fascination with Snicket's miserable, fragmented, but inherently false life.⁸ Snicket is more than a character within the series, though. He blurs the line between author and narrator. Handler further constructs the persona through the inscriptions to Snicket's lost love Beatrice preceding each installment.⁹ There is also his investigative detritus in the form of water-logged letters, torn napkins, and typed notes that ends each book while piquing interest for the next. There are even photographs of silhouetted strangers positioned next to each of Snicket's biographies, suggesting that there is an actual being with an actual image that could be captured were Snicket not such a wily fugitive. He is a persona in that there is documentation of the cultural artifacts that he has allegedly left in his tracks. In fact, it would seem that Snicket is ultimately the apotheosis of a "person" under twenty-first century surveillance society: an identity observed through items usually considered mere evidence, and conveniently lacking an "actual" physical presence. He is completely reducible to archived documents.

The presumption of Snicket as anything other than a tool of Handler is problematized within the series's accessory book *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography*. Within this text, Handler makes an appearance as himself in the guise of Snicket's legal representative and the author of the text's "Introduction." At first glance, this inclusion of Handler under his given name would appear to advance the illusion of

⁸ In Paul Feig's autobiography *Superstud: Or How I Became a 24-Year-Old Virgin*, Feig begins the particularly humiliating chapter "Please Do Not Read This Chapter" by writing, "Seriously. Don't. I am not trying to be cute or provocative by telling you this. I do not ask you to avoid this chapter because I'm trying to be clever. I am not trying to be Lemony Snicket. I really don't want you to read this." Paul Feig, *Superstud: Or How I Became a 24-Year-Old Virgin* (New York: Three Rivers Press, 2005), 255.

⁹ "For Beatrice – No one could extinguish my love, or your house." Lemony Snicket, *The Penultimate Peril* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), dedication page.

Snicket as a separate personality. However, the writing style that Handler employs within the introduction's first paragraphs so closely mimics Snicket's style that the relationship between the two identities is made plain to the reader. For example, Handler writes that "The origins of the *Unauthorized Autobiography* are somewhat cryptic—a word which here means 'enigmatic.'"¹⁰ Within the texts of the actual series, Snicket constantly defines words within their context as seen in the second paragraph of *The Bad Beginning* when he writes, "Occasionally their parents gave them permission to take a rickety trolley—the word 'rickety,' you probably know, here means 'unsteady' or 'likely to collapse'—alone to the seashore..."¹¹ Handler also appears listed as the legal representative on Lemony Snicket's website.¹² Were Snicket's style not so recognizable and idiosyncratic, perhaps the relationship between Handler and his pseudopersona would not be so obvious. It is, though. Additionally, Snicket's evasion of the view of institutional authorities—a facet deemed impossible by the eye iconography discussed previously—allows his role as a disguise adopted by Handler to be easily discovered.

Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography begins with Handler's "Introduction," thus establishing in the reader early in the text distrust in the artifacts that are employed throughout the *Autobiography* to validate Snicket's identity and life story. The documents presented are so dubious that this disbelief continues undeterred. Facsimiles of sheet music are reprinted in the first chapter for an alleged popular ballad,

¹⁰ *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), ix.

¹¹ Lemony Snicket, *The Bad Beginning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), 2.

¹² *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, <<http://www.lemonysnicket.com/index.cfm?border=classic>> (7 March 2005).

“The Little Snicket Lad.”¹³ Any person, child or adult, with the most rudimentary ability to read music can tell that the lyrics have been indiscriminately matched—or, more aptly, mismatched—to the notes (Fig. 3-1).¹⁴ In regard to the ballad presented, Snicket writes, “But lyrics are not proof; photographs are.”¹⁵ However, he then goes on to add, “If I can find it, I will paste a photograph on this paper at the age I was taken [kidnapped by the V.F.D.]. (If I can’t find it, I will paste a photograph of someone else of more or less the same age.)”¹⁶ Not only does Snicket’s hilarious narration cast the material evidence as unreliable, but the photographs from other chapters—photographs that he is not given credit for submitting—demonstrate that all such examples are untrustworthy. In a collage of photographs that are purportedly contemporaneous to one another, the reader sees that they should not be able to coexist (Fig. 3-2).¹⁷ The fashions within the photographs indicate figures presumably from the 1920s, the 1940s, and the 1960s. These inconsistencies place typically reliable documentary sources such as those found in *The Unauthorized Autobiography*—news articles, photographs, transcribed conversations—in opposition to the notion of an objective truth. Such a belief in documentary as a distinct genre from poetry or belles lettres is no revolutionary proposition. However, documentary, despite academia’s problematizing of its biases, is often considered as at

¹³ *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography*, 9, 12-19.

¹⁴ Figure 3-1 may be found on *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography*, 16-17.

¹⁵ *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography*, 16.

¹⁶ *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography*, 16.

¹⁷ Figure 3-2 can be found on *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography*, 29.

least a consistent point of view, whether or not “real.”¹⁸ The collection of Snicket’s life’s documents is anything but consistent; it is haphazard, disjointed, and inadequate.

It is Brett Helquist’s role in the series that enables a model of subjective truth to be revealed. This provides an alternative to the newly revealed fallibility of documentation and material evidence. In *The Bad Beginning*, his biographical blurb contrasts sharply with the information provided for Lemony Snicket. Snicket’s reads:

Lemony Snicket was born in a small town where the inhabitants were suspicious and prone to riot. He now lives in the city. During his spare time he gathers evidence and is considered something of an expert by leading authorities. These are his first books for HarperCollins.¹⁹

Helquist’s box, on the other hand, offers specifics instead of generalities, and its straightforward presentation highlights the tongue-in-cheek nature of Snicket’s biography. It includes:

Brett Helquist was born in Ganado, Arizona, grew up in Orem, Utah, and now lives in New York City. He earned a bachelor’s degree in fine arts from Brigham Young University and has been illustrating ever since. His art has appeared in many publications, including *Cricket* magazine and *The New York Times*.²⁰

Incidentally, these facts may be confirmed outside the realm of the books on the basis of published interviews with him.²¹ Helquist’s role as straight man lessens as the series moves forward. In fact, by the time that Lemony Snicket’s construction hinges more on

¹⁸ William Stott advances a definition in *Documentary Expression and Thirties America* that “documentary – whether in film, photograph, writing, broadcast, or art – is a genre as distinct as tragedy, epic, or satire, but a genre unlike these in that its content is, or is assumed to be, actually true.” William Stott, *Documentary Expression and Thirties America*, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), ix.

¹⁹ Lemony Snicket, *The Bad Beginning*, 165.

²⁰ Lemony Snicket, *The Bad Beginning*, 165.

²¹ Marin Decker, “Utahn is Feeling Fortunate about ‘Unfortunate Events’,” *Deseret Morning News*, 17 December 2004.

documentary references, Helquist's biography does not emphasize traceable statements as much as his first blurb. In *The Carnivorous Carnival*, his information claims:

Brett Helquist was born in Ganado, Arizona, and grew up in Orem, Utah. He studied hard to become an illustrator, but can't help wondering if he might have chosen to become something safer, like a pirate. Despite the risks, he continues to translate Lemony Snicket's odd findings into unusual pictures.²²

The reader is still given basic information in the form of his birthplace and hometown, but gone are the educational achievements, his current location, and listed titles for finding his previous works. *The Carnivorous Carnival* was published the same year as *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography*. As Lemony Snicket, the established pseudopersona, gains supposed specificity in his increased amount of traditionally acceptable forms of documentation, Helquist sheds his presentation of any real data.

Helquist's adjoining self-portraits are additional commentary and guidance on this thorny presentation of a documented identity (Figs. 3.3 – 3.14).²³ Snicket's biographical box with its blurry photograph is located immediately above Helquist's box with his drawn self-portrait. Helquist's fashionings always match the books thematically but sometimes only tangentially so. While the association may be plain when he depicts himself as a measles patient for *The Hostile Hospital*, the association is not immediately apparent when he portrays himself as Francisco Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Children* in *The Carnivorous Carnival*.

It could be argued that Helquist's choice to match his self-portraits to aspects of the books is merely an imitative tactic to incorporate himself into the narrative like Lemony Snicket. This argument could certainly be supported when one considers the letter within

²² Lemony Snicket, *The Carnivorous Carnival* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 289.

²³ His self-portraits, figures 3.3 – 3.14, are numbered so that they follow their presentation within the series.

Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography labeled from Helquist Artist Services that begins:

Dear Mr. Snicket,

I am very sorry to report that I arrived too late to make any sketches that might clear your name or provide any information on the survivor or survivors you think may exist.²⁴

I feel that this inclusion is actually more indicative of Daniel Handler's great admiration for Brett Helquist. On the series's official website, Helquist's information is included prominently in the main menu under "The Ill-Fated Illustrator." In an "Introduction" to an edited anthology marketed for the juvenile fiction audience, Handler, in the guise of Snicket, again opts to have Helquist illustrate the work.²⁵ However, even if my speculation that Helquist has become enmeshed in the narrative via Handler's desire to share credit with his illustrator is incorrect, Helquist's self-portraits nonetheless offer an alternative to the model of Snicket's construction. Helquist never illustrates himself within the story; he simply matches the presentation of himself to an aspect of the story. For example, *The Grim Grotto* finds the Baudelaire orphans on a quest involving a submarine and deep-sea diving. Helquist's self-portrait at the conclusion of *The Grim Grotto* shows him as peg legged, Captain Ahab-type figure (Fig. 3-13). While submarines and *Moby Dick* are both inextricably acquainted with the sea, it would be a stretch to imagine them sharing a narrative. His self-portraits recall aspects of the texts, but not the plots.

²⁴ *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), 182.

²⁵ Lemony Snicket, "Introduction," *Noisy Outlaws, Unfriendly Blobs, and Some Other Things That Aren't as Scary, Maybe, Depending on How You Feel About Lost Lands, Stray Cellphones, Creatures from the Sky, Parents Who Disappear in Peru, a Man Named Lars Farf, and One Other Story We Couldn't Quite Finish, So Maybe You Could Help Us Out*, ed. Ted Thompson (San Francisco: McSweeney's Books, 2005).

Helquist never repeats the same self-portrait. It may be that he varies his image to avoid boredom. Barring specificities of a contract, though, it is still worthwhile to remember that each self-portrait does require separate work for him to complete. Considering the average eighteen illustrations that he creates per book, using these self-portraits to keep him excited and occupied seems excessive on a level of productivity. One must remember that, over the years that he has been illustrating *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, he has also illustrated two major juvenile fiction books and has authored and illustrated his own picture book, among many other commissions.²⁶ This series has in no way been his sole endeavor or source of income. In this light, I believe the array of personalities that he uses to depict himself is an effort to describe himself in an assortment of subjective perceptions.

Artists have traditionally utilized self-portraits for a variety of reasons.²⁷ Self-portraits offered a chance to observe human physiognomy without hiring a model. This genre of painting typically allowed freedom from patrons' demands, permitting an artist to use an independently created self-portrait as a vehicle for thematic and technical explorations that may have displeased a buyer. An artist could also include a self-portrait within a larger work as a form of his signature. However, after the advent of photography and the perception that it was superior to the human hand at capturing the

²⁶ Blue Balliett, *Chasing Vermeer* (New York: Scholastic, Inc., 2004). J.V. Hart, *Captain Hook: the Adventures of a Notorious Youth* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005). Brett Helquist, *Roger, the Jolly Pirate* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004).

²⁷ For more on self-portraits, see Sean Kelly, and Edward Lucie-Smith, *The Self-Portrait: a Modern View* (London: Sarema Press, 1987).

world, the self-portrait increasingly became the method through which an artist explored her psyche or social identity.²⁸

Helquist's self-portraits, each presumably completed at the time of the other book illustrations, offer him a variety of guises and ages. The similarities are not immediately apparent until close examination, and even then they contain only slight similarities. A long nose and large ears become evident, but the portraits do not picture Helquist consistently within the frame to aid these detections, as do the images of the Baudelaires and Olaf in the Ex Libris plates, to be discussed later. In *The Austere Academy*, a young boy wearing a dunce cap presents the viewer with his back as he sits in a corner (Fig. 3-7).²⁹ This image is of particular note because, unlike the traditional concern over the human face being included in the self-portrait, there is no emphasis upon this feature of the body. Instead, the figure is dwarfed by the chalkboard with the incorrect mathematics problem on the left in the image. The only indication that this scene is the self-portrait of a grown man is the biography box to the right of it that describes adult achievements.

I do not mean to suggest that Helquist is fragmenting his personality in a belief that he really is a lumberjack, a tailor, and a hotel maid simultaneously (Figs. 3.6, 3.8, 3.14).³⁰ Instead, I feel the variety of images suggests the array of selves that he could choose to be. His self-portraits are the balm to the anxiety created by other illustrations within the

²⁸ Erika Billeter writes, "A self-portrait is not a commissioned work. The patron is the artist himself. Every self-portrait is a moment of truth, for the artist does not have to make concessions to anyone. If he does depict a pleasantly idealized version of himself, then he does so intentionally... Every self-portrait is a dialogue with the ego." Erika Billeter, ed., *Self-Portrait in the Age of Photography: Photographers Reflecting Their Own Image*, (Bern: Benteli AG, 1985), 8.

²⁹ Lemony Snicket, *The Austere Academy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 225.

³⁰ Lemony Snicket, *The Miserable Mill* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 197. Lemony Snicket, *The Ersatz Elevator* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 263. Lemony Snicket, *The Penultimate Peril* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 357.

series and the loss of the indexical physical image. Among these other images are anthropomorphized material objects with eyes. Helquist and his works suggest at a basic level that biological creatures with the capacity to see are no more perceptive than the objects their eyes consider, as the next section shall demonstrate. As the books conclude with his self-portraits, however, he demonstrates that it is self-perception that is a uniquely human trait, and one through which the young readers may be empowered. This revelation does not eradicate the concern over the loss of a physical presence and the potential for documenting it. His self-portraits serve as an example that the manipulation of the human body comes as the result of choice. Were he a tailor, he may indeed require glasses from the strain caused on eyes staring at stitches. It is possible that, to be in the position of a colonial captain undergoing mutiny, he would be found in a powdered wig (Fig. 3-5).³¹ Albeit, these are superficial and ridiculous examples, but they still indicate how the body's physicality is manipulated. It is manipulated by choices, though. Underneath all of these images, there is a truth. Unfortunately for documentation, it is a subjective truth.

Ultimately, an individual is more than a collection of cultural artifacts. In fact, those artifacts only present one constructed view of a personality. The contrast of Helquist's multiple and pliable visions of himself are a contributing factor to the failure of Handler's Snicket-ruse being anything more than a stylistic choice.

Lacan's Sardine Can

At this juncture, it is evident that surveillance, independence of disciplinary powers, and a heightened sense of subjective understanding are key factors within A

³¹ Lemony Snicket, *The Wide Window* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 217.

Series of Unfortunate Events. The examples of the eye in the series's iconography considered thus far are predominantly concerned with disembodied eyes, their ties to the V.F.D., and the capacity for ignoring and hijacking surveillance's power. These instances of the eye's appearance fail to address the many times that it appears attached to non-human subjects or anthropomorphized forms. It would seem that its function in these instances make it little more than a symbol to inspire dread. However, these occasions actually reveal it, at one level, to be symbolic of the utter foolishness of connecting it with dread. Only human agency can invest it with any power. I hope to use Jacques Lacan's writings not to provide a Lacanian reading of these appearances, but to provide a starting point to some observation concerning its function.

In a lecture entitled "The Line and Light" on the fourth of March, 1964, Jacques Lacan presented his attendants with an anecdote from his days as a young scholar.³² He described a vacation during which he accompanied fishermen to sea on their boat. One of them pointed to a floating sardine can in the water and asked Lacan, "You see that can? Do you see it? Well, it doesn't see you!"³³ Lacan then described to his students the discomfiture the remark produced within him, explaining it as a commentary on the different life paths that he and the fishermen trod. He could not fit into their "picture" of life; he wrote, "The picture, certainly, is in my eye. But I am not in the picture."³⁴ Through these thoughts he began to elaborate his philosophy of the screen as interruption in the geometrical relation between objects. The purpose of considering his remarks is not

³² Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 1981), 91-104.

³³ Lacan, 95.

³⁴ Lacan, 96.

to elucidate his meaning of each of these terms. It is instead to grasp those illustrations within Lemony Snicket's *A Series of Unfortunate Events* that do not strictly conform to the initial iconography of the eye but that support and enhance illustrator Brett Helquist's program nonetheless.

Lacan's anecdote would in a very literal sense seem to strangely fit Snicket's prose, a prose that spans everything from quoting Richard Wright's *Native Son* to describing a hotel organized according to a Dewey Decimal system. After ruminations on the constructions of triptychs, a philosophical consideration of the ocular abilities of inanimate objects would not be too much to ask of his young fans. Therefore, when the second full-page illustration of *The Grim Grotto* depicts young Sunny Baudelaire standing in an underwater cave next to a sardine can, it merits attention and offers a nice reference point to Lacan's anecdote, regardless of Helquist's intention (Fig. 3-15).³⁵ It provides a reference to a framework through which one can make sense of Helquist's smiling hamburgers, peering eggs, and scowling radios (Figs. 3.16, 3.17, 3.28).³⁶ The eyes are not the unorthodox aspects of these images. Eyes riddle the books. What distinguishes these is their seeming separation from the conspiratorial V.F.D. organization. Nonetheless, how does one come to terms with the jam on nondescript toast outlining an eye (Fig. 3-18)?³⁷

Lacan explained later in his "The Line and Light" lecture that the gaze could exist independent of the eyes. He stated:

³⁵ Figure 3-15 is found on Lemony Snicket, *The Grim Grotto* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 137.

³⁶ Figure 3-16 is found on Snicket, *The Wide Window*, 95. Figure 3-17 is found on Snicket, *The Austere Academy*, 83. Figure 3-28 is found on Lemony Snicket, *The Hostile Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), front endsheet.

³⁷ Figure 3-18 is found on Lemony Snicket, *The Slippery Slope* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003), 103.

Looking at pictures, even those most lacking in what is usually called the gaze, and which is constituted by a pair of eyes, pictures in which any representation of the human figure is absent, like a landscape by a Dutch or a Flemish painter, you will see in the end, as in filigree, something so specific to each of the painters that you will feel the presence of the gaze.³⁸

In his qualification “in which any representation of the human figure is absent,” Lacan ties the pair of eyes to the body, leaving no true model for representations of the eyes as separate from the body, as encountered in these illustrations in question in *A Series of Unfortunate Events*. This omission begs the question: can the eyes exist independently of the gaze? It is possible to consider the gaze without eyes, but it seems unlikely that the eyes can do anything but coexist with the gaze. They are too heavily loaded with shared associations. However, in an illustration depicting Count Olaf’s art collection in *The Bad Beginning*, Helquist takes his viewer through a history of art styles, all as demonstrated via the eye (Figure 3-19).³⁹ In it, there is the cubist eye, the Pop Art eye, and the Pointillist eye. There is a portrait of a man whose head is nothing but an eye. There is even a *Persistence of Memory* parody in which Salvador Dali’s melted watches have become eyes. Considering that the lecture “What is a Picture?”—which immediately followed “The Line and Light”—included Lacan’s defense of resorting to art criticism and history to differentiate between the eye and the gaze, it is interesting Helquist utilizes the same areas to deepen his iconographic program.

That this image appears in the first installment of the series, in which the majority of the illustrations are concerned with overtly connecting Count Olaf to the eye, is particularly significant. Granted, the text establishes these works as displayed in his

³⁸ Lacan, 101.

³⁹ Figure 3-19 is found on Snicket, *The Bad Beginning*, 123.

home's tower, so there is a precedent for including them and an association with Olaf. It is these objects that even allow Snicket to claim, "It was a terrible place."⁴⁰ However, they lack the raw power of an earlier chapter illustration depicting a close-up of Olaf's eyes, or another in which an anchovy's useless, dead eye heightens its helplessness (Fig. 3-20).⁴¹ The art collection illustration does not align the eye with power, except perhaps by its association with connoisseurship. In positioning the eye against the stylistic fashions of art making, Helquist shows the organ as adaptable and thus controllable.

Negotiating the power of the eye as organ attributes elasticity symbolically to the power of the eye as gaze. When Lacan took the time to make his point that the gaze can be seen in non-human forms, he silently assumed and argued that people naturally connect it to the eyes. He tried to distinguish the two. *A Series of Unfortunate Events* has no need; if these books can elide the eyes with the gaze easily to the benefit of their themes, why enter this theoretical terrain? When Helquist manipulates the organ in Figure 3-19, he opens the potential for the gaze throughout the rest of the series. While in the first installments the Baudelaire orphans may be at the mercy of Count Olaf and his henchpeople as represented through the eye, it loses its power of intimidation when they discover its connection to the V.F.D., an organization that their beloved parents once supported. The eye never loses its power completely; simply put, ownership of the power of the eye is lost. By the twelfth installment, *The Penultimate Peril*, the reader finds both good and bad supporters of the V.F.D. spying on one another.⁴² The Baudelaires are

⁴⁰ Snicket, *The Bad Beginning*, 125.

⁴¹ Figure 3-20 is found on Snicket, *The Bad Beginning*, 41.

⁴² Snicket, *The Penultimate Peril*, 309, 314.

enlisted as concierges and flaneurs at the Hotel Denouement, purported site of the final power struggle. Upon reaching this point in the series, a viewer may return to images like Figure 3-19 and further comprehend their powerlessness. Count Olaf is prisoner to the gaze as much as the Baudelaires, as his crimes have him pursued by the opposing faction of the V.F.D. He also suffers for his lapses in being the seer. In *The Penultimate Peril*, Olaf repeatedly proclaims, “I always wondered how you did that,” when seeing the Baudelaires turn to tricks that they used to escape from his actions in the past. Had he truly been all-seeing, he could have intervened, but he was the product of his own gaze; he saw what he desired, three helpless orphans, and as such took no precautions. It is through Olaf’s unconscious desire and transference—he is an orphan himself and helpless without his followers—that the difference between the gaze and the eye’s powers of sight begins to be outlined within the series.

What significance do these interpretations have on Figure 3-18’s toast? They show the inability of either the eye or the gaze to function without a being attached. Images of eyes may alternatively boost and destroy the characters’ self-confidence in the series. They may remind of Olaf’s success and failure in tracking the children. They may symbolize the hope and disappointment the Baudelaires hold towards their various ignorant guardians. Attached to a piece of toast, though, they still only recall emotions. The real damage comes when Olaf’s physical presence murders their Uncle Monty or when Aunt Josephine’s cowardice leaves them vulnerable to outside forces. Ultimately, these iconographic eyes are nothing without human consciousness and unconsciousness behind them. Figure 3-18 reminds the reader that unprocessed vision and knowledge

matters as little as toasted bread.⁴³ Its effects will be as fleeting. It also offers the iconography's potential to users of all ages. An innocent five-year-old may apply jam in the outline of an eye as easily as a diabolical villain. These illustrative examples still encourage the Baudelaires' rejection of panopticism. They also suggest that simple surveying is not enough to invest the Baudelaires with new-found power. Again, just because the Baudelaires are no longer internalizing institutional powers does not mean that they are safe. To truly match the efforts being placed against them, the Baudelaires must be matching action to their sights, and inference to their findings.

Upon consideration of issues of the eye and the gaze, the illustrations with seemingly inexplicable eyes serve a dual purpose. Their foreignness via their inanimate, unthinking states highlights the need for information archiving and processing. They also stand in contrast to anthropomorphized objects in other children's fiction wherein the anthropomorphosis requires a corresponding animation of the object. Their simplicity, and the potential suggested therein, forces these needs into the realm of the child reader, a topic which will be considered in the "Lost in the Archive" chapter.

Ex Corporem Ex Libris

Agency is obviously a battle that the protagonists and antagonists within *A Series of Unfortunate Events* must wage. Power does not come simply through surveillance. It comes through subjectivity and a willingness to take risks. This requirement is made visually apparent in the illustrated Ex Libris plate located on the front endsheets of each installment.

⁴³ For the purposes of this argument, there is a purposeful disregard of the toast, the smiling hamburger, and the eggs in consideration with their potential for nourishment. It would be tempting to argue that they achieve an effect of food fear, but the texts' multiple inclusions of Sunny's cooking abilities under duress plainly support the necessity of eating under all circumstances, even if the food is looking at the eater.

Within each of the entries of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, the reader is faced on the front endsheets with a pre-printed facsimile of an Ex Libris plate. The Ex Libris plate is more commonly found in the collections of readers who need to maintain order in significant numbers of books, always sure that their property can be associated with its initial collector as a sign of identity and property. The Ex Libris plate is often also commissioned and produced by the collector; it is atypical to find a facsimile of one already included upon a book's endsheets. It is often utilized in various forms by university libraries, a vast cry from the traditional stereotypical crayon sprawl normally located in the front pages of a "children's" book. Aside from their idiosyncratic presences, these are not illustrations to be ignored within the Snicket series. Set against a busy, decorative background of floral figures and voluted leaves on the endsheets, the dark shadings and hatchings by Helquist emerge from the clean white background of the Ex Libris box (Figs. 3.21 – 3.32).⁴⁴

In each book, the Ex Libris plate is constructed identically to the previous novels. In a circle at the top of the plate, the viewer finds the heads of the three Baudelaire orphans, the youngest in the front and the eldest in the back: Sunny, often biting the circle; Klaus, glancing sidelong at the viewer; and Violet, with her hair pulled back, but her mouth and chin obstructed by Klaus's hair. Contained within an identically framed circle at the bottom of the box is Count Olaf. Around each of these medallions is a curving vine of thorns, the upper vine containing a banner which reads "Ex Libris." Between the two hedges sits the line instructing, "Name." The implicit argument is that this book will be unique with an identity attached to it. It is a particularly convenient

⁴⁴ Like the self-portrait figures, all of the series's Ex Libris are listed as successive figures 3.21 – 3.32. They proceed in the books' chronological order.

effect considering the series's best-selling status, a way of separating one's property from the hordes of published tomes circulating.

However, considering the first novel was originally published with Helquist's illustrations and there was no way to predict the success that it would garner, it is a dubious argument to claim the pseudo-Ex Libris plate serves as a mere denotation of property, especially under the consideration that success of children and young adult books often rely on the good word of mouth of librarians. In such institutions, this plate would only serve to remind readers of its communal status, excepting the uninhibited, rebellious borrowers who may try to mark it as their own regardless.

The plate serves a narrative role, in addition to assisting the collection and incorporation of books into a private collection. It serves as a visual benchmark to keep the projected thirteen volume work organized by major issues. The books do have titles that locate each story's action via alliterative titles: *The Reptile Room*, *The Miserable Mill*, *The Austere Academy*, *The Grim Grotto*, and so on. These titles are convenient in providing clues as to the scene of each novel. Equally important to the setting, if not more so, is the disguise that Count Olaf adopts within each novel.⁴⁵ The plates reflect these costumes.

In *The Bad Beginning*, there is no disguise for Olaf to adopt, so the viewer sees him as he is: an angular, severe, one-eyebrowed, horn-haired mature man forced into a starched white collar under a black suit jacket (Fig. 3-21). This image may change, but the strong lines and angles used to depict him never do. They provide an excellent

⁴⁵ It is no insignificant detail that in the movie adaptation of the first three novels (*The Bad Beginning*, *The Reptile Room*, and *The Wide Window*), the viewer catches Count Olaf (Jim Carrey) reading a magazine with Lon Chaney, Hollywood's own master of disguise, on its cover. *Lemony Snicket's A Series of Unfortunate Events*, dir. Brad Silberling, 1 hr. 48 min., Paramount Pictures, 2004.

contrast to the curvilinear lines of the three Baudelaires. Not only does it utilize the discomfort that rigidity can place upon a viewer, but the curves of the Baudelaires echo the baby fat that they would easily possess over the course of the stories of their young lives. Their visual innocence is a reminder to the assumedly child reader that they are, despite their various forms of precocity, still potential peers.

The first variation occurs in the second installment, *The Reptile Room*. Olaf appears as Stefano with a beard, a turtleneck, a bald pate, and a brow sans eyebrow (Fig. 3-22). While the lines and angles would be enough to give him away, he does retain small details to preserve his original villainous countenance: his nose, his ears, and especially, his darkened, sunken eyes. Helquist complicates the ability to identify Olaf's eyes in later installments, however, showing a wiliness that Olaf himself would appreciate. Helquist gives him an eye patch as Captain Sham; he lightens the eyes in Olaf's solo drag appearance as Shirley the secretary (Figs. 3.23 and 3.24).⁴⁶ He gives him a monocle in *The Ersatz Elevator* and sunglasses in *The Vile Village* (Figs. 3.26 and 3.27). He removes Olaf altogether in *The Hostile Hospital*, placing in his stead an anthropomorphized radio, the instrument through which Olaf yields his power in this installment over the Baudelaires (Fig. 3-28).

By the ninth book, *The Carnivorous Carnival*, it would seem that there is little hope of using the eyes to identify Count Olaf. The tradition has been set, however, within the Ex Libris plates, thanks to the first and second books, to assume that it will be him if the visage appears within that lower medallion. Just as the Baudelaires rely on his antagonism from sheer habit, so too does the reader. Within *The Carnivorous Carnival*,

⁴⁶ This image would beg an application of drag and masquerade discussions in a wider study, but limitations will prevent its discussion here.

however, Olaf reappears in his original, sunken-eyed glory. He keeps this, his allegedly true identity, in the Ex Libris plates of the tenth, eleventh, and twelfth books also.

Olaf's reclaiming of his visage, or more specifically, Helquist's efforts to reflect this return visually, comes at a cost to both him and the Baudelaires. While the Baudelaires may find themselves able to identify, and thus pursue, Olaf more easily, it comes at the cost of their own identities, reflecting, as does *The Hostile Hospital's* Ex Libris radio, greater themes emerging within the books. Once they begin actively pursuing Olaf, they, by all accounts of the Ex Libris plates, become him. In donning disguises, the Baudelaires adopt his duplicitous tactics. They are willing—again, via Helquist's transference—to stake their sense of selves for a greater plan. And so, in *The Carnivorous Carnival*, they are no longer the Baudelaires but Chabo the Wolf Baby and a pair of Siamese twins (Fig. 3-29). As Sunny is held hostage by Olaf in *The Slippery Slope*, her identity is returned to her in its Ex Libris plate, but since Violet and Klaus are still in pursuit, Helquist's rules seem to dictate that they must continue to sacrifice their visage, in this instance completely obscuring their faces by ski masks (Fig. 3-30). In *The Grim Grotto*, the three are reunited in their pursuit and are depicted floating behind the bars of giant diving helmets (Fig. 3-31).

It is the Ex Libris plates which suggest the most direct example of subjectivity in the novels. The Baudelaires discover that they possess the inner strength to break from society and pursue their antagonist. However, they become increasingly discomfited that they are doing so at the expense of their notions of their personalities, especially when they assist burning down the Hotel Denouement. This revelation changes them as people, though, and it forces them into identities—or, at least, obscured identities—that

must necessitate difference from their original, baby-faced selves. Meanwhile, Count Olaf becomes careless; he no longer invests the energy needed to uphold alternate identity upon alternate identity. This choice leaves him vulnerable, but also allows him the security of his beliefs about himself. Agency comes at a sacrifice of the indexical form, but it also liberates. The children become as adept at fooling surrounding people with their disguises as Count Olaf was. They even, on occasion, fool him, which is something Olaf never managed to do to the Baudelaires. *A Series of Unfortunate Events* presents to the readers a host of alternatives to socially-expected behaviors through the use of subjective understandings, but it does so cautiously, illuminating the effects of those decisions.

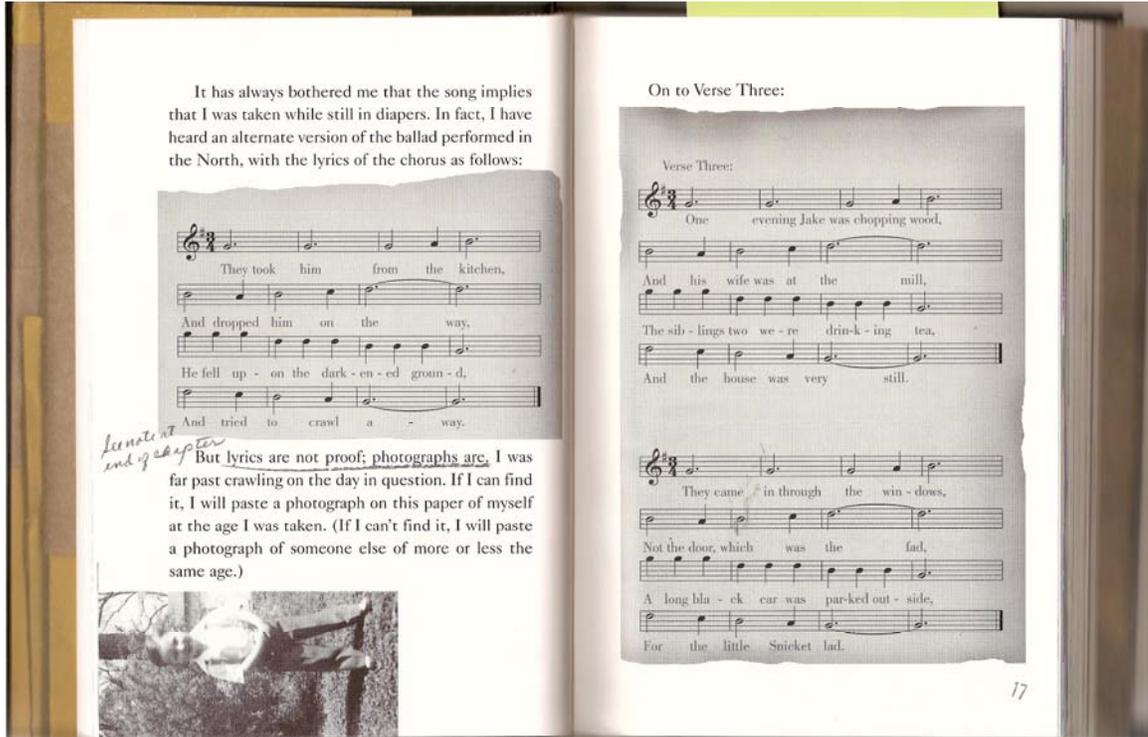


Figure 3-1 *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography*, pp.16 and 17

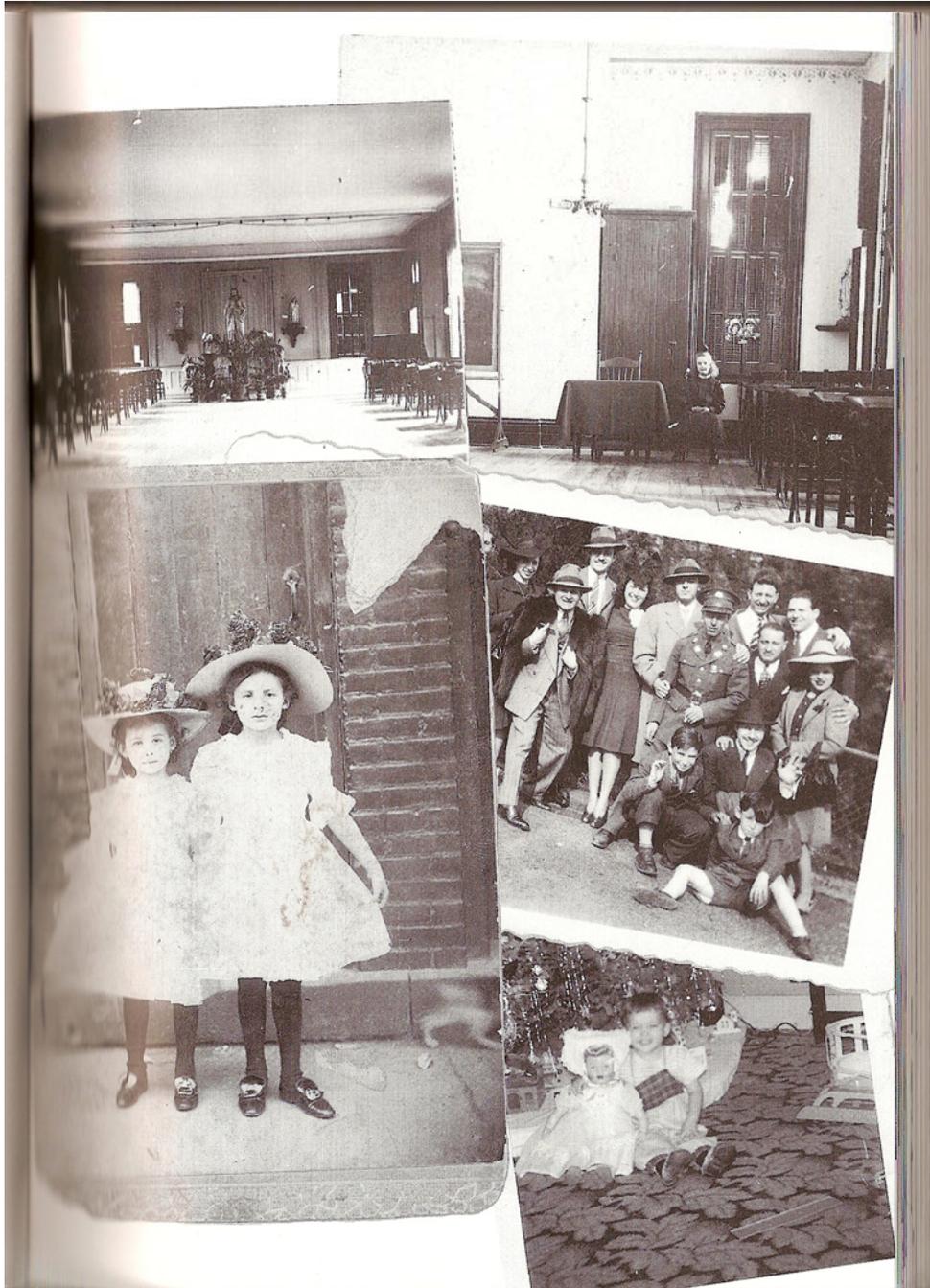


Figure 3-2 *Lemony Snicket: the Unauthorized Autobiography*, p.29



Meredith Heuer © 1999

LEMONY SNICKET was born in a small town where the inhabitants were suspicious and prone to riot. He now lives in the city. During his spare time he gathers evidence and is considered something of an expert by leading authorities. These are his first books for HarperCollins.

Visit him on the Web at <http://www.harperchildrens.com/lsnicket/> or E-mail to lsnicket@harpercollins.com

BRETT HELQUIST was born in Gonado, Arizona, grew up in Orem, Utah, and now lives in New York City. He earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Brigham Young University and has been illustrating ever since. His art has appeared in many publications, including *Cricket* magazine and *The New York Times*.



Figure 3-3 *The Bad Beginning*, biography page



Mercedith Heuer © 1999

LEMONY SNICKET

was born in a small town where the inhabitants were suspicious and prone to riot. He now lives in the city. During his spare time he gathers evidence and is considered something of an expert by leading authorities. These are his first books for HarperCollins.

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Figure 3-4 *The Reptile Room*, biography page



© Meredith Heuer

LEMONY SNICKET was born before you were and is likely to die before you as well. A studied expert in rhetorical analysis, Mr. Snicket has spent the last several eras researching the travails of the Baudelaire orphans. His findings are being published serially by HarperCollins.

Visit him on the Web at www.lemonysnicket.com

BRETT HELQUIST was born in Ganado, Arizona, grew up in Orem, Utah, and now lives in New York City. He earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Brigham Young University and has been illustrating ever since. His art has appeared in many publications, including *Cricket* magazine and *The New York Times*.



Figure 3-5 *The Wide Window*, biography page

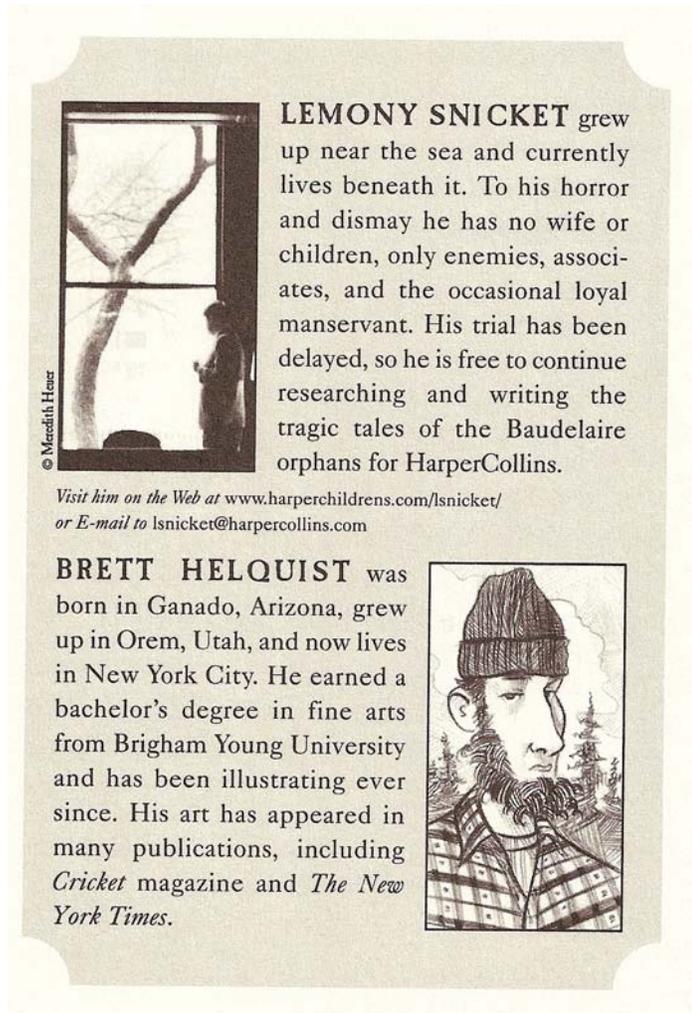


Figure 3-6 *The Miserable Mill*, biography page



© Meredith Heuer

LEMONY SNICKET first received his education from public schools and private tutors, and then vice versa. He has been hailed as a brilliant scholar, discredited as a brilliant fraud, and mistaken for a much taller man on several occasions. Mr. Snicket's researching skills are currently and devoutly concentrated on the plight of the Baudelaire orphans, published serially by HarperCollins.

BRETT HELQUIST was born in Ganado, Arizona, grew up in Orem, Utah, and now lives in New York City. He earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Brigham Young University and has been illustrating ever since. His art has appeared in many publications, including *Cricket* magazine and *The New York Times*.



Figure 3-7 *The Austere Academy*, biography page



© Meredith Heuer

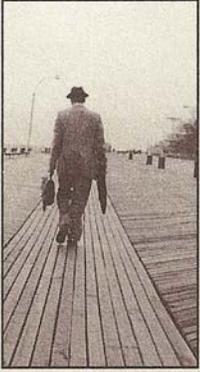
LEMONY SNICKET'S extended family, if they were alive, would describe him as a distinguished scholar, an amateur connoisseur, and an outright gentleman. Unfortunately this description has been challenged of late, but HarperCollins continues to support his research and writing on the lives of the Baudelaire orphans.

Visit him on the Web at www.lemonysnicket.com

BRETT HELQUIST was born in Ganado, Arizona, grew up in Orem, Utah, and now lives in New York City. He earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Brigham Young University and has been illustrating ever since. His art has appeared in many publications, including *Cricket* magazine and *The New York Times*.



Figure 3-8 *The Ersatz Elevator*, biography page



© Meredith Heuer

LEMONY SNICKET is the author of quite a few books, all dreadful, and has been accused of many crimes, all falsely. Until recently, he was living someplace else.

Visit him on the Web at www.lemonysnicket.com

BRETT HELQUIST was born in Ganado, Arizona, grew up in Orem, Utah, and now lives in New York City. He earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Brigham Young University and has been illustrating ever since. His art has appeared in many publications, including *Cricket* magazine and *The New York Times*.



Figure 3-9 *The Vile Village*, biography page



© Meredith Hauser

LEMONY SNICKET

is widely regarded as one of the most difficult children's authors to capture and imprison. Recently, he had to give up on his hobbies due to laws regarding musical performances in mountainous terrain. Most things written about him are not true, but this is.

Visit him on the Web at www.lemonysnicket.com

BRETT HELQUIST was born in Ganado, Arizona, grew up in Orem, Utah, and now lives in New York City, where among other noble pursuits, he translates Mr. Snicket's obscure findings into the images that help readers understand the horror of the Baudelaires' plight.



Figure 3-10 *The Hostile Hospital*, biography page

© Meredith Heuer

LEMONY SNICKET published his first book in 1999 and has not had a good night's sleep since. Once the recipient of several distinguished awards, he is now an escapee of several indistinguishable prisons. Early in his life, Mr. Snicket learned to reupholster furniture, a skill that turned out to be far more important than anyone imagined.

Visit him on the Web at www.lemonysnicket.com

BRETT HELQUIST was born in Ganado, Arizona, and grew up in Orem, Utah. He studied hard to become an illustrator, but can't help wondering if he might have chosen to become something safer, like a pirate. Despite the risks, he continues to translate Lemony Snicket's odd findings into unusual pictures.

Figure 3-11 *The Carnivorous Carnival*, biography page



Meredith Heuer © 2003

Until recently, **LEMONY SNICKET** was presumed to be “presumed dead.” Instead, this “presumed” presumption wasn’t disproved to not be incorrect. As he continues with his investigation, interest in the Baudelaire case has increased. So has his horror.

Visit him on the Web at www.lemonysnicket.com

BRETT HELQUIST

was born in Ganado, Arizona, grew up in Orem, Utah, and now lives in Brooklyn, New York. He earned a bachelor’s degree in fine arts from Brigham Young University and has been illustrating ever since. His work deciphering the evidence provided by Lemony Snicket into pictures often leaves him so distraught that he is awake late into the night.



Figure 3-12 *The Slippery Slope*, biography page

© Meredith Hozer

LEMONY SNICKET

has received several citations for bravery in the face of evil and several more for caution when bravery might have proven to be more trouble than it was worth. He was last seen by witnesses who proved to be unreliable and/or of a particularly suspicious nature. In his spare time he hides all traces of his actions.

BRETT HELQUIST

was born in Ganado, Arizona, grew up in Orem, Utah, and now lives in Brooklyn, New York. In order to depict the tragic lives of the Baudelaire orphans, he uses broken pencils, dried-up paint, and boxes and boxes of tissues.

Figure 3-13 *The Grim Grotto*, biography page



LEMONY SNICKET

has been chronicling the lives of the Baudelaire children with only occasional breaks for food, rest, and court-appointed sword-fights. His hobbies include nervous apprehension, increasing dread, and wondering if his enemies were right after all.

Visit him on the web at www.lemonysnicket.com.

BRETT HELQUIST was born in Ganado, Arizona, grew up in Orem, Utah, and now lives in Brooklyn, New York. He earned a bachelor's degree in fine arts from Brigham Young University and has been illustrating ever since. Sometimes, he finds his work so distressing that he sends himself flowers, but it never helps.



Figure 3-14 *The Penultimate Peril*, biography page

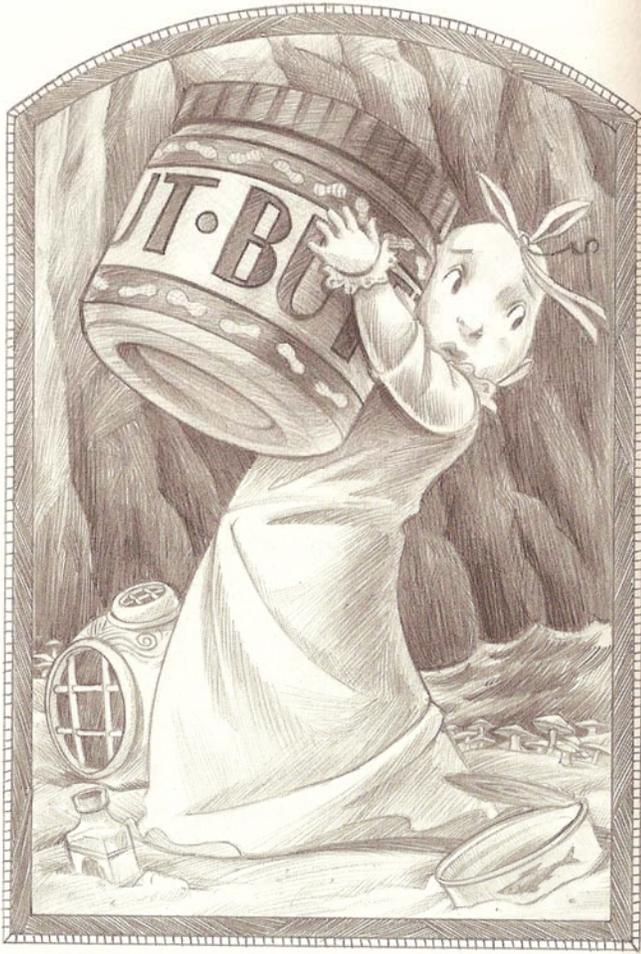
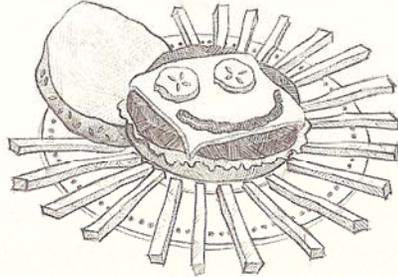


Figure 3-15 *The Grim Grotto*, full page illustration, p.137

CHAPTER

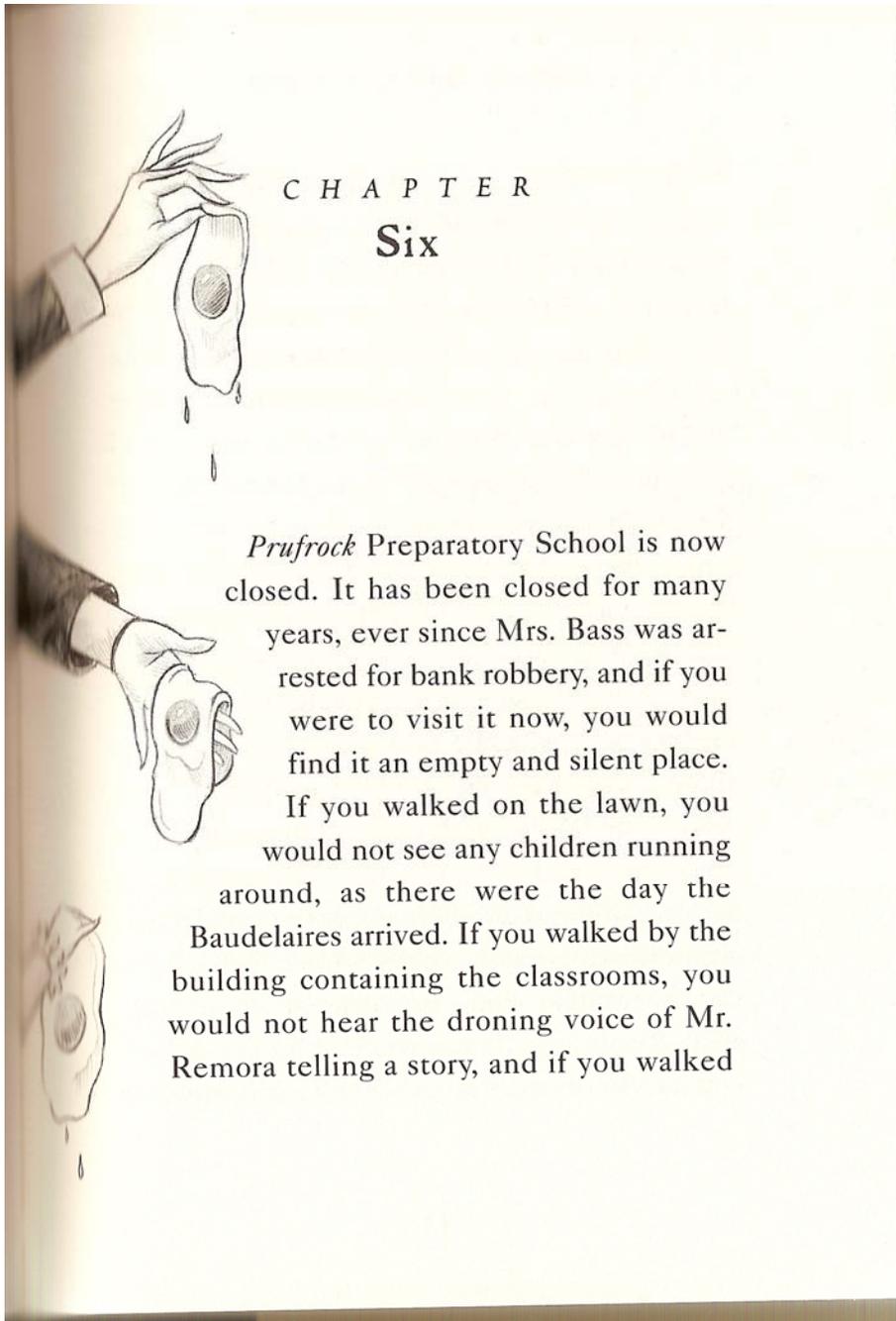
Seven



“Hello, I’m Larry, your waiter,” said Larry, the Baudelaire orphans’ waiter. He was a short, skinny man in a goofy clown costume with a name tag pinned to his chest that read LARRY. “Welcome to the Anxious Clown restaurant—where everybody has a good time, whether they like it or not. I can see we have a whole family lunching together today, so allow me to recommend the Extra Fun Special Family Appetizer. It’s a bunch of things fried up together and served with a sauce.”

“What a wonderful idea,” Captain Sham said,

Figure 3-16 *The Wide Window*, chapter illustration, p.95

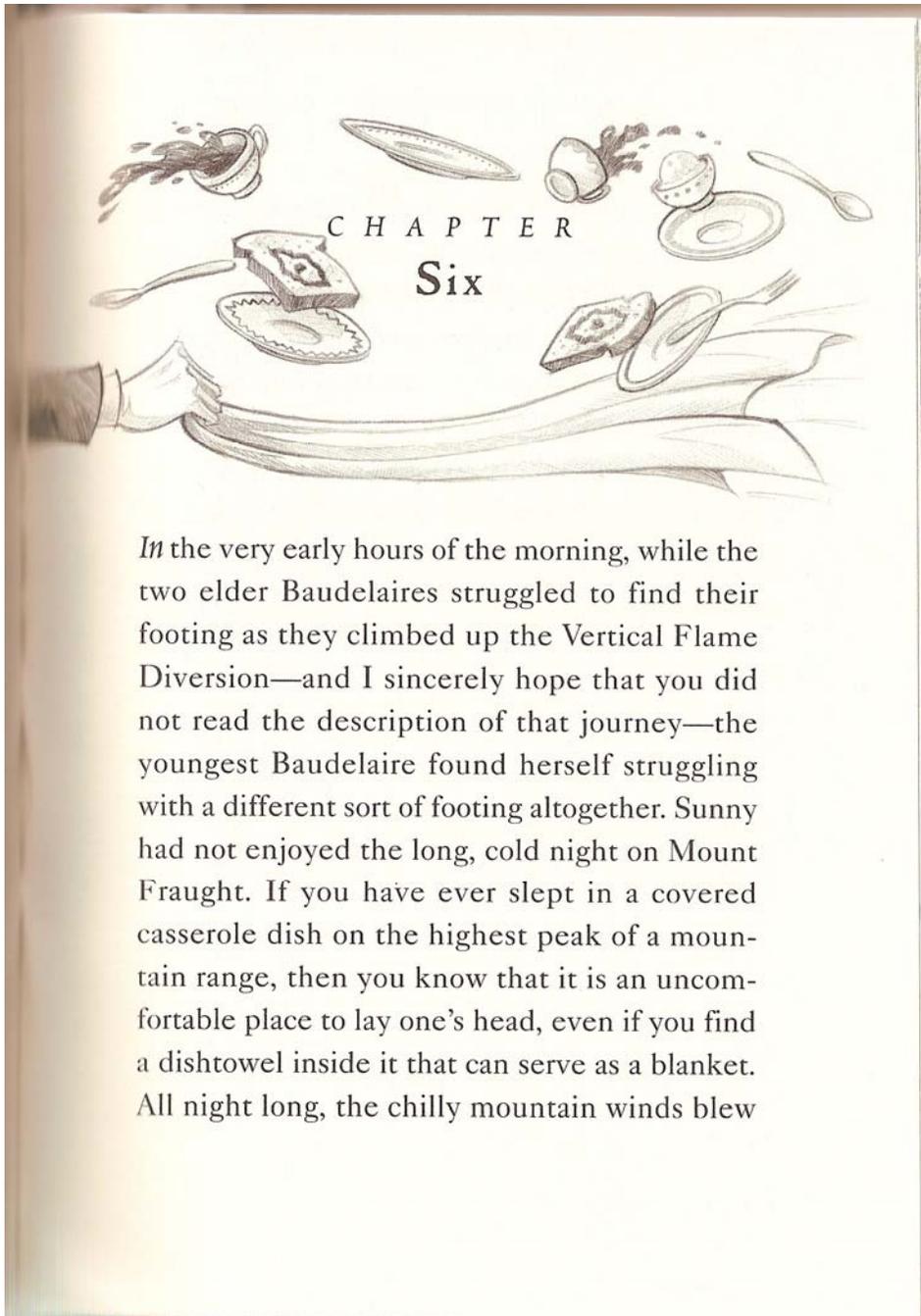


CHAPTER

Six

Prufrock Preparatory School is now closed. It has been closed for many years, ever since Mrs. Bass was arrested for bank robbery, and if you were to visit it now, you would find it an empty and silent place. If you walked on the lawn, you would not see any children running around, as there were the day the Baudelaires arrived. If you walked by the building containing the classrooms, you would not hear the droning voice of Mr. Remora telling a story, and if you walked

Figure 3-17 *The Austere Academy*, chapter illustration, p.83



In the very early hours of the morning, while the two elder Baudelaires struggled to find their footing as they climbed up the Vertical Flame Diversion—and I sincerely hope that you did not read the description of that journey—the youngest Baudelaire found herself struggling with a different sort of footing altogether. Sunny had not enjoyed the long, cold night on Mount Fraught. If you have ever slept in a covered casserole dish on the highest peak of a mountain range, then you know that it is an uncomfortable place to lay one's head, even if you find a dishtowel inside it that can serve as a blanket. All night long, the chilly mountain winds blew

Figure 3-18 *The Slippery Slope*, chapter illustration, p.103

C H A P T E R
Eleven

"How pleasant that you could join us," the hook-handed man said in a sickly sweet voice. Violet immediately tried to scurry back down the rope, but Count Olaf's assistant was too quick for her. In one movement he hoisted her into the tower room and, with a flick of his hook, sent her rescue device clanging to the ground. Now Violet was as trapped as her sister. "I'm so glad you're here," the hook-handed man

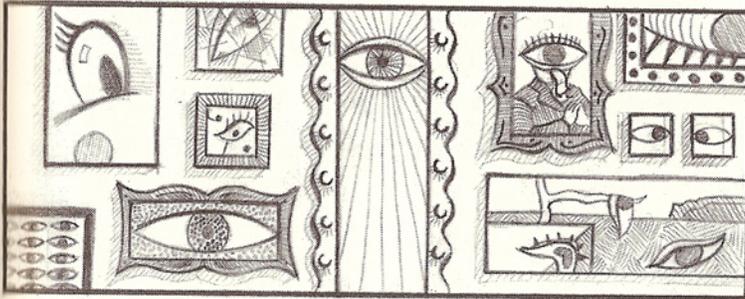


Figure 3-19 *The Bad Beginning*, chapter illustration, p.125

C H A P T E R
Four

The Baudelaire orphans copied the puttanesca recipe from the cookbook onto a piece of scrap paper, and Justice Strauss was kind enough to escort them to the market to buy the necessary ingredients. Count Olaf had not left them very much money, but the children were able to buy everything they needed. From a street vendor, they purchased olives after tasting several

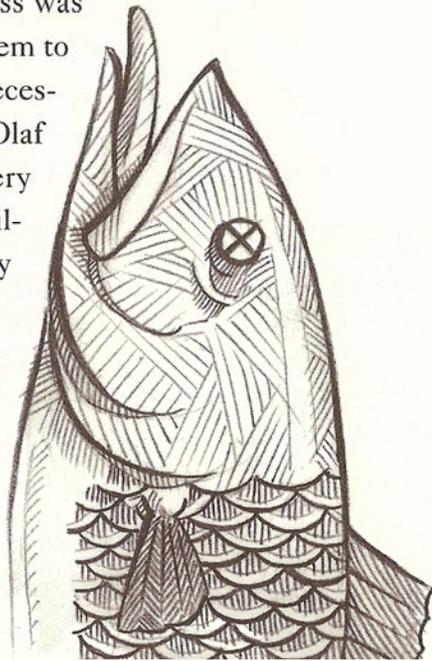


Figure 3-20 *The Bad Beginning*, chapter illustration, p.41

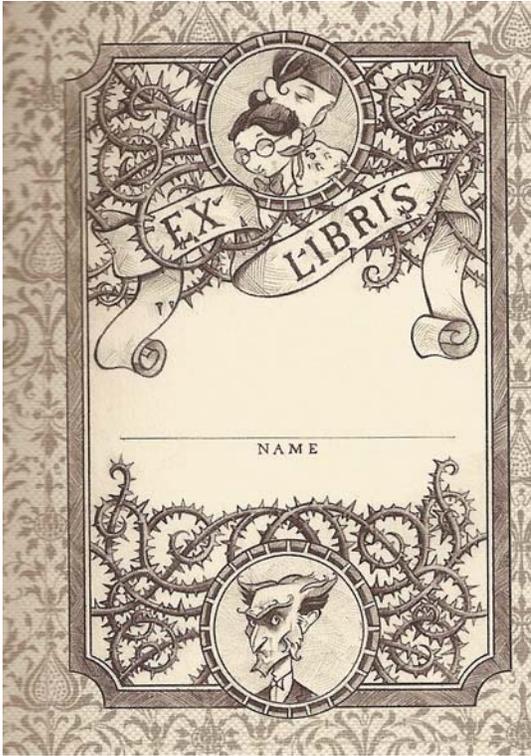


Figure 3-21 *The Bad Beginning*, front endsheet

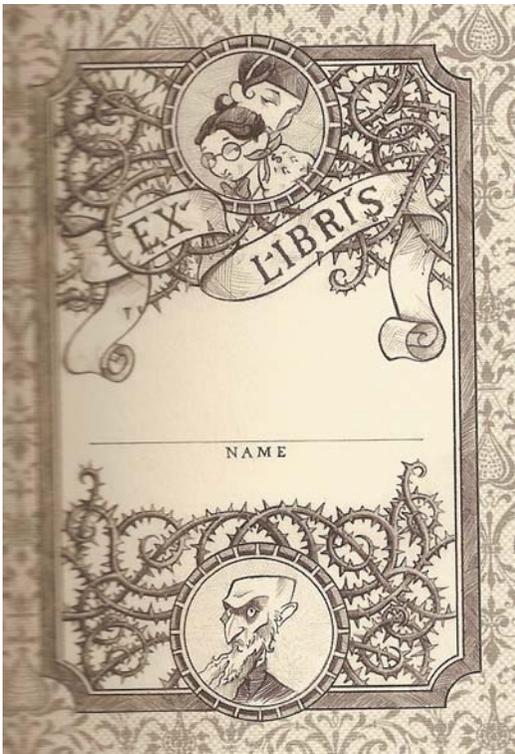


Figure 3-22 *The Reptile Room*, front endsheet

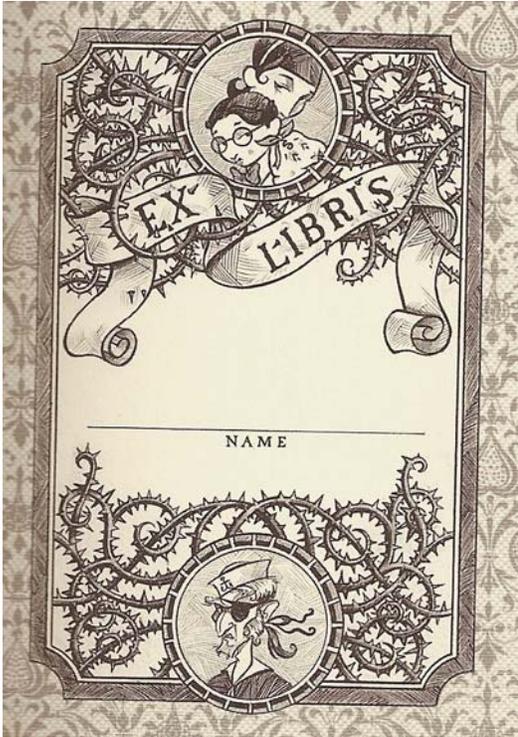


Figure 3-23 *The Wide Window*, front endsheet

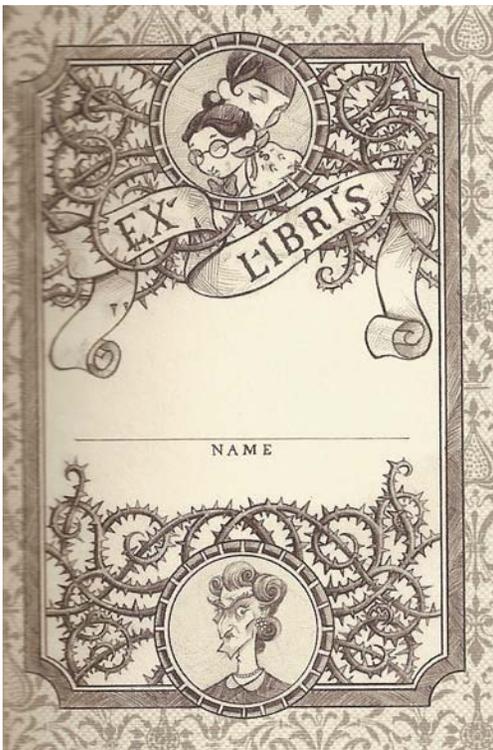


Figure 3-24 *The Miserable Mill*, front endsheet

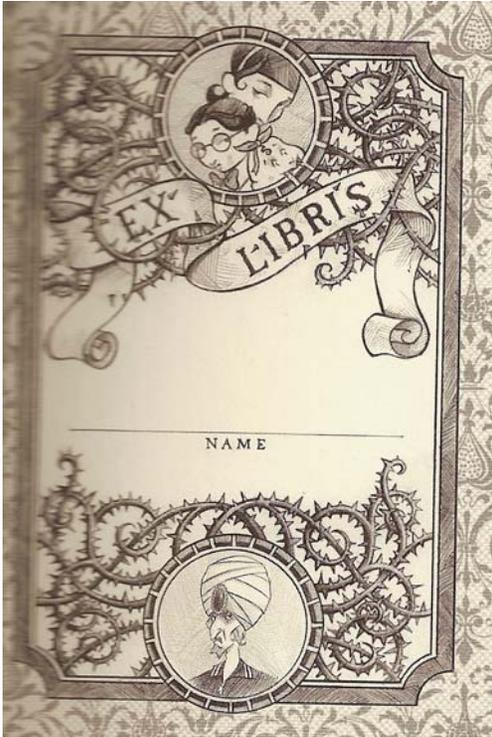


Figure 3-25 *The Austere Academy*, front endsheet

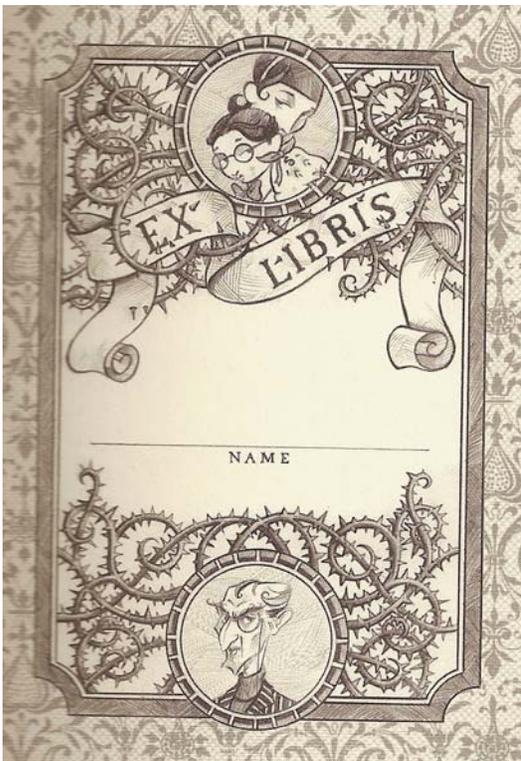


Figure 3-26 *The Ersatz Elevator*, front endsheet

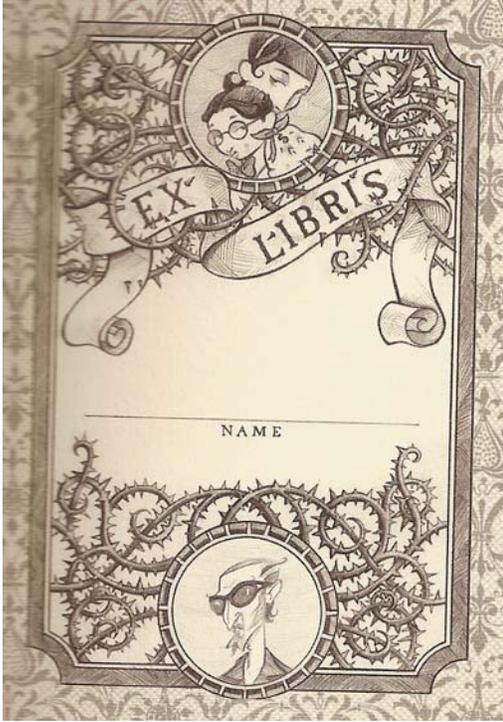


Figure 3-27 *The Vile Village*, front endsheet

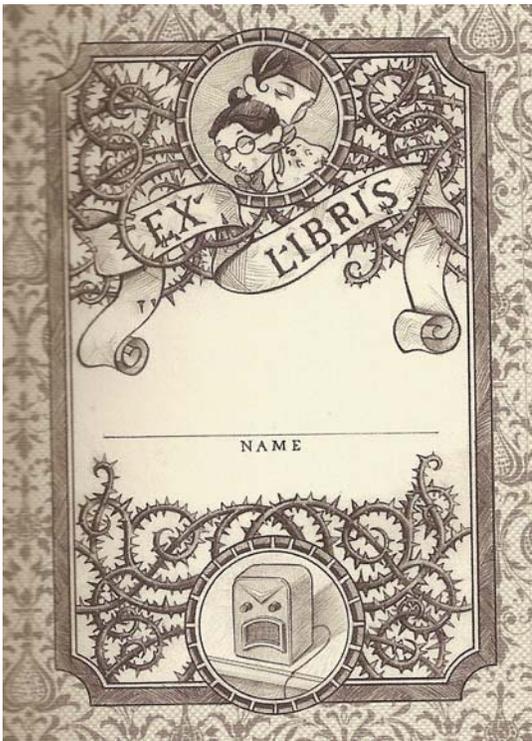


Figure 3-28 *The Hostile Hospital*, front endsheet

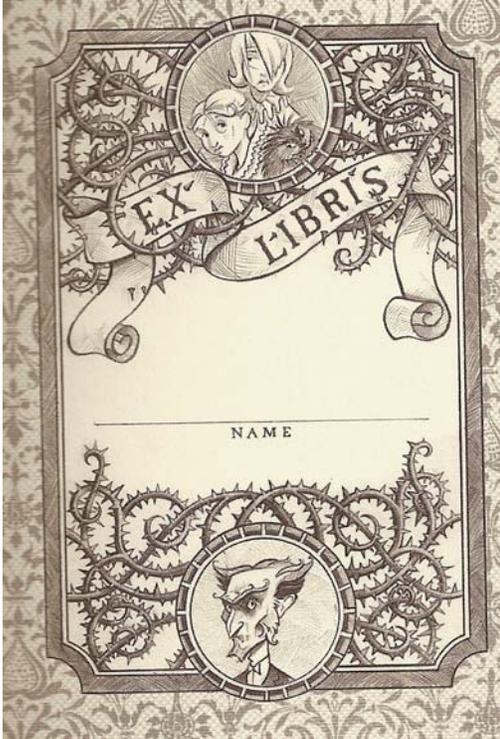


Figure 3-29 *The Carnivorous Carnival*, front endsheet

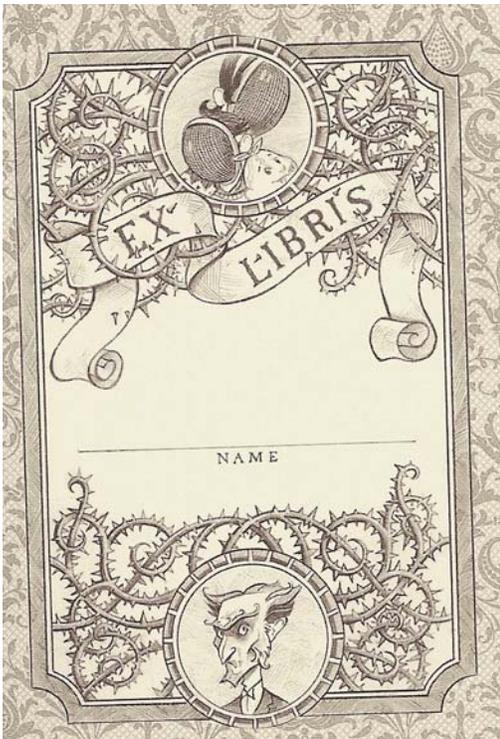


Figure 3-30 *The Slippery Slope*, front endsheet

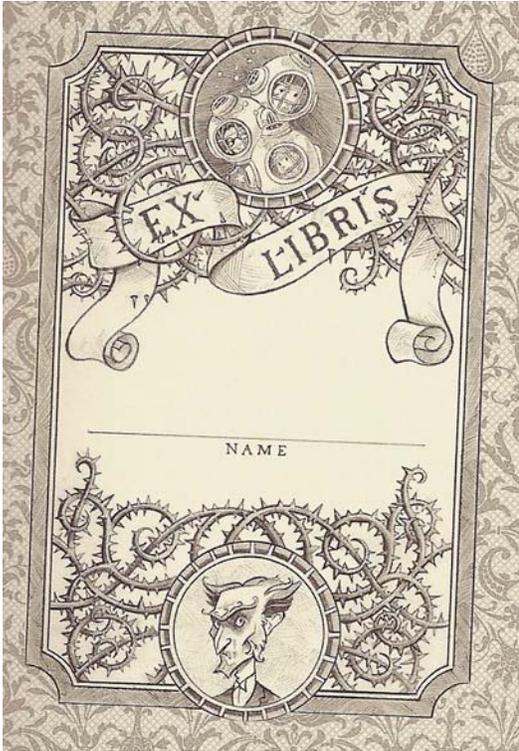


Figure 3-31 *The Grim Grotto*, front endsheet

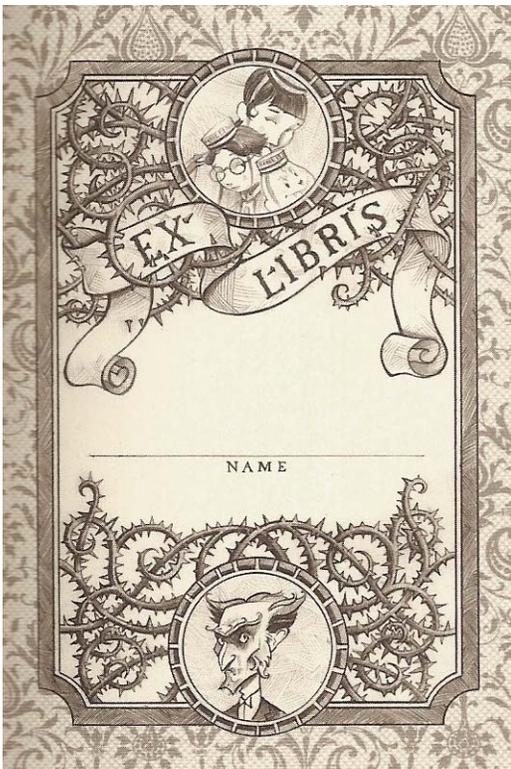


Figure 3-32 *The Penultimate Peril*, front endsheet

CHAPTER 4 LOST IN THE ARCHIVE

A Series of Unfortunate Events incorporates within its text and illustrations an emphasis on surveillance and mistrust in objective information. These two foci would appear contradictory. While Foucault outlines surveillance as ultimately an exercise in power structuring, the immediate purpose of any surveillance is to gather some form of information.¹ Conversely, the internalization of surveillance is the attempt to withhold potentially damaging information from the presumed spectator. The basic tenet behind these practices is that observation may lead to some form of data, and the manipulation of the data leads to power. The need that arises from these behaviors is a process through which one may record and store said data, leaving it retrievable for future needs of recollection and comparison. On the institutional level, this necessity is traditionally believed to be fulfilled via some form of the archive. I propose that *A Series of Unfortunate Events* provides an alternative approach to constructing the archive that still results in an anxiety produced by relying on collected data.

¹ Foucault acknowledges this need in his consideration of the Panopticon's Enlightenment roots. He writes, "And this unceasing observation had to be accumulated in a series of reports and registers; throughout the eighteenth century, an immense police text increasingly covered society by means of a complex documentary organization." Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: the Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage Books, 1995), 214.

Articulating the difference between an archive and a library is difficult. For the purposes of this study, Michael Cook's distinction in *The Management of Information from Archives* proves most useful.² He writes:

Archival material can be evaluated as a source as against other sources available within the same institution. What is distinctive about the archives is the circumstances of their origin, not the quality of the information they carry (which may be great or little, as with other media). The definition of archives can therefore concentrate on their origin within the creating agency. Archives are information-bearing media which have been generated from within the organization; library and documentation materials are information-bearing media that were originally acquired from outside the organization.³

The critical delineation between the two is the source of their materials' origins. A library may be hyper-specialized according to subject, but its contents are still the provenance of exterior forces. An archive may be housed under the institution of a library, but, even as a sub-collection, it is an assortment of data produced from the inner workings of an institution.

In *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, the reader finds the Baudelaire orphans encountering both the library and the archive. The library is especially omnipresent within the texts. As the children bounce from one guardian to another, they encounter an assortment of libraries that reflect the interests of their caretakers: a judicial library, a herpetological library, and even a grammatical library.⁴ However, the series progresses, and the frequency and quality of the libraries decrease. By the fourth novel, *The Miserable Mill*, the library to which the Baudelaire have access contains only three

² Michael Cook, *The Management of Information from Archives*, 2nd ed. (Hampshire, England: Gower, 1999).

³ Cook, 10.

⁴ Respectively, Lemony Snicket, *The Bad Beginning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999). Lemony Snicket, *The Reptile Room* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999). Lemony Snicket, *The Wide Window* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000).

books, a detail made plain in the vertical half-page illustration to Chapter Four that depicts a wall with eighteen shelves, seventeen of which are completely barren (Fig. 4-1).⁵ The decreasing quality and size of nearby libraries affords an example of yet another unfortunate event encountered by the orphans. In *The Miserable Mill*, the reader is told that

Whether it was Uncle Monty’s library of reptile books, or Aunt Josephine’s library of grammar books, or Justice Strauss’s library of law books, or, best of all, their parents’ library of all kinds of books – all burned up now, alas – libraries always made them feel a little bit better. Just knowing that they could read made the Baudelaire orphans feel as if their wretched lives could be a little brighter.⁶

When the Baudelaires lose the raw material needed to undergo the pleasure of reading, their world becomes that much darker, especially as the world within the series depends upon the presence of libraries and the dispersal of knowledge that they enable. Daniel Handler has said in interviews that he likes “the idea of a universe that was governed entirely by books.”⁷ An example of this may be found in *The Grim Grotto* when Klaus Baudelaire discovers a code utilized by the V.F.D. called Verse Fluctuation Declaration. It functions via the assumption that there are certain familiar texts to any well-read person, and the manipulation of those texts allow for an educated reader to discover a message in their inconsistencies. Klaus finds this code in analyzing “My Last Wife” by Obert Browning, clearly a reference to Robert Browning’s “My Last Duchess.”⁸ In this instance, the V.F.D.’s reliance on a consistent access to texts sows the seeds of its

⁵Figure 4.1 may be found on Lemony Snicket, *The Miserable Mill* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 45.

⁶ Snicket, *The Miserable Mill*, 58.

⁷ Daniel Handler, interview by David Bianculli and Terry Gross, *Fresh Air*, National Public Radio, 10 December 2004.

⁸ Lemony Snicket, *The Grim Grotto* (New York: HarperCollins, 2004), 157.

undoing. Books are ephemeral, as seen in the increasingly inadequate resources to which the Baudelaires have access, and the destruction of books means the destruction of knowledge.

Of the two hundred eighteen illustrations, eleven feature books or shelves of books. Nearly doubling that sum, an additional twenty-one illustrations highlight ticket stubs, newspapers, maps, photographs, programs, and advertisements. I suggest that the illustrations reflect a shift over the series from faith in the library to hope in the archive. I do not qualify these scraps as evidence of an archive because they make a loose collection of papers. I qualify them as such because they are all presumably documents that have been manufactured by the V.F.D. and its agents. They are records of the novels' representative institution. As inheritors and potential inductees into the V.F.D., the Baudelaires recognize these documents as aids in deciphering the mysteries of their lives. As outlined earlier, I do not suggest that these collected papers are presented as documents of any objective reality. There is a need for such manner of data, nonetheless.

A conversation in *The Grim Grotto* articulates the necessity:

“I think you Baudelaires are forgetting that your exploits haven’t exactly been a secret. Nearly everyday there’s been a story about you in one of the most popular newspapers.”

“*The Daily Punctilio*?” Violet asked. “I hope you haven’t been believing the dreadful lies they’ve been printing about us.”

“Of course not,” Fiona said. “But even the most ridiculous of stories can contain a grain of truth. *The Daily Punctilio* said that you’d murdered a man in the Village of Fowl Devotees, and then set fires at Heimlich Hospital and Caligari Carnival. We knew, of course, that you hadn’t committed these crimes, but we could tell that you had been there.”⁹

⁹ Snicket, *The Grim Grotto*, 52-53.

Information exists, no matter the biases used to present it. It only exists, though, to serve individual interpretation and needs. It is this role that makes the archive ineffectual as a tool of an institution.

Instead, the reader is treated to an alternative mode of information gathering and retrieval in the form of the commonplace book. The purposes of a commonplace book through time may vary widely, but the Baudelaires utilize it as a place in which to house documents and observations concerning activities and persons that may bear an influence on their lives. The Baudelaires begin their commonplace book in *The Slippery Slope* when they witness the success to which their friend Quigley Quagmire puts it to use.¹⁰ He explains its function:

“Whenever I find something that seems important or interesting, I write it down. That way, all my important information is in one place.”

“I should start one,” Klaus said. “My pockets are bulging with scraps of paper.”¹¹

The personal filter needed in assembling a commonplace book implies both a predetermined hypothesis in the handler’s research ventures and a specific function for the book’s existence. The commonplace book also calls for a personal theory of interpretation in order for the bearer to derive meaning.

The appearance of the commonplace book within *A Series of Unfortunate Events* is by no means the first or the most famous example of this information management tool in literature. Sherlock Holmes, the detective protagonist created by Arthur Conan Doyle, leans upon his series of commonplace books beginning as early as his first appearance in

¹⁰ Lemony Snicket, *The Slippery Slope* (New York: HarperCollins, 2003).

¹¹ Snicket, *The Slippery Slope*, 141.

the short story, “A Scandal in Bohemia.”¹² While searching for information regarding the case, his friend Dr. Watson reports that

For many years he [Holmes] had adopted a system of docketing all paragraphs concerning men and things, so that it was difficult to name a subject or a person on which he could not at once furnish information. In this case, I found her biography sandwiched in between that of a Hebrew rabbi and that of a staff commander who had written a monograph upon the deep sea fishes.¹³

It borders on the ridiculous to imagine the process through which Holmes could construct such a comprehensive set and still leave time for his private investigations and cocaine abuse. The mechanics of his archiving are of no concern. Holmes warrants mention because of his unique, albeit fictional, standing in Victorian society. James W. Maertens explains in “Masculine Power and the Ideal Reasoner: Sherlock Holmes, Technician-Hero,” that

He [Holmes] is not an official policeman or an official scientist; his power does not derive from the state, and its machinery; he stands aloof from the military and imperial commerce. But this is, of course, an illusory myth, a hope against the reality of institutional power, which was already in the Victorian period well advanced. The technical rationalization Holmes makes us feel so excited about, is the foundation of the modern mechanized state.¹⁴

Sherlock Holmes hovers outside the confines of Scotland Yard, but Maertens argues that he does so only in body. His methodology belongs in spirit to the administration within its walls. However, this analysis misses a crucial component to the dynamism of the great detective’s modus operandi: his analysis of the technical. In “They Were the Very

¹² Arthur Conan Doyle, *The New Annotated Sherlock Holmes*, vol. 1, ed. Leslie S. Klinger (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2005), 5-40. “A Scandal in Bohemia,” printed in the July 1891 Strand magazine, is actually Holmes’s third published appearance. The previous two publications in which he featured were the novels *A Study in Scarlet* and *The Sign of Four*.

¹³ Doyle, vol.1, 17.

¹⁴ James W. Maertens, “Masculine Power and the Ideal Reasoner: Sherlock Holmes, Technician-Hero,” *Sherlock Holmes: Victorian Sleuth to Modern Hero*, Charles R. Putney, Joseph A. Cutshall King, and Sally Sugarman, eds., (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 296-321, esp. 320.

Models of the Modern Information Age,” James R. Wright presents Victorian England as a country flooded with information courtesy of the time-saving mechanisms created during the Industrial Age.¹⁵ He writes:

The world’s first consulting detective lived in the midst of an information explosion. However, the common image of the information explosion is counterproductive. It confuses the capacity to transmit data with the capacity to create information. The two are distinctly different as Sherlock Holmes recognized.¹⁶

Data is but a tool for creating information. While Holmes convinces the reader to believe that deductive reasoning leads to an objective truth, he is spoon-feeding an illusion. He sends the data through his subjective interpretation. He can anticipate the many paths that the data can take, and he chooses the most appropriate one to form his information.

Holmes is important in a discussion of the archive, as his idiosyncratic method is a product of and a response to the nineteenth-century institutional efforts to harness the many new strands of data being produced, a phenomenon detailed in Allan Sekula’s “The Body in the Archive.”¹⁷ Sekula’s article, by examining nineteenth-century photographic,

¹⁵ “Newspapers and periodicals required extensive mechanization in order to accelerate and cheapen production to meet the demands of a growing literate public. David Bruce’s typesetting machine appeared in 1850, and the completely revolutionary rotary caster of Frederick Wicks was patented in 1881. Sixty thousand characters could be cast an hour, and the type was not broken up but returned to the foundry, melted and recast. The Linotype machine was invented in America, but by 1900 it set many London dailies and 250 other English newspapers and periodicals. Printing machines made rapid strides as well. The first rotary press had been devised in 1846, and by 1868 a rotary machine printed *The Times* (London). Metal blocks replaced wood blocks in the 1880s for line drawings, and halftone blocks to reproduce photographs were extensively used in the 1880s.

The railroad grids carried London papers and periodicals to the provinces and the Continent, and provincial and continental periodicals were returned to the metropolis. Faster than a speeding locomotive was electric telegraphy. The first telegraph line between Paddington and West Drayton had been established in 1839, and by 1870 the network of telegraphic communication was quite extensive.” James R. Wright, “They Were the Very Models of the Modern Information Age,” *Sherlock Holmes: Victorian Sleuth to Modern Hero*, Charles R. Putney, Joseph A. Cutshall King, and Sally Sugarman, eds., (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 1996), 16-24, esp. 16-17.

¹⁶ Wright, 17.

¹⁷ Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (Winter, 1986): 3-64.

phrenologic, and physiognomic practices, lays bare many of the philosophies and approaches that specifically went into recording the criminal body. It suggests that

The camera is integrated into a larger ensemble: a bureaucratic-clerical-statistical system of “intelligence.” This system can be described as a sophisticated form of the archive. The central artifact of this system is not the camera but the filing cabinet.¹⁸

For Sekula, the camera merely gave a certain speed and supposed accuracy to already burgeoning empirical practices in organizing data. A problem that the archive’s practitioners consistently encountered was reconciling individual entries’ data with the archive’s dictated need for general assumptions.¹⁹ This challenge was, I feel, the result of the archive’s requirement to cater to questions from and of multiple individuals in an institution over an unspecified period of time. The archive must function like the Panopticon in giving the appearance that it can be generated and accessed by anyone. For Sekula’s criminal body, this need means that “it was only on the basis of the tentative construction of a larger, ‘universal’ archive, that zones of deviance and respectability could be clearly demarcated.”²⁰ “The Body in the Archive” demonstrates the relative failure of any institutional archive to succeed in defining the criminal body. The article also hints at another challenge to the archive. Sekula relates, “During the Commune, all

¹⁸ Sekula, 16.

¹⁹ Sekula writes, “Photography promised more than a wealth of detail; it promised to reduce nature to its geometrical essence. Presumably then, the archive could provide a standard physiognomic gauge of the criminal could assign each criminal body a relative and quantitative position within a larger ensemble.

This archival promise was frustrated, however, both by the messy contingencies of the photograph and by the sheer quantity of images. The photographic archive’s components are not conventional lexical units, but rather are subject to the circumstantial character of all that is photographable. ... Clearly, one way of ‘taming’ photography is by means of this transformation of the circumstantial and idiosyncratic into the typical and emblematic. This is usually achieved by stylistic or interpretive fiat, or by a sampling of the archive’s offerings for a ‘representative’ instance.” Sekula, 17-18.

²⁰ Sekula, 14.

city records prior to 1859 had been burned; any Parisian over twenty-two years old was at liberty to invent and reinvent an entirely bogus nativity.”²¹ If an institution places faith in the archive, then the loss of that archive would significantly weaken the institution.

Therefore, the positioning of the Baudelaires and their ancestor Holmes with their collections of data in the commonplace book as miniature institutions reveals the advantages of a personalized archive. The assumed ‘universal’ archive needed for a specific, individual search is considerably smaller than that which serves an institution, especially considering that the institution’s strength typically lies in its members’ ignorance of its workings. To possess a fully pragmatic archive, the past, present, and future data needs of the institution must be guessed. This impossible task reveals an unaccounted hole in the undertaking of surveillance. Again, the Baudelaires’ and Holmes’s efforts may still be viewed as archives due to their associations with institutions. The Baudelaires seek a fraction of data regarding the V.F.D. Holmes, as a consultant to the police, is an institutional agent in his own way.²² However, they seek only a percentage of the potential data.

Of course, this system of information collecting and retrieval functions far better in theory than in practice. Any archive will fail to achieve its utopian state. To assemble a personal archive examining a particular question via the commonplace book is to hypothesize the results. This feat may be possible for the seemingly omniscient Holmes, but it proves a greater challenge for three juveniles already striving to fend for themselves. Also, the very basis of the commonplace book negates its physical presence.

²¹ Sekula, 34.

²² It could also be argued that, as the mature, learned, Victorian gentleman of leisure, Holmes is a composite representative and member of a variety of institutions.

A recognition and acknowledgement of a previous encounter with the data being sought is undertaken when resorting to its pages. It is a memory aid, for it can house the information garnered from documents rather than the documents themselves. The personal archive is at odds with the mission statement of institutional archivists, which Heather MacNeil defines as “their professional calling to identify, preserve, and make available for use records of enduring value.”²³ The institutional archive is the larder of information-getting for generations to come, whereas the commonplace book is the empty Mason jar of a single preserve. Its records are not less valuable; it simply has no requirement to house the data that informs the resulting informational conclusions, in part because said data is worthless without the accompanying subjective filter. This disposal of data creates an immediate paradox: if data is ultimately fated as a transient waste product, then how does one distinguish and collect it before its demise? While the Holmesian model is less fraught with troubles than the traditional institutional archive, it is not without its own anxiety-producing dilemma.

It is this dilemma that Brett Helquist’s illustrations bring to the fore in the later novels of the series. The imagery of the eye becomes less omnipresent as the plots move forward, especially once the eye is identified with the V.F.D. institution. Data-bearing scraps, however, replace the eye in its dominance within the illustrations. Helquist’s success in articulating the ephemeral presence of data stems from his visual elision of it with refuse. In the second of *The Miserable Mill*’s three full page illustrations, the viewer sees the three Baudelaire children standing before the looming eye-shaped office

²³ Heather MacNeil, *Without Consent: The Ethics of Disclosing Personal Information in Public Archives* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow Press, Inc., 1992), 5.

of ophthalmologist Dr. Georgiana Orwell (Fig. 4-2).²⁴ In the immediate foreground, lying in the street gutter, are the scraps of a discarded newspaper. At this juncture in the storyline, the press has not issued its misinformation concerning the Baudelaires, as it later will, evidenced by *The Hostile Hospital's* Chapter Two illustration of a tightly bundled set of papers that read, "Baudelaire Butchers," and are ready for delivery (Figure 4.3).²⁵ The difference between these two images is the presentation of the paper. In *The Miserable Mill*, it is trash, its time spent and its use met. In *The Hostile Hospital*, the stack of papers is prepared for consumption, their purpose not yet determined. The bundle also has the benefit of repetition. It is not just one paper, and scattered remnants at that, but it is eleven complete newspapers. Behind the pile is the potential for multiple minds molded. The lifespan of the data, in this instance the data being a daily newspaper, is indeterminate. It may be a matter of hours before it is pulp in the gutter, its purchaser gone after a brief skim of the headlines. Or it may be housed for decades as a lone copy in the storerooms of the publisher. In either instance, its contents may be obtained only under the circumstances that the seeker has the time and means to procure a preserved copy and that a notion of the desired topic's data already has been reached. Sherlock Holmes has the benefit of idle time and disparate interests that prevent him from reaching this state of anxiety and sense of urgency. For ingénue archivists like the Baudelaires, these caveats present a hurdle.

In addition to the relative assignation of worth, Helquist's illustrations supply unease as to the odds of survival and discovery of necessary data. The Baudelaires must

²⁴ Figure 4.2 may be found on Snicket, *The Miserable Mill*, 125.

²⁵ Figure 4.3 may be found on Lemony Snicket, *The Hostile Hospital* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 21.

ascertain the location of their kidnapped friends in *The Vile Village*. Their friends, Duncan and Isadora Quagmire, are hidden in the central fountain of the Village of Fowl Devotees, the town that collectively adopts the Baudelaires. Their friends utilize the flight patterns of crows to send S.O.S. signals to potential rescuers. This mode of communication is a risky venture, a concern echoed in Helquist's work. The accompanying illustrations to Chapters Four and Eight depict a feather with a message wrapped around it and a message recently dropped by a crow, respectively (Figs. 4.4 and 4.5).²⁶ In the second image, only the crow's feet are included. It is against a non-existent background. If one were to consider the image alone, there would be no indication of a planned destination. The scrap would seem to be as carelessly discarded as the molting feathers surrounding it. If anything, Helquist's work is drawing attention to the text's literary conceit. For the Quagmires to employ untrained birds over four consecutive days to deliver messages to friends who can manage to decode them is almost asking the reader to suspend too much disbelief. On this occasion, Helquist's illustrations almost dispute the text. They emphasize the fantasy behind the story while still presenting the dangers that face the collection of data, for the purposes of intuiting information, at every turn.

Another tactic through which Helquist's illustrations demonstrate the ephemeral nature of data is his substitution of irrelevant items in the frame where data was previously found. *The Vile Village*'s first and third full-page illustrations place the three children against an overpowering sky that fills almost the entire frame (Figs. 4.6 and

²⁶ Figures 4.4 and 4.5 may be found on Lemony Snicket, *The Vile Village* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 69, 135.

4.7).²⁷ In the first example, the children are posed with their backs to the viewer, and they are waiting on a plain with their suitcases. Surrounding them is a bench, the faint outline of a settlement on the skyline, an enormous cloud, a sign that reads “V.F.D.,” and crows. There are also scraps of paper, some of which are presumably newspapers. Three pages later, the reader learns of *The Daily Punctilio*’s erroneous identification of Count Olaf as Count Omar.²⁸ For the Baudelaires, the papers are irrelevant because they know more than the data presented in the newspaper. They need not challenge its presence as litter, as they have already considered it and placed its report through their perceptive filters.

In the later full page illustration, it is the same low horizon with another dominating cloud. Violet and Sunny have barely changed positions, but Klaus dominates the foreground, as he bends forward to catch torn scraps of paper, the notations from their friend’s own journal. Because their trusted friends never shared their findings with the Baudelaires, this data is untried, its value to their own pursuit not yet ascertained. In the lower left corner, there is a copy of *The Daily Punctilio* with an advertisement that proclaims, “Last Chance \$2.” This text serves multiple purposes. It, like Helquist’s other final full page illustrations, trumpets a detail of the subsequent book, for the children begin *The Hostile Hospital* patronizing the Last Chance General Store.²⁹ It editorializes the children’s decision at the conclusion of this novel to give up on guardian care. It also remarks upon the urgency of Klaus collecting those sheets. Once gone, that data will not

²⁷ Figures 4.6 and 4.7 may be found on Snicket, *The Vile Village*, frontispiece, 257.

²⁸ Snicket, *The Vile Village*, 3.

²⁹ Snicket, *The Hostile Hospital*, 3. The inference that can be drawn from the embedded foreshadowing in the final full page illustrations is that Helquist is never completely ignorant of Handler’s plans for later books and, perhaps, an overview of the entire series.

easily be recoverable. Again, the temporary presence of necessary data flaunts unknown future needs for information.

The additional commentary on these illustrations comes in the final full page illustration of *The Grim Grotto* (Fig. 4-8).³⁰ This book ends as the Baudelaires leave Briny Beach, the site of the original announcement that their home had burned to the ground, to enter an unknown course of action with a strange woman. While the story clearly indicates that this exit occurs in a separate location from the plains of *The Vile Village*, Helquist also gives visual cues. There is the retaining wall at the edge of the beach, the waves lapping in the foreground, and a distinct metropolis deep against the horizon. The composition of the image, however, repeats the previous two discussed. The sky dominates the image with large clouds occupying much of the picture plane. On this occasion, though, the rubbish on the ground does not provide any sort of data for the Baudelaires or the reader. Granted, there is a bellboy's hat that reads, "Hotel D," but the text has already indicated that their destination is the Hotel Denouement. Helquist's work is not offering any tantalizing glimpse into the future novel. Also in the foreground are a starfish and a beach ball. As the reader leaves with the Baudelaires from their eleventh of thirteen novels, it becomes apparent that, in the span of the narrative, both the data and the search for information are nearing an end. When there is the most crucial need for data to resolve the Baudelaires' lives and to decode Handler's conspiracies, none is available. This image highlights a further limitation to archiving through an individual agent. Not only is data fleeting, irrelevant or indistinguishable from useless items, but often there is none offered at all.

³⁰ Figure 4.8 may be found on Snicket, *The Grim Grotto*, 325.

Of course, in many ways this reading relies on the assumption of data encoded in a tangible form which is a vast contrast to the contemporary streams of binary code sent from one electronic device to another. Bank accounts are linked to email accounts, email accounts to address books, address books to phone numbers, and phone numbers to cellular phones with global positioning systems. This web needs but one malevolent force—be it a con artist, an identity thief, or a reckless government agency—to exploit its potential. Additionally, the ever-growing capacity of computer chips to store these files allows for a speedier search for creating an informational narrative. This state of affairs is a far cry from the simplistic paper collections stuffed in Klaus Baudelaire’s pockets. I suggest that it is this pre-digital presence that relieves the anxiety that *A Series of Unfortunate Events* otherwise creates.

The narrative occurs in an unspecified time and place. One can assume that its environs are fictional, unless there is an allusive society that has escaped the global radar thus far. Handler is careful never to include in his texts mentions of digital age technology. There is one reappearing character, Esmé Squalor, who obsesses over societal trends. If any character within the books was to possess a laptop, a security system, or an iPod, it would be her. Instead, Handler creates his own fads in which she may indulge, as when she informs the Baudelaires, “Regular light is in—as in as aqueous martinis, pinstripes, and orphans.”³¹ Olaf never hunts down the orphans by tracing their phone calls or presenting them with a credit card whose activities can be easily tracked. Instead, he relies on a network of sympathetic spies. Helquist’s illustrations not only include pre-digital technology, but they add an extra emphasis to it. On two separate

³¹ Lemony Snicket, *The Ersatz Elevator* (New York: HarperCollins, 2001), 35.

occasions, in the representations of a rotary telephone and a telegraph, Helquist depicts the instrument on a verso page with a frayed cord passing into the facing reverse page (Figs. 4.9 and 4.10).³² It is not often that he utilizes the two page format, and it is especially interesting that he chooses to do so for these machines. The frayed cord hints at the ease with which they may be disconnected and serves as a sharp contrast to unanchored cellular phones and email access. Instead of manipulating his images to assign *A Series of Unfortunate Events* a specific time period, Helquist uses the non-specificity to expand his subject range. In the final full page illustration of *The Austere Academy*, the Baudelaires' friends Duncan and Isadora are shown being pushed by Olaf's followers into an antique model car waiting to aid in their abduction (Fig. 4-11).³³ In *The Carnivorous Carnival*'s frontispiece, Olaf's car is shown as a significantly more recent automobile sporting huge tailfins (Fig. 4-12).³⁴ Helquist's shuffling of possible time periods alleviates anxiety for the reader since it allows for enough difference to place the narrative in a time other than contemporary life. If anything, the illustrations skew the novels into a more distant past than the text necessarily presents them. While Helquist may be following Handler's lead in presenting a pre-digital society, his costume choices for the protagonists on the cover of *The Bad Beginning* place them in a distinct contrast to contemporary fashions (Fig. 4-13).³⁵ Klaus's well-kept suit with its bowtie, Violet's

³² Figures 4.9 and 4.10 may be found on Lemony Snicket, *The Wide Window* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 54-55. Snicket, *The Grim Grotto*, 62-63.

³³ Figure 4.11 may be found on Lemony Snicket, *The Austere Academy* (New York: HarperCollins, 2000), 223.

³⁴ Figure 4.12 may be found on Lemony Snicket, *The Carnivorous Carnival* (New York: HarperCollins, 2002), frontispiece.

³⁵ Figure 4.13 may be found on Lemony Snicket, *The Bad Beginning* (New York: HarperCollins, 1999), cover.

colored dress and stockings, and Sunny's dressing gown stand against today's more common casual t-shirts, unisex shorts, and infant onesies.

Not only does the universe created by Handler and Helquist prevent anxiety from reaching readers, but also the production of the books offers a further remove. It is rare to see the novels marketed in anything other than their hardcover forms.³⁶ When a film adaptation of the first three novels was released, the tie-in books were simply the traditional release with an easily removable, glossy, wraparound cover featuring film stills. The floral endsheets and the Ex Libris plates provide a reference to older books and compel the owners to preserve them in a collection. These details reference a degree of permanence, and the hardcover, heavy paper, and stitched signatures provide the means of maintaining a lasting presence.

A separation from the reader's own surroundings and a connoisseurial production value obviously do not qualify as actual solutions to the archival complexities raised by the texts and illustrations. However, the fact that the collaborative efforts hold even a potential to raise these issues is intellectually ambitious in itself. They teach the reading audience the shortcomings of the institutional archive. They encourage a thoughtful contemplation of data sources. While they do not offer a perfect alternative to the processes criticized, they nonetheless offer a glimpse of hope into breaking out of panopticism. Data is subjective and ephemeral. The body is recorded by accepted forms of data, so it may be as changeable as its records. Perhaps the most radical suggestion raised by this series is the potential destruction of the institution. *The Penultimate Peril* draws to a close as the Baudelaires have assisted their nemesis in burning down the last

³⁶ I am referring specifically to American editions.

headquarters of the V.F.D., a hotel organized according to the Dewey Decimal system. In summation, Lemony Snicket remarks in his narration:

Richard Wright, an American novelist of the realist school, asks a famous unfathomable question in his best-known novel, *Native Son*. “Who knows when some slight shock,” he asks, “disturbing the delicate balance between social order and thirsty aspiration, shall send the skyscrapers in our cities toppling?” It is a difficult question to read, almost as if it is in some sort of code, but after much research I have been able to make some sense of its mysterious words. “Social order,” for instance, is a phrase which may refer to the systems people use to organize their lives, such as the Dewey Decimal system, or the blind-folded procedures of the High Court. And “thirsty aspiration” is a phrase which may refer to things people want, such as the Baudelaire fortune, or the sugar bowl, or a safe place that lonely and exhausted orphans can call home. So when Mr. Wright asks his question, he might be wondering if a small event, such as a stone dropping into a pond, can cause ripples in the systems of the world, and tremble the things that people want, until all this rippling and trembling brings down something enormous, such as a building.³⁷

The Baudelaires found their building. The question that remains is whether their fans may one day, too.

³⁷ Lemony Snicket, *The Penultimate Peril* (New York: HarperCollins, 2005), 351-352.

C H A P T E R
Four

As I'm sure you know, whenever there is a mirror around, it is almost impossible not to take a look at yourself. Even though we all know what we look like, we all like just to look at our reflections, if only to see how we're doing. As the Baudelaire orphans waited outside the office to meet their new guardian, they looked in a mirror

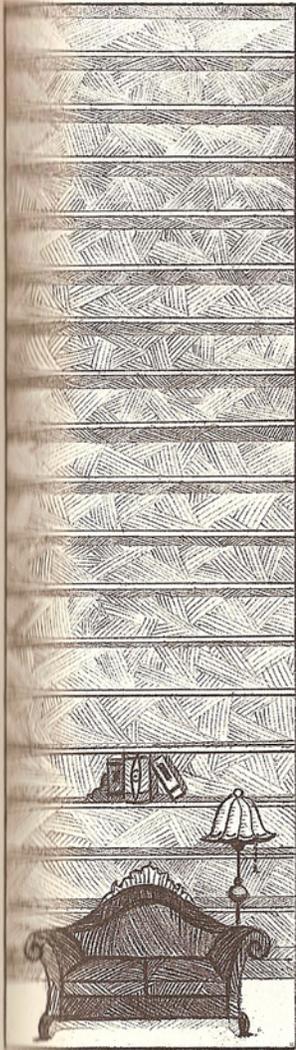


Figure 4-1 *The Miserable Mill*, chapter illustration, p.45

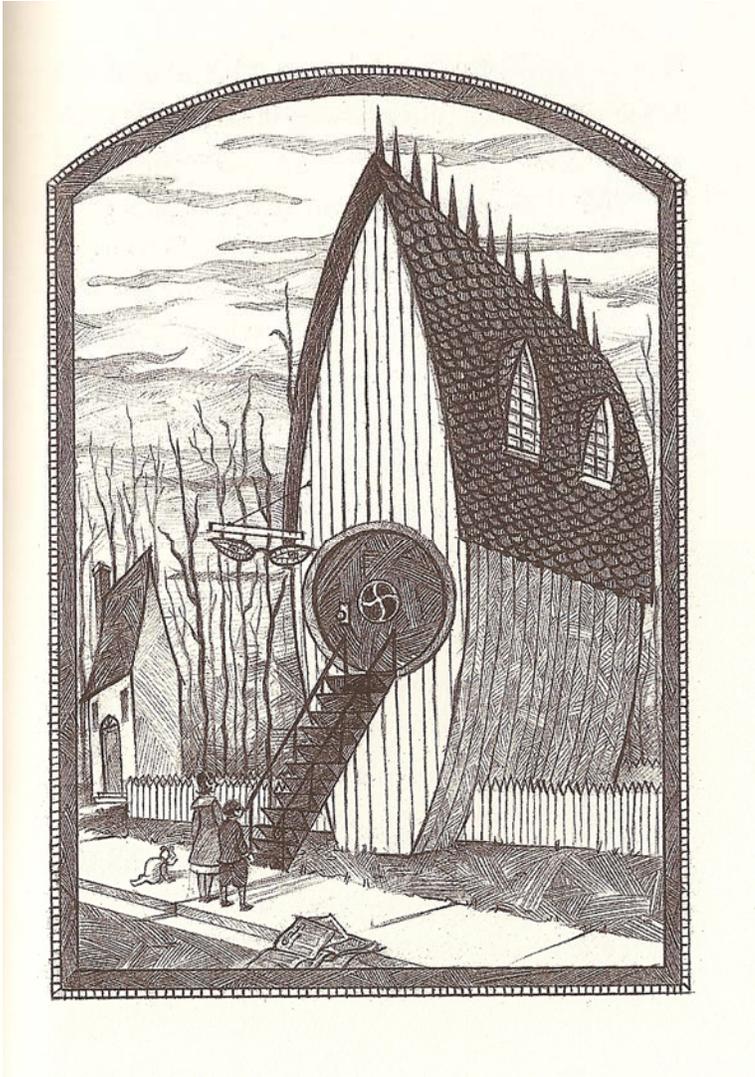


Figure 4-2 *The Miserable Mill*, full page illustration, p.125

C H A P T E R
Two

Of all the ridiculous expressions people use—and people use a great many ridiculous expressions—one of the most ridiculous is “No news is good news.” “No news is good news” simply means that if you don’t hear from someone, everything is probably fine, and you can see at once why this expression makes such little sense, because everything being fine is only one of many, many reasons why someone may not contact you. Perhaps they are tied up. Maybe they are surrounded by

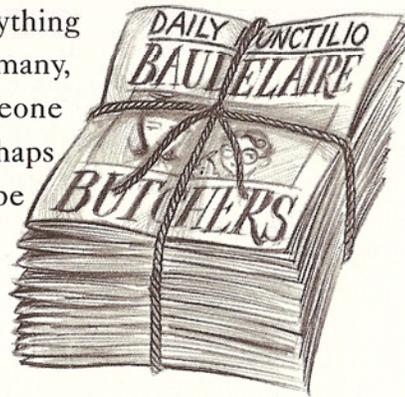
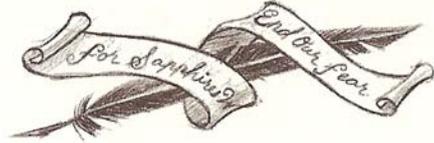


Figure 4-3 *The Hostile Hospital*, chapter illustration, p.21

C H A P T E R

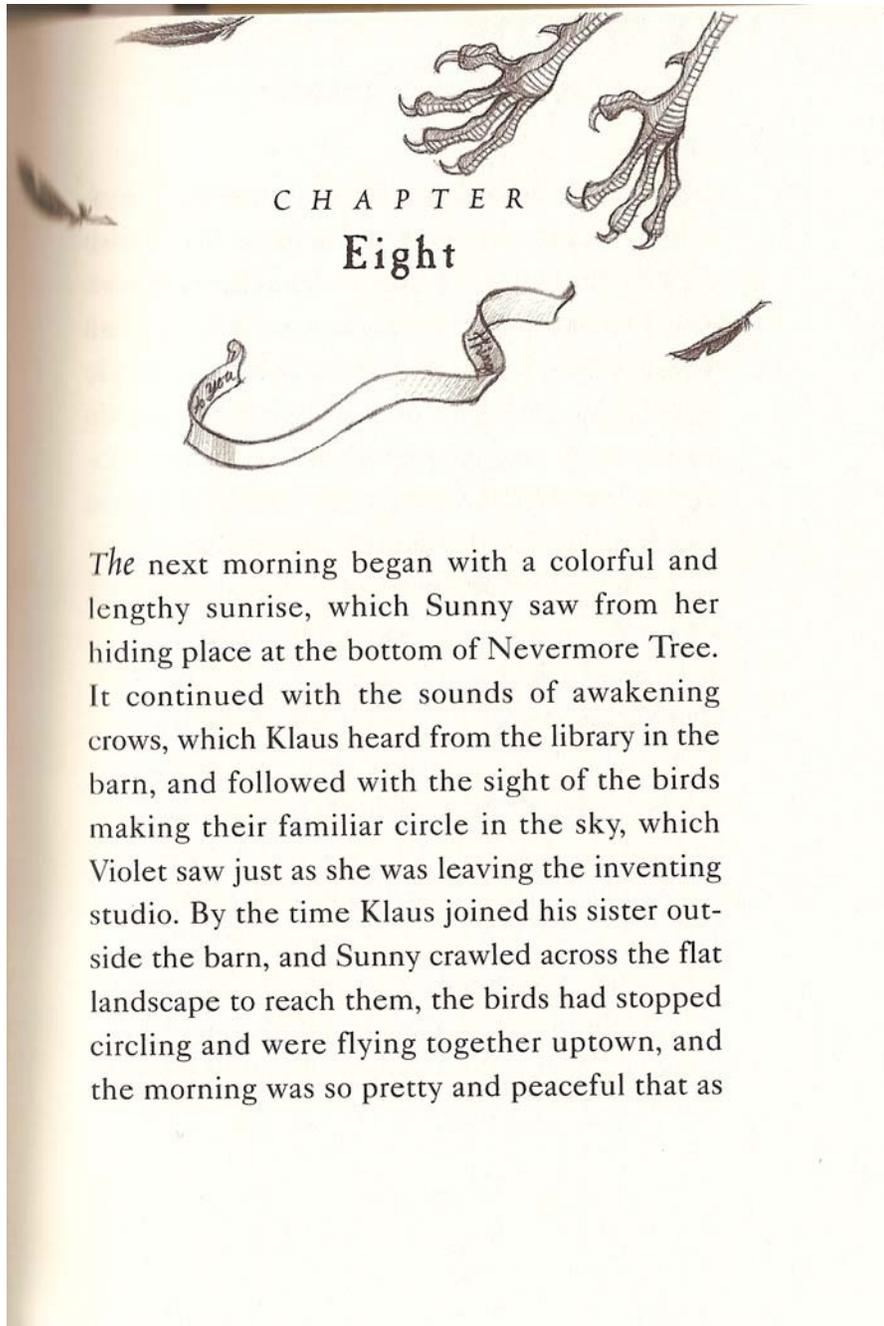
Four



The Baudelaire orphans stared at the scrap of paper, and then at Hector, and then at the scrap of paper again. Then they stared at Hector again, and then at the scrap of paper once more and then at Hector once more and then at the scrap of paper once again, and then at Hector once again and then at the scrap of paper one more time. Their mouths were open as if they were about to speak, but the three children could not find the words they wanted to say.

The expression “a bolt from the blue” describes something so surprising that it makes your head spin, your legs wobble, and your body

Figure 4-4 *The Vile Village*, chapter illustration, 69



The next morning began with a colorful and lengthy sunrise, which Sunny saw from her hiding place at the bottom of Nevermore Tree. It continued with the sounds of awakening crows, which Klaus heard from the library in the barn, and followed with the sight of the birds making their familiar circle in the sky, which Violet saw just as she was leaving the inventing studio. By the time Klaus joined his sister outside the barn, and Sunny crawled across the flat landscape to reach them, the birds had stopped circling and were flying together uptown, and the morning was so pretty and peaceful that as

Figure 4-5 *The Vile Village*, chapter illustration, 135



Figure 4-6 *The Vile Village*, frontispiece



Figure 4-7 *The Vile Village*, full page illustration, 257

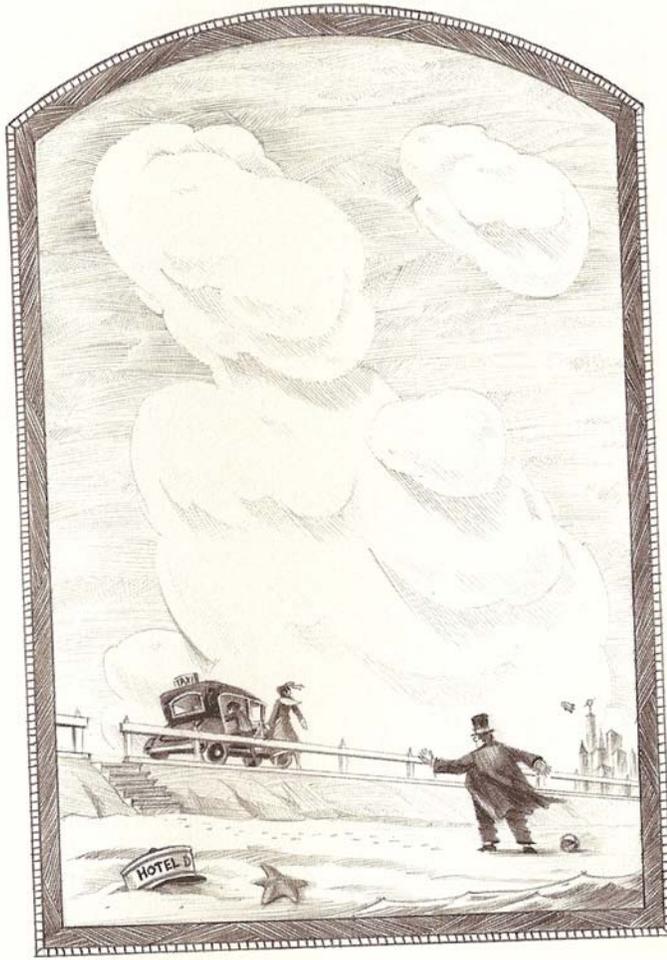


Figure 4-8 *The Grim Grotto*, full page illustration, 325

C H A P T E R
Four

That night, the Baudelaire children sat at the table with Aunt Josephine and ate their dinner with a cold pit in their stomachs. Half of the pit came from the chilled lime stew that Aunt Josephine had prepared. But the other half—if not more than half—came from the knowledge that Count Olaf was in their lives once again.

“That Captain Sham is certainly a charming person,” Aunt Josephine said, putting a piece of lime rind in her

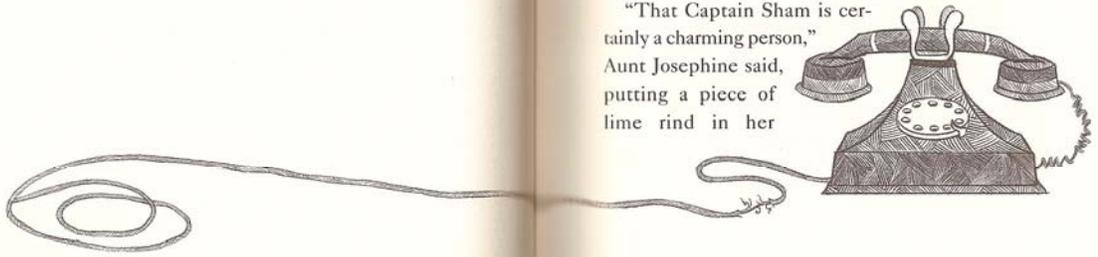


Figure 4-9 *The Wide Window*, chapter illustration, pp.54 and 55

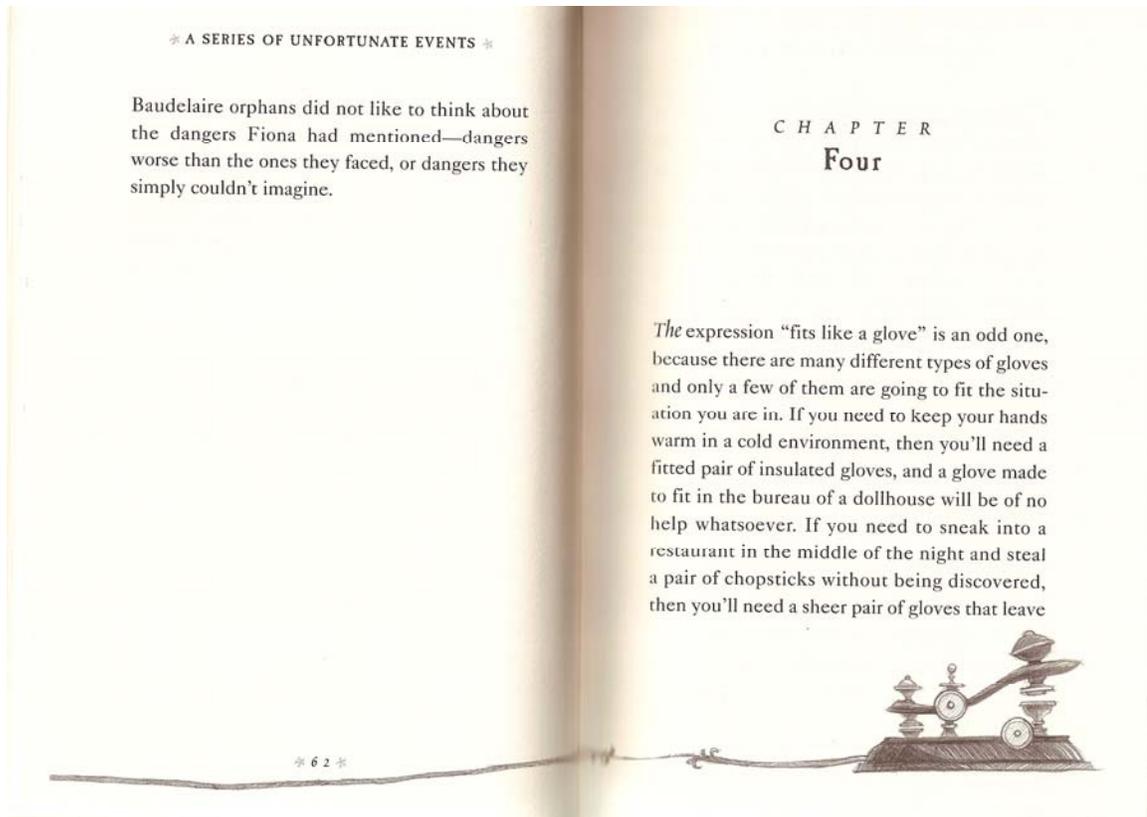


Figure 4-10 *The Grim Grotto*, chapter illustration, pp.62 and 63

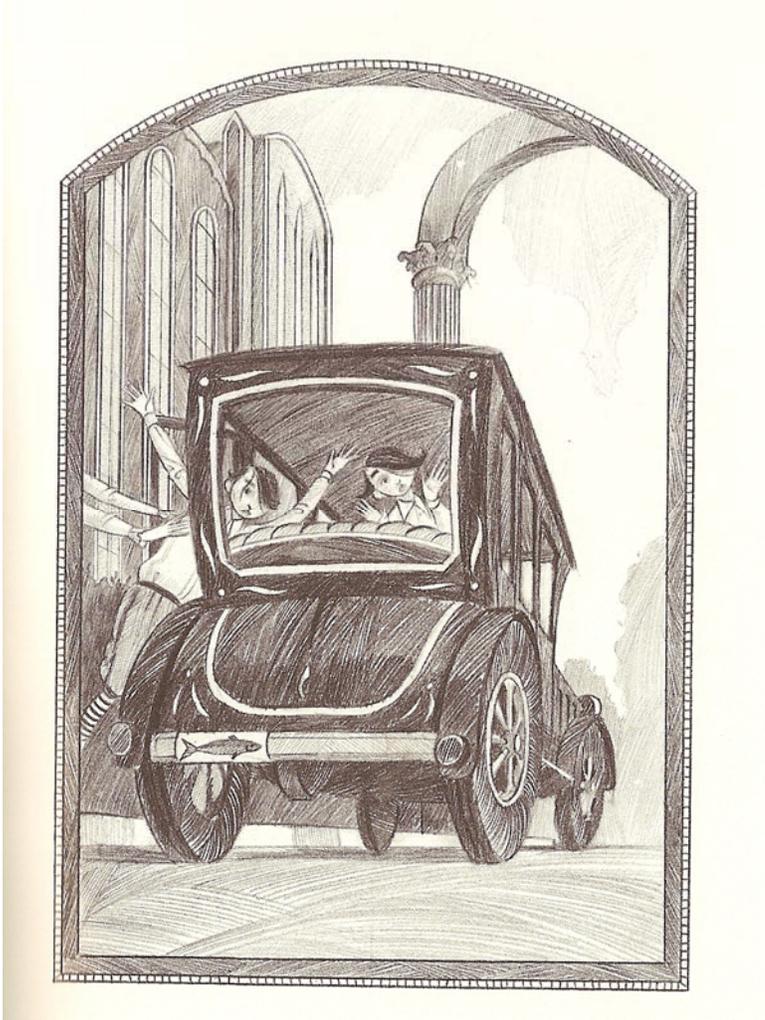


Figure 4-11 *The Austere Academy*, full page illustration, p.223

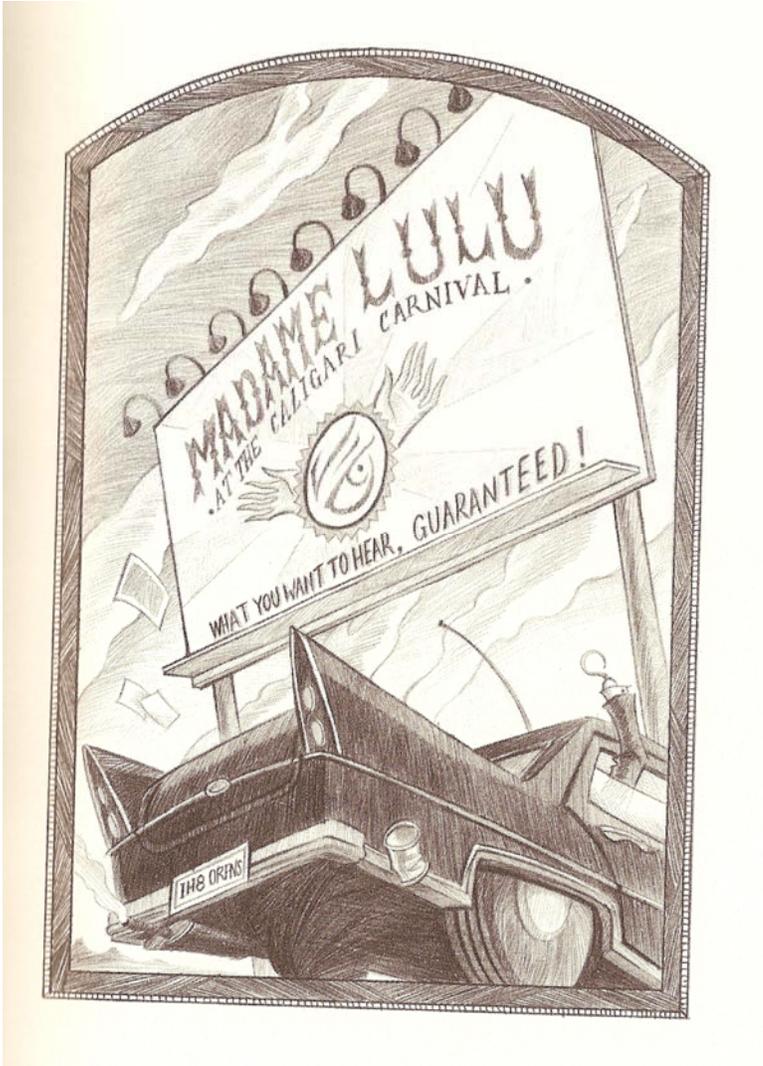


Figure 4-12 *The Carnivorous Carnival*, frontispiece

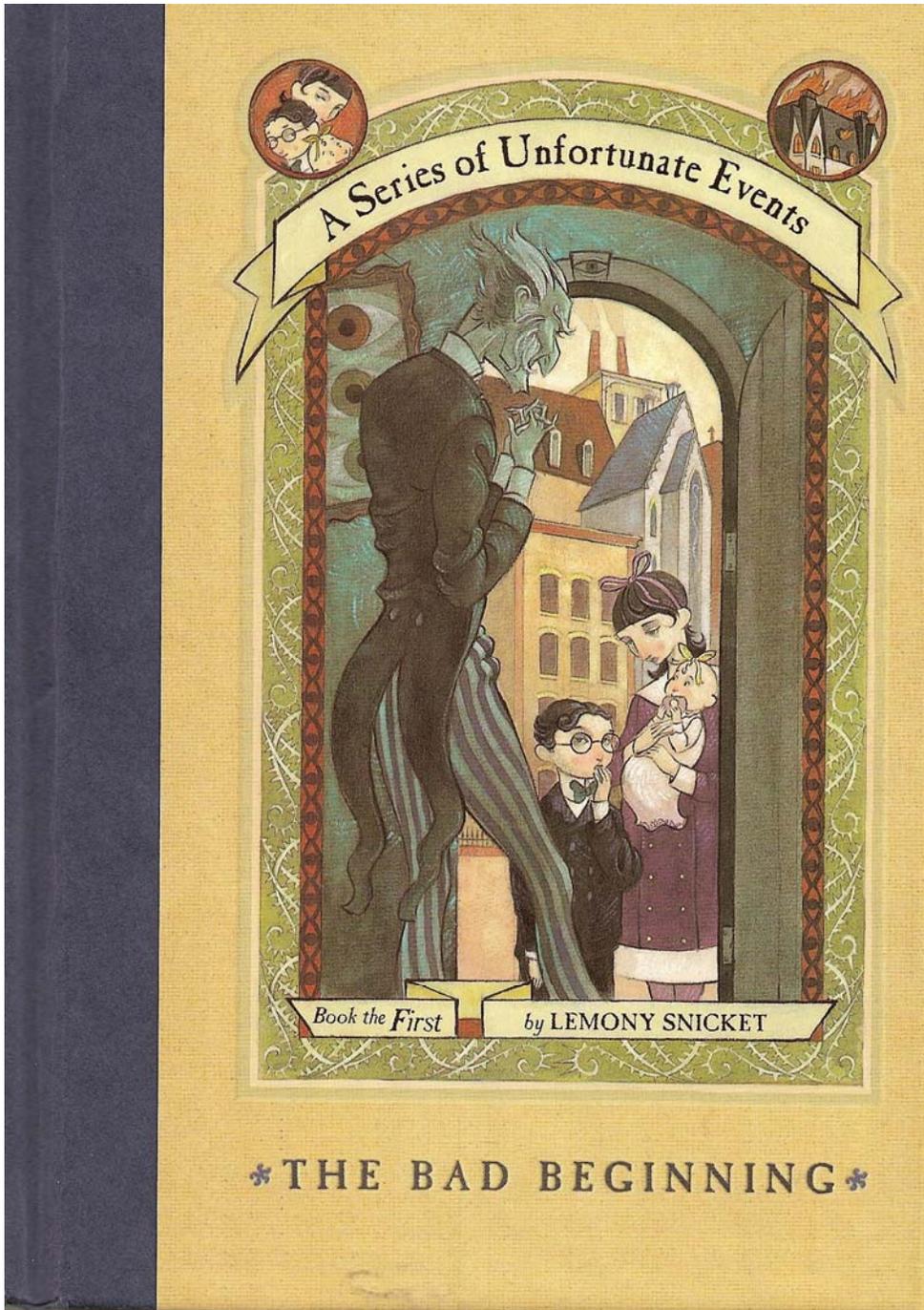


Figure 4-13 *The Bad Beginning*, cover illustration

APPENDIX
A SERIES OF UNFORTUNATE EVENTS INSTALLMENTS IN ORDER OF
PUBLICATION DATES

The Bad Beginning: Book the First. 1999.

The Reptile Room: Book the Second. 1999.

The Wide Window: Book the Third. 2000.

The Miserable Mill: Book the Fourth. 2000.

The Austere Academy: Book the Fifth. 2000.

The Ersatz Elevator: Book the Sixth. 2001.

The Vile Village: Book the Seventh. 2001.

The Hostile Hospital: Book the Eighth. 2001.

The Carnivorous Carnival: Book the Ninth. 2002.

The Slippery Slope: Book the Tenth. 2003.

The Grim Grotto: Book the Eleventh. 2004.

The Penultimate Peril: Book the Twelfth. 2005.

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lauren Turner earned her B.A. in art history with a minor in creative writing from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in May 2004.