ADVENTURES INTO OTHERNESS

MARIA LASSÉN-SEGER

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CHILD METAMORPHS IN LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

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Maria Lassén-Seger

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INTRODUCTION

Have you read the hilarious picturebook in which a young boy left at the dinner table to finish a healthy meal he finds repulsive decides to change into a series of monsters to spice things up a bit? Or the one in which a mother and father refuse to fulfil their daughter's wish and she works out a way to transform herself into the horse she wants? Maybe you have already shared the longing and the grief that turns a lonely girl orphan into a doll, or marvelled at the turn of events when immanent danger results in a hasty wish that changes a youngster into solid rock? Perhaps you have already shared the thoughts and feelings of distraught teenagers who find an irresistible appeal in the carefree life of a wild fox and a stray dog? If not, you are in for a treat.

In fantasy literature, protagonists travel in time and space to experience the past or the future, other worlds and other universes. But the fascination of literary metamorphosis is that it enacts an adventure that takes the protagonists, not necessarily out of this world, but out of their human bodies. What is it like to become someone or something else? The idea is both thrilling and threatening. And so are the stories that place human-other metamorphosis centre-stage. These stories take the fictive human self where it cannot go except in the imagination, whether it be into the body of a wild animal or into the deadening clasp of cold and lifeless rock.

Metamorphosis stories always negotiate what it is to be human. When protagonists become an *Other* through a radical physical transformation, they literally experience the essence of empathy – what it is like to put themselves in the place of another – as well as the anxiety of alienation as their minds are separated from their own human bodies. Displaced into the shape of someone or something else, they experience a radically new outlook on life. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* human metamorphosis becomes the stuff of heart-piercing beauty. When his protagonists merge with nature as trees, plants and animals, they are immortalised. Metamorphosis makes them truly belong somewhere in the natural world, yet at the price of losing their unified human selves.

As a student of literary metamorphosis, I am not surprised by mankind's long-lived fascination with this complex and slippery motif. To me, the attractions of metamorphosis are the attractions and the essence of story. Narratives in which human characters suddenly find themselves living the lives of stray dogs, caged birds or scaly dragons celebrate the power of imagination. The task of the author, as I see it, is to turn these supernatural events into plausible mental experiments that awaken wonder in readers and provoke them to probe beneath the surface of the story. The task of the scholar, in turn, is to explore the literal and symbolical readings that can open up these alluring and repelling supernatural events to further kinds of meaning.

I share previous scholars' fascination with the profoundly ambiguous nature of the motif, which in a children's literature context is especially associated with conflicting issues, such as the ultimate freedom from self or the ultimate loss of self, personal growth or regression. Authors who use this motif may interrogate identity or establish identity, and may affirm or subvert power relationships. They may preach or entertain, and may use the motif to liberate or entrap the fictive child. The central fascination of such stories is in the essentially human issues raised, rather than the ambiguous answers offered. In addition to which, the motif can inspire some truly gripping story-telling.

AIMS AND MATERIAL

The main driving force behind this thesis has been a search for a further understanding of our need to keep producing and reading tales of human metamorphosis. It explores a selection of late twentieth-century English-language literature for children and teenagers in which young protagonists metamorphose into animals, insects, monsters, plants, minerals or objects. My aims are to examine how children's writers of this period use the motif and what representations of children and teenagers they thereby offer.[1]

The metamorphic protagonists, as well as the intended audience, of the narratives examined are all non-adult, that is, children or teenagers who are under-age and therefore the focus of adult concerns to protect, enlighten and guide the young. The uses of child-other metamorphoses are closely tied up, I shall be suggesting, with the question of whether, as a result of the physical transformation, the young protagonist is *empowered* or *disempowered*. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, empowerment means to be made powerful or to gain power over, whereas disempowerment correspondingly stands for being deprived of power. These terms are not used here to signify power over others as simply physical strength or the ability to exercise control over others. Instead, empowerment refers to what Roberta Seelinger Trites (1997: 8; 2000: 5), a children's literature critic with feminist interests, defines as agency, subjectivity, positive forms of autonomy, self-expression, and self-awareness. In short: the scope children may have to carry out their own decisions without having to stifle their sense of self in order to fit (adult) hegemonic expectations of what a young person – male or female – ought to be like. For the purposes of my research, I can thus rephrase my key questions as follows: does the physical change entrap, silence or repress child characters in a manner that undercuts their individual agency and forces them into submission or regression? Or does the experience of otherness increase their agency and self-awareness in a manner that enhances the equality of children with adults, or subverts adult authority? In order to suggest

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1. In my general discussions I shall from now on use the terms "children" and "child metamorphs" to refer to both younger child (pre-adolescent) and teenage protagonists. Here I follow the decree of Article 1 in the 1989 United Nation's Convention on the Rights of the Child which states that "a child means every human being below the age of eighteen years". Available: http://www.ohchr.org/english/law/pdf/crc.pdf [19 September 2006]. However, in discussions where I refer specifically to younger child characters (approx. 1-11 years old) I shall use the term "pre-adolescent metamorphs". Correspondingly, in discussions where I specifically refer to older child characters (approx. 12-18 years old) I shall use the terms "teenage metamorphs" or "adolescent metamorphs".

answers to these questions, I will use narratological tools to explore narrative perspective, focalisation, voice and agency.

The empowerment or disempowerment of fictive children particularly interests me because it relates to what I see as the central issue for a poetics of literature for children and teenagers.[2] Such a poetics cannot be adequate in my view unless it deals not only with aesthetic questions but with pragmatic and ethical dimensions as well. My thinking here is very much along the lines of David Rudd (1992, 1999b, 2000, 2004a, 2004b) and Roberta Seelinger Trites (2000, 2002), who have presented fresh perspectives on children's fiction as a form of literature that stages ongoing negotiations of power between child and adult. This thesis is written in dialogue with that wider scholarly debate on the poetics of children's literature. Underpinning my argumentation is the view that literature "can function as a significant and democratic channel of human interactivity" (Sell, 2002: [1]) and that children's literature should not be regarded as either necessarily hegemonic or as a form of distorted communication between adult authors and young readers. In the 1980s and 1990s, children's literature scholars showed an increasing interest in what came to be known as "the dilemma" of children's literature (Wall, 1991): i.e. the fact that the vast majority of books for children are written by adults and thus inevitably reflect adult images of what children and childhood are like, or *ought* to be like. I do not deny that adult desires to educate, instruct and even control young readers are inevitably part of the history of children's literature. But I will strongly argue against essentialist assumptions about the nature of children's literature and childhood, in an attempt to show that children's literature criticism must also acknowledge that books for children and teenagers comprise a variety of genres and artistic intent, including even an ability to interrogate and subvert child/adult power structures.

Adult authors need to address both adult and child readers if their texts are to pass the adult "gatekeepers" who publish, review and buy the majority of children's books. But contrary to the views of the semiotician Zohar Shavit (1986, 1995) and, to some extent, the narratologist Barbara Wall (1991), I argue that this circumstance need not be regarded primarily as a problem or a dilemma. Instead, in accordance with Maria Nikolajeva's (1996) semiotic and narratological understanding of children's literature as a form of ritual or "canonical" art, the double-voicedness of children's fiction can be seen to contribute to a complex richness of codes in books for children. The potential duality of address, and the ongoing negotiation of power between adult and child that is featured in fiction for children, are what I have come to regard as two of the most fascinating topics in contemporary children's literature criticism.

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[2] From now on I shall be referring to both literature for children and teenagers with the umbrella term "children's literature" unless I mention otherwise. In cases where I speak in particular about literature addressed to a teenage audience, I shall be using the terms "teenage literature/novels/fiction". This usage is more established within a British context than the terms "young adult literature/novels/fiction" or "adolescent literature/novels/fiction", which are more frequent in American and Australian scholarly contexts.

Considering the continuous popularity and rich variety of the metamorphosis motif in children's literature, I have found it necessary to formulate a clear set of selection criteria. First of all, my study will deal only with texts where child protagonists transform into animals, plants, insects, minerals, objects or monsters. Metamorphosis must constitute a kernel event and not appear only in the form of a threat, as in Georgess McHargue's *Stoneflight* (1975) or David Elliott's *The Transmogrification of Roscoe Wizzle* (2001). A wide variety of other forms of metamorphosis have also been excluded from this study. Stories of gender transformation, as in Anne Fine's *Bill's New Frock* (1989) in which a young boy protagonist turns into a girl for just one day, are not covered,[3] for instance, and neither are stories where young protagonists undergo a partial change into inanimate objects, as in Gillian Cross's *Twin and Super-Twin* (1990), or sprout wings and start to fly, as in Beatrice Gormley's *Mail Order Wings* (1981) and Bill Brittain's *Wings* (1991). Stories where child characters change colour, turn into other people (usually in connection with a fantastic journey in time), acquire supernatural powers, become dazzlingly beautiful or hideously ugly, also fall outside the scope of this study.

Of all the metamorphoses imaginable, children's writers seem especially preoccupied with magical changes in physical size and age. Stories featuring child characters shrinking or growing include well-known children's classics such as Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and Florence Parry Heide's *The Shrinking of Treehorn* (1971), as well as more obscure tales such as Jeff Brown's *Flat Stanley* (1964), about a literally two-dimensional boy, who has been flattened by a billboard. Young protagonists grow instantly old in, for instance, Allen Say's *Stranger in the Mirror* (1995) and Diana Wynne Jones's *Howl's Moving Castle* (1986), whereas F. Anstey's *Vice Versa* (1881) and Mary Rodgers's *Freaky Friday* (1972) explore the comical possibilities of children exchanging bodies with a parent. In *The Big Baby* (1993), Anthony Browne explores the comical effects of an adult turning back into a child again. These fascinating variants of the metamorphosis motif are also firmly excluded from this study.

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[3] Whereas actual gender metamorphoses are rare, stories of gender transgression through cross-dressing is a frequent motif in teenage novels. The motif of cross-dressing has been studied from a gender and power perspective by Victoria Flanagan (2004, 2005) and Maria Österlund (2005).

Naturally, metamorphosis may also occur in the opposite direction. In the tradition of E. T. A. Hoffmann's "Nutcracker and the Mouse-King" (1816), animate matter coming to life is often associated with evil witchcraft or the horrific, as in Otfried Preussler's *The Satanic Mill* (1971) or Vivien Alcock's *The Stonewalkers* (1981). But this motif may also express a development from object into subject, as in Carlo Collodi's classic *The Adventures of Pinocchio: Tale of a Puppet* (1883) and Margery Williams Bianco's *The Velveteen Rabbit: Or, How Toys Become Real* (1922). The motif of toys coming to life is particularly well represented within children's literature and has been much studied (see Kuznets, 1994). Also quite common are stories about animals transforming into human beings, such as Mary James's *Shoebag* books (1990, 1996), S. E. Hinton's *The Puppy Sister* (1995), and Philip Pullman's *I Was a Rat!: …Or the Scarlet Slippers* (1999), all of which comically invert the traditional man-beast metamorphosis. The reversed forms of metamorphosis are not part of the texts explored in this study, though they, too, illustrate the richness of the motif.

Another of my selection criteria is that the main books examined are British, North American and Australian texts written for children and teenagers from 1950 up until the beginning of the twenty-first century. Because the motif was so prevalent towards the end of the twentieth century, I have included a greater number of texts from the 1980s and 1990s. But as a suggestion of the wider historical context of the narratives under study, I shall sometimes refer to influential texts written previous to the main time frame. Also, to emphasise my positionality as a Scandinavian scholar of Anglophone children's literature, I shall occasionally refer to non-English narratives.

Then again, I have excluded the large number of retellings, or direct reinterpretations, of myths and fairy tales featuring metamorphosis. For example, the numerous stories that, from the 1980s forwards, have been inspired by Selkie lore, such as Berlie Doherty's *Daughter of the Sea* (1996), fall outside my scope. Nor shall I examine the popular category of comic retellings of fairy tales of metamorphosis, such as Jon Scieszka and Steve Johnson's *The Frog Prince Continued* (1991). Instead, I concentrate on stories where magic or fantastic metamorphoses more overtly intervene in an everyday, realistic setting, usually referred to as "the primary world" within studies of fantasy, thereby causing the real to clash with the fantastic. In other words, I have excluded "high fantasy" stories – such as for example Ursula K. Le Guin's five *Earthsea* novels (1968-2001) and Lloyd Alexander's *The Arkadians* (1995) – which are set exclusively in secondary, mythic worlds where magic, as Tzvetan Todorov (1973) puts it, causes little or no hesitation. On the other hand, when *relevant* to the modern narratives studied here, metamorphosis in myth and fairy tales will obviously be taken into account.

When dealing with monster metamorphoses, another of my exclusions is horror fiction for children, including vampire and werewolf stories, for the simple reason that these narratives deserve a study of their own.[4]

On the other hand, I have not restricted my examples to texts regarded as literature of high quality. Given the special circumstances surrounding children's literature and its intended young audience, I have deemed it important to deal both with narratives which have received the stamp of adult approval, and with formula fiction which is mainly endorsed by its young target audience. I have included not only award-winning books and texts that have survived in bibliographies of children's literature, but also formula fiction and mass market literature.

---

[4] So far, Roderick McGillis (1995-96, 1997c) has analysed the best-selling author R.L. Stine's horror fiction series *Goosebumps* in light of the gothic, and has also addressed the cult of fear in literature for teenagers from an ethical point of view; Perry Nodelman (1997) has explored the success of the *Goosebumps* series and Kevin McCarron (2001) the success of the *Point Horror* series; Kimberley Reynolds (2000, 2001b) has investigated the vogue for frightening fiction at the turn of the previous century, exploring horror fiction in particular from the point of view of gender; John Stephens and Robyn McCallum (2001) have discussed horror chronotopes in Australian children's fiction; and Victoria de Rijke (2004) has mapped the history and the contemporary global market of the genre, as well as analysed its contents using a psychoanalytic approach. None of these studies, though, deal specifically with the role of metamorphosis in horror fiction for children.

This thesis covers different categories within the umbrella term children's literature, such as picturebooks and fiction for children and teenagers. Keeping the focus on the motif of child-other metamorphosis, such a mixture of texts is fruitful, as long as one takes into consideration the special nature of picturebooks as literary works constructed of interacting verbal and visual narratives. My main examples have been selected from a larger set of texts (see Appendixes 1 and 2 for a complete list) which includes older and newer texts, texts written by male and female authors, texts featuring male and female protagonists, texts aimed at older as well as younger audiences, and "quality" literature as well as mass market literature.

In order to be able to draw overarching conclusions about possible shifts and trends in the uses of metamorphosis in children's literature, I have worked with a large number of texts. This has its drawbacks, of which one is the presentational difficulty of keeping an acceptable balance between the generalisations to be made and the need to discuss texts in greater depth. In order to investigate the issues in a meaningful and coherent way, I have therefore selected some representative texts for more thorough discussion whilst other texts figure more briefly as examples for comparison. In this manner, I aim to support my more general conclusions mainly with readings of representative narratives. Moreover, my analyses will specially focus on how the motif of metamorphosis is actually used. That is, in order to keep the main argument of the thesis stringent, other motifs and issues raised in the books studied will be discussed only insofar as they relate to the motif of metamorphosis.

Another danger associated with the sheer range of books chosen may be that of overlooking the differences in cultural background of the texts studied. The discussion of the roles these books play within their respective national children's literatures will be subordinate to the overarching focus on the metamorphosis motif as such. When considered especially relevant, however, critical reviews of, as well as debates on, particular texts will be taken into consideration in order to acknowledge the specific cultural context in which texts have been produced and received.

Since the *uses* of metamorphosis – and what they may tell us about the representations of fictive children and childhood – are central to this thesis, I have chosen not to structure it according to what kind of shape the child characters change into. Neither have I wanted to exaggerate the potential age differences in the target audiences of picture-books and literature for children and teenagers by investigating them in separate chapters. Instead, my analyses will be conducted under three thematic headings that will allow me to answer the two central questions raised: How do children's authors employ the motif of child-other metamorphosis? And is the motif used to empower or disempower child metamorphs, or both?

These three thematic headings concern:

- **Wild and uncivilised child metamorphs**

  Part 2 of the thesis begins with a chapter investigating girls' and boys' coming-of-age stories in which animal metamorphosis plays a decisive role for protagonists who grow out of childhood and adolescence into adulthood. The other two chapters in Part 2 explore involuntary transformations into monsters and objects in relation to unpleasure, power, and images of childhood.

- **Innocent, playful, and rebellious child metamorphs**

  Part 3 explores representations of child metamorphs in narratives featuring pleasurable metamorphoses. Its first chapter investigates metamorphic pleasure and power by discussing the notion of empowerment and by contrasting child and adult metamorphs. Its second and third chapters employ play theory and carnival theory to suggest a deeper understanding of self-chosen and joyful incidents of child-other metamorphosis.

- **Victimised and lost child metamorphs**

  Part 4 begins with a chapter on stories in which metamorphosis constitutes a means of refuge from harm. Its second chapter discusses the increase in narratives of irreversible metamorphoses towards the end of the twentieth century. Both chapters relate metamorphosis to ambivalent images of abused and futureless children.

CHILDREN, ADULTS, AND POWER

Apart from being a study of the motif of metamorphosis, this thesis aims to explore representations of the child and will therefore participate in the ongoing discussion of how the child in fiction for children is constructed as "the Other" – potentially an Other that is colonised by adults. Since the individual experience of growing up in a community is likely to be one of the central topics negotiated within children's literature, one might well expect stories involving metamorphosis to have particular relevance here, not least because adults often associate childhood with flux and change. The children's author Natalie Babbitt (1988: 588), for one, claims that "[t]he very nature of childhood is metamorphic". Babbitt's view of childhood may be expressed in a poetic manner, but still it suggests, in my view, a problematically essentialist concept of childhood, in that it pins down the "nature of the child" as an easily knowable series of developmental stages. From an adult perspective, childhood is often supposed to be a transitory stage involving physical as well as mental change, on the road to a more fully developed adolescence and a later adulthood. But as the constructivist psychologists Rex and Wendy Stainton Rogers (1998) argue, the naive view of childhood as a natural sequence of metamorphoses ignores the fact that childhood is not only a biological process but also a historico-cultural product.

Inspired by such social constructionist views both in the psychological and sociological study of childhood and cultural studies, several students of childhood and children's literature – such as Jacqueline Rose (1984), James Kincaid (1992), Perry Nodelman (1992), Kimberley Reynolds (1994) and Karín Lesnik-Oberstein (1994) – have greatly sharpened our awareness of the constructedness of the adult image of the child. The main impact of the social constructionist paradigm that these scholars apply may be understood in the words of Barry Goldson (2001: 35) as posing "a fundamental challenge to 'natural' and/or 'universalistic' conceptualizations of childhood". In other words, their approach has enabled oppositions between adulthood and childhood to be deconstructed in order to expose and possibly challenge existing power relationships.

In any overview of social constructionism in children's literature criticism, the place to start is Jacqueline Rose's *The Case of Peter Pan: Or,* *the Impossibility of Children's Fiction* (1984). Rose's study is *the* groundbreaking study of the socially, culturally and historically constructed image of the child in children's literature, even if the French historian Philippe Ariès had already laid the groundwork in his highly influential *Centuries of Childhood* (1962).[5] The main purpose of Rose's book is to raise our awareness of the ideological charge in Western notions of children and childhood. She voices a sharp critique of writers who ascribe to children a kind of innocence that ultimately separates them from adults and turns them into objects of adult desire.[6]

Rose's thesis gave a new impetus to the old debate on the poetics of children's literature. Her invaluable contribution to children's literature criticism has been to raise awareness of the prevailing "adult fantasy of the child". Such a "cult of childhood" still suffuses the way we perceive childhood and adulthood, and explains our urge to keep these two categories separated from each other. In other words, Rose has taken the innocence out of children's literature critics by making it painfully clear that children's fiction can no longer be regarded merely as a passive reflection of any given society's changing values and conceptions of childhood. On the contrary, she argues that children's fiction is one of the main modes for generating such cultural concepts.

The plasticity of the image of childhood emphasised by Rose is further explored in many important later studies of childhood and children's literature. For James Kincaid (1992: 5), the notion of "the child" is frankly a concept which "changes to fit different situations and different needs". For Kimberley Reynolds (1994: 3-4), the myth of childhood, which evolved in Victorian society under the influence of Romanticism, rests on "an exaggerated and unrealistic sense of difference between adult and child, which most of us experience as a sense of crisis and discontinuity in adolescence, when the difference needs to be traversed".

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[5] Ariès's claim that a concept of childhood did not exist in medieval society has indeed been questioned by many later students of childhood and children's literature. For my present purposes, however, it suffices to note that there are competing histories of children's literature and that historians after Ariès have convincingly provided evidence for the existence of a children's culture, including texts for children, from ancient and medieval times onwards. Ariès's claim that a medieval *concept* of childhood did not exist is therefore no longer tenable, but the issue of whether that concept has remained the same over time is still a much debated issue. See for example Colin Heywood (2001) and Nicholas Orme (2001) on the history of childhood; and Gillian Adams (2004) and Margaret Evans (2004) on the history of texts for children before the eighteenth century.

[6] A similar critique of the binary opposition between childhood innocence and adult experience has later been reinforced by the historian and critic Marina Warner (1994a) and the sociologist Chris Jenks (1996).

But the idea of the child as a socially constructed non-adult has also inspired scholars to draw rather exaggerated conclusions about the coercive powers of children's literature. For Rose's deconstruction of childhood innocence leads her to aim a potentially fatal blow at the very foundations of children's literature. The opening statement of her book has become almost a classic quotation among children's literature critics:

> Children's fiction is impossible, not in the sense that it cannot be written (that would be nonsense), but in that it hangs on an impossibility, one of which it rarely ventures to speak. This is the impossible relation between adult and child. Children's fiction is clearly about that relation, but it has the remarkable characteristic of being about something which it hardly ever talks of. (Rose, [1984] 1994: 1)

Here Rose presents the power relations between adult and child in fiction for children as an impossible dilemma. Gradually, other children's literature critics were to follow suit and develop her radical standpoint further.

One of them is Perry Nodelman (1992), who raises the question of power inherent in the child/adult dichotomy by expanding upon the connection with colonialism already raised in Rose's study. Nodelman adds more fuel to this discussion by drawing a parallel between the way children are rendered voiceless in Western society and the "Orientalism" described by Edward Said ([1978] 1995: 3) as "a Western style for dominating, restructuring, and having authority over the Orient". Obviously, children can only be perceived as colonised in a metaphorical sense and any attempt at drawing direct literal parallels between children/adults and colonials/imperialists will inevitably show, as Victor J. Ramraj (2000) does, that the analogy is somewhat strained. "[T]he actual colony, unlike the *colony* of childhood, has literal oppressive military forces, literal political prisoners; and the actual colony does not literally grow out of its colonial state as does the child who, on reaching the age of majority, is no longer a colonized figure but now takes his or her turn at being an adult-imperialist", Ramraj (2000: 263-264) argues. Without any such reservations, however, Nodelman adopts Said's concept of the Other and argues that, through children's literature, adults assign otherness to children in order to be able to control the field of representation. By marginalising the child as powerless, adults define themselves as powerful, and children's literature in his view becomes a means of dominating children, and of imposing on them adult assumptions about what "a child" is or *ought* to be. Along with Rose, Nodelman (1992: 30) suggests that adults "write books for children to provide them with values and with images of themselves *we* approve of or feel comfortable with".[7]

Initially not referring to Nodelman, Karín Lesnik-Oberstein (1994, 1998, 2004) also takes off from Jacqueline Rose's notion of the socially constructed image of the child, but adds her own special angle to the discussion by concentrating on the way the child is referred to in children's literature *criticism*. Lesnik-Oberstein (1994: 175) points out many revealing fallacies in arbitrary generalisations about "the child" in children's literature criticism prior to the 1990s, but undermines her own argumentation when she reduces the central aim of children's literature criticism to finding "the good book for the child, the book which will elicit from the child a response – above all, an emotional response which will allow it to embrace certain values and ideas spontaneously and voluntarily".[8] Responding to this supposedly central concern of children's literature criticism, Lesnik-Oberstein (1994: 8) draws on Rose in order to claim that critics of children's literature "usually display an urgency of belief, asserted as knowledge, which is intricately involved with the need within Western society to capture, define, control, and release and protect the 'child'". In her view, children's literature is thus inherently connected with a didactic purpose and its critics are all followers of a faith in the redemptive role of art.

Taking this approach to children's literature criticism, Lesnik-Oberstein boldly argues that critics who try to adopt a literary point of view on children's literature are bound to fail. The efforts of such

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[7] Joseph L. Zornado (2001) takes similar ideas to an extreme form in his study of Western child-rearing practices, where he reduces children's literature to a tool for transferring adult ideologies of dominance, violence and consumerism onto a powerless victimised child audience.

[8] In her later work, too, Lesnik-Oberstein (2004: 5) claims that the goal of children's literature criticism today is still to know how to choose the right book for the child.

"pluralists" (as she chooses to label them, in contrast to "educationalists") to leave the real child reader behind and concentrate on the text cannot be successful, she argues, since children's literature cannot be assessed without saying something about the way it appeals to child readers: "[c]hildren's literature criticism is about saying: 'I know what children like to read/are able to read/should read/, *because I know what children are like*'" (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994: 2). As a solution to this problem, Lesnik-Oberstein's early works suggest that psychoanalysis and psychoanalytic psychotherapy may provide critics with more suitable approaches, though she never fully explains how this new critical approach would work in practice.

But what if speculating about what children themselves like or dislike about the books written for them, which is what Lesnik-Oberstein assume critics must do, is *not* the main goal of children's literature criticism? Various scholars have shown that within the academic study of children's literature it is possible to acknowledge the socialising, pedagogical, and ideological dimensions of children's books and their literary dimensions *simultaneously*.

The Danish and German children's literature scholars Torben Weinreich (2000) and Hans-Heino Ewers (2001), for example, both stress that scholarly distinctions between pedagogy and art are still artificial and over-exaggerated. Behind the generalising misconception that literature for children is inherently more didactic than literature written for an adult audience lies a confusion as to what constitutes literary communication, pedagogy and didacticism. According to Weinreich (2000: 123), children's literature is

> a type of literature which has clear communicative features [...] because the narratees, in other words the children, to a much greater degree than is the case in any other literature, are embedded in the author's creative process itself. The child as reader is a requirement of children's literature.

Weinreich (2000: 123) laments, however, that "it is these very communicative features which for some disqualify children's literature, or at least most of it, from being art"; and the term typically used to describe the communicative features is "pedagogical". Consequently, if one regards the pedagogical or educational aspects of children's literature as part of authors' communicative desire to inform or influence their intended readers, one need not perceive fiction for children as *either* pedagogy *or* art. It can be a mixture of both.

Neither is it fruitful, in my view, to over-emphasise the communicative aspects of children's literature, as if adult literature were somehow *less* communicational, as Weinreich to some extent implies. The wider theoretical framework developed by Roger D. Sell (2000, 2001, 2002) suggests that *all* literature may be envisioned as a form of communication since it originates in an author's wish to interact with his/her reading audience. This is not to say, of course, that children's literature is completely free from overt didacticism. But to use Sell's terminology, there is a difference between undistorted and coercive communication. Whereas undistorted communication implies that the author and the reader will respect each other's autonomy, an author whose communication is distorted does attempt to exercise a greater force of persuasion over the reader. Both types of communicative acts are, of course, perfectly possible, quite regardless of whether the written text is aimed at an audience of children or adults. But by adopting some such fully communicational view of literature one can see more clearly that the idea that books for children are substantially more domineering than literature written and published for adults is nothing but a well-established myth.[9]

Since the 1980s, the ever-increasing interest in the power relations and power imbalance between adults and children has resulted in many crucial insights for the study of children's literature. Yet the scholars who address these issues often base their polemical conclusions on ideas of children's literature which are outright reductive. This is certainly the case with Lesnik-Oberstein and her narrow thesis about finding the good book for the child, and perhaps even more so with Joseph L. Zornado (2001), who even more blatantly ignores the diversity of children's literature, in his attempt to prove that *all* children's literature reflects the childhood traumas of adult authors. This leads me to conclude that the idea of adults constructing and marginalising the child as the Other can be pushed too far. An increased awareness of the child as a socio-historically constructed non-adult should not be allowed to legitimate essentialist reductions of children's literature.[10]

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[9] This communicational stance may also be used to interrogate the reductive implications of Zohar Shavit's (1986, 1995) notion that the historical development of children's literature may be expressed with a static model that would supposedly apply to all systems of children's literature world-wide because of its strong connection to educational doctrines.

During the last decade of the twentieth century, several children's literature scholars began to offer some much-needed sophistication on the notion of the "othering" of the child. Roderick McGillis (1997a: 7, 1997b), despite his conviction that children – often brutally silenced by adults – "remain the most colonialized persons on the globe", draws attention to the philosopher and psychoanalyst Julia Kristeva's broader concept of social and cultural otherness. Kristeva (1991: 191) maintains that otherness is not simply the opposite of the self, but in a sense a part of the self: the "foreigner is within us. And when we flee from or struggle against the foreigner, we are fighting our unconscious". Collapsing the binary structure of self/other in this manner, McGillis argues that the gap between adults and children can be bridged, precisely through story-telling and fiction. In his view,

> we do not need to wipe out Otherness in order to experience Oneness because we have a constant reminder of the possibility of Oneness through our experience of story. Our experience of story is both communal and personal. (McGillis, 1997b: 218)

McGillis, then, regards children's literature as a possible mediator between adult and child. Perhaps stating the obvious, he confirms that all literature is in a sense heuristic: "to construct a character is to make an imaginative leap into the possibility of other lives. […] Literature is not life. In short, each attempt at story is an attempt to understand what it is like to be an 'Other'" (McGillis, 1997b: 220).

McGillis's idea of children's fiction as mediating between children and adults shows that the ideological or socialising aspects of children's literature, including the social construction of children, can be taken seriously without reducing children's literature to a mere means of adult control over children. What McGillis provides us with is a much-welcome way to reassert the possibility for agency on the part of child readers. He helps us to see that when critics such as Rose, Nodelman, Lesnik-Oberstein and Zornado assume that a child is completely unable to resist adult indoctrination through the books s/he reads, they are being unduly pessimistic.

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[10] Such a reduction occurs for example when Peter Hunt (1991: 191), drawing a parallel to feminist criticism, suggests that adult critics need develop a criticism, which would "involve a total re-reading of texts from the 'childist' point of view", meaning that "we have to challenge all our assumptions, question every reaction, and ask what reading as a child actually means, given the complexities of the cultural interaction". How we should go about acquiring such a skill is never clearly explained, which leads me to wonder whether Hunt in fact commits the very error he tries to avoid. His suggested strategy does, in fact, rest on the essentialist assumption that there is some clear, detectable way of reading as *a child*, thus once more robbing the child audience of its complexity and individuality. Consequently, Hunt's suggestion has not won much ground within children's literature criticism of the 1990s. What started out as an intriguing idea in theory seems to have stranded on its own practical impossibility.

Whereas McGillis's suggests that the radically social-constructivist critics lack a faith in *child readers*, the Swedish literary scholar Boel Westin (1997) points out that their lack of faith in child readers is accompanied by a fear of *fiction*, something which is also typical of much earlier children's literature criticism. The bottom line in Westin's argument is that when scholars push the idea of adult writers colonising the fictional child as the Other too far, they reduce children's literature to a means of identification for child readers. By doing so, they let their deep mistrust of child readers' abilities to grasp the difference between fact and fiction result in a similar reluctance to view children's literature as fictional and hence as open to various possible ways of reading. Radical constructivists also reveal a lack of faith in authors' abilities to depict anything of which they currently have no direct experience. Grown-up authors, who in fact were once children themselves, are viewed as incapable of creating plausible child characters and tenable representations of childhood. If that were the case and the relations between author, text and reader were to be this rigidly fixed, Westin provocatively suggests, women authors could not write about men, or men authors about women. In short, we are back in the narrow-minded frame of mind generated by identity politics.

McGillis's and Westin's approaches are part of a growing tendency among children's literature critics to qualify the reductive view of children's books as mere pawns in a game of power between adults and children. For a poetics of children's literature that would take into consideration not only power, but also the purely literary potential of children's literature, and its ability to be subversive about child/adult power structures, the perspectives of David Rudd (1992, 1999b, 2000, 2004a, 2004b) and Roberta Seelinger Trites (2000, 2002) seem to me especially fresh and rewarding. By using the concept of hybridity (first introduced by the Russian philosopher Mikhail Bakhtin and the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha) Rudd highlights the complexity of children's literature as a mixture of instructional and subversive impulses, where notions of adulthood and childhood are not seen as static phenomena, but undergo constant negotiation. Rudd (2000: 11) adopts a discourse approach to children's literature, arguing that texts should be viewed as, in a Foucauldian sense, discourses, or force-fields that comprise not only the text itself but also its context and readership.[11]

Also relevant to the discussion of child/adult power relationships is Foucault's claim that power is both repressive and productive. Foucault (1980: 98) argues that individuals are always in the position of simultaneously undergoing and exercising power.

> If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it doesn't only weigh on us as a force that says no, but that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse. It needs to be considered as a productive network which runs through the whole social body, much more than as a negative instance whose function is repression. (Foucault, 1980: 119)

The Foucauldian notion of power[12] is invoked by Rudd (2000: 11, 2004a: 31), not in order to reinforce confrontational identity politics, but – on the contrary – to emphasise that all discourses embody power and a set of social relations. Therefore, Rudd concludes, culturally sensitive notions of the construct*ed* child and its literature should not lose sight of the notion of construct*ive* children's individual responses to whatever texts they may read (Rudd, 2004a). Reading is never a monologic process (but a dialogic one) and texts written by adults for children cannot be simplistically construed as direct means of repression and oppression.

Rudd brings together many of the previous criticisms directed at Rose and her followers. Like McGillis and Westin, he criticises Rose for granting too much power to the text and far too little to child readers. In his view, "the child's construction, and child/adult relations in general, are a lot less stable than is often admitted, and are often themselves the subject of children's literature" (Rudd, 1999b: n. pag.). Like Ewers and Weinreich, Rudd looks upon instruction and amusement in children's literature as far more intermingled than has been suggested by those critics who focus too narrowly on the "othering" of the child in children's literature. Since the child/adult power relationships expressed in children's literature are not as static as Rose and her advocates claim them to be, Rudd suggests – like McGillis – that fiction for children should be placed within a postcolonial, rather than a colonial, discourse. That would allow us to explore the tensions between adults and children – the coloniser and the colonised – that are forever present in the space created between them:

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[11] The term discourse is used here chiefly in a Foucauldian sense to link ways of speaking about topics to sites of power (Rudd, 2000: 11).

[12] For deeper insight into Foucault's view of the mechanisms of power see his *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (1980).

> Children's literature, then, can never be defined in essentialist terms, but only pragmatically, as an inveterately contested site, for the simple reason that this is what it is about: constructing and contesting a space, over which adults and children will forever be playing. (Rudd, 1999b: n. pag.)

Roberta Seelinger Trites (2000) has taken a similar interest in the discourse of power in fiction for teenagers. Teenage fiction is usually defined as narratives about the individual growth and maturation of adolescent protagonists. Trites broadens this definition by uncovering the wider dynamics of power and repression present in these books. In teenage fiction, Trites (2000: 3) argues, "protagonists must learn about the social forces that have made them what they are". Also drawing on the Foucauldian notion of the duality of power, she regards teenage fiction as specifically characterised by power struggles between individuals and social institutions such as government politics, school, religion, and identity politics (that is, race, gender and class), as well as by the negotiation of power between teenagers and parents, who always tend to be overtly or covertly present in the narratives.

In exploring the motif of metamorphosis, I shall be in dialogue with this ongoing discussion of power relations in children's literature, and of the relevance of this to a children's literature poetics. My aim is to assume a mediating role between those critics who advocate a social-constructionist view of the fictive child, and those who defend a broader view of the qualities of children's literature and who refuse to perceive children's books as inherently didactic and deterministically coercive. It seems fruitless to exaggerate the differences between literature written for children and adults by stating that the former is inherently more communicative than the latter. Yet in a study of books written for a young audience, issues concerning power relationships, ideology and the images of fictive children and teenagers are to my mind of the utmost relevance. Contrary to Rose and her followers, I do not regard the dual audience of children's books, nor the ongoing negotiations of power between child and adult, as a "dilemma" or an "impossibility", but as a fascinating and essential part of the poetics of children's literature.

I do readily grant that child/adult power relationships inevitably enter into any discourse concerned with children and childhood. Ideological issues related to how authors address the young target audience indisputably raise questions about how the image of the child is constructed in the text. But that this need not express a one-sided domination of adults over children is shown, in my view, by the latest applications within children's literature criticism of both Foucault's theory of power and of post-colonial theory. With the support of Trites's and Rudd's nuanced ways of interpreting power relationships, I shall argue that children's literature comprises a variety of genres and artistic ambitions, and that narratives for children and teenagers may actually question child/adult power relationships. To me, this seems a far more fruitful option than to suppose that children's fiction and its criticism are so entangled in their own misconceptions that they merely render themselves impossible.

LITERARY METAMORPHOSIS

Literature as a societal phenomenon involves writers, books, and readers, and any literary study has to position itself as to how this three-fold entity will be addressed. The present study will approach the narratives investigated from a textual perspective, using narratological tools to examine not only *what* is told (= the *story*), but also *how* stories of metamorphosis are told (= the *discourse*) and how this may affect our interpretation of them (cf. Chatman, 1978). Studying voice, perspective, and narrative patterns (especially endings) may help uncover ideological elements in the representations of child metamorphs. But literary texts will also be regarded here as open to the readers' interpretations, and not as author-expressive or reader-affective in some rigidly single manner. In other words, how stories are told, and how readers may interpret them, will be treated with equal interest.

Having said this, I would also like to clarify that this is not a text-centred study of a strictly formalistic or deconstructive kind. I do not assume that a work of literature is an aesthetic heterocosm, or that there is nothing beyond the text. Children's literature critics of the past have already used such one-sided approaches in an attempt to legitimate children's books as *literature* in its own right, and also to legitimate children's literature as a subject of academic study. My own approach is more in the spirit of present-day children's literature criticism, where it is becoming increasingly important to take into consideration the relations between literary texts and their context in time and place, and their relations with other texts (intertexts),[13] their authors and their readers. Theories that address internal and external aspects of the literary texts will, in my analyses, be combined, the aim being to produce interpretations that are enriching and nuanced. My choice of such an eclectic approach has also been motivated by a wish to reflect the central argument underpinning this study: that any reader – young or old – should be regarded as capable of responding to literary texts subjectively and interrogatively.

TERMINOLOGY

Literary metamorphoses cannot be defined by any simple set of rules. They may vary in duration from being temporary to permanent; they may be self-chosen or imposed from outside; and they can happen for an obvious reason or for no apparent reason at all. Terminological explanations will be provided throughout the thesis, but in order to avoid confusion the central terms "metamorphosis", "transformation" and "shapeshifting" need to be clarified at the start.

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[13] Inspired by Bakhtin's view of the dialogism of language and literature, Julia Kristeva coined the term intertextuality in the late 1960s. Essentially, the term signifies that no text is unique in itself, but "any text is constructed as a mosaic of quotations; any text is the absorption and transformation of another. [...P]oetic language is read as at least *double*" (Kristeva, 1986: 37). Also, the concept of intertextuality stresses that every text is informed by other texts the reader has read, and by the reader's own cultural context.

Etymologically, metamorphosis "derives from the Greek *meta*, signifying both a change and the state of being among, with or after, and *morphe*, signifying a form" (Mikkonen, 1997: 1-2). A direct translation from the Greek would simply be "change of shape", but according to *The Encyclopedia of Fantasy* (Clute and Grant, 1997: 641) metamorphosis in English "has always implied *radical* change – from one kind of being to another", mostly involving magic. The presence of change and magic is also quintessential to my understanding of metamorphosis and I therefore draw on a definition formulated by Leonard Barkan (1986: 19), who is a student of Renaissance art and literature, and who regards metamorphosis in the Ovidian tradition as a "magical alteration of physical form from one species to another […] designed to capture the imagination through shock and wonderment".

Unlike theorists who make a distinction between transformation and metamorphosis, perceiving the former term as implying an external agent of change (cf. Clute and Grant, 1997), I use the two terms interchangeably. This decision has been prompted mainly for stylistic reasons, but also because such a distinction seems to me too vague for any practical purposes. Consequently, both "metamorphosis" and "transformation" will be used to signify both voluntary and involuntary magical changes of shape, self-induced changes and changes imposed by external agents, single and multiple, as well as reversible and irreversible changes of shape.

A third term, shapeshifting, will also be used, but with some reservations. Reversibility and repeatability are commonly regarded as key characteristics of shapeshifting in contrast to metamorphosis, which tends to be more "radical, unique and permanent" (Clute and Grant, 1997: 858). Although my use of the term shapeshifting will only refer to changes of shape that are voluntary, self-induced, multiple, and reversible, the term metamorphosis will not refer only to permanent alterations of shape. On the contrary, I have found it crucial for my discussion of the metamorphosis motif to include stories of reversible, as well as irreversible, metamorphoses, especially since towards the end of the twentieth century there was a boom of narratives featuring irreversible child-other transformations.

Finally, I should perhaps point out that although most of the narratives explored will feature a physical change of the child character's own body, some stories depict the process as an *exchange* of bodies (typically with an animal). I have chosen to define these magical incidents as metamorphoses, too, since they feature a process wherein the child's sense of self remains intact despite the alteration in bodily form. Even more importantly, stories where child characters exchange bodies raise the same sort of issues as other metamorphosis narratives, quite irrespective of the manner in which the passage from Self to Other is brought about technically.

EARLIER SCHOLARSHIP

The study of metamorphosis – understood as a process of change from one form to another – has occupied scholars within such diverse disciplines as mythology, folkloristics, literature, art, philosophy, popular culture, journalism, religion, psychology, anthropology, biology, and geology. Since this is a literary study, I shall engage first and foremost with research conducted within the human sciences.

Several scholarly works have been written on literary metamorphosis but – apart from those dealing with Lewis Carroll's classic *Alice* books – these studies are generally not concerned with texts written for children or teenagers. Within children's literature criticism, the motif of metamorphosis is explicitly studied in only a handful of articles (Wilner, 1990; Thompson, 1993; Easun, 1994; Scott, 1996-97; Coward, 1999; Bradford, 2001; Harris, 2003; Warner, 2005), and there is as yet no book-length study.[14] Lois Rostow Kuznets's *When Toys Come Alive: Narratives of Animation, Metamorphosis, and Development* (1994) is the work that comes closest to addressing the topic in depth, and has been one of my most important sources of inspiration. But since her work is primarily occupied with narratives that feature transformations from the inanimate into the animate, it naturally leaves many issues concerning human-other metamorphosis unexplored.

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[14] At the time of writing this thesis, there is to my knowledge another forthcoming doctoral thesis on the motif of metamorphosis. Shelley Chappell, who is a doctoral student at MacQuarie University, Australia, is working on a study of the metamorphosis motif in fiction for children and teenagers as a metaphor for childhood otherness and the adolescence process. Chappell's work does not overlap with this study, since it specifically aims to cover types of transformations excluded from this study, such as werewolf and selkie stories, and narratives where children and young people grow wings.

Among literary scholars who study metamorphosis in general there is a keen fascination with the motif. For Leonard Barkan (1986: 17), who applies an interdisciplinary approach to metamorphosis in Western art and literature from classical times (Ovid), through the Middle Ages (Dante) to the Renaissance (Spenser, Shakespeare), the motif remains something of "a question mark, an experience outside the realm of real life that has nonetheless persistently captured the human imagination". The Finnish literary critic Kai Mikkonen (1997: 2-3) explains the power of the motif as located in its affinity with the "big" questions in life:

> metamorphosis addresses the process of ageing, changes in the body and language, identity and sexuality, birth and death. How the person may be (figuratively) threatened or born again as well as the relationship between culture and what we understand as its other (nature, the transcendent) are issues also approached through metamorphosis.

In this thesis I intend to show that such "big" questions in life are also raised within narratives featuring child-other metamorphosis.

Towards the end of the twentieth century, there was an increasing number of studies on literary metamorphosis (Massey, 1976; Skulsky, 1981; Díaz, 1988; Clarke, 1995; Mikkonen, 1996, 1997; Ivory, 2000; Asker, 2001; Bynum, 2001; Warner, 2002; Dente et al., 2005).[15] Evidence of a much wider public fascination with the motif is to be found in the huge success of Ted Hughes's best-selling *Tales from Ovid* (1997), and blockbuster animations for children such as *Help, I'm a Fish* (2000), Disney's *The Emperor's New Groove* (2000) and *Bear Brother*

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[15] Of these studies, D.B.D. Asker's work on human-animal metamorphosis and *Proteus: The Language of Metamorphosis*, edited by Carla Dente et al., approach the subject of literary metamorphosis very broadly. Asker includes in his study, not only stories where there is an actual change of form, but also narratives where authors attribute human-like consciousness to animals and thereby blur the distinction between species. Dente's *Proteus*, in turn, includes essays specifically on the motif of metamorphosis as well as essays where the term metamorphosis refers to general changes and lines of development in literature. The broad use of metamorphosis undertaken in both of these studies are problematic and illustrate how, if used too generally, the term can be made to signify everything and nothing in particular.

(2003), as well as DreamWorks's *Shrek* (2001) and *Shrek 2* (2004).[16] Although scholars have their own agenda for studying metamorphosis, most of them tend to waver between remaining true to the diversity of the motif and trying to unveil some underlying patterns. The two most central concerns of recent theorising are, first, to discuss whether literary metamorphosis should be understood as metaphor, metonymy, allegory or trope; and, secondly, to investigate the nature of the metamorphic subject – the "metamorph" – to use the term suggested by Irving Massey (1976).

Summing up the recent theorisation of literary metamorphosis, Kai Mikkonen (1996) presents a tropological account that to my mind covers the motif's most significant aspects. First, he acknowledges the paradoxical nature of metamorphosis as a metaphor; it fuses two opposing signs (self/other), and thereby challenges the figurative status of metaphor by literalising it. Secondly, he notes that the metamorphic subject is characterised by a sense of process or continuum as in metonymy, since the two forms involved in the process of metamorphosis are connected not by language, but by body. Thirdly, he points out that metamorphosis typically thematises and problematises the relationship between sign and its point of reference, since the supernatural and dual character of the literary metamorph resists easy categorisation. The paradox, then, is that metamorphosis denotes both sameness and change, following both a metaphoric and a metonymic logic:

> On the one hand, metamorphosis combines signs together into a new sign and creates a sense of contiguity and/or displacement. On the other hand, metamorphosis also functions like a metaphor as it substitutes or replaces one thing with another. (Mikkonen, 1996: 318)

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[16] *Meta-Morphing: Visual Transformation and the Culture of Quick-Change* (2000) edited by Vivian Sobchack – which is a collection of essays dealing with computer graphic "morphing" in various media such as film, television, music videos and advertising – also presents metamorphosis in Western culture at the end of the nineteenth century as a leading trope. Morphing fascinates us, the contributors to this volume argue, because it expresses contemporary confusions, fears, and desires, and challenges our notions of boundaries, space, time, and identity.

Mikkonen further acknowledges that literary metamorphosis raises questions about selfhood and subjectivity.[17] These questions are essentially concerned with why, how, and to whom fantastic transformations occur. The very same questions provide the background for the present study, which, instead of formulating any new theory of literary metamorphosis, will draw on previous studies of the motif whenever they are relevant for a children's literature context.

Most students of literary metamorphosis observe that metamorphs rarely transform completely into the Other. A human point of view, or human consciousness, must remain, in order for the author to be able to account for the *experience* of metamorphosis. Nancy Gray Díaz (1988: 5), in her study of literary metamorphosis in twentieth-century Latin American fiction, points out that "[a] metamorphosis in which the consciousness passes out of existence must be a metaphor of death". For the child metamorphs under study in this thesis, human consciousness is extremely seldom entirely wiped out. The human psyche may be affected on a sliding scale from the complete preservation of the human psyche for Roald Dahl's mouse-child in *The Witches* (1983), through a dulling of the senses for William Steig's petrified young protagonist in *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* (1969), to occasional lapses into animal consciousness as in Melvin Burgess's *Lady: My Life As a Bitch* (2001).

Allowing the metamorph to retain at least a minimum of human consciousness is a necessary literary convention of metamorphosis stories, but may also be explained in terms of our ontological understanding of change. The historian and medievalist Caroline Walker Bynum (2001: 20) notes that unless there is some connection between what was and what comes after, we see no change but merely two things.[18] In other words, a metamorphic change from human shape into something Other is not simply a replacement-change, but a continuum-change where the original and newly acquired shapes oppose and define each other.

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[17] The fractured image of identity and subjectivity implied by narratives of human-other metamorphoses has been studied by Harold Skulsky (1981), Nancy Gray Díaz (1988), James Maurice Ivory (2000), Caroline Walker Bynum (2001), Marina Warner (2002) and Carla Dente et al. (2005).

[18] I do not, however, adopt the distinction that Bynum (2001: 28-33) makes between hybridity and metamorphosis, since the young metamorphs studied here are typically depicted as hybrids struggling with their sense of self/other duality.

The dual nature of literary metamorphs may also be defined in terms of the socially transgressive. Much of their slippery and haunting impact on readers can be related to that of other transgressively grotesque characters, such as monsters and aliens, who have the potential to subvert and threaten cultural categories such as the nature/culture or wilderness/civilisation distinctions made between the animal and the human, and the life/death distinction made between animate and inanimate matter. Metamorphic bodies are, like the bodies of monsters and aliens, products of their time and culture, and thus ideologically charged (cf. Clarke, 1995: 53; Maule, 1996: 119). In this study I shall be suggesting that the same applies to the image of *young* metamorphs.

MYTH, FAIRY TALES, AND FANTASY

Although direct retellings of myths and fairy tales are beyond my present scope, the historical tradition of the metamorphosis motif and its development cannot be ignored, for the simple reason that every narrative of metamorphosis bears some intertextual relation to previous stories in the past.[19] Moreover, children's literature, myth, and fairy tales arguably share a past history. Since the "childhood" of the human species was also understood to be the era of myth and legend, these types of narratives were early on considered to be especially appropriate reading for the young (Warner, [1994a] 1995a: 50). Children's literature scholars readily admit that the narrative pattern of myth and fairy tale has always had a strong influence on fiction for children.[20] In the interests of a fuller historical understanding of the motif of metamorphosis, my own general stance *vis-à-vis* the historical connection between myths, fairy tales and children's literature perhaps calls for further explanation. More detailed discussions of the influence of myth and fairy tales on my materials will be provided as and when relevant.

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[19] Kai Mikkonen (1996) suggests that literary metamorphosis can be read as a trope for intertextuality in the sense that the motif functions as a figure for combinations and interrelationships between texts.

[20] See for example Maria Nikolajeva (2000a) and John Stephens and Robyn McCallum (1998).

Owing to a certain proliferation of terminology in the study of myth and fairy tale, certain terms need to be clarified from the beginning. In this study, the term "myth" is used to signify a narrative tending to construct, order and explain the structure of the world and human or societal values. Originally, myth is understood to have been connected to religious ritual, in which it played the role of a "sacred history" that was once believed to have really happened (Eliade, 1963). However, since myths will here be dealt with from a literary point of view, my argumentation will be influenced by the perspectives of literary and classical scholars such as Northrop Frye (1963), Roland Barthes (1972), Leonard Barkan (1986), and P. M. C. Forbes Irving (1990), who argue that the impact of ancient myths need not be confined to ritual. Frye traces myth as narrative patterns in Western literature. Barthes historicises myth as "truths" created by language within social contexts that are ideologically charged. Barkan explores the poetics of metamorphosis in terms of influence of Ovid's pagan myths on Western art and literature. Forbes Irving pursues Greek myths of metamorphosis purely for their imaginative appeal as stories.

Defining the term fairy tale is a slightly more complex matter, since terminology varies and overlaps from discipline to discipline. Whereas some scholars separate fairy tales from folk tales and wonder tales – one of the main issues under negotiation being whether the tale is of oral or literary origin – the present study will use only the general term "fairy tale", covering as it does tales including magic, wonder, and supernatural transformations in exclusively literary versions. Moreover, since the key texts under study are contemporary children's literature and not fairy tales as such, I will not engage in the debate on authenticity, but simply take for granted the validity of the fairy tale versions found in critical editions. For present purposes, it is enough to acknowledge that the fairy tale versions to be discussed, although literary, draw heavily on oral tradition.

As to *interpreting* fairy tales and myths, I have chosen a multifaceted approach, that takes into consideration structural, formalist, historical, psychological and ideological issues. I do not see these narratives merely as expressions of universally collective archetypes. Instead, I draw on scholars who investigate myth and fairy tales in terms of ideology and gender, though without losing sight of the fact that they are formulaic tales which should not be *over*interpreted. Such scholars include Jack Zipes (1983, 1994), Ruth B. Bottigheimer (1987), Maria Tatar (1987, 1992), Marina Warner (1994b, 1998), and John Stephens and Robyn McCallum (1998).

Another critical position that I take *vis-à-vis* fairy tales is to question their status as reading matter exclusively intended for children. Traditional oral folktales were never meant for children's ears exclusively and early fairy tales published for children, for instance those collected by the Grimm Brothers, were not "the pure voice of the folk", but successively adapted versions purged of unsuitable subject matter in accordance with prevailing didactic aspirations (cf. Bottigheimer, 1987; Tatar, 1987; Zipes, 1983, 1994, 2000a; Warner, 1994b).[21] The establishment of a separate book publishing for children is in any case a fairly late phenomenon that did not occur in Western society until the eighteenth century (cf. Ariès, 1962; Evans, 2004).[22] So while there has always been a close relationship between fairy tales and reading matter for children, this must be treated with caution. Unlike the folklorist Joyce Thomas (1989), who ignores such historical matters, and who – like the German Romantics of the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – claims that fairy tales appeal particularly to primitive human beings and children, I subscribe to Roger Sale's (1978: 31) argument that "[f]airy tales are no more 'for' children than they are 'not for' children".

Since the literary motif of metamorphosis implies a breaking of the laws of nature and thus belongs to the realm of the fantastic, I also need to position myself towards the study of the literary fantastic and to map the influences from myth and fairy tales on contemporary fantasy fiction.[23] Like Rosemary Jackson (1981: 20), I regard the fantastic as a literary mode that is not predominantly escapist, but as one which is never free from its social context: "[f]antasy re-combines and inverts the real, but it does not escape it". I assume that the texts to be explored are symptomatic of prevailing ideas about children and childhood, and may be read as covering the entire range from the Freudian concept of the uncanny to Todorov's and Jackson's taxonomies of the marvellous and the purely fantastic (which is seen as a mixture of the marvellous and the mimetic). William Steig's *Solomon the Rusty Nail* (1985), for example, illustrates the Todorovian notion of the marvellous, where metamorphic otherness is a supernatural event that causes little or no hesitation. The boy-doll metamorphosis in Ian McEwan's *The Daydreamer* (1994) illustrates the concept of the uncanny, since the fantastic transformation may be given a natural explanation as a projection of the fantasies and desires of the metamorph's subjective perception. Finally, Jackson's understanding of pure fantasy as inverted reality, unexplained and non-significant, may be exemplified by David McKee's *Not Now, Bernard* (1980). Eric S. Rabkin's (1976) rather diffusely theoretical approach to the literary fantastic has also been helpful, for the simple reason that he is one of the few scholars who investigate the less anxiety-ridden forms of the literary fantastic. Rabkin's approach responds particularly well to comic, pleasurable and playful texts, such as Babette Cole's *Winni Allfours* (1993).

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[21] Despite this, the Grimm fairy tales will be a significant point of comparison in this thesis, since they hold, as John Stephens and Robyn McCallum (1998: 202) note, a virtually uncontested status in Anglophone popular culture.

[22] Literary fairy tales for children begin with the publication of Charles Perrault's *Histoires ou contes du temps passé*, or *Contes de ma Mère l'Oye* in 1697 (Warner, [1994b] 1995b: xii). Yet Jack Zipes (1994, 2000a) points out that Perrault's tales were never originally intended for a child audience. A more plausible source of origin for fairy tales *for children* would instead be the chapbooks that began to be broadly distributed among children around the 1720s and 1730s. Later, when the publishing of children's books began to flourish in eighteenth century France, England and Germany, fairy tales quickly became a popular genre.

In a children's literature context, however, Jackson's value-laden and *exclusive* distinction between marvellous/transcendental/romance narratives – such as fairy tales and secondary world fantasy – and modern pure fantasy which signifies nothing and does not look for redemption, meaning or closure, is open to question. More fruitful is Maria Nikolajeva's (1988) notion of the chronotope of the fantastic; it offers a more *inclusive* and more nuanced perspective on the fantastic in children's fiction, which can encompass both fantastic otherworlds of the Narnia kind, and magical incidents intruding into an otherwise realistic setting of the kind developed by Edith Nesbit.[24] Traditionally, these two variants of fantasy tales have been referred to as "high fantasy" and "low fantasy"/"domestic fantasy". But in order to avoid such a value-laden and rigidly two-fold categorisation, Nikolajeva introduces a three-fold distinction between closed, open, and implied secondary worlds. The metamorphoses I explore are mostly staged within the third category, that is, within an otherwise mimetic setting. Metamorphosis might thus be understood as a "fantaseme", a term introduced by Nikolajeva (1988: 113) in order to pin down the "narrative devices used to introduce magic surroundings, events, figures, objects and their interaction". Fantasemes, including metamorphosis, as I hope to show, constitute the essence of fantasy. They bring about a displacement of character – through magic or other non-rational means – which causes the supernatural to mix with the rational. In literary metamorphosis we find what Brian Atterby (1980: 3-4) considers to be a crucial feature of fantasy: a sense of wonder generated when the impossible seems familiar and the familiar seems new and strange.

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[23] Underpinning my study is a view of the literary fantastic influenced by the works of Sigmund Freud (1953), Tzvetan Todorov (1973), Eric S. Rabkin (1976), and Rosemary Jackson (1981). For a particular perspective on the fantastic in children's literature, scholars such as J.R.R. Tolkien (1964), Brian Atterby (1980), Ying Toijer-Nilsson (1981), Ann Swinfen (1984), and Maria Nikolajeva (1988) have been consulted.

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[24] See the Danish children's literature critic Anna Karlskov Skyggebjerg (2005: 21-73) for a thorough discussion of the theorising of the literary fantastic in relation to the study of children's literature.

WILD AND UNCIVILISED CHILD METAMORPHS

In this part of the thesis I first take a closer look at the historical background to animal imagery in contemporary stories of child-animal metamorphosis and, in particular, in coming-of-age stories in which authors use child-animal metamorphoses to express the imaginary initiation of adolescent protagonists. I then move on to examine narratives in which authors portray the metamorphosis into a monster or an inanimate object as profoundly unpleasurable for the child. My central aim is to explore to what extent such narratives mirror and affirm stereotypes regarding social roles and gender constructions (such as the myth of the wild/uncivilised child and the myth of sexual difference). Are these stories always coercive, that is, permeated by an adult desire to guide child metamorphs to conform to prescribed expectations of gender and social conduct? Or do authors employ initiatory and unpleasurable metamorphoses for other communicative purposes, and possibly subversive ones?

ANIMAL IMAGERY IN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE

Animal imagery has been used for centuries within Western society to connote the instinctual and the uncivilised in contrast to the rational and the civilised. It is hardly surprising, then, that human-animal transformations are by far the most common form of child-other metamorphosis within children's literature. These narratives tend to explore the nature/culture split by presenting animal otherness as a state that the fictive child must either conquer or embrace.[25]

Anglo-Saxon children's literature reflects the ambivalent status of the nature/culture split of animal imagery. On the one hand, there is a long and rich tradition of authors who use animal imagery for metaphorical purposes in a non-pejorative sense.[26] Kenneth Grahame's Mole, Rat, Toad and Badger, Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit and E. B. White's Stuart Little are some of the many unforgettable anthropomorphic characters of classical children's novels.[27] These hybrid forms of talking animals tend to trouble rather than reinforce binary distinctions between human and animal, adult and child (cf. Flynn, 2004; Cosslett, 2006). Also, they present animality as a positive alternative to the harsh technological reality of the modern world and thereby express a desire for a more equal relationship between men and animals (cf. Blount, 1974; Kuznets, 1994). Similarly, many of the human-animal metamorphosis stories under study in this thesis conflate a romantic reverence for nature with influences of twentieth-century ecological politics. As Ying Toijer-Nilsson (1981: 176-179) has noted, one of the general trends in children's fantasy from the 1980s onwards has been cultural criticism, the enhancement of environmental awareness and a celebration of liberating fantasy over materialism. David Almond's *Secret Heart* (2001), for example, radically celebrates the feral child. In this story, Joe Maloney is a feared and scorned outsider boy. Although he has no way with words, Joe possesses secret powers of imagination and vision, and he prefers roaming in the wilderness to adopting the narrow-minded, harshly materialistic life-style of his local community, Helmouth. Being able to cross the boundary between the real and the imaginary, Joe's mission is to undergo an animal metamorphosis that brings to life an ancient tiger symbolising "dream, imagination, [and] truth" (Almond, [2001] 2002: 156).[28] In a society where people have no regard for spirituality and have forgotten how to live in harmony with their natural surroundings, Joe's metamorphosis represents a redemptive triumph of the powers of imagination over reason.

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[25] Human/animal relations have continued to be negotiated throughout Western history. The culture/nature split is visible in the way that man and animal were for a long time regarded as parties in a subject/object relationship where mankind invariably holds the rights of dominion over the animal world (cf. Thomas, 1983; Noske, 1997). A severe blow to the idea of the superiority and uniqueness of man came with the evolutionary theories under discussion in the eighteenth century, culminating in the nineteenth century in Charles Darwin's theories on mankind's biological evolution from animals (cf. Beer, 1983; Norris, 1985).

[26] Aesop's ancient Greek fables were the starting point for this tradition. Already in fifteenth century England the fables were known in translation to children and adults alike through the publications of William Caxton. When the publishing of a literature especially for children gradually emerged in the eighteenth century, the continuing popularity of the fables owed a lot to John Locke, who recommended fables as appropriate reading for children in his influential *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693) (cf. Blount, 1974; Townsend, 1990).

[27] For a detailed overview of the Anglo-Saxon tradition of animal stories see Simon Flynn (2004).

But throughout Western history a less positive tendency can also be traced, which perceives animality as instinctual and non-rational,[29] and which then associates the realm of childhood with pejorative images of animality.[30] This myth of the animal child, as I shall call it, is still visible in cultural representations of the child. Today, the picturebook market is flooded with mediocre stories featuring anthropomorphic characters. There seems to be a widespread assumption that any story with animals in it will automatically interest a child audience. Perry Nodelman (1996: 151) suggests that this phenomenon relates to the way "we tend to think of 'kids' as basically animal-like savages who must be taught how to act like civilized humans". We know that most children's books are written and published *by* adults *for* children, and thus it would seem logical to assume that the great number of animal characters in books for children primarily reflects an *adult* preoccupation that child and animal are interchangeable.

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[28] Like the innocent "natural" child of Wordsworth's romantic poem "The Idiot Boy" (1798), Almond's Joe is characterised by spirituality rather than reason.

[29] Mankind has shown a certain predilection for mirroring itself in animal images and the metaphorical uses that animal representations are put to often reflect the power imbalance in human/animal relations. In a critical study of animal imagery in Western culture, Steve Baker (1993) expands upon the negative role that representations of animals predominantly play in politics, entertainment, art and literature. To sum up his main argument, animal imagery is often used pejoratively to marginalise someone as ruled by instinct and emotion, rather than by reason. In *Madness and Civilisation* (1967) Michel Foucault argues for a similar analogy between animality, madness, uncivilised behaviour and marginalisation in Western society from the Renaissance onwards. Foucault shows that children and other repressed groups in society have suffered the fate of being marginalised through an association with nature and animality and, therefore, considered ruled by instinct and emotion, not reason.

[30] The stereotype of the uncivilised and irrational child holds its mirror image in an equally stereotypical image of the civilised and rational adult. Early evidence of an essentialising view of the child as innately animalistic is given by Aristotle in his *History of Animals* where he claims that "psychologically a child hardly differs for the time being from an animal" (in Berger, 1980: 9). Much later, Bruno Bettelheim, in his orthodox Freudian readings of fairy tales in *The Uses of Enchantment* (1976), developed Piaget's theories about the prelogical and animistic thinking of children, thus reinforcing the myth of a universal and essential bond between child and animal. For a critique of Bettelheim's speculative view of universal childhood animism, his a-historical and unscientific treatment of fairy tales, and his prejudiced view of the child as incomplete and at a lower stage of human development, see for example Mary Douglas (1966), Jack Zipes (1979), Maria Tatar (1992), Steve Baker (1993), Lois Rostow Kuznets (1994) and Simon Flynn (2004).

While Nodelman makes an important point here, this way of reasoning can be taken too far, thus reducing *all* children's literature to a mere vehicle for adult domination of children. Animal imagery may also be used for aesthetically creative and socially subversive purposes, which address child and adult readers as equals. A concrete example of such a children's book would be Quentin Blake's picturebook *Zagazoo* (1998), where animal transformation is used as a trope for a family life comedy. The child Zagazoo's development is depicted from the point of view of his parents in a series of transformations into uncontrollable animals (a screaming vulture, a small clumsy elephant, a messy warthog, a bad-tempered dragon, a wailing bat, and a monstrous hairy creature) until the day when Zagazoo miraculously changes into a young man with perfect manners. Beneath the seemingly non-significant comic use of animal imagery in Blake's picturebook, we see the nature of the wild and uncivilised child contrasted with adult, rational behaviour (see picture 1).[31] But Blake has yet another comical twist in store for his readers. When Zagazoo's parents grow old they, in turn, change into a pair of large brown pelicans. In this manner Blake uses the ambivalence of human/animal relations as a satirical comment on the marginalised status of both the young and the elderly. "Normality", domestication and civilisation characterise the rational adults of this story, whereas the inexplicable oddity of children and old people appears in the comical disguise of animalhood.

Anthony Browne is another picturebook-maker who uses zoomorphism and anthropomorphism very self-consciously. In an analysis of Browne's *Voices in the Park* (1998), Jane Doonan (1999: 48) shows that he employs these techniques to emphasise the gap between fantasy and reality. Depicting his main characters as monkeys and gorillas, Browne signals to his audience that the story can be interpreted symbolically, which, in turn, may distance younger, as well as older, readers/viewers from the potentially painful human issues raised in the book.[32]

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[31] This and all pictures referred to henceforth are available in the inset.

The way children's literature critics understand literary images of the child has recently been considerably affected by the social-constructivist paradigm.[33] The greater awareness of the plasticity of the image of the child reflected in books for children emerged in the mid 1980s in the wake of Jaqcueline Rose's seminal work on Peter Pan and the alleged impossibility of children's fiction. Yet the tendency to overlook and neutralise the nature/culture split between irrational children and rational adults is not merely a thing of the past. An established critic of children's literature such as Alison Lurie ([1990] 1998: ix, 96) may still be caught uncritically referring to children as a "partly savage tribe" or as "inarticulate, instinctive small creatures, with simple animal needs and pleasures".

If one were persuaded by Lurie's marginalising view of children and childhood, it would indeed be tempting to over-emphasise (and over-simplify) the impact of the marginal and powerless status of the child in Western society on the literature produced for children. Karín Lesnik-Oberstein clearly yields to this temptation. Drawing on Foucault's interpretation of the role of insanity within society to argue that childhood, too, "functions as an exponent of the 'non-adult' and 'non-reason'", she sketches a scenario in which children's literature criticism is part of the ongoing adult dominance over the voiceless child in culture and history (Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994: 26). In her radically constructivist stance Lesnik-Oberstein overlooks, as I see it, a crucial point made by the historian Carolyn Steedman (1995: 97): that a historical account of childhood needs to acknowledge "that children were *both* the repositories of adults' desires (or a text, to be 'written' and 'rewritten', to use a newer language), *and* social beings, who lived in social worlds and networks of social and economic relationships, as well as in the adult imagination". In other words, no study of childhood should reduce its object of study (i.e. children) to a metaphorical state that exists only in the minds of adults and holds no connection to children as real social beings.

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[32] In his essay on animal stories Simon Flynn (2004: 420) makes a strong case for the dual appeal of animal stories in that they encourage a combination of distancing and empathy.

[33] See the chapter "Children, adults, and power" in the introduction.

In her later work, Lesnik-Oberstein (2004) asserts once more that, in her view, there are no concepts of child or childhood beyond the ones set up by adult discourse. So the approaches of recent children's literature critics (especially McGillis and Rudd) who wish to avoid identity politics and over-simplification by interrogating the notion that everything is construction are not to her taste. But a radical constructivist stance of the kind Lesnik-Oberstein favours ignores, to my mind, the fact that adult concepts of the child have throughout history been of a complex and continuously fluctuating nature. Contemporary adult images of the child and childhood consist, more than ever, of a conglomerate of different ideas that are still discussed and debated today (cf. Heywood, 2001). Lois Rostow Kuznets's (1994: 35) sums up the history of the notion of childhood as follows:

> first the concept of the child as tainted by original sin was challenged by the eighteenth-century Lockean view of the child as a blank slate on which environment could make its mark; then that was challenged by the early nineteenth-century Romantic view of the child as naturally marvelously imaginative, if not totally innocent and pure; then that was challenged by the later nineteenth-, early twentieth-century Freudian revelations about the marvelously impure nature of the child's 'polymorphously perverse' imagination. The modern or postmodern concept of the child on which adult guardians, liberal and conservative, operate today probably partakes of an odd, fluctuating amalgam of all these perceptions.

Kuznets's exposé goes to prove that the concept of the child is under constant negotiation. The child/animal connection in children's literature must therefore be seen as part of that conglomerate of ideas and discussed as such. This is the task that the Australian children's critic Heather Scutter (1999: 225) sets herself, when she notes that children and animals are lumped together as if there were a natural affinity, and that this reflects "a conflation of puritan and romantic discourses at work: on the one hand, children are seen to be wild animals in need of taming, domestication and confinement and, on the other, children are seen to belong, with animals, to a gentle and uncorrupted natural world". Put roughly, the myth of the animal child relates to two opposing discourses of childhood that have dominated Western perceptions of the child for centuries: the image of the "innocent and wholesome child" and the image of the "wicked and sinful child" (Stainton Rogers, 2001: 29).

In practice, the two discourses of course entail radically different ways in which children should be raised and treated. The first discourse is based on an idealisation of childhood that originates in Neo-Platonism, which was later reinforced by the ideas of Rousseau and the Romantics, who developed a notion of the innocently natural child not yet corrupted by adulthood. It is difficult to exaggerate the impact that the Romantic poets – especially Blake's *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* and Wordsworth's Ode on "Intimations of Immortality from Recollections of Early Childhood" – have had in forming and spreading the adult idea of childhood innocence as a temporary and impermanent state associated with loss (cf. Coveney, 1967; Steedman, 1995; Thacker and Webb, 2002; Natov, 2003). The second discourse originates in Augustinian, and later Puritan, views of the child as tainted with sin. Contrary to the literary critic Peter Coveney's (1967: 291-292) optimistic view that after Freud's "objective assessment of the nature of the child" we know what the real child is like and need not resort to the false myths of innocence and sin, Carolyn Steedman (1995) and Chris Jenks (1996) argue that psychoanalysis did in fact add new fuel to the discourse of the wild and uncivilised child. In *The Ego and the Id* (1923) Freud developed a model of the unconscious that explicitly characterises the socially conscious ego as the realm of the *adult* and the id – that is the repository of desires that have to be repressed if people are to live in relation to each other – as the realm of the *child*.

These polarised stereotypes of childhood have lately been frequently commented on and criticised. Marina Warner (1994a) playfully refers to this split image of the child as an alteration between "little angels" and "little monsters". Chris Jenks (1996) labels the same phenomenon the Apollonian and the Dionysian child, the literary critic Ellen Pifer (2000) talks about dolls versus demons, and Kimberley Reynolds (2001a) refers to the two dominant discourses as the demonised and the idealised child. Some scholars express deep concern about the manner in which these extreme views of childhood may marginalise children in society and reduce them to mere targets for our (adult) hopes for the future or, alternatively, our worst fears and nightmares. In the chapters that follow, I shall explore how the split image of the demonised and the idealised child is reflected and negotiated in contemporary stories of child-animal metamorphosis.

DIONYSIAN/APOLLONIAN CHILDREN IN COMING-OF-AGE STORIES

In order to see how the extremist Dionysian and Apollonian discourses on childhood still surface in contemporary stories of child-animal metamorphosis, we can turn to two American writers. Janet S. Anderson's *Going Through the Gate* (1997) and Gregory J. Holch's *The Things With Wings* (1998) are paradigmatic examples. As it happens, both novels illustrate the vague border between fiction for children and teenagers since they cannot be easily placed in either category but seem to waver in between, as do their young protagonists, who find themselves in the early stages of their adolescent process. But be that as it may, both Anderson and Holch use animal metamorphosis as a narrative device for staging the separation-initiation-return plot pattern, which is typical of stories of a pre-adolescent child's initiation into adolescence and later adulthood.

Since stories about children undergoing metamorphosis so centrally focus on the element of "change", they often invite interpretations in terms of the young protagonist's maturation. Critics have for a long time maintained that the motif of self-discovery and maturation is peculiarly central to teenage fiction. However, it is also generally acknowledged that the motif of maturation is essential to all fiction created for a young audience. Maria Nikolajeva (2000a: [1]), for one, argues that children's literature as such can be regarded as "mythic" or nonmimetic, that is, as "a symbolic depiction of a maturation process (initiation, rite of passage)". She finds evidence for this in the basic narrative pattern that books for children share with myth and fairy tales: the circular home-away-home plot, which corresponds with the narrative stages of what the myth critic Joseph Campbell in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces* (1949) refers to as the heroic monomyth of separation, initiation and return (Nikolajeva, 2002: 28).

Stories of initiation answer a need to structure and explore in words the human condition and human development, and the use of literary metamorphosis as a means of depicting a rite of passage – whether it is in myths, fairy tales or contemporary children's fiction – can be understood as a strictly symbolical procedure. This does not mean, however, that the narratives in question bear no relevance to the world in which they are created by actual authors and read by real readers. As Robyn McCallum (1999: 256) points out in her study of ideologies of identity in teenage fiction, to recognise the constructedness of fictional metaphors is not to "discount the power such fictions and ideologies have in fashioning identities and in shaping the ways in which we relate to the world". McCallum regards the concepts of personal identity and selfhood in Bakhtinian terms as formed in dialogue with others, through language and within society. Thus she makes a strong case for discussing these very issues in relation to children's literature, which so often focuses on the personal growth and maturation of its young protagonists.

Anderson's *Going Through the Gate* tells the story of a class of sixth-graders who are about to partake in the local graduation ceremony called "going through the gate". The ritual is foreshadowed as involving a radical change in life described as a "special private once-in-a-lifetime graduation" (Anderson, 1997: 7), and the purpose of the ritual is clearly initiatory: the ones who experience it will leave childhood behind and enter the adult community. In conjunction with Miss Clough, their teacher/mentor, who instigates the ritual, the children each choose an animal, visit the "magical" place of transformation, and undergo a temporary change into "their" animal. If their time in animal shape is successful, they return to their human selves, to become full-fledged members of their community. The girl Becky, for instance, attains a heroic status at the end, when she becomes Miss Clough's successor and so assumes the role of a leader in the society into which she has now been initiated.

The initiatory process of monomyth involves a trial such as a descent into the under-world, or a symbolical meeting with death. In Anderson's book the phrase "going through the gate" is also used as a euphemism for the taking of one's own life (Anderson, 1997: 105). The use of animal metamorphosis as a form of symbolic death is most explicit in the portrayal of Mary Margaret, who is a deeply troubled girl about to fail her rite of passage by trying to remain in her chosen shape of a swallow. "I did want to die", she declares afterwards. "I didn't know. But that's what I wanted, the most terrible sin there is" (Anderson, 1997: 124). The explicitly communal nature of the child characters' rite of passage is reinforced when her classmates join forces in order to persuade Mary Margaret to return to life as a human.

In the rural society Anderson portrays, there is pervasive longing for a closer relation between man and nature. Having experienced being animals themselves, those who graduate gain a new empathy that stops them from exploiting animals for their own benefit: "What if every time [a cat] grabbed a mouse and shook it and tortured it, you could *feel* it [...]? That's what graduation does. Because once you are a bird or a mouse or a snake or a spider, even for a minute, then you know" (Anderson, 1997: 64).[34] Animal metamorphosis is thus the crucial experience behind a utopian vision of a closely-knit community where mankind's feelings of isolation and lack of purpose in life are redeemed by a return to nature. A liberal humanist message also permeates the story: through a temporary union with your animal other you may attain a sense of "true self". The transcendental near-ecstatic experience of the metamorphic ritual holds out the promise that you may learn who you really are. As a bird, the girl Becky feels "absolutely real, absolutely right, just as she was at this very moment" (Anderson, 1997: 91). As a frog, the boy Eddy experiences that"[a]ll that sensation, all that feeling, *fit*. [...] He didn't have to fight it anymore or be afraid of it. And he never would have to again" (Anderson, 1997: 92).

Yet the child characters' process of self-discovery is also a heavy-handed lesson in how to conform to social mores. When choosing your animal other, you need adult guidance. Miss Clough has made it a rule "never [to] let students have their first choice. It's too dangerous. [...] [Y]our first choice is what you really want to be. You want it too much" (Anderson, 1997: 106-107). The disastrous effects of any relaxation of adult control is exemplified in the case of Mary Margaret's symbolic suicide, and also in the tale Miss Clough tells of Mr. Heinman, a former student of hers who was granted his first foolish wish to become a crow:

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[34] Anderson uses metamorphosis as a "reversal strategy" here, by which means she invites her implied child readers to imagine themselves along with her child protagonists as defenceless and vulnerable animals. Such a strategy has its origins already in eighteenth-century animal autobiographies, which repeatedly depict cruelty towards animals from an animal point-of-view and thus voice an ethical plea for greater empathy towards animals (cf. Cosslett, 2006). Anderson's decision to let her child protagonists internalise the animal perspective themselves by undergoing literal animal transformations is merely a more explicit form of the Victorian, didactic reversal strategy.

> "It's always dangerous if you don't believe in graduation. Too much of you stays human, not just the little bit that lets most of us experience what we experience and then lets us come back and remember it. And if you couple not believing with hating what it is you've chosen..." [...]
>
> "Peter Heinman's bad luck was that it did happen, and that he got in with a flock of crows. They attacked him immediately and mauled him so badly that he spent most of the summer in the hospital, recovering. But the one thing he never recovered was the use of his right eye. They'd pecked it out." (Anderson, 1997: 84)

The reported incidents show that – in accordance with the discourse of the Dionysian child – liberation through animal transformation is only possible through the repression of desire and a limitation of choice. The children cannot be trusted to mature successfully without strict adult guidance.[35] When left to their own devices, they run the risk of becoming self-destructive like Mary Margaret, or outsiders within their own community like Mr. Heinman.

In *The Things With Wings* Gregory J. Holch also employs the pattern of separation-initiation-return to envision the coming-of-age of his young protagonists, yet he communicates a radically different view of the child from the one expressed in Anderson's book. Holch's story, which exemplifies the Apollonian discourse of childhood, features the young protagonists as the redeemers of their elders and not vice versa. Holch uses butterfly metamorphosis as a metaphor for the maturation process of motherless Vanessa Zephyr, who dreams of "repeal[ing] the law of gravity" (Holch, [1998] 1999: 29) and learning to fly, and her literally more earth-bound friend, Newton Bellnap, who "didn't really like it when things changed" (Holch, [1998] 1999: 3-4). The children come upon a secluded butterfly garden hidden in the woods, with the motto "Life is a garden. Everything that grows must change" carved on the inside of the door (Holch, [1998] 1999: 67). When Vanessa eats a fruit from the tree in the garden she begins to metamorphose. First she changes into a larva, then into a pupa, and finally into a semi-human butterfly. The incident takes place on her twelfth birthday, which underscores the analogy between her animal metamorphosis and pubertal changes.[36]

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[35] Also Ann Lawler and Nancy Winslow Parker's picturebook *The Substitute* (1977) enforces – albeit in a very playful manner – parental authority through metamorphosis. Here, a substitute teacher transforms her pupils into animals and monsters to keep them from misbehaving.

The small community where the action is set goes by the name Angel Falls. Such overt allusions to a biblical context serve to draw attention away from the surface action of the adventure plot to the subtext, where growth and maturation are connected to the loss of innocence and the gaining of experience. The scene in the secret garden recalls the biblical story of the tree of wisdom, the forbidden fruit and the Fall of Man:

> She held in her hand something that looked like a piece of fruit. It was shaped like an apple, but it was golden like an orange, and its skin was fuzzy, not smooth.
>
> She held it out to Newton.
>
> "It doesn't look like an apple to me," said Newton. "It looks more like a peach."
>
> "I dare you to eat it," said Vanessa.
>
> "Who are we supposed to be, Adam and Eve?" (Holch, [1998] 1999: 65-66)

The children's quest for self and maturity is thus framed as a return to paradise and, especially, to the moment when paradise was lost. As the story unfolds, Vanessa and Newton discover a plot against all local children entering upon puberty. Since parents – led by Vanessa's father – fear their children might be hurt or estranged by the changes caused by the butterfly metamorphosis, they hospitalise their young ones in order to terminate the process. In order to preserve childhood intact and innocent – or as Vanessa's father says "trying to keep you from being hurt" – the adults of Angel Falls keep their offspring from undergoing a rite of passage that would empower them beyond the restrictions of adult control (Holch, [1998] 1999: 207). Their fear of butterflies and flying is bluntly revealed by one anxious mother who declares that her "philosophy of life is [...]: If it flies, kill it!" (Holch, [1998] 1999: 27).

The moral thrust of Holch's didactic tale is apparent. Moreover, it is firmly lodged in a romantic concept of the child. Peter Coveney (1967: 31) characterises the image of the Romantic child as a "symbol of Imagination and Sensibility, a symbol of Nature set against the forces abroad in society actively de-naturing humanity". Vanessa, who embraces Imagination, flying, and change, introduces Newton, who represents Reason (as his name suggests), fear of flying and change, to the power of Imagination and the importance of change and maturity. Echoing the image of the redemptive child from novels and high fantasies of the Victorian era, such as Little Nell or MacDonald's Diamond, Vanessa must also redeem the adults in her community. The ending strongly recalls that of Frances Hodgson Burnett's classic *The Secret Garden* (1911), in which a child protagonist restores paradise for an adult and defeats death (cf. Nikolajeva, 2000a: 31). Re-enacting what Burnett's Mary Lennox does for Colin's widowed father, Vanessa – in a scene that re-enacts the Daedalus and Icarus myth – repeats the fate of her mother who was killed when trying to save the magic tree from destruction. Vanessa falls, burning "like a child who has flown too close to the sun", and is saved by her father who thereby rediscovers his own ability to fly (Holch, [1998] 1999: 212). Holch blends pagan myth and the Fall of Man so as to re-stage a personal drama, where the fall that once killed Vanessa's mother has robbed her father of his faith in growth and change and separated him emotionally from his daughter. The ability to believe in these things is restored to him, and to the community of Angel Falls, by a child who plays the role of a redeeming Christ-figure when she seeks her future in reconnecting with nature.

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[36] Other stories where animal metamorphosis is overtly used as a trope for the teenage protagonists' mixed feelings about their pubertal bodily changes are William Rayner's *Stag Boy* (1972), Patrice Kindl's *Owl in Love* (1993), K.A. Applegate's the *Animorphs* series (1996-2001), Melvin Burgess's *Tiger, Tiger* (1996), Kate Thompson's the *Switchers* trilogy (1997-1999) and Melvin Burgess's *Lady: My Life As a Bitch* (2001).

In terms of child empowerment, Holch's use of animal metamorphosis may at first glance seem to represent maturation as more liberating and non-conformist than Anderson's use of the motif. Yet it may also be argued that in their depiction of child-animal metamorphosis both authors resort to highly stereotypical and problematic views of childhood. In *Going Through the Gate* we saw that the author uses metamorphosis to issue a warning against transgressing social mores and to project adult fears about such transgressions onto the image of the growing child. In *The Things With Wings* we see that the same motif is used to highlight the opposite: the author places all hope for the future onto the fictive child and makes her the redeemer of adults. Moreover, both Anderson's and Holch's books rely heavily on a liberal humanist conception of the individual, since they depict the notion of one's true inner self as something simply there to be found. Thus, complexity is avoided and each author resorts to one of the two dominant stereotypical ways of constructing the fictional child – as savage (implying that desires have to be repressed and the child has to be guided to reason) or angelic (implying that the child stands for goodness, truth and redemption). The child's rite of passage through animal metamorphosis is consequently described either as a repression of improper desires, or conversely as an over-idealised celebration of the child's inherent goodness.

WHEN GIRLS BECOME WOMEN AND BOYS BECOME MEN

So is the motif of child-animal metamorphosis *always* associated with the tendency to portray the child metamorph as either Dionysian (demonised) or Apollonian (idealised)? To claim this would be a gross over-simplification. Since becoming male or female is part of the adolescent characters' symbolic rite of passage, many authors also use the motif to interrogate gender stereotyping in a manner that empowers, rather than disempowers, the teenage protagonists.

Stories featuring boy metamorphs by far outnumber narratives featuring girl metamorphs. Confirming the Australian children's literature critic Jo Coward's (1999: 136) discovery that animal metamorphosis most commonly appears to occur to teenage boys, the narratives collected for this thesis (listed in Appendixes 1 and 2) indicate that boy-animal transformations outnumber girl-animal transformations regardless of the age of the young protagonist. There is evidently a much longer and more visible tradition of depicting male characters' rites of passage into adulthood, whether metaphorically through animal metamorphosis, or whether in relation to the solving of a metamorphic mystery. Typical teenage novels of the former kind include for example Andre Norton's *Fur Magic* (1968), William Rayner's *Stag Boy* (1972) and Melvin Burgess's *Tiger, Tiger* (1996); whereas Lynne Reid Banks's *Melusine* (1988) and Gillian Cross's *Pictures in the Dark* (1996) serve as examples of the latter.

In fiction for children and teenagers, the motif of female initiation through animal metamorphosis appears to be a relatively recent phenomenon. Not until the 1990s do we find a greater number of stories that – more or less successfully – set out to explore female initiation through animal transformation. Examples here are Patrice Kindl's *Owl in Love* (1993), Kate Thompson's *Switchers* trilogy (1997-1999) and

Mary Hooper's *The Peculiar Power of Tabitha Brown* (1998). Possible explanations for why girl metamorphs have been in a minority for so long may be found in the gender power imbalance reflected in myths and fairy tales, where female-animal metamorphosis typically is framed as a punishment for sexual pollution or an escape from abuse, rather than as a successful initiation into society. Differences in the use of animal metamorphosis when depicting male and female initiation are deeply rooted in the tradition of Western myth and fairy tales. Female animal metamorphs in the Greek myths – such as Io/cow, Callisto/bear, Atalanta/lion, and Hippo/horse – are principally objects of a male pursuit, which more often results in rape than seduction. These female characters' victimisation is further enforced by the metamorphoses they suffer at the hands of the gods, who turn them into impure and maddened animals (Forbes Irving, 1990: 68). In fairy tales, rather than completing an actual initiation, animal metamorphoses typically provide female heroines with increased freedom and a means to escape confinement (Warner, [1994b] 1995b: 283).[37]

Another reason for the late appearance of initiatory girl-animal metamorphoses within children's literature can be sought in the tradition of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century girl's fiction, in which initiation into womanhood usually meant growing into passivity, silence and invisibility.[38] Given this traditional pattern of the female coming-of-age story, it is hardly surprising that the animal metaphor – with its allusions to untamed (potentially sexual) wildness – in relation to female self-discovery has not become a common motif within mainstream children's fiction until the late twentieth century. The influence of feminist concerns on fiction for children and teenagers may also to some extent account for the change in attitude towards girl-animal

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37. In for example *Steel Magic* (1965) Andre Norton employs animal metamorphosis in a routinely fairy tale fashion to see one of her child protagonists, Sara, through a difficult quest. Sara and her brothers have been magically transported to King Arthur's Avalon where they, in order to save the kingdom from evil powers, have to retrieve three magical objects. Sara accomplishes her quest by transforming into a sleek and cunning cat, whereas her brothers perform traditional male tasks as slayers of dragons and other monstrous creatures.

38. See Annis Pratt ([1981] 1982: 14, 30, 34) on the traditional pattern of boys growing and girls shrinking in literature. Typical examples of long-lived and popular girl protagonists who "grow down" rather than up as part of their initiation into womanhood are Jo in Louisa M. Alcott's *Little Women* (1868), Katy in Susan Coolidge's *What Katy Did* (1872), and Anne in L.M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* (1908).

metamorphosis. Although the emphasis on nurturing and compassion for others is still strong in late twentieth-century narratives featuring the initiatory self-discovery of girl characters, self-denial and a final return to conformity is no longer such an obvious part of the agenda (cf. Trites, 1997: ix). In Anderson's *Going Through the Gate*, part of Becky's heroic initiation into her community is to assume leadership and to help others go through with their rites of passage; and in Holch's *The Things With Wings* Vanessa's thriftiness restores her relationship with her father but also helps Newton to mature.

Negotiating femininity

The American writer Patrice Kindl's teenage novel *Owl in Love* is a clear example of how a female coming-of-age story may be depicted metaphorically through animal metamorphosis without the author resorting to mere gender permutation. The notion of gender permutation implies that a female heroine is simply inserted into the traditional pattern of male initiation, which is typical of the adventure story that has its roots in the Western goal-oriented linear quest myth (cf. Paul, 1987; Hourihan, 1997; Nikolajeva, 2000a). According to the feminist children's literature critic Lissa Paul ([1987] 1990: 162), such a token exchange of the sex of the protagonist will only result in an unconvincing heroine who masquerades as "a hero in drag". Kindl, by contrast, frequently aims to subvert the traditional plot pattern of female initiation stories where girl characters are forced to "grow down" as a result of their rite of passage into womanhood.[39] In *Owl in Love* she uses the motif of human-animal shapeshifting to convey a comically playful outsider's perspective on adolescence and the process of maturation.

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[39] Drawing intertextually on Charlotte Perkins Gilman's short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1899), Kindl's *The Woman in the Wall* (1997) depicts a shy girl who literally escapes into invisibility and imprisons herself within the walls of her own home. Anna, who dares not face the world outside, builds a liminal space for herself in between the inner and outer walls of her family's house. There she becomes an invisible "angel in the house" serving and caring for her family (cf. Gilbert and Gubar, [1979] 1984: 20-29). Playing with the real and the imaginary, as well as with the house metaphor, Kindl makes the liberating coming-of-age of her girl character tangible as Anna steps out of her isolation, resumes visibility and makes herself a "home" within her own body.

A gender-conscious reading of the book suggests that its playful and ironic narrative tone is also part of a subversive agenda.

Owl in Love is almost exclusively narrated in the first-person singular by the shapeshifting girl protagonist Owl Tycho, who is part owl, part human teenager by descent. First-person narration used to be rare within fantasy literature for children and teenagers, but is now becoming an increasingly common postmodernist phenomenon. More importantly, however, bringing the metamorph forward in the first person can make metamorphic ironies more explicit (Clarke, 1995: 35). Although she is at times naive as a reporter of events, Owl Tycho's outsider's perspective on human life provides the author with a means ironically to subvert stereotypical images of girlhood. Owl herself is represented as a mock version of a lovesick teenager who pines away for her middle-aged science teacher:

> I am not stupid, you know. I read teen magazines like *Seventeen* and *Sassy*, just like other girls. I know what *Psychology Today* has to say about young girls (I turned fourteen last June) who fall in love with their science teachers. Mr. Lindstrom is not a substitute for my father. He is nothing like my father. My father is pale as a potato sprouting in a root cellar; Mr. Lindstrom is red and brown and furry like the flanks of a deer mouse.
>
> Yes, and the magazines hint that a teacher is a safe object of desire for a girl not yet ready to date a boy her own age. Mr. Lindstrom is available, they would say, but not too available. He is near enough that I can count every pore on his nose, thrill to the sweat stains under his jacket on a hot September day, tremble at his small kindnesses to me. Ah, the low rumble of his voice when he is amused! Like the sweet threat of thunder on a sultry summer's day. O Mr. Lindstrom! (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 1-2)

Clearly this is no rosy romance. Owl Tycho is consumed with a passionate infatuation, not lacking in self-irony, for her science teacher whom she stalks at night while in the shape of an owl. Her idea of falling in love is initially both romantically naive and obstinately sinister: "Remember who I am. I am Owl; it is in my nature to give my love once and only once in a lifetime. I shall love him until I die, or he does" (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 20).

With a greyish complexion that "the major cosmetic companies of America seemed to be unprepared for", Owl is a freakish version of the American teenage beauty (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 56). Her hybridity can be read in terms of a monstrous body that eludes and disturbs a clear notion of identity, system and order (cf. Cohen, 1996).[40] In the tradition of the literary grotesque, she transgresses the nature/culture split and gives readers a comic perspective on humankind as strange and alien (cf. Casson, 1997: 21). Kindl's choice of owl imagery is also significant since the owl – a stock ingredient in Gothic horror – has transgressional qualities such as its "man-like facial characteristics, nocturnal habits and eerie calls" (Casson, 1997: 88). But if we apply a gender-conscious perspective to *Owl in Love*, the central actions may also be interpreted as Owl's quest for female self-discovery, independence and agency. Owl's circumstances are undoubtedly comically extraordinary, but her need to find a place of her own outside home also has a serious ring to it:

> I was growing up, alas; my parents no longer controlled the universe. No more could they make everything better for me with a hug and a kiss and a juicy mealworm. I was discovering a new world, in which I might suffer and toil and fail and there would be no help for it. (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 136)

Food and eating are recurrent motifs that Kindl uses for a variety of metaphorical purposes throughout the book. In the quotation above, food represents the comfort and security of home. In the previous quotation, Owl expresses her sexual desire for Mr. Lindstrom in terms of his resemblance to her favourite prey, "a tasty little mouse" (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 7), and claims she is "eaten up with desire for him" (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 2). From a gender perspective, however, Kindl's use of food imagery is especially interesting since it is frequently used to stage the body of the teenage girl in relation to eating as pleasurable and/or repulsive. Marla Harris (2003) notes that Kindl in all her fantasy novels uses strategies of defamiliarising girls' bodies – by a focus on eating habits, through distorted perceptions of the body, and by attributing magical properties to the body – in order to challenge narrow definitions of femininity. Generally speaking, metamorphosis in teenage literature can frequently be interpreted as a trope for the physical and sexual changes that adolescents both fear and embrace.[41] Owl's inability to openly express her hybrid nature forces her to hide the fact that she cannot eat human food: "I can hardly lunch on grasshoppers before the eyes of several hundred ninth-graders, so I prefer not to eat lunch at all" (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 6). Her inner turmoil thus surfaces in the shape of a comically inverted eating disorder:

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[40] In *The Oxboy* (1993) Anne Mazer uses the image of hybridity in order to tell an allegoric tale about racism and ethnic cleansing. The protagonist of her book is an oxboy, half human, half ox, who has to hide his hybrid nature from a society obsessed with preserving the human race pure-blooded.

> In the space underneath the cookies' resting place a fat sausage lolling in a bun revealed itself. I stared at this object, fascinated. Would it be possible, I asked myself, to pretend that it was something edible – a stunted, overweight garter snake, for instance – and, with eyes shut, gobble it down so quickly that the taste would not linger? Possibly. The thing was made of processed pig flesh rather than dog meat as the name "hot dog" implied. It stank of factories and chemicals, but still, my stomach argued, one must not be narrow-minded. How much difference could one sausage make? (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 43)

Whereas "[w]eight-loss diets are entirely foreign to owls", Owl – as a human teenager – has the body of a starved anorexic girl (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 92).[42] The feminist literary critics Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar ([1979] 1984: 53-59) have identified obsessive depictions of female diseases such as anorexia in nineteenth-century women's fiction as symbols of the disintegration of the psyche and the negation of the body caused by narrow socially approved gender roles. Similarly, the identity crisis staged around Owl's shapeshifting body is not only a matter of transcending the binary opposition between the species, but of transcending rigid gender boundaries.

Owl's thin and underfed body is played off against the pink and plump body of her excessively over-eating friend Dawn, whose eating habits are under the constant surveillance of her mother. Dawn's mother's first inquiry upon entering home is "Have you been eating, Dawn?", and Owl is baffled by the "transparent falsehood" of Dawn's cheerful reply "No-o-o, not a bite, Ma" (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 59-60). Lisa Tyler (1993-94) and Hilary S. Crew (2000: 112-113) have explored how mother/daughter conflicts in teenage fiction frequently are worked out in terms of the body. One manner of exercising control over young girls is through constant commenting on their bodies and eating habits. Dawn, however, is clearly not depicted as a victim of such oppression, but as a cunning girl who does not refrain from bending the truth in order to assert her own agency and integrity.

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[41] Owl's outsidership and her mixed feelings of disgust and pleasure for her transforming body can also be understood in the light of Julia Kristeva's (1982) theorising on the abject. For a more thorough discussion of the exploration of abjection as a dominating trait in teenage fiction see Karen Coats (2004).

[42] Metamorphosis as a metaphor for anorexia is also used, albeit more bluntly, in Philip Gross's formula fiction horror book *Transformer* (1996).

Another case where gender is an issue concerns Owl's relationship with the shapeshifting boy-owl, whom she names Houle and rescues from starvation and madness. Houle can be understood to be Owl's asocial surrogate or "mad double".[43] Gilbert and Gubar ([1979] 1984: 77-80) coined this term to show how women writers have used such a narrative strategy to symbolise the physical and mental imprisonment caused by narrow hegemonic constructions of gender. Driven mad by the inability to comprehend his hybrid nature, Houle ends up proudly declaring that "Owl will teach me to enjoy it, rather than flee from it" (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 201). On the surface of the story, Owl and Houle upset a rigid definition of the human/animal boundary. On a symbolic level, however, their quest for self-discovery and agency may be read as a subversion of gender stereotyping.

Owl's female quest for self is depicted as a plunge into the unconscious, rather than a linear goal-oriented quest. As the title of the book indicates, this is a story about love, but the motif of romance traditionally dominant in girl's fiction is here subverted and of marginal importance to the central issue of acquiring subjectivity (cf. Harris, 2003). Owl gains deeper insight into her own split self when she mirrors herself in Houle's predicament and, contrary to tradition, he (a male character) functions as a catalyst in her maturation process:

> I saw it all now. He was a wereowl born to normal parents. […] *They* [...] had thought him demented, when he tried to do what his instinct told him he must do. Yes of course! They had shut him up as a mad boy when he persisted, when he tried to catch the prey he must have, if he was to transform. How then could he prove them wrong, show evidence of his double nature, even to himself?
>
> I contemplated my Houle's childhood with horror. Was that not enough to drive anyone mad in earnest? I know something by now of the human race. He would have been an object of fear and disgust even to those who loved him the most. His deepest, most vital needs would have made him a monster in their eyes and, eventually, in his own eyes as well.
>
> Under these circumstances insanity would almost seem like a refuge, a safe harbor. And the only way to escape it would be to face his true identity

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[43] Houle may also be viewed as a typical "abject hero" of teenage literature; an outsider expelled as abject because of his human-animal hybridity he is driven to violent and self-destructive behavior (cf. Coats, 2004: 137-160).

> – precisely the activity that had driven him mad in the first place. (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 188-189)

Owl's maturation is not depicted as an assertion of her independence (that is, fulfilling a dangerous quest) or of her dependence (that is, growing down into passive submission). Instead, she gains self-awareness through being able to view the world from a variety of angles. In the end she can no longer arrogantly hold on to a black-and-white animal view of humans as at best "strange", at worst "vile, treacherous creatures" (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 58, 191). Gradually she also comes to accept her human social conscience and empathetic skills, albeit in her own typically teenage ironic tone of voice: "I am, however, half human. It seems that my mixed heritage is tempting me to become some sort of a feathered do-gooder, a flying philanthropist" (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 93). Owl's journey towards self-discovery is not described as a linear development resulting in a neat, but over-simplified, understanding of what her inner, true self is like. Instead, it may be defined in terms of what Roberta Seelinger Trites (1997) and Robyn McCallum (1999) refer to as the ability to acquire different subject positions through a dialogic relationship with others, language, social and cultural forces, as well as ideologies. This dialogic way of understanding subjectivity is seen to be substantially different from essentialist or liberal humanist notions of identity as an individual fixed inner essence; or from mechanistic social theories of the subject as determined only by social forces. Owl's quest for female self-discovery is, to borrow the words of McCallum (1999: 8), a move out of "solipsistic childhood" into "an intersubjective adulthood". The celebration of Owl's female, ludic and hybrid character corresponds with Trites's (1997: 6) concept of a feminist teenage protagonist who does not have to "squelch her individuality in order to fit into society. Instead, her agency, her individuality, her choice, and her nonconformity are affirmed and even celebrated". That such gender transgression finds expression through the fantastic motif of animal metamorphosis – in a story that has borrowed many traits from Gothic horror fiction – is hardly surprising. As Maria Nikolajeva (2000b: 73) points out, liberated girl characters still occur more frequently in fantasy and science fiction, where the imaginary setting makes it easier for authors to interrogate and subvert gender stereotyping.

Negotiating masculinity

Authors have also used the motif of animal metamorphosis to question and critique stereotypical notions of masculinity. In the English writer William Rayner's teenage novel *Stag Boy* the alienated boy protagonist, Jim, is separated from his family (father dead, mother absent) and has returned to the wild rural landscape of Exmoor where he grew up. Jim struggles with his self-hatred, since he cannot live up to his own expectations of what manhood is:

> he looked down at his whitening knuckles, the narrowness of his wrists, and felt a choking anger at being shut up in such a poor thing of a body. He was overtaken by a longing so enormous it shook him physically, made him tremble. His spirit, if it could only get free, he felt sure would be as strong and wild as a hawk. (Rayner, 1972: 18)

What Jim perceives to be his weaknesses are effectively mirrored in the characterisation of his rival, Edward, who takes every chance to demonstrate his own physical strength, arrogance, upper-class privileges and lack of sensitivity at the expense of Jim. The two boys' antagonism is also part of a conventional triangle drama, where the girl they both covet, Mary, is torn between the seemingly adult appearance of Edward and Jim's sensitive childishness. Jim's desire to become more of a wild thing erupts in a fantastic adventure, during which – with the aid of an ancient magical helmet – he is brought into mental contact with the animal world. The helmet enables him temporarily to occupy the body of a notorious black stag that has evaded the local hunters for centuries. Behind the call of the wild lies the legendary Herne the Hunter, who is half man, half stag. In *The Box of Delights* (1935), John Masefield also used this legendary character to take a boy protagonist, Kay, on dreamlike adventures into the wilderness. Kay's experiences as stag, duck, and fish, however, are more superficially plot-driven than Rayner's metaphorical use of the stag metamorphosis, which is inextricably bound up with the adolescent protagonist's maturation as a male sexual being. Rayner's take on gender and masculinity is also more overtly moralistic and clearly shows the influence of feminist concerns (cf. Coward, 1999). Jim's transformation is depicted as pleasurable and physically empowering, but also as deeply dangerous. In stag shape his deepest desires are fulfilled: he exerts a sensual power over Mary and he manages to humiliate Edward. But animal consciousness threatens to take over and – like Actaeon and Lycaon in Greek mythology[44] – Jim must learn the dangers of transcending the culture/nature split that separates human civilised behaviour from animal savagery. Moreover, he has to face the consequences of embracing a masculinity characterised by aggression and domination:

> One day in early October something happened to shake Mary's composure. She and Jim were sitting on the settle in the old cottage, their arms round each other, when suddenly Mary felt her head dragged back by the hair. She was forced down on the seat of the settle with Jim's face looming over her, the handsome features set in a grim mask and the brown eyes glaring. Jim was very strong nowadays and he was hurting her. [...] Jim plunged his face down on to her neck, took the skin between his teeth and nipped her so hard that she cried out. There was a low, booming noise coming from his throat, an inhuman growl. He threw his weight over her and, with his free hand, he ripped her dress open. Hard fingers seized her flesh. She looked up into blind glaring eyes. "Jim," she pleaded. "Let me go. You're hurting me, Jim."
>
> He took no notice. The growl still rumbled in his throat. It was not Jim but a harsh and violent stranger. (Rayner, 1972: 128)

Mary's desperate resistance brings Jim back to himself and to the full awareness that he almost committed rape under the influence of his animal other. Jim does not know how to break the spell of metamorphosis, though, and Rayner chooses to stage his salvation once more through the intervention of Mary. Refusing to "bide still and bow [her] head" as tradition bids women to do (Rayner, 1972: 156), Mary finds the helmet and picks it up "trembling at the monstrous weight of it in her hands. Resistance flowed from the pronged male crown like a sullen heat. Who was she? asked a booming voice in her head, who was she, a woman, to break in on this mystery?" (Rayner, 1972: 157). At the risk of losing her life, she puts the helmet on, assumes stag shape herself and breaks Herne's spell over Jim. Mary's resistance towards the socially narrow female role offered her thus enables Jim to resist giving in to a destructive hegemonic notion of masculinity. Using Mary as Jim's redeemer in this manner, Rayner makes the point that both sexes benefit from an interrogation of traditional gender roles.

Whereas Rayner's narrative may come across as rather blunt in its critique of gender stereotyping, there is a growing trend among authors – from the 1990s onwards – to use the motif of animal metamorphosis to critique gender stereotyping by linking it to the fate of an adolescent metamorph who fails to be initiated into adulthood. Examples of such ambiguous narratives are Melvin Burgess's *Lady: My Life As a Bitch* (2001) and Gillian Rubinstein's *Foxspell* (1994). To focus on the Australian teenage novel *Foxspell* for the moment, twelve-year-old Tod Crofton seems to find no other way out of his social entrapment than to give up the prospect of life as a grown man altogether. Tod's alienation and displacement is many-fold, but strongly linked to his search for empowering ways of being male. His English father has recently returned to his native country and Tod has moved with the remainder of his family from urban Sydney to live with his maternal grandmother in rural Adelaide:

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[44] The hunter Actaeon is turned into a deer and eventually killed by his own dogs in a narrative featuring savagery let out of control. Lycaon, who secretly serves Zeus human flesh to eat, is eternally transformed into a savage wolf by the offended god.

> It was a dump, he thought. He was living in a dump with his grandmother, his sisters, his mother (way too many women). His father was on the other side of the world and the only other male around was a drake, who let himself be bossed about by an old chook called May. (Rubinstein, [1994] 1998: 9)

Tod misses his father desperately and is haunted by the fear that he will never return: "Once someone had returned to their own landscape did they ever come back again to the new one? He had no way of knowing" (Rubinstein, [1994] 1998: 22). And his new surroundings leave him still further estranged from male companionship. He feels neither at home with the sensitive boys at school who have "that look of fear that made other people pick on them", nor with the tough local boy gang bent on playing war games, vandalising and shooting foxes for fun (Rubinstein, [1994] 1998: 77). Alienated among the women in his family, and gifted with artistic talents, Tod resembles Jess in Katherine Paterson's classic coming-of-age story, *Bridge to Terabithia* (1977). But unlike Jess, who grows to believe in his own powers of imagination through his friendship with the girl next-door, Leslie, Tod has no human friend or mentor who can act as his catalyst and redeemer. His only release is to be found in an uncanny pull towards nature and the animal world.

Initially, Tod finds increasing pleasure in his vivid dreams of changing into a fox:

> He was chasing something that twisted and ran in front of him, but he could twist and run just as fast and he was gaining on it. Energy rushed from the earth into him, and the same energy powered the thing that ran from him desperately. They were locked together in an eternal triangle: the predator, the prey and the earth that sustained them both equally. Nothing had ever

> been so exciting as this dream hunt, and he could already taste in his mouth the sharp, fierce end to it. (Rubinstein, [1994] 1998: 106)

But eventually these subconscious adventures are realised, as animal metamorphosis is indeed granted him by a supernatural helper called the Fox Spirit, also known as Dan Russell: "As soon as it happened Tod realised it had been going to happen all along. Everything had been leading to this point. [...] His new body was familiar to him from his dreams, and he felt as much at home in it as in his old one" (Rubinstein, [1994] 1998: 136). The Australian children's literature critic Margery Hourihan (1997: 26-28) notes that the civilisation versus wilderness motif is central to all Australian fiction. But in *Foxspell* Rubinstein's use of fox imagery accentuates in particular Tod's alienation, since foxes, originally brought over from England, do not belong in the Australian landscape.[45] They are considered to be scavengers, "a terrible pest" for killing off the native wildlife (Rubinstein, [1994] 1998: 40). For Tod, however, the attraction of the fox lies in its "perseverance", "stamina", "cunning" and "strength" under extreme circumstances (Rubinstein, [1994] 1998: 137). The author thus uses animal metamorphosis to symbolise the young protagonist's struggle to cope with the overpowering social forces in his life.

When Tod turns fox he enters an explicitly non-linguistic state where he finds himself "thinking without words, in instant pictures that leaped into his mind in response to the world around him" (Rubinstein, [1994] 1998: 136). The Australian children's literature critic Clare Bradford (2001: 157) offers a post-colonial, as well as a thorough psychoanalytical reading of Tod's dilemma, noting that his inability to articulate himself stops him from accessing "a symbolic system through which to construct his subjectivity". Tod finds reading and writing both hard and boring. "They seemed such a slow way to deal with the world and they made everything fixed in a way that he'd never been able to explain to anyone, but that he didn't like" (Rubinstein, [1994] 1998: 29). Choosing the animal means choosing a non-rational existence, which provides him with a means to escape from the agony of self-definition:

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[45] Most child-fox transformations associate the fox with disempowering circumstances, though, such as being the legitimate prey of humans. See for example Elizabeth Coatsworth's *The Fox Boy* (1973) and N.M. Browne's *Hunted* (2002).

> He knew if he wanted to – and Dan Russell did want him to – he could stay a fox for ever, and always live in a fox's clear-cut, exciting, immediate world. […] He saw the harsh fox life, with its brevity and pain, but he saw that the pain was not like human pain. It was purely physical. It did not tear at the heart or torment the mind. And it was short, and after it came death, but death was just a diving back into the earth, the eater becoming the eaten, feeding as well as being fed.
> *Home*. (Rubinstein, [1994] 1998: 163)

Bradford (2001: 158-159) also notes that Tod's name has at least a two-fold meaning. An old Scottish word for fox, as well as the German word for death, the name "Tod" forebodes the young protagonist's futurelessness as a human being.

Humiliated by his mother's stand-up comedy act, in which she ruthlessly makes "jokes about foxes and sex and puberty", Tod's sense of dislocation and betrayal keeps escalating (Rubinstein, [1994] 1998: 184). Now suspecting that his father will never come back, Tod allows his fox adventures to grow increasingly violent and Dan Russell grows all the more reluctant to let Tod change back into a human again. What finally seems to push Tod over the edge is the accidental death of his classmate Adrian at the end of the novel. The ending, however, is open to multiple readings since there is a switch of focaliser in the final chapter. After Tod has witnessed Adrian fall to his death under a moving train in a desperate attempt to follow his older brother, Shaun, who is running from the police, readers are denied access to his thoughts and feelings. Instead, Rubinstein ([1994] 1998: 218) shifts internal focalisation onto Dan Russell, the Fox Spirit, who hears Tod's anguished scream and comes to the rescue:

> His human was making strange sounds, no longer screaming but panting in a heavy anguished way that made Dan Russell want to snarl and run. He wanted to save his cub. He wanted to take him away from whatever it was that made him pant like that. He barked sharply. Then he waited for his cub to look up and meet his gaze.

Still, in the light of Adrian's death – which is emblematic of a general futurelessness of teenage boys who lack constructive and alternative images of masculinity – the open ending strongly suggests that Tod finally gives in to the desire to escape into animality. Whether the ending is pessimistic or not is of course also open to debate. But from the point of view of a traditional male rite of passage, Tod's flight into nature can only be regarded as a failure.

Jo Coward (1999: 136) suggests that "[t]he increasing awareness of feminist issues in recent years has affected how masculinity is presented, and by extension how animal metamorphosis is used". This certainly seems to be the case in Kindl's novel where Owl and Houle find themselves to be of an equally hybrid nature, but even more so in Rayner's and Rubinstein's novels, where both boy protagonists feel alienated in a society where social mores encourage young boys to adopt a patriarchal construct of themselves (including their sexuality) as dominant and aggressive. The motif of animal metamorphosis as a reinforcement of the theme of female submission and male domination can be traced back to classic fairy tales such as "Beauty and the Beast"[46] (cf. Tatar, 1987; Zipes, 1994; Warner, 1994b; Coward, 1999). Contrary to this tradition, Rayner's and Rubinstein's novels may be regarded as attempts to deconstruct narrative patterns which seem to take female submissiveness and male domination for granted. Tod's stunted initiation, in particular, follows a narrative pattern typical of female characters. In her study of Swedish teenage fiction from the 1980s, Maria Österlund (2005) shows that fictive girls who transgress prescribed gender roles by dressing up as boys are left with three final options: to lie, to die or to conform to dominant socially accepted gender matrixes. Like the girl protagonists of Österlund's second category, Tod goes under since he cannot conform to the prevailing gender restrictions.

The animal metamorphoses in *Stag Boy* and *Foxspell* are undoubtedly both ideologically problematic and ambiguous since they arise out of profound feelings of distress and alienation. Yet I hesitate to agree with Jo Coward (1999: 144) that they express "a negative view [of masculinity] that indicates an unsocial male with little humane qualities". I also disagree with Bradford's (2001: 161) view that the gender politics advocated in *Foxspell* would simply propose "a system in which the masculine is the normative, positive term, and the feminine its negative". There is admittedly an anti-feminist edge in the manner Rubinstein describes the smothering female domination of Tod at home, but there is also no denying that Tod feels just as alienated from the stereotypical male characters he encounters. The two extreme male stereotypes portrayed are, on the one hand, his distant and dreamy father, on the other, the hardened macho gang-leader Shaun. In Rayner's *Stag Boy* the possibility of resisting traditional disempowering and reductive gender stereotyping – albeit utopian – is actually confirmed. In Rubinstein's far more complex novel, the growing need for such resistance is implicitly acknowledged, since at the end Tod is left with no truly empowering or attractive alternatives. Whether or not Tod chooses to take his refuge in an eternal animal metamorphosis is up to the readers to decide, but Rubinstein does invite them to interact with the text and draw their own meanings from the open ending. Through animal metamorphosis, both *Stag Boy* and *Foxspell* interrogate the traditional motif of male initiation in much the same way as female writers traditionally have dealt with issues of female alienation, marginalisation, and confinement. In my reading, these texts are just as much concerned with transcending gender roles as they are with portraying states of gender entrapment.

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[46] This fairy tale originates from the tale "Cupid and Psyche", which was first published in Apuleius's *The Golden Ass* in the middle of the second century A D. Today "Beauty and the Beast" is a fairy tale known in many different European literary versions (Tatar, 1987; Zipes, 1994; Warner, 1994b). Madame de Beaumont's version of "Beauty and the Beast", written in 1756, is, however, regarded by scholars as the canonical fairy tale version for children in Anglo-American and European cultures (Zipes, 1994; Tatar, 1999).

THE UNPLEASURES OF CHILD-BEAST METAMORPHOSIS

The use of the motif of human-beast metamorphosis as a way of causing a protagonist profound discomfort has long traditions within Western literature. Behind authors' uses of such metamorphoses, one can usually detect a socialising agenda. In Book 9 of the *Republic*[47] Plato described the process of socialisation and becoming civilised in terms of taming the wild beast within.[48] In a children's literature context, authors of unpleasurable metamorphoses which make the fictive child feel debased, disoriented, powerless and/or voiceless mostly draw on and reinforce the discourse of the Dionysian wild and uncivilised child. Here the metamorphosis is typically depicted as a personal crisis that has an improving effect on the morals of the young protagonist.[49] However, unpleasurable metamorphoses are not exclusively used as vehicles for forcing fictive children to tame their beastly nature. As I will show, the motif can also be used both to expose the powerlessness of the child and actually to interrogate the stereotypical image of the Dionysian child. I shall, to begin with, discuss the uses of unpleasurable metamorphoses within the wider context of myth, fairy tales and children's literature, and then move on to analyse two specific texts: C. S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* (1952) and David McKee's *Not Now, Bernard* (1980).

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[47] *The Republic of Plato*, IX: 571c, trans. Francis MacDonald Cornford.

[48] See for example Keith Thomas ([1983] 1984: 36-41) and Mary Midgley ([1978] 1995: 36-44) on the human need to maintain, and the anxiety associated with, human/animal boundaries.

Contemporary children's stories featuring unpleasurable metamorphoses have strong intertextual relations to myth and fairy tales. Scholars frequently interpret human-other transformation in Western myth as a punishment for impure transgressions of certain norms of moral human behaviour (cf. Otten, 1986; Warner, 1994a). The myth of Lycaon, for instance, is read as depicting the fate of a man who breaks the taboo against cannibalism by serving Jupiter/Zeus with human flesh to eat. Having set himself up against the gods, Lycaon's punishment is to be transformed into a physical image of his inner, degenerate nature. He turns into a mixture of man and wolf, becoming the first werewolf in Western literature (cf. Otten, 1986). Patricia Miles's children's book *The Gods in Winter* (1978) and Anthony Browne's picturebook *Piggybook* (1986) are stories in which animal metamorphoses can be taken as serving a similar metonymical purpose. That is, the authors use the motif of unpleasurable physical transformation in order to visualise the questionable morals of their metamorphs. In Miles's novel, which is a reworking of the Greek myth of the rape of Proserpine and the kidnapping of Persephone, the sly and obnoxious cousin Crispin's temper is curbed by a temporary lizard transformation. The incident refers back to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which in Ted Hughes's retelling features Ceres, mother of the abducted Proserpine, transforming a "cocky brat, who jeered and called her a greedy guzzling old witch" into a newt (Hughes, 1997: 59-60). Browne's picturebook alludes to the ambivalent carnivalesque imagery of the beastly, slothful pig (cf. White, 1982; Casson, 1997). Browne turns the male chauvinist pigs of the Piggott family into literal swine (see picture 2).

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[49] For a discussion on disempowering metamorphoses in C.S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, David McKee's *Not Now, Bernard*, and Roald Dahl's *The Witches* see Maria Lassén-Seger (2000).

Unlike human-other metamorphosis in Western myth, unpleasurable *child*-beast metamorphoses in traditional children's literature are predominantly temporary. Metamorphosis thereby takes the shape, not so much of an eternal punishment like the one inflicted upon Lycaon, as of a test of the young metamorph's character. One could also argue that authors use such traditional children's stories to communicate an ethics of hope since they affirm a belief in the ability of the wild and uncivilised child to reform and suppress anti-social desires and behaviour. Following in the tradition of *The Golden Ass*, *A Midsummernight's Dream* and Collodi's *Pinocchio*, donkey metamorphoses are still frequently used in children's literature to signify a humiliating punishment for acts of transgression. But these unflattering metamorphoses also provide the young protagonists with an opportunity to prove their true value and make amends for their wrongdoings. Bill Brittain's *Devil's Donkey* (1981), for example, features a young boy bewitched into donkey shape for daring to cut a branch from a tree that is sacred to the local witches. In order to free himself from his asinine shape he has to fight the Devil and reclaim his soul.

When fairy tales feature unpleasurable metamorphoses caused by the spells of evil antagonists, they usually provide an incentive to other characters to prove their worth as liberating spell-breakers. In the spirit of this tradition, many classic works of children's fantasy, such as L. Frank Baum's *Ozma of Oz* (1907) and C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950), feature child heroes and heroines who help to release those unfortunate enough to be trapped in metamorphic shape. Baum's Dorothy saves the royal family of Ev, whose members have been turned into objects by the evil Nome King, and Lewis's Pevensie children help Aslan revive the Narnians whom the White Witch has turned into statues. In general, fairy tale entrapments induced by evil magic are, as Joyce Thomas (1989: 152) notes, overcome according to the formula that "love disenchants". The spell-breaker may be a faithful lover, as in Grimms' "Jorinda and Joringel" and the Scottish tale "Tam Lin", or a younger sibling, as in Grimms' "The Six Swans" and "The Queen Bee". The task of releasing a loved one from a disempowering metamorphic spell into animal or object is still frequently explored within children's fantasy today. Compassionate siblings who save their brothers or sisters from petrification or entrapment in animal shape are to be found in for example Anthony Browne's picturebook *The Tunnel* (1989) and Diana Wynne Jones's children's book *Black Maria* (1991).

Unpleasurable animal metamorphoses in fairy tales are sometimes the result, not of evil spells, but of foolish wishes or unwarranted tampering with magic. In Grimms' "The Seven Ravens", for example, an angry father wishes that his sons were turned into ravens and finds his rash utterance come true. In fantasy fiction for children, authors tend to use such accidentally caused unpleasurable metamorphoses for comic, rather than tragic effect.[50] In Nancy Winslow Parker's picturebook *The Spotted Dog* (1980) a witch entrusts a boy with a magic object which, owing to his and his family's carelessness, accidentally turns his baby sister into a small brown terrier. The dog sister manages to win several prizes in the local dog show before she turns back into a baby again. Still, the unfortunate fate of Sarah in Elaine Horseman's *Hubble's Bubble* (1964) illustrates that comic metamorphoses may also express a socialising thrust. Sarah is a headstrong and stubborn tomboy whose tampering with magic turns her, not into a cat as she had hoped, but into a small and vulnerable mouse. Her unpleasant metamorphic entrapment lasts for several days and to some extent curbs her temper.

In traditional children's stories authors frequently employ unpleasurable metamorphoses in a rather heavy-handed coercive manner as disempowering punishments imposed on the fictive child in order to enhance the child's moral development. Charlotte Maria Tucker's *My Neighbour's Shoes or Feelings for Others* (1861), for instance, is a typical cautionary tale about a wicked boy who has a vivid dream adventure in which he is successively transformed into the shapes of those he has mistreated.[51] Having felt what it is like to be his great-aunt, his cousin

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[50] Influenced by F. Anstey's adult fantasy novels, such as *The Brass Bottle* (1900), Edith Nesbit introduced in her first full-length fantasy novel *Five Children and It* (1902) the comic motif of wishes gone wrong to a child audience (Townsend, 1990: 78; Nikolajeva, 1996: 161).

[51] Charlotte Maria Tucker (1821-1893) was a successful writer of numerous didactic evangelical books for children who published her work under the acronym A.L.O.E. (= A Lady of England).

Lina, a blind man, a poor boy, a pony, a cat, and a sparrow, he wakes up to a new sense of self and duty:[52]

> "I see that my dream was a kind of lecture, with illustrations, to teach me what I had never learned before – how to think for and feel for my neighbours. I really think that it will help me to be a somewhat different boy in the future from what I have been in the past. [...] I must begin to practice *sympathy*, because it is better to be loved than to be hated, better to be welcomed than to be dreaded, better to be thought a kind and pleasant companion than to be considered a torment and a plague." (A.L.O.E. [= Charlotte Maria Tucker], [1861] 1904: 67-68)

But Tucker's tales, which were often allegorical in nature, were stern even by the standard of their own time (Carpenter and Prichard, [1984] 1999: 19; Zipes, 2000b: 528), and such heavy-handed lessons in manners coexisted with more frivolous depictions of the wicked child-animal. In *The Bad Child's Book of Beasts* (1896), for instance, Hilaire Belloc warns his young readers not to do

> [...] as evil children do,
>   Who on the slightest grounds
> Will imitate
>   the Kangaroo,
> With wild unmeaning bounds:
>
> Do not as children badly bred,
>   Who eat like little Hogs,
> And when they have to go to bed
>   Will Whine like Puppy Dogs [...]
> (Belloc, 1964: 91-92)

Yet the sheer hyperbole of his promise that "The Moral of this priceless work / (If rightly understood) / Will make you – from a little Turk – / Unnaturally good" signals that the moral lessons of his exaggeratedly brutal cautionary verse need not be taken literally (Belloc, 1964: 91).

In order to pursue the literary motif of unpleasurable metamorphosis further, we must recognise the obvious: that narratives of metamorphosis are deeply concerned with what it is to be human, and with the borders between human Self and non-human Other. Metamorphic adventures always feature a subject undergoing the physical transformation. So change and identity are of the essence. Since literary metamorphosis rests upon such a tension between identity and form it can be used by authors to make readers more self-conscious about how conceptions of human identity and subjectivity are constructed (cf. Barkan, 1986: 46). Or to put it slightly differently, since literary metamorphosis often problematises the boundaries between the subject and its Other, it can function as a means of testing the limits of both the literary character and received notions of self and the world (cf. Mikkonen, 1996).

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[52] Mrs. Molesworth's *The Ruby Ring* (1904) is a later example of a cautionary story that also uses metamorphosis as a reversal strategy to teach a spoilt girl to appreciate her orderly and comfortable life at home. Sybil's desire to lead the carefree lives of a gipsy girl, a robin and a fairy are granted her through a series of magical transformations; each metamorphosis being a lesson in obedience, good manners and self-restraint.

Clearly the concept of selfhood suggested by metamorphosis is neither static nor unified, since metamorphic change results in a metamorph representing a mixture between human Self and Other. For example, both Carlo Collodi's and Bill Brittain's donkey boys retain human perception while they are trapped in their undesirable animal form. To Marina Warner (2002), the notion of selfhood is essential to any story of metamorphosis and might in part explain mankind's long-lived fascination with the motif:

> the seductive invitation of metamorphosis – of turning into something other – has continued to suffuse fantasies of identity, on the one hand holding out a way of escape from humanity, on the other annihilating self. (Warner, [1998] 2000: 263)

Kai Mikkonen (1997: 2) addresses issues of identity and subjectivity in a similar manner when he describes metamorphosis as "characterized by a simultaneous drive to identity and difference". The paradox of metamorphosis seems to lie in our fascination with the possibility and vitality of change, and in our deep-seated fear of the loss of identity implied by the severing of body and soul (cf. Bynum, 2001: 98). On the one hand, the notion of metamorphosis confirms the perseverance of life. In Ovid's famous words, "Omnia mutantur, nihil interit" ("All things change, nothing perishes").[53] On the other hand, the image of the mutable metamorph violates a "definition of the self as a coherent, indivisible and continuous whole", which according to Rosemary Jackson (1981: 82-83) is the most cherished of all human unities in Western culture. In the following sections of this chapter I shall examine more closely how two particular authors use the horror of having one's sense of selfhood interrogated by a monster metamorphosis for very different purposes.

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[53] From *Metamorphoses* (XV, 165).

TAMING THE BEAST WITHIN

Since fantasy literature involves strong intertextual links to myth and fairy tales (cf. Toijer-Nilsson, 1981; Nikolajeva, 2003), it is hardly surprising that unpleasurable physical transformations recur frequently throughout C. S. Lewis's *Chronicles of Narnia* (1950-1956). In *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, for instance, the White Witch spreads terror by transforming her enemies into statues; and in *The Horse and His Boy* (1954), the haughty Prince Rabadash of Tashbaan suffers the classically humiliating donkey transformation. Of more particular interest here is *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, since as a kernel event in the character development of a child protagonist it features a dragon metamorphosis. The overall theme of the novel is discovery. Lucy, Edmund and their cousin Eustace are transported to Narnia through a painting in which they travel with King Caspian on the ship Dawn Treader to the far end of the world in search of the lost friends of Caspian's father. But for the selfish, spoilt and priggish Eustace, the journey is also a quest for inner discovery thanks to a dragon metamorphosis, which completely alters his perception of Self and Other.

For three main reasons, Eustace's dragon metamorphosis can be seen as a coercively socialising unpleasurable punishment. First of all, it represents a step down in the human-beast hierarchy. Secondly, it functions as a physicalisation of his sinful actions and desires. Thirdly, it is a horrific experience that bereaves him of his human voice and alienates him from human companionship.

Pertaining to the first point, Naomi Wood (2001: 239) notes that in creating the Narnian universe Lewis, who was saturated in the writings of Medieval Europe and the theology of St. Augustine, posits a hierarchical ladder of creation consisting of God, men, women, and animals in descending order. To this can be added that the animal category can be further broken down into a hierarchy of speaking (anthropomorphic) animals and non-speaking animals. Throughout the *Narnia* series, Lewis keeps these categories carefully separated and he repeatedly affirms the superiority of human beings over dumb beasts. John Morgenstern (2000), who has compared Lewis's writing for children with his writing for adults, finds that in the *Narnia* series there are no uncomfortable slippages between the animal and human categories, whereas in Lewis's adult novel *Out of the Silent Planet* such uncertainties are central. Consequently, Morgenstern (2000: 120) claims that the *Narnia* books tend to suppress ambivalence by allegorising it into a moral choice: "into a symbolic assertion of the need for reason to bridle desire". Whereas I agree with Morgenstern that Lewis's narratives are both opaque and overtly coercive, I do not sympathise with his treatment of Lewis's works as representative of all (including contemporary) fiction for children. To my mind, his attempt to create a children's literature poetics based solely on a reading of the *Narnia* cycle is far too reductive. For one thing, Lewis's coercive use of the motif of unpleasurable metamorphosis differs greatly from that of contemporary writers such as David McKee, Gillian Cross, Gillian Rubinstein, and Melvin Burgess.

In *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, the notions of human reason and animal desire are indeed pitted against each other. The frequently recurring adjective "beastly" is exclusively used to signify unpleasant experiences and unacceptable behaviour. Edmund refers to Eustace's nightmarish dragon transformation as a "beastly time"; Aslan un-dragons Eustace by peeling off his "beastly stuff"; Eustace apologises for having been so "beastly"; and when Lucy finds out what a friend *really* thinks of her, she calls this person a "[t]wo-faced little beast" (Lewis, [1952] 1980: 84, 86, 87, 121). The hierarchical structure of the Narnian universe affirms, even on a linguistic level, that beastliness equals degeneration.

This brings me to the second reason for reading Eustace's metamorphosis as coercively socialising: the physicalisation of his sinful actions and desires. Lewis explains Eustace's transformation in the following words: "[s]leeping on a dragon's hoard with greedy, dragonish thoughts in his heart, he had become a dragon himself" (Lewis, [1952] 1980: 73). Like the man-pig transformation in Anthony Browne's *Piggybook*, Eustace's metamorphosis turns metaphor into metonymy. Assuming the shape of a dragon, Eustace becomes an embodiment, a physical emblem of his secret desires, so that his inner flaws are exposed for everyone to see. Consequently, he loathes his hideous animal body and finds himself "almost afraid to be alone with himself and yet [...] ashamed to be with the others" (Lewis, [1952] 1980: 81). The metaphysical implication of the boy-dragon transformation echoes that of Lycaon's mythic werewolf transformation as interpreted by the anthropologist Charlotte F. Otten (1986: 224): it suggests the protagonist's denial of the spiritual and his descent into the material. Within the Judaeo-Christian tradition and medieval eschatology, metamorphosis belonged to the devil's party as it was associated with heterodoxy, mutability, perversity and monstrosity (Warner, 2002: 35-36). For example, in *Divina Commedia* (1320) Dante built his image of hell on metamorphic imagery, albeit in an allegorical rather than a physical sense. In the *Inferno* the damned sinners are transformed into eternal objectifications or moral emblems of their sins (Gross, 1985: 47; Barkan, 1986: 142). Hypocrites are weighed down by golden capes of lead, those who are overcome by anger are condemned to tear each other to pieces, tyrants suffer drenched in a river of blood, and the gluttonous wallow eternally in mud. The crucial difference for Eustace is, of course, that his transformation is not eternal. For him, redemption is still within reach. According to Lewis's Christian doctrine, Eustace, though he cannot save himself from his predicament, can *be* saved and "reborn" with the aid of Aslan. The scene where the lion "undresses" Eustace by peeling off his dragon-skin, purifies him in water, and redresses him in new clothes alludes in part to the symbolism of rebirth through baptism (Lewis, [1952] 1980: 85-87). But the incident also resembles werewolf narratives in medieval romances and entertainment literature in which the psychosomatic unity of man is preserved since the wolf-skin, when peeled off, reveals a human body underneath the monstrous exterior (cf. Bynum, 2001: 105-109). Moreover, the metamorphosis results in a radical improvement of Eustace's character. As the narrator points out, "he began to be a different boy. [...] The cure had begun" (Lewis, [1952] 1980: 89).

As for the third dimension of Eustace's punishment, his dragonhood might well have a positive effect on his character, yet it is described as a traumatic experience, which unmistakably alienates him from human communication and companionship. David Holbrook (1973: 14) goes so far as to call the incident "perhaps the weirdest episode in all C S Lewis's Narnia books" and a "psychotic nightmare".[54] At first, when

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[54] In his psychoanalytical approach, Holbrook uncovers the sexual-sadistic undertones of the dragon metamorphosis. But when he interprets every conflict in terms of sexual imagery, his readings come across as rather reductive.

Eustace sees his own reflection in a pool of water and realises that he has changed into a dragon, he is momentarily relieved, afraid of nothing and no one. But when he realises "that he [is] a monster cut off from the whole human race" and that he can no longer "get back among humans and talk and laugh and share things", the full tragedy of his predicament hits him (Lewis, [1952] 1980: 74). His alienation is further increased by the fact that, although he retains "the mind of Eustace", he loses his ability to speak and "his tastes and his digestion were dragonish" (Lewis, [1952] 1980: 74). Ruled by animal desire rather than human reason, he instantly resorts to cannibalism and eats the dead dragon with which he has traded places. Since Eustace's metamorphosis alludes overtly to both the pagan and the Judeo-Christian metaphor that acts of transgression and sin turn men into beasts, this means that, despite his disempowering loss of voice and his hideous exterior, readers are continuously assured that he has suffered a punishment fitting the crime. Lewis's Christianity is grounded in the Old Testament law: *lex talionis*, an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth (Goldthwaite, 1996: 241; Rudd, 2002: 36). And Eustace is portrayed as bringing his own punishment upon himself. From the very first sentence of the book he is described in the following ungracious terms: "[t]here was a boy called Eustace Clarence Scrubb, and he almost deserved it" (Lewis, [1952] 1980: 7). The intrusive narrator's voice is far from flattering as it continues to characterise the boy as an unimaginative bully, friendless and spoilt, a victim of "modern upbringing". The narrator ridicules openly Eustace's vegetarian, non-smoking parents, who have raised their son according to feminist and pacifist ideals, encouraged his faith in facts and technological progress, and sent him to a school "where they didn't have corporal punishment" (Lewis, [1952] 1980: 31). Lewis also employs Eustace's own voice, communicated through interspersed diary entries in the first-person singular, to expose his character weaknesses. The whining, nagging tone of these diary passages is Lewis's means to *show* what his authoritative narratorial voice has repeatedly *told* us: that Eustace is a self-centred coward. For this display of honeyed didacticism – or "sado-masochistic relish for violence" as Philip Pullman (1998) has called it – Lewis has frequently been criticised (e.g. by Holbrook, 1973; Hollindale and Sutherland, 1995: 274-275; Goldthwaite, 1996: 220-244; Wood, 2001; Graham, 2004). But he has also been partly defended by critics who feel that his work should be judged with a deeper understanding of his personal background and the time in which he produced it (e.g. by Hooper, 1974; Pinsent, 2002; Rudd, 2002; Schakel, 2002; Jones, 2004; DuPlessis, 2004).

In his fascinating account of how his life and perception of self was shaped by the books he encountered in his childhood, Francis Spufford (2002) voices a love of the *Narnia* series intermingled with a deep ambivalence that seems typical of Narnia-criticism today. As a child reader Spufford (2002: 105) found the episode where Aslan un-dragons Eustace to be very unsettling, yet, in "defence" of Lewis, he also felt:

> that there was nothing manipulative, or machiavellian about Lewis's belief in Aslan's claws. He didn't urge anything on you that he didn't think he needed himself. He truly thought he would not be chaste unless God ravished him. You could tell he was sure, that what a person needed was to be changed, turned inside out in a way you could never manage for yourself, because your fear would always prevent you from being drastic enough, cutting deep enough. Aslan the lion, God the surgeon, would show love ruthless enough to effect the cure.

All things considered, the on-going debate around the ideology communicated in the *Narnia* cycle cannot diminish Lewis's skill as a storyteller, his popularity among child readers, and his impact as a re-newer of fantasy literature for children (cf. Toijer-Nilsson, 1981; Glover, 1989; Schakel, 2002).[55] Moreover, one should be able to interrogate Lewis's authoritative narratorial voice without jumping to the conclusion that young readers are blindly indoctrinated by his honeyed didacticism.[56] For present purposes it suffices to note that Lewis's *Narnia* cycle is overtly characterised by a strong urge to instruct and socialise his readers. As Naomi Wood (2001: 254) notes, "[r]ather than emphasizing independent agency or free will" the *Narnia* chronicles encourage "conformity to a predetermined pattern". Thus, there is nothing endearing about Eustace's flaws of character, nor is there anything even remotely playful about his dragon transformation. Like Edmund, who plays the unflattering part of the sinner/traitor bought free from his death penalty by the sacrifice, death and resurrection of Aslan in *The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe*, Eustace must pay the price for his actions. His temporary dragonhood is inflicted as a punishment and as a narrative vehicle to promote character improvement, which the boy does achieve, but only at the expense of this crucially disempowering metamorphosis which for a time turns him into a monster.

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[55] For a thorough discussion of the imaginative appeal of the *Narnia* chronicles see Peter J. Schakel (2002). Schakel (2002: 53-88) refutes any suggestion of didacticism on Lewis's part by celebrating his storytelling skills (which include his talent for creating suspense, excitement, atmosphere, and mythopoesis) and his ability to make the narrator appear as a trustworthy storyteller.

[56] David Rudd (2002) has, in fact, noted that young readers frequently ignore the allegorical aspects of the *Narnia* cycle.

EXPOSING THE BEASTLY CHILD

Whereas Lewis's Eustace epitomises disempowerment as he temporarily becomes a physical representation of "the beastly child", David McKee's picturebook *Not Now, Bernard* features a radically different kind of disempowered beastly boy (cf. Lassén-Seger, 2000, 2001a). Whereas Lewis uses an assertive narrative voice to guide readers towards an understanding of metamorphosis as a self-induced punishment that signifies the degenerate nature of the badly-behaved child, McKee creates an intriguingly open narrative where visual and verbal elements of the picturebook interact to make its interpretation something of a puzzle. The book opens with the boy called Bernard trying to establish contact with his busy parents. Bernard's mother and father keep dismissing him with the off-putting phrase "Not now Bernard". Even when he professes to have seen a monster in the garden and to believe that this monster is going to eat him, he does not catch his parents' attention. He then steps out into the garden, meets the monster and, in a narrative climax that is simultaneously comic and horrifying, the monster devours him. Having finished his meal, the monster re-enters the house and tries to attract the attention of Bernard's parents. Their response is to persist in calling the monster Bernard, and to send the monster off to bed.

Peter Hunt (1991: 128) calls attention to two possible ways in which McKee's picturebook can be interpreted: "[o]ne set of readers may see this as a variation on the classic *The Shrinking of Treehorn*,[57] the superior child versus insensitive adults. Another may see it as a simple

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57. Hunt is referring to Florence Parry Heide's *The Shrinking of Treehorn* (1971).

equation from an adult point of view – Bernard = Monster".[58] Neither of these readings seems that simple, however, and they both deserve further exploration. In fact they can both be linked to McKee's playful use of metamorphosis as a means of exposing readers to the fragile concept of the child character's identity. The actual "invisibility" of the child protagonist gives the story its simultaneously comic and horrific ethos, and also cheats readers of any comfortable resolution they may expect from the book as a *children's* book.

Since McKee supplies only scattered clues as to any "message", readers/beholders have to do a lot of work to fill in the gaps in both the visual and the verbal narrative. For showing such a deep trust in his child audience, he initially met with a mixed response from reviewers. While some of them thought that *Not Now, Bernard* appealed to children rather than to adults, others found it too bizarre, the wit expressed in it too mature for a child audience. In *The Times Educational Supplement* Carolyn O'Grady (1980: 44) wrote that "[a] lot of adults, I'm sure, will hate David McKee's *Not Now, Bernard*. Kids love it", and in *The Times Literary Supplement* Joy Chant (1980: 809) found it to be "[a] moral tale for parents certainly; but the possible effect on a sensitive child alarmed me. Unfortunately I do not seem to know any sensitive children for my guinea-pigs were obstinately undisturbed". Expressing a less favourable view, Joan W. Blos (1981: 58), in *The School Library Journal*, claimed that this was "one of the strangest books published recently on either side of the Atlantic". In *The School Librarian*, Aidan Warlow (1980: 252) was still more direct: the book was "a clever joke for grown-ups, with only limited appeal for children". And in *Publishers Weekly* (1981: 74), an anonymous reviewer discarded the book ruthlessly as a "bizarre, negative picture book that should be for grown-ups".

For my present purposes, the first issue to be addressed is whether this story should even be considered as featuring a child-other metamorphosis in the first place? After all, the text says that "[t]he monster ate Bernard up, every bit", and the pictures convey the same message (McKee, [1980] 1990: [9]). If we read the picturebook in this direct and literal way, no metamorphosis takes place. Bernard is simply devoured and replaced by a monster. He is not turned into one. Reading the monster as Bernard transformed is not, of course, a new interpretation in itself. Joseph H. and Chava Schwarcz (1991: 80-82) take for granted that Bernard changes into a monster in order to make his parents notice him. But if we ask *why* a symbolical reading of the monster as still representing Bernard is possible, then the answer lies in the book's pictures. The analysis of picturebook narratives cannot afford to ignore the "iconotext", that is, the "real text" of picturebooks, which includes two semiotic systems, text and pictures, in interaction with each other (Hallberg, 1982: 165).[59]

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[58] The second view-point he mentions need not necessarily be that of an adult. Anne R. Thomas (1997: 33) testifies in her review of *Not Now, Bernard*, that one of her four-year-old pupils when asked to read the book aloud "had no difficulty in reaching the conclusion that Bernard was the monster".

The first reason for reading the monster as Bernard transformed is hinted at in the boy's facial expression when he tries to get the attention of his busy parents. Instead of looking hurt by their curt remarks, he seems to be reflecting on a new strategy to get their attention (McKee, [1980] 1990: [4]). Nor is Bernard afraid to meet the monster. On the contrary, he does so voluntarily. He simply walks straight up to it and says "Hello, monster" (McKee, [1980] 1990: [8]). In the picture illustrating their meeting we see a confident boy wearing a rather mischievous look on his face similar to the look on the monster's face on the following page where the text states that "[t]he monster ate Bernard up, every bit" (McKee, [1980] 1990: [9]). But we do not see the actual eating taking place in the pictures – it happens, so to speak, while the reader is turning the page – and the fact that it has been omitted arguably stresses the symbolic nature of "the eating" (see pictures 3 and 4).

When the monster has devoured Bernard, there is further visual evidence for a symbolic, rather than a literal reading of his fusion with the monster. The landscape changes drastically, signalling a shift from the mimetic into the fantastic (see pictures 3 and 4). The trees take on palm-like features that turn the neutral backyard setting into a jungle echoing the wood that grew in Max's bedroom in Maurice Sendak's classic picturebook *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963). The wild-looking, exotic palm trees accentuate Bernard's change from a human being into something beastly, something not civilised, a creature of the wild. The narratologist Seymour Chatman comments on how setting may be related to plot and character. One possibility is a symbolic, very tight relationship between setting and action, where "setting is not neutral but *like* the action" (Chatman, 1978: 143). He further expands upon the relative power of narration, stating that we tend to see implied messages as the credible ones, "just as a person's tone of voice is always more credible than the words he speaks" (Chatman, 1978: 234). In my view, the pictures in *Not Now, Bernard* carry the implied message that the monster is Bernard transformed.

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[59] Other picturebook critics make the same point – that the picturebook story emerges out of the union of text and picture – with a number of different terminologies (cf. Happonen, 2005: 57). Joseph H. Schwarcz (1982) and Jane Doonan (1993) use the term "composite text"; W.J.T. Mitchell (1994) uses "imagetext"; and David Lewis (2001), drawing on the work of Margaret Meek, speaks of word-picture "interanimation". I have chosen to use Hallberg's term iconotext ("ikonotext" in Swedish), since it precedes the other ones and is the established term within Scandinavian picturebook research.

A deeper understanding of *Not Now, Bernard* can also be gained from a study of intertextual relations with other picturebook narratives. Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* has already been mentioned, but deserves further exploration. Max's adventures are intriguingly like and unlike Bernard's. Both are child protagonists who seek refuge in the wilderness in order to cope with the frustration they experience in a child/parent conflict. Assuming monstrous exteriors – Max dresses up as a wild beast and Bernard is devoured by one – both boys' metamorphoses are to be taken symbolically rather than literally. The most suggestive relationship between Sendak's and McKee's picturebooks, however, is the striking difference in the endings. Sendak has created a paradigmatic picturebook narrative, where the child protagonist expresses and resolves his aggressive urges through a playful beast metamorphosis. When the adventure is over, Max returns home and back to his human self and his parent's affection. McKee, on the other hand, writes in dialogue with this "master narrative", distorting the expected plot pattern by refusing to bring his story to the expected closure.

Both books end with a bedroom scene. Typically this scene is used in picturebooks to signify closure and conflict resolved. As the literary critic William Moebius (1991: 55) comments,

> [n]o matter what the book is about, the bedroom betokens the restoration of calm and the absence of confusion or anxiety. The bedroom scene is the book's (and the sleepy child's) destiny, its calling; and it is as much a testament to ultimate knowledge and certainty as its title is a call to discovery. At whatever time the story may have begun, its chronology and that of the reader come to be synchronized in this final moment, just as a wave breaks and a swimmer emerges on the shore at the same time.

Not Now, Bernard, however, offers its readers no such comforting identification with the sleepy child character safely tucked up in bed. As in many of McKee's other picturebooks with an ironic twist at the end, such as *The Sad Story of Veronica Who Played the Violin* (1987) or *Charlotte's Piggy Bank* (1996), the author challenges readers not to read for comfort and identification. Instead, the story of Bernard and the monster may be read as an ironical comment to Sendak's more paradigmatic story. By leaving the child's rebellion unresolved, McKee seems to ask of his readers new and disturbing questions, such as: What is worse? To be punished for one's transgressive behaviour and be forgiven? Or to be allowed to do anything and be completely ignored?

Another intervisual, rather than intertextual, link which strengthens the reading of the monster as Bernard transformed concerns the picture in which monster-Bernard is sent to bed by mother. He walks upstairs, shoulders drooping, and teddy bear in hand (see picture 5). The picture echoes, as well as parodies, Ernest Shepard's well-known illustration from A. A. Milne's *Winnie-the-Pooh* (1926), where Christopher Robin is depicted going upstairs dragging Pooh behind him (see picture 6). The contrast between the two pictures is the more obvious since Milne's story and Shepard's drawing represent a romantic view of the innocent child so different from the image of Bernard, the modern child who is so neglected that his entire identity is brought into question.

In her study of fear and monstrosity, Marina Warner (1998) highlights many important aspects of the image of the monster-child constructed in *Not Now, Bernard*. Yet she stops short of interrelating the visual narrative with the verbal. Stating that "[t]he imagery of identity flows through the act of eating: Bernard does not turn into the monster, he is incorporated by it" (Warner, [1998] 2000: 151), she pinpoints the issue of identity raised by the book, but by overlooking the omission of the eating in the visual narrative she misses a clue that this event need not be taken literally. Warner ([1998] 2000: 151) further argues that "the latent message whispers that they [Bernard's parents] cannot tell the difference between a tiny tot and an angry beast, because the two are all the same to them: that is how they see Bernard". Her idea here that an adult can paradoxically view children as both icons of innocence and uncivilised monsters is indeed pertinent. But a closer investigation of the illustrations shows that the point is not so much that Bernard's parents *cannot tell the difference* between a beast and their own child, but that throughout the book they *refuse to look at* Bernard in *whatever* shape he assumes.

Although never mentioned in the text, the issue of *seeing*, or rather *not seeing*, lies at the heart of almost every picture in the book. Ultimately, the visual narrative suggests that in order to exist one has to be perceived by an "other". Bernard's parents constantly refuse to give their child that kind of affirmation of his own sense of self. Picture after picture shows Bernard's mother and father never looking at their child, but keeping their eyes closed or focused elsewhere. Bernard on the other hand, persistently looks at his parents and seeks their attention. He even dares to look the monster straight in the eyes. The cover illustration, which interestingly enough does not appear at all within the actual book, but which clearly enhances the book's entire drift (cf. Nikolajeva and Scott, 2001: 245-254), reaffirms the importance of visual contact between boy and monster and anticipates their future meeting. It features the monster placed in a powerful position, high up on a hill, grinning fiercely. Although Bernard assumes the weaker position,[60] standing lower down and looking up at the monster, he smiles and looks very calm and confident. He even keeps his hands tucked into his pockets, and his gaze interlocks with that of the monster without any sign of fear.

The human importance of people's seeing and looking at one another is immediately taken up when readers/beholders open the book and find themselves looking straight into the wide-open eyes of Bernard on the title page. That same bewildered look is repeated in the penultimate picture of the book, but this time readers find themselves staring into the round eyes of the monster tucked into Bernard's bed. The constant looks exchanged between boy and monster, and between boy or monster and reader/beholder, further support a reading of the story as a child-other metamorphosis. The monster is, in fact, the only character in the book who notices and looks at Bernard. Consequently, the boy's metamorphosis could symbolise his last desperate attempt to be seen by his parents. Disguised as a wild thing, he roars at his mother and bites his father in the leg. But the hilariously ironic, albeit also deeply disturbing, result is that nothing changes. Bernard's parents continue to ignore him. His mother serves the "monster" dinner in front of the TV and at the end of the day sends him off to bed.

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[60] See William Moebius (1986: 148-149) on the importance of where a character is depicted on the page.

There are several ways of creating irony within picturebooks. One of the most obvious is to create a contradiction between the verbal and the visual narrative. Or as Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (2001: 119) put it, "pictures can provide an ironic counterpoint to words, showing us something different from what the words say and revealing the narrator either as naive or a deliberate liar". But in *Not Now, Bernard* text and pictures are predominantly symmetrical; that is, they tell the same story. The ironic ambiguity is rather a result of the fact that, as in Kafka's short story "The Metamorphosis" (1915), the mimetic and the fantastic (or supernatural) are casually intertwined. The verbal narrative keeps reporting in a matter of fact tone of voice the supernatural events that take place in the pictures, thus enforcing an illusion of mimesis. Yet mimesis is simultaneously undermined by the highly stylised illustrations, which can make the readers/beholders aware of the constructedness of the fictive "reality" portrayed in the book.

In this respect, McKee could be said to make excellent use of the picturebook's ability to function like a theatre's stage. The analogy between drama and picturebooks has been discussed by William Moebius (1991: 53), who compares picturebooks to chamber theatre, and by Perry Nodelman (1991: 20), who suggests that "reading a picture book is more like watching a play than reading a novel. In their essential doubleness, picture books are as inherently dialogical, as dependent on ironic relationships between different forms of information, as theatre is". The use of thick white frames around each brightly-coloured picture in *Not Now, Bernard*, reinforces a "Verfremdungs"-effect, since framing in picturebooks, as Moebius (1986: 150) points out, often denotes that the illustrations provide only "a limited glimpse 'into' a world". Also, the illustrations include a wealth of intertextual relationships such as the toy elephant in Bernard's room, which alludes to McKee's *Elmer* books. And they involve fictions within fictions and art within art: the painting on the wall depicts a robbery, and the floors, walls, and carpets have detailed patterning. These "stage props" strewn all over the pages of the book function as postmodernist reminders of the constructed nature of the events accounted for.

For Nikolajeva and Scott (2001: 195-197), it remains utterly unclear whether McKee's book should be interpreted mimetically or symbolically. Although I obviously do not agree that there is *nothing* in either the pictures or the words that directly supports a symbolical reading, alternative readings are certainly possible. Many readers are bound to be baffled by the fact that Bernard's parents ignore what they both *see* and *hear/read*: Bernard has turned into a monster. So *has* he, or hasn't he? Who or what are we to believe? Bernard, whose exterior is altered beyond recognition? His parents? Or our own eyes and ears? The students of visual rhetoric Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996: 121-126), as well as the picturebook critic Jane Doonan (1999: 39), point out that when a represented character gazes directly into the eyes of the reader/beholder, close contact is established and the reader/beholder is nudged towards an imaginary relationship with the gazer. Since the reader of *Not Now, Bernard* has eye contact with no one but Bernard and the monster, I would argue that the author at least *intends* to engage the reader's sympathy with the child character and the monster.

The issue of focalisation is therefore crucial here, since such a large measure of the ambiguity stems from the difficulty of deciding who the focaliser is. To use the narratologist Gérard Genette's (1980) terminology, the narrator is extradiegetic-heterodiegetic. That is, the narrator is outside the story when it is being told, and the narrator is not a character within the story. Yet if we choose to read Bernard's disappearance as a symbolic metamorphosis, the point of view could be said to belong to Bernard, since the images we see feature his imaginary role-play as a "real" event. Focalisation is further complicated in that readers/beholders watch the events portrayed from outside, whereas a separate game of seeing is staged within the pictures. Consequently, one could say that the verbal narrative is externally focalised while the visual narrative implies an internal perspective from Bernard's point of view. In practice, this double or ambiguous focalisation leaves the reader with a sense of dislocation and disorientation *vis-à-vis* the intended "message".

Such ambiguity can be understood both as a postmodernist feature,[61] and as a typical feature of the truly subversive literary fantastic. While postmodernism in the arts can be seen as a contradictory phenomenon which simultaneously installs or reinforces the concepts it undermines or subverts (cf. Hutcheon, 1989), fantasy literature which "problematizes vision (is it possible to trust the seeing eye?) and language (is it possible to trust the recording, speaking 'I'?)" also aims at subverting readers' sense of reality and imagination (Jackson, 1981: 30). Such loose relationships between signifier and signified are partly what adds to the confusion and makes it even more difficult to discern who is who in McKee's picturebook. Such a "gap between signifier and signified dramatizes the impossibility of arriving at definitive meaning, or absolute 'reality'" (Jackson, 1981: 41). Instead, the deconstruction and subversion of meaning becomes the story's main purpose.

So the manifold narrative perspectives in McKee's picturebook blur the border between human and beast, between "reality", imagination and play. The result is an intriguingly ambiguous narrative in pictures and words, where we cannot say for sure who is beast and who is human. If anyone is behaving in a beastly manner, it would in fact be Bernard's parents. Because of the predominantly dual (adult + child) audience of the picturebook medium, the possibility of addressing – and sometimes even socialising and educating– the *adult co*-reader is not foreign to the picturebook medium (cf. Wall, 1991; Christensen, 2003: 77-79). Still, the main purpose of this particular picturebook seems to be to raise more questions than it answers. In this respect *Not Now, Bernard* aligns itself with other postmodern picturebooks, which, as Clare Bradford (1993: 13) says, "construct ideology indirectly rather than directly, through irony and parody rather than through parable and fable". Should I interpret this picturebook as a cautionary tale for adults or as a horror story for children? Both options are possible. The only thing I can know for certain is that the events portrayed call into question Bernard's very existence and his relationship to his parents. Whether he has disappeared into the interior of the monster, or has been transformed into one, his failure to become visible in the eyes of his parents is profoundly disempowering. The open ending suggests that his parents' monotonously repeated answer, anticipated in the book's main title, will go on being repeated. For Bernard, there will probably never be a "now".

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[61] See David Lewis (1990, 2001: 87-101) for a closer investigation of postmodernism and picturebooks. The narrative features he investigates are: parody, irony, metafictive slippage, excess in detail, indeterminacy and fragmentation understood as the refusal to tidy up loose ends, as well as an increased demand on readers to write the text they read. As noted, all these features are to be found in *Not Now, Bernard*.

Eustace's unpleasurable metamorphosis in Lewis's novel has a clear purpose. The beastly child has to be forcefully guided into suppressing his anti-social desires. The purpose of Bernard's metamorphosis is, on the contrary, obscured. Yet Bernard's failure to be recognised by behaving like a typical "little monster" may alert adult co-readers to their own expectation that beastly children in children's books will either be tamed or safely returned to their human selves in the end. For the child who changes into an object, the loss of agency is even more pronounced. In the following chapter I shall pursue the uses of unpleasurable metamorphoses in stories where child characters transform into the inanimate.

METAMORPHOSES FROM SUBJECT INTO OBJECT

The issue of identity is at the core of every metamorphosis story and often, as Caroline Walker Bynum (2001: 32) notes, "[i]dentity is explored via threats to it". Nowhere is this as obvious as in the stories where human characters acquire inanimate shape and find themselves no longer in control of their own bodies.[62] Within the context of children's literature, a transformation into mineral, object, puppet or doll is usually associated with a disempowering loss of voice and agency. The ultimate fear hinted at is of annihilation and death.

Once again, we can trace a strong influence from myth and fairy tale tradition. Petrification caused by gods in Greek myths is typically associated with fear, punishment, warning and grief (cf. Forbes Irving, 1990: 139-148). Perseus uses the Gorgon's severed head to turn the giant Atlas, who tries to block his way, into a mountain. Niobe, struck by grief for her murdered children, becomes a symbol of eternal mourning as she turns into a rock from which a stream is formed by her ceaseless tears. Lichas, the herald who unknowingly brings Heracles a poisoned robe, is thrown into the sea where he turns into a rock. The petrification of these mythical characters serves an aetiological function – that is, their metamorphoses explain the origins of various natural phenomena – but the motif is also linked to issues of punishment, defeat and misery. In fairy tales transformations into the inanimate tend to be punishments that suit the crime. In Grimms' "The Queen Bee", for example, two selfish and inconsiderate brothers are turned into stone. And in de Beaumont's "Beauty and the Beast" the heroine's jealous sisters are immobilised in the shape of statues and forced to watch the marital happiness of their virtuous sister. Both the poetic beauty of aetiological change in myth and the horrors of eternal petrification in fairy tales are closely associated with human suffering.

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[62] Correspondingly, when child protagonists remain in full control of their metamorphic bodies, even transformations into objects can be playful and anxiety-free experiences. In Richard Egielski's picturebook *Jazper* (1998) a young boy saves his father from financial trouble by performing shapeshifting tricks, such as turning himself into a cheese doodle or a sour pickle.

In late twentieth-century children's books, however, authors tend to use the motif of a child character petrified to signify emotional and psychological processes rather than straightforward disempowering punishments. Anthony Browne's picturebook, *The Tunnel*, depicts a conflict between a sensitive, introvert and bookish girl character and her extrovert, insensitive bully of a brother. Like McKee's *Not Now, Bernard*, this narrative invites several different readings. Some readers may interpret the book as being literally about the resolution of sibling rivalry. Others may interpret the narrative metaphorically, symbolically and psychologically as a successful reunion between conventional gender stereotypes, or in a more abstract sense, between ego and id, or the conscious and the unconscious (cf. Stephens, 1992: 173-176; Bradford, 1998; Doonan, 1999).[63]

In *The Tunnel* Browne uses plenty of fairy tale imagery – most obviously from "Little Red Riding Hood" – and in true fairy tale fashion he depicts a metamorphic enchantment undone by a loving sibling. Yet he adds a psychological dimension to his narrative that goes beyond the mere reporting of events in myth and fairy tale. For one thing, the siblings' adventure comprises a removal from a seemingly realistic primary world into a nightmarish secondary world where emotions

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63. Reader-response research has shown that the complex visual metaphors and the abounding intertextual and intratextual references in *The Tunnel* are well within the grasp of even very young readers (cf. Watson, 1996: 147-148; Arizpe, 2001).

and states of mind take on physical shape. When the terrified girl follows her brother through the transitional "dark, and damp, and slimy, and scary" tunnel which they have come across in a waste ground, she enters a "dark forest" where her deepest fears of "wolves and giants and witches" are materialised (Browne, [1989] 1997: [13-18]). In a desolate landscape where trees have been cut down to the ground and storm clouds loom threateningly over-head, she finds her brother "still as stone" (Browne, [1989] 1997: [19]). Unlike his sister he has not been able to face his fears and survive. He is immobilised in a movement of flight, his mouth wide open in a silenced scream:

> She threw her arms around the cold hard form, and wept.
> Very slowly, the figure began to change colour, becoming softer and warmer.
> Then, little by little, it began to move. Her brother was there.
> "Rose! I knew you'd come," he said. They ran back, through the forest, through the wood, into the tunnel, and out again.
> Together. (Browne, [1989] 1997: [21-22])

This quotation is accompanied by a series of framed pictures depicting the boy's gradual return to life, along with the return of light and colour to the landscape (see picture 7). As the book ends, attentive readers will find a metaphorical key to the motif of reunion on the wordless back endpaper, where the book and the football – objects characteristic of the two protagonists – now lie next to each other beneath the brick wall (cf. Nikolajeva and Scott, 2001: 106).

In stories featuring child protagonists turned into inanimate matter, fear and courage, death and rebirth, are typical themes. In the examples mentioned above, authors were seen to use such unpleasant metamorphoses as a means of furthering the growth and maturation of the child protagonist. But stories of petrification need not always promote the value of inner transformation and maturation. The next section presents a closer study of a picturebook where a child's unpleasant metamorphic crisis results instead in a regressive return to childhood.

PETRIFICATION AS CRISIS AND REBIRTH

Bakhtin (1981: 115) defines metamorphosis as a method for portraying the whole of an individual's life in its more important moments of *crisis*, showing how an individual becomes other than what he was. Whereas such a definition of literary metamorphosis in many cases would seem too broad to signify anything in particular, it does in my view perfectly correspond with William Steig's award-winning picturebook *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* (1969).[64] Steig's donkey boy Sylvester[65] finds a wish-fulfilling pebble that helps him escape a hungry lion. But the snag is that he panics and, instead of ridding himself of his carnivorous enemy, he wishes he were a rock. The instant gratification of his wish echoes ancient narratives where fear turns a character into a rock. Leonard Barkan (1986: 21) speaks of such stories as poetically expressing a "parallel between emotional state and shape". Irving Massey (1976: 64) similarly views petrification symbolically as "a kind of protective imitation" where "one takes on the deadness of the meaningless thing or situation with which one is confronted and meets its threat by becoming it". Both Barkan and Massey hereby argue that metamorphoses into the inanimate are physical manifestations of the inner, psychological state of those who undergo the transformation. Still, the immobility and non-linguistic state that characterise human petrification bear witness to a disempowerment similar to the punishment inflicted on Lot's wife in the Old Testament. So what function has Sylvester's transformation in Steig's picturebook? Is it escape, punishment or both?

For a scholarly reader searching, as I am, for an explanation, the nature of Sylvester's metamorphosis is curiously haunting. The transformation results from a foolish wish uttered in fear, and it provides the protagonist with instant escape. Yet it is not a liberating escape but one that causes the child protagonist further misery. Seasons pass while Sylvester-the-rock lies dead to the world on Strawberry Hill. His existence as a rock seems agonisingly irreversible:

> And there was Sylvester, a rock on Strawberry Hill, with the magic pebble lying right beside him on the ground, and he was unable to pick it up. "Oh, how I wish I were myself again," he thought, but nothing happened. […]
>
> His thoughts began to race like mad. He was scared and worried. Being helpless, he felt hopeless. (Steig, [1969] 1980: [8])

Ironically, the pebble that initially grants Sylvester power over the forces of nature – his first wish is for the rain to stop – transforms him into an inanimate object that is passively a part of the natural world around him. The dogs searching for Sylvester cannot find him because he only

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[64] The picturebook won the Caldecott Medal in 1970.

[65] The story features anthropomorphic characters. But regardless of Sylvester's outward shape of a donkey he is filling the narrative function of a fictional child.

"smelled like a rock", and being "stone-dumb" he cannot call out for help (Steig, [1969] 1980: [15], [25]). But typically of a metamorph, something of the original character remains. In this case the narrator has access to Sylvester's consciousness and lets readers know that Sylvester can still think and hear what is going on around him:

> One day in May, Mr. Duncan insisted that his wife go with him on a picnic. […] They went to Strawberry Hill.
>
> Mrs. Duncan sat down on the rock. The warmth of his own mother sitting on him woke Sylvester up from his deep winter sleep. How he wanted to shout, "Mother! Father! It's me, Sylvester, I'm right here!" But he couldn't talk. He had no voice. He was stone-dumb. (Steig, [1969] 1980: [24-25])

So to the surrounding world, Sylvester is as good as dead, trapped in an inactive, mute state in which he is unable to communicate with anybody. Steig, however, plays down the horrifying implications of the child character buried alive inside solid rock. The narrator's authoritative voice, which describes everything from an outside perspective, distances the reader from the actual horror of the child character's experience. To begin with, Sylvester is said to feel "scared" and "worried", "helpless" and "hopeless", but as autumn approaches his senses are dulled and he falls "into an endless sleep" (Steig, [1969] 1980: [8-9], [18-19]). It is in fact only one picture that gives the reader a subtle hint of the truly horrific nature of Sylvester's metamorphosis. On this spread, deepest winter surrounds a lonely wolf, perched on top of Sylvester-the-rock and howling with hunger, vicariously giving voice to the voiceless deep despair of the child character perhaps forever trapped inside the rock.

It is indeed difficult to ignore the unpleasurable nature of Sylvester's transformation, since it robs him of mobility, voice and selfhood, and separates him from his family. The incident involves no clear punishment, but is a disempowering undoing of the child's body that communicates a loss of subjectivity (that some readers may possibly interpret as death).[66] Neither is the incident a test of the child protagonist's ability to act bravely or cleverly in a tricky situation since the nature of Sylvester's transformation prevents him from doing anything about his predicament. Instead, his metamorphosis may be better understood in light of the difference that Bakhtin sees between novels of testing and novels of becoming. Bakhtin (1981: 111-129) uses Lucius Apuleius's satirical romance *The Golden Ass* to illustrate a narrative where there is no character evolution in the strict sense of the word. The protagonist Lucius's donkey transformation is not a test that enhances character development, but is rather a means of communicating a character's change instantly through *crisis* and *rebirth*. In a similar manner, Sylvester endures his petrification without any visible sign of maturation or change. A year passes and one spring day his parents decide to go for a picnic. As it happens, they sit down by the rock that is Sylvester and they place the magic pebble on the rock finally enabling their long-lost son to wish himself back to his original form. Again, Sylvester's transformation back into his own self is no test, but just as accidental as his initial metamorphosis. For what were the chances that this extraordinary coincidence would come about? "[O]ne in a billion at best", is what Sylvester thinks as he evaluates his chances of ever returning to himself again (Steig, [1969] 1980: [9]).

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[66] Barbara Bottner (1978) observes that Steig, in all his children's stories, keeps reworking classical themes such as the beauty and mystery of life and the fear of death.

The change that Sylvester undergoes is thus expressed as a *crisis* he undergoes in terms of a symbolic death, and the *rebirth* he experiences when he transforms into himself again at the end. The cathartic nature of Sylvester's return to himself is visualised in a "page-turner" that emphasises his parents' joy of suddenly finding their long-lost son literally in their midst (Steig, [1969] 1980: [27-28]). Furthermore, the tragic disruption of Sylvester's family, caused by his metamorphosis, and the joyful family reunion in the end are themes central to my understanding of Steig's picturebook as what Bakhtin (1981: 224-227) calls a family idyll.[67] Bakhtin explains the idyll in terms of the cyclic rhythm of time; the conjoining of human life with the rhythm of nature; and the importance of food and drink. Firstly, the cyclical changes of the seasons that take place while Sylvester lies petrified on Strawberry Hill are a significant part of Steig's narrative. Secondly, the time-span of the entire narrative covers a whole year, neatly rounding up in spring, which was the story's initial setting. Steig uses the cyclical change of seasons to visualise time passing, but also to give the narrative a soothing rhythm and to show Sylvester-the-rock becoming one with nature.

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[67] This interpretation ties in with Anita Moss's (1982) claim that several of Steig's heroes, including Dominique and Abel in *Dominique* (1972) and *Abel's Island* (1976), are "pastoral heroes" characterised by their affinity with nature and their interest in home and community.

Thirdly, as to the importance of food and drink, it remains to be noted that when Sylvester is reborn and reunited with his family he is literally functioning as the table where his parents have laid out a luscious picnic meal of "alfalfa sandwiches, pickled oats, sassafras salad, [and] timothy compote" (Steig, [1969] 1980: [26]). Thus the final scene of reunion reinforces the notion of a family idyll where images of food, drink and the return of the lost child are associated with spring and the rebirth and renewal of life.

Reading Steig's picturebook as a narrative where metamorphosis brings about a crisis that is resolved when the child is reborn and reunited with his family explains, in part, the complexity and enduring appeal of this seemingly simple narrative. Yet the ending, with its strong emphasis on a return to the idyllic happiness of family and childhood, makes me wonder to whom this regressive fantasy may be primarily addressed. The emotional impact of Sylvester's bereavement of body and family seems to target implied child readers directly; as does the way in which Sylvester's parents confirm their enduring love and affection for their lost child. But when the family is reunited, they return home, where the magic pebble is ceremoniously locked away, perhaps never to be used again:

> When they had eventually calmed down a bit, and had gotten home, Mr. Duncan put the magic pebble in an iron safe. Some day they might want to use it, but really, for now, what more could they wish for? They all had all that they wanted. (Steig, [1969] 1980: [30])

This ending suggests that to preserve the safety of family and home, the child's desire for change must be repressed. Such a reading is reinforced by the very last picture, where Sylvester's family sit huddled together with eyes closed. The image easily recalls the very first picture in the book where the family triangle is still intact and the parents' closed eyes emphasise the self-fulfilling contentment of family and home. The story thus seems to be permeated by an adult nostalgia for a never-ending childhood utopia, and one way of reading it could be: let there be no change; or at least, let us not wish for things to change.

The American cartoonist, author and picturebook artist William Steig (1907-2003) turned to writing and drawing picturebooks for children fairly late in life, when he was in his sixties. In his work aimed at an adult audience he explores the agony of childhood and the despair and neurotic behaviour of modern man.[68] His children's stories, on the contrary, are characterised by a much more positive and life-affirming thrust.[69] In an interview, Steig himself declares that he "would never express despair to a kid. It doesn't make sense" (Higgins, 1978: 10). Yet *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*, ironically one of Steig's most popular children's books (cf. Cott, [1983] 1984: 118), seems to open up to a number of different and contradictory readings, some of which are indeed disturbing. On the one hand, the narrative has attracted Piagetian psychological readings. William Moebius (1986: 146) reads Sylvester's metamorphosis as a study in problem solving, where his hasty wish teaches him to value intangible "ideas and concepts such as love, responsibility, a truth beyond the individual". Moebius links this inner development of Sylvester to Piaget's notion of a cognitive development from concrete operational thought to the recognition of symbols. Arlene Wilner (1990), on the other hand, emphasises the impact of the motif of liberation through parental love and interprets Sylvester's metamorphic life crisis as a maturation process away from childhood egocentricity and the belief in animism and magic. As I have shown, it is also possible to read the narrative in another way, as expressing a regressive reluctance towards change, as well as a regressive desire never to leave the safe realm of childhood, which would stand in striking contrast with much of Steig's other work.[70]

Since the motif of transformation is a favourite theme of Steig's, and since his picturebook plots tend to be very much alike, *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* readily invites comparison with his other works. John

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[68] Critics who take an interest in the biographical and psychoanalytical study of Steig's work refer to such neurotic behaviour, using the words of the controversial Austrian psychoanalyst Wilhelm Reich, as "armored human life". In Reich, Steig found a therapist and a mentor equally interested in how an oppressed childhood may later result in stunted growth and adult trauma (cf. Cott, [1983] 1984: 85-133; Galbraith, 2000).

[69] Critics often stress the contrast between Steig's controversially dark and satirical illustrated works for adults, such as *The Agony in the Kindergarten* (1950) which depicts a gallery of traumatic childhood incidents, with his more hopeful and joyfully reassuring picturebooks for children (cf. Kuskin, 1976; Higgins, 1978; Cott, 1983; Galbraith, 2000).

[70] Jane F. Rudden's (1995) reader-response study of how a group of middle elementary aged children interpret Steig's picturebook shows that also young child readers are capable of producing similar metaphorical readings of the story as warning against hasty wishes, affirming parental love, and protecting the child and family from future harm.

Donovan (1977) sums up Steig's master plot as follows: a trusting and hopeful protagonist has a misadventure that causes him (and the reader) great anxiety; finding no way to extricate himself from the frightening situation, he stoically resigns until the seemingly impossible happens and harmony is restored, usually involving a lot of affectionate kissing and hugging. Although these plot ingredients can be found in most of Steig's works, *Solomon the Rusty Nail* (1985) is the one picturebook that most obviously re-enacts Sylvester's drama of fear, escape, metamorphosis, separation from family, and joyful reunion. A crucial difference, however, is that in the later picturebook Steig ascribes the child character much more agency and a less dependent position within the family union. Solomon, who claims to be an "ordinary rabbit", is granted a most unusual gift (Steig, [1985] 1987: [1]). By wiggling his toes and scratching his nose, he finds that he is able to turn himself into a rusty nail. The magical gift to transform back and forth between nail and rabbit is Solomon's secret pride and joy (Steig, [1985] 1987: [4]). It is also an ability that provides him with a means to play tricks on his family and friends. Eventually metamorphosis saves him from death at the hands of Ambrose, a vicious and hungry one-eyed cat. But, captured by the cat, who accidentally figures out Solomon's secret, the young protagonist has to remain a nail in order to save his life. Solomon's time as a prisoner, partly spent nailed into the wall of the cat's house, resembles Sylvester's stoic endurance of his petrification. Metamorphosis is, for Solomon, too, an experience steeped in longing and existential anguish. But much more overtly than Sylvester, Solomon experiences his transformation as a time of contemplation considerably softened by a comfortable feeling that he is one with the natural world:

> "Must I stay locked in this prison until it rots and caves in and releases me? That could take a hundred years. Would I still be alive then?" he wondered. "Do nails die?"
>
> Day followed day over the mountain. To while away the time, Solomon took to counting – up to a million, a billion, a zillion.
>
> Sometimes the world looked so beautiful he felt satisfied just being a tiny part of it, even embedded in wood. Mostly, though, he longed to be back home with his family. (Steig, [1985] 1987: [18-19])

When the cat's house finally burns down and Solomon is released back into the arms of his overjoyed family, the differences between Solomon's and Sylvester's adventures are yet further accentuated. Solomon's propensity to shift and change is always depicted as an empowering gift, and he is never victimised for using it rashly – which Sylvester apparently is. Symptomatically, Solomon does not have to give up his independence and his shapeshifting ability when he in the end returns to his family. All he has to do is promise "never to do it again. Except, of course, if he absolutely had to" (Steig, [1985] 1987: [28]).

A comparison between the uses of the metamorphosis motif in Steig's two picturebooks reinforces my initial argument that *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* idealises the bliss and security of eternal childhood in favour of the child protagonist's maturation and change. A cyclic perception of time easily creates an illusion of eternity. However, since childhood is not a state any of us can remain within forever, Steig's story of Sylvester seems permeated with adult nostalgia and a regressive desire for a never-ending idyllic childhood. Maybe it is symptomatic that Steig would later rework his basic picturebook plot into the story of Solomon; this time portraying the child protagonist's metamorphosis into the inanimate with less anxiety and with a more positive attitude towards the fictive child's independence and change.

ABUSIVE AND PERVERTED DOLL FANTASIES

Like the stories that featured child protagonists transformed into immobile objects or minerals, an anxiety-ridden undoing of the body underpins most narratives where children change into puppets or dolls. Still, these kinds of unpleasurable metamorphoses tend to be less occupied with the loss of voice and mobility and more concerned with the fear of becoming objectified as someone else's plaything.[71] Classic literary toy/doll characters such as Pinocchio, the Velveteen Rabbit and the Nutcracker all express a desire to become human subjects rather than living objects (Kuznets, 1994: 59-75). Conversely, a transformation in the opposite direction is seldom portrayed as desirable. Child protagonists turned into dolls or puppets often experience their transformations in terms of an entrapment and a loss of power and agency which sound some kind of warning note. In Diana Wynne Jones's fantasy novel *The Magicians of Caprona* (1980), for instance, the main thrust of the child protagonists' puppet transformation is socialising. Here the main child characters Tonino and Angelica find themselves forced to participate in a grotesque scene of domestic violence enacted in a Punch and Judy show. For the children the incident serves as a nightmare version of their constant squabbling and makes them more willing to get along in the future.

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[71] In Jane Langton's *The Diamond in the Window* (1962) a young girl finds herself transformed into a doll and transported back in time into the home of the young Louisa M. Alcott. The situation allows for a comic scene where the girl-doll is saved from the rough and tumble treatment of tomboy Louisa only by the mercy of her gentle sisters. Yet the scene also illustrates the vulnerability of the doll as an object exposed to the whims of its owner.

But authors do not always use child-doll metamorphoses to communicate lessons in how to behave. Richard Kennedy's *Amy's Eyes* (1985) and Ian McEwan's *The Daydreamer* (1994) are children's novels which explore the horrors and subversive aspects of the motif for entirely different purposes. Both narratives contain bizarre accounts of entrapment and dismemberment communicated through deeply unsettling child-doll metamorphoses. So how, exactly, are the images of the child articulated in these two disturbing narratives?

Since his debut in 1974, Richard Kennedy's numerous children's books have frequently drawn on the tradition of myth, folk and fairy tales in order to create magical and surreal universes (Neumeyer, 1984). In stories such as *The Porcelain Man* (1976) and *The Blue Stone* (1976) he uses poetic, as well as playful, versions of the motif of metamorphosis. *The Porcelain Man* draws on the Pygmalion-myth, telling the story of a timid daughter who manages to escape her dominant father by creating a lover and a horse out of porcelain. *The Blue Stone* is a burlesque account of a not too bright married couple, Jack and Bertie, who foolishly squander their chance of having their wishes fulfilled.

Kennedy's first longer narrative, *Amy's Eyes*, also features metamorphosis as a central theme. The novel is many-layered and has continued to receive mixed criticism. Edwin J. Kenney Jr. (1985: 18) stresses, in his review for *The New York Times*, the novel's appeal to a dual audience of young and adult readers. Peter F. Neumeyer (1985: 58) is more outspokenly torn between admiration and awareness of flaws, arguing that "[f]or a children's book, it's a leviathan, worthy of our attention". Also intrigued by the novel, but more critical about its stereotypical constructions of gender, is Lois Rostow Kuznets (1994: 168), who refers to it as "patriarchy triumphant". A thorough investigation of the novel's male quest narrative, the metaphysical implications of toys aspiring to become "real", and the magically animating power of language and literature has already been undertaken successfully by Kuznets (1994: 163-169). And Neumeyer (1985) has already investigated the novel's intertextual relations to Mother Goose, the King James Bible (especially the Book of Revelation), eighteenth-century fiction – in particular sea narratives such as Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* – and Disney. So for my present purposes I shall focus strictly on its child-doll metamorphosis.

In *Amy's Eyes* unrequited longing, loneliness and grief turn the orphaned girl Amy into a mute, passive doll. For the greater part of the narrative, she is sheltered and shut away in boxes. Prior to her confinement, Amy has managed to bring to life her beloved sailor doll, which is her equivalent of a brother, by loving it and reading Mother Goose rhymes to it. When intrigues at the orphanage force the Captain doll-come-alive to leave Amy for a while, the neglected girl finds her only refuge from grief in turning into a doll. The narrator reassuringly tells us that "[d]olls have a great patience [...]. Dolls know how to wait, and how to keep love. [...] So Amy lay quietly, and in the serenity of the shoe box she passed several weeks remembering the happy times when she and the Captain had been together" (Kennedy, 1985: 66). When the Captain eventually returns to the orphanage to fetch Amy, what began as her story swiftly switches into becoming the story of the Captain, his quest for a sunken gold treasure and for his "destiny as a man" (Kennedy, 1985: 72). With an odd crew of toys and objects brought to life by the Captain, they sail off in the ship *Ariel*[72] in search of treasure and destiny.

Although Amy-the-doll is brought along on her "brother's" quest, little enjoyment of the actual adventure is in store for her. The few and fragmented glimpses that readers initially get of her experiences are, as with the petrification of Steig's donkey boy Sylvester, framed to make the metamorphosis seem less horrifying. Readers are repeatedly assured that Amy in her catatonic state remains calm and content:

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[72] Peter F. Neumeyer (1985: 62) points out the biblical allusions of the ships' names. According to *OED*, *Ariel* stands for "Jerusalem, or Lion of God". The pirate ship, called the *Locust*, on the other hand, awakens biblical allusions to persecution, destruction and avenge. Ultimately, this imagery foreshadows the apocalyptic holocaust at the end of the novel when the pirate ship "annihilates not only itself but almost all the characters on the good ship, *Ariel*" (Neumeyer, 1985: 62).

> From a thousand miles away Amy heard everything and saw everything, and understood, and was not very concerned, as it was all so remote. [...] She was content. Dolls have calm and simple pleasures and a spherical patience. They can spend weeks propped up nicely on a shelf and not feel very much neglected. They can enjoy watching the slow changing of the light and shadows moving on the wall. There is time enough to be real. And if it never happens, that can be all right, too. (Kennedy, 1985: 113)

However, attentive readers are bound to notice the striking difference between the Captain's burning desire to become and remain a human subject and Amy's placid contentment with her role as an immobile object. In a letter to Amy the Captain has revealed that his "single dark fear" in life is to "change again into a doll" (Kennedy, 1985: 71). Yet when he, upon his return to the orphanage, learns that Amy has suffered that very fate, he finds this a "wonderful" indication "that almost anything could happen" (Kennedy, 1985: 83).

Throughout the narrative, the characterisation of the Captain and Amy continues to conform to the stereotypically gendered roles of the active masculine fortune-seeker versus the passively feminine maiden whose innocence is to be protected. In the following italicised passage the narrator, once again, overtly tries to reassure readers that "*Amy was lucky to have such a brother. [...H]is heart was true and he was set upon a duty and a destination. And a man should have a duty and a destination, that he may know his worth*" (Kennedy, 1985: 219). Yet Kennedy makes it increasingly difficult for his readers to perceive Amy's passive and marginal role in this male quest as even remotely desirable. When the *Ariel* is about to arrive at the place where the treasure has been buried, the Captain reveals a sinister ulterior motive for delaying her transformation back into a girl. "There's a reason I haven't brought you around to your real self" he declares: "we [will] snip your eyes off and put them in a bottle and lower it over-board, way down to the bottom. You can look around and search for the ship...." (Kennedy, 1985: 186-187). Amy's objectification culminates when this plan backfires and her eyes are lost at the bottom of the sea. Dismembered and blinded, but with the ability to speak restored to her (by the Captain), her pitiful cries now become audible to readers: "'Captain, that big fish has eaten my eyes! Captain, it's all dark! Captain, I'm inside the belly of a fish!'" (Kennedy, 1985: 308). At this point in the novel, the arbitrary and plot-driven nature of Amy's bizarre dismemberment in her prolonged doll transformation appears to be abusive (Kuznets, 1994: 164).

In an analogy to Amy's predicament, the Captain now feels that he has been blinded by his desire for gold and destiny. Yet he still believes that she is better off by being kept in the dark, literally and symbolically, about crucial events in her own life. When the golden treasure turns out to be her long-lost father (who is also the maker and symbolical "father" of the Captain), Amy's male guardians deem it to be for the best that she remains unaware of this discovery as well for the time being. So she is safely packed away in salt, in order to slow down her return to life, and tucked away in a breadbox until the threat of a pirate attack is over and her eyes are restored to her. Once again, readers are allowed a glimpse into the horrific nature of Amy's entrapment. Being buried alive in the breadbox, she is unable to tell the Captain about the whereabouts of her eyes, and her desperate cries ring out for no one to hear but the readers:

> "[...] I'm buried, and no one knows where my eyes are. Can't you hear me? Oh, please, hear me! I'm lost. The Captain doesn't know where my eyes are. Oh, please, I think I'm dying. [...] I can't move. Oh, don't leave me alone. Please help me!" (Kennedy, 1985: 371-372)

It seems indeed as if the price Amy has to pay for her innocence is rather dire.

In the hasty and plot-driven closure in the novel, the Captain is killed during the final bloody battle with the pirates. A wise woman, who functions as a *dea ex machina*, restores the missing eyes to Amy, who grows back into a flesh-and-blood ten-year-old, happily reunited with her father and her beloved Miss Eclair from the orphanage. The Latin word for doll is *pupa*, but this analogy holds little significance for this tale since Amy returns from her torments as a doll seemingly unharmed and unchanged. Moreover, this unconvincing "happy" ending can gloss over neither the death of the Captain nor the suffering that Amy has experienced while still a doll. In the end both the Captain and Amy, as Lois Rostow Kuznets (1994: 168) so rightly points out, are badly handled. Within the quest narrative's patriarchal system, both are depicted as equally powerless. The "father" is the ultimate winner, since the doll-son he manufactured never survives his own human initiation but dies in battle, and the daughter must endure trials in passive silence.

In many stories of girl-doll transformation, the fictive girls' time in doll shape is so strongly associated with confinement, dismemberment and silence that gender stereotyping is actually enforced rather than subverted. In David Fletcher's *The Children Who Changed* (1961), two girl protagonists are rather arbitrarily punished with doll metamorphoses for being curious and for neglecting their toy dolls. As a result of their metamorphic adventure, the girls do develop a sense of empathy for others, but like Amy they must first endure a task of self-restraint that echoes the traditionally female quest of endurance in fairy tales (cf. Bottigheimer, 1987), as well as the conventions of girls' coming-of-age stories, in which girl protagonists learn to conform to prescribed gender expectations.

In *The Daydreamer*, Ian McEwan also exploits the horrors made possible by a transformation into the inanimate. Yet Peter, his boy protagonist, is not rendered as vulnerable and powerless as Kennedy's Amy. His child-doll transformation is actually the first in a series of metamorphoses (each to be dealt with in different parts of this thesis) which are represented as in part "real" and in part resulting from vivid imagination. Whereas Freud ([1953] 1997: 209) spoke of children's natural delight in animism and their complete lack of fear at the idea of dolls coming to life, McEwan (1994: 16, my italics) makes the life-like, freakish dolls in the bedroom of Peter's sister Kate seem increasingly threatening:

> They *sat* along the window ledge with their legs *dangling* idly, they *balanced* on her chest of drawers and *flopped* over its mirror, they *sat* in a toy pram, jammed like tube-train commuters. The ones in favour *crept* nearer her bed. They were all colours, from shiny boot-polish black to *deathly* white, though most were a glowing pink. Some were naked. Others wore only one item, a sock, a T-shirt, or a bonnet. A few were dressed to the nines in ball gowns with sashes, lace-trimmed frocks, and long skirts trailing ribbons. They were all quite different, but they all had one thing in common: *they all had the same wide, mad, unblinking angry stare. They were meant to be babies, but their eyes gave them away. Babies never looked at anyone like that. When he walked past the dolls, Peter felt watched, and when he was out of the room, he suspected they were talking about him, all sixty of them.*

Worst of all is "the Bad Doll", feared by brother and sister alike. This doll's monstrosity results from its hybrid appearance.[73] It is a mixture of the animate and the inanimate, wearing a scornful smile that suggests evil intent, but tainted by a "pink [colour] that no human had ever been"; its body is mutilated as "its left leg and right arm ha[ve] been wrenched from their sockets"; and its nakedness reveals its lack of gender, for "[o]f all the dolls, only the Bad Doll was neither boy nor girl" (McEwan, 1994: 17).

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[73] See Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996) on the transgressive nature of the monstrous.

One rainy afternoon when Peter is alone in his sister's room, his fears are realised as the dolls suddenly come to life. Led by the Bad Doll, they come "leaping, spilling and tumbling and surging across the carpet" towards Peter with anger "in every wide glassy eye" and shrieking for revenge (McEwan, 1994: 21). Resenting the fact that Peter now has his own room, whereas they must live "piled on top of each other like bricks in a wall" (McEwan, 1994: 23), the dolls take hold of his left leg.

> And then a strange thing happened. Peter's leg came off. It came right off. He looked down at where his leg used to be, and instead of blood there was a little coiled spring poking out through his torn trousers. (McEwan, 1994: 23-24)

The dolls continue to tear clothes and limbs off of Peter amid much mockery and laughter. Previous to his appearance in Kate's room, Peter has feasted on a huge Easter egg and when the crippled doll confronts him, he catches a whiff of "chocolate on its breath" (McEwan, 1994: 23). This suggested link between Peter and the Bad Doll is pushed to its extreme as Peter himself gradually begins to transform into the Bad Doll: crippled, scalped, naked and, as suggested by the previous description of the evil-looking toy, also frightfully close to being castrated.

The narrator has so far been curiously sparse in commenting on Peter's feelings during this seemingly violent assault. While having his limbs pulled off, Peter's own laconic comments are strangely calm and detached. "That's funny, [...] I never would have guessed..." (McEwan, 1994: 24) is all he has to say about having his leg severed from his body. What to the reader has so far seemed like a nightmare, in which the boy protagonist is completely helpless at the hands of the vindictive dolls bent on his humiliation, is suddenly revealed – through a shift in the narrative perspective – to be the boy protagonist's own fantasies. Just as the Bad Doll is about to change places entirely with Peter, and is fitting the boy's severed limbs to his own doll's body, Kate enters the room, and readers are suddenly urged:

> to try and imagine the scene from where she stood. She had come home from playing with her friend, she had walked into her bedroom, and there was her brother, lying on the spare bed, playing with her dolls, *all* her dolls, and

> he was moving them around, and doing their voices. The only one not on the bed was the Bad Doll, which was lying on the carpet nearby. (McEwan, 1994: 24)

From having been invited to share the story from what seemed to be an omniscient narrator's point of view, readers are thus suddenly asked to think of the incident as a figment of the boy's imagination. While this gives a credible explanation to Peter's previously *in*credible lack of horror at his seemingly horrific doll metamorphosis, it simultaneously gives the story a new, rather nasty twist, since Peter is put back in control of events and revealed as actually enjoying his own violent objectification at the hands of the vicious dolls. McEwan's intricate shifts in point of view thus make it intriguingly difficult to decide whether the doll metamorphosis is disempowering or empowering for the boy protagonist.

Reviewing *The Daydreamer* in *The Times Literary Supplement*, Phil Baker (1994: 25) finds it "a benevolent celebration of childhood as adults see it", without any of McEwan's typically sinister display of perversity and gothic horror. Yet such a display is surely exactly what McEwan articulates in the boy-doll transformation incident – albeit this time with a child audience in mind. Focused here are the horrors of the inanimate coming to life and the perverse pleasure that Peter takes in what is ultimately revealed to be his own fantasies of dismemberment and objectification. Richard Kennedy, as we saw, used the doll metamorphosis to keep his girl protagonist Amy sheltered and innocent. Yet Amy's catatonic state of being can only be interpreted as disempowering, given the extreme and quite unmotivated suffering it brings her. McEwan, by contrast, makes his boy protagonist an active agent of the metamorphosis, and thus articulates a child character who is not all pure-minded and innocent, but who still remains sympathetic to readers. Since the transformation, which we initially thought was unpleasurable, is revealed to be pleasurable, our interpretation of the effect of the metamorphosis on Peter is obscured. McEwan reinscribes the child protagonist as agent and shows us that a metamorphosis into the inanimate need not always be, as in the case of Kennedy's *Amy's Eyes*, a tale of confinement, suffering and powerlessness.

SUMMARY

Western myths and fairy tales featuring human-animal metamorphosis tend to be anthropocentric. That is, they are not mainly concerned with animals and their rights, but with who we ourselves are, and how we develop, as human beings.[74] In coming-of-age stories such metamorphoses are often linked to the young protagonists' initiation into adult life and their adjustment to the society they live in, with its prevailing norms of gender. When I first set out to study these stories, as well as those that portray the metamorphic incident as profoundly unpleasurable for the child, I assumed that they would mirror a polarised, equally disempowering, image of the child as either "little angel" or "uncivilised brute". I also thought that these stories would be permeated by an adult desire to guide – even force – the child into quashing his/her inappropriate desires and conform to prescribed expectations of gender and social conduct. Instead, I found that many stories were not in fact so easily reducible to lessons in growing up. Although Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and Anderson's *Going Through the Gate* show that the image of the reprehensibly Dionysian child does live on within contemporary children's literature, McKee's *Not Now, Bernard* interrogates the myth of the monster child, and McEwan's *The Daydreamer* portrays a young boy indulging in fantasies of objectification and dismemberment without being overtly demonised. In Holch's *The Things With Wings*, the Apollonian child plays the typical role of saviour, but in Kennedy's *Amy's Eyes* the innocence superimposed on Amy appears to be abusive rather than celebratory, and Steig's *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* reads, not as a celebration of growth and change, but as a nostalgic and regressive fantasy of eternal childhood bliss. Rayner's *Stag Boy*, Rubinstein's *Foxspell* and Patrice Kindl's *Owl in Love* all explore gender entrapment and/or transgression (male as well as female) through the motif of child-animal metamorphosis in ways that seek to problematise issues of gender rather than to conform to gender ste-

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[74] D.B.D. Asker (2001: 2) argues in a similar manner that the appeal of modern stories of human-animal metamorphosis – or literary species-blending as he calls it – for adults lies in the way they suggest an understanding of what it is to be human by providing literary experiences of the non-human. Asker (2001: 16-17) is not inclined to regard these stories as necessarily anthropocentric, however, but sees them rather as authors' attempts to cross the species-barrier by assuming that humans and animals share at least some commonality of experience.

reotyping. In short, the narratives I have analysed showed that child-animal metamorphoses were used for a variety of purposes: to confirm or to problematise, to embrace or to resist, to reinforce or to deconstruct traditional social and gender stereotypes.

On the basis of my analyses, one can also question whether the stories in which child protagonists are successfully "socialised" through unpleasurable transformations into animals or objects are really coercive. Even seemingly disempowering metamorphoses may in fact enable authors to make abstract conflicts symbolically concrete for the child reader, as in Anthony Browne's *The Tunnel*. It would be far too simplistic to conclude that reading about disempowering metamorphoses of fictive children is straightforwardly equally disempowering and harmful for the child reader. Not every reader, whether child or adult, can be assumed to read for identification, and many of the texts explored here openly invite and encourage even very young readers actively to participate in the process of meaning-making.

INNOCENT, PLAYFUL, AND REBELLIOUS CHILD METAMORPHS

The previous part of the thesis showed that there is no simple correlation between child-animal metamorphoses, unpleasurable metamorphoses and a disempowering "othering" of the fictive child. Authors were shown to use metamorphic unpleasure for a variety of purposes, disempowering as well as empowering. Some use it to rid the child of voice and agency in order to chasten the fictive child (Lewis) or to affirm gender stereotyping (Kennedy). Others displace the child through metamorphosis in an attempt to expose the vulnerability of the powerless child (McKee) or to interrogate gender stereotyping (Rayner, Rubinstein: *Foxspell*, Kindl). In the third part of the thesis I shall now explore the nature of pleasurable metamorphoses and at the same time investigate whether there is a correlation between pleasurable, playful and carnivalesque metamorphoses and an empowerment of the fictive child.

THE PLEASURES OF METAMORPHOSIS

What pleasures may lie in store for a literary character who undergoes a magical transformation into the Other? According to students of metamorphosis in nineteenth- and twentieth-century fantasy literature for adults, scholars such as Tzvetan Todorov (1973), Irving Massey (1976), Rosemary Jackson (1981), Bruce Clarke (1995), and Lucie Armitt (1996), such pleasures hardly exist at all. Instead, such scholars stress the tragic implications of the motif as an expression of alienation and repressed desires. Irving Massey (1976: 1) claims in the very first sentence of his seminal study that "[i]n spite of all my efforts to convince myself of the contrary, metamorphosis is a morbid subject". His preoccupation with the tragic nature of the motif is later expressed metaphorically through the image of the gaping pig:

> The image produces the kind of uninterpretable paradox that is characteristic of metamorphosis. Is it a mockery of human laughter? Is it the agonized shriek of the animal? Laughter, or desperation? A hideous expression of life, or the frozen face of death? (Massey, 1976: 11-12)

Massey argues for metamorphosis as a trope expressing desperation rather than joyful laughter. But not all child-other metamorphoses in stories for children are tragic. On the contrary, many of them express a positive, even joyfully pleasurable attitude towards physical transformation. For pre-adolescent characters, who are generally smaller and weaker than adults, and less able to influence their own lives, one attraction of metamorphosis may lie in the delights of playfully trying out what it is like to be someone else. This is the case in books such as J. B. S. Haldane's comic fantasy classic *My Friend Mr Leakey* (1937), where metamorphosis is portrayed as sheer frivolous fun. At a party, the eccentric magician Mr. Leakey happily turns his guests into any shape they like, be it an elephant, a butterfly, a comet, a lobster, a ghost or a fire engine:

> One of the little girls, who wore spectacles, looked as if she worked rather hard at her lessons, and she asked to become William Shakespeare. So she did, and talked nothing but blank verse for the rest of the afternoon, except once or twice when she rhymed. (Haldane, [1937] 2004: 86)

Consequently, many of the theories based on fantasy literature for adults do not necessarily work for metamorphosis in fantasy stories for children. For example, Rosemary Jackson's (1981: 81) view of the literary fantastic is far too reductive, it seems to me, in claiming that there are no delightful metamorphoses in post-Romantic fantasy. Her suggestion is that post-Romantic transformations are non-teleological and horrifyingly Kafkaesque, and that they constitute "the purely fantastic" (Jackson, 1981: 85). Hereby she implies that tragic metamorphoses (as opposed to joyful ones) are actually the stuff of "better" fantasies, and that writing and reading about metamorphic despair (as opposed to metamorphic pleasure) is more intellectually demanding and satisfying. In this respect, she voices a trend within twentieth-century aesthetic culture described by Lionel Trilling in his essay "The Fate of Pleasure" (1965) as a certain devaluation of the human impulse to pleasure. Moreover, Jackson regards fantasy literature for children as being closer to the realm of the fairy tale than what she sees as the truly subversive fantasy genre. What is unfortunate here is not that she points out a close link between children's fantasy, myth and fairy tale, but her suggestion that these literary forms are inferior to the *truly* subversive fantasy narratives which stems, she thinks, from repressed desires. This elitist view that there is "greater" and "lesser" forms of fantasy allows her offhandedly to dismiss the classical canon of children's fantasy[75] as "romances (of integration)" that "leave problems of social order untouched" (Jackson, 1981: 155).

Since others before me have written eminent defences of fantasy for children, it will suffice here to refer to scholars such as Ann Swinfen (1984) and Lois Rostow Kuznets (1994), who show that fantasy stories for children – including stories with a positive and joyful thrust – do have great artistic and subversive potential. One of the few critics of fantasy literature to address the light and playful aspects of this literary mode, however, is Eric S. Rabkin (1976). Significantly, his view of the literary fantastic has been shaped by his interest in a fair number of narratives for children. Carroll's *Alice* books are, in general, the only children's texts to cross the threshold into studies of adult fantasy (cf. Massey, 1976; Jackson, 1981; Armitt, 1996). Rabkin, by contrast, celebrates a more widespread entertainment value in the literary fantastic. In his view, the fantastic bestows on its readers a "vision of escape", and he allows his own definition of the literary fantastic to encompass both the "dark side to the fantastic, and [the] light side" (Rabkin, 1976: 42, 226). Although his definition can be criticised for being so broad that it loses critical edge (it includes anything from detective stories to Gothic novels), it does serve to challenge Massey, Jackson and other critics who, in their preoccupation with the dark aspects of the literary fantastic, overlook metamorphic pleasure.

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[75] The classical canon extends from the Victorian writers Lewis Carroll, George MacDonald, and Charles Kingsley, to later British and American fantasy writers such as Edith Nesbit, Walter de la Mare, Rudyard Kipling, Beatrix Potter, A.A. Milne, T.H. White, J.R.R. Tolkien, C.S. Lewis and Ursula K. Le Guin.

METAMORPHOSIS AS "POWER OVER" OR "POWER TO"

So wherein lies the potential pleasure that child metamorphs may derive from their adventures into otherness? And are we to assume that such pleasures will automatically empower the child character? In this section I shall compare K. A. Applegate's (1996-2001) popular formula fiction series, *Animorphs*, with Jamila Gavin's children's novel *The Wormholers* (1996) in order to show how authors may use pleasurable metamorphoses in very different ways. The texts will be analysed for the specific purpose of clarifying the distinction I make between disempowerment and empowerment. To illustrate this, I shall elaborate especially upon the differences between those fictive children who gain power over others and those who gain power to increase their sense of agency, subjectivity, and self-awareness.

I have already suggested that great delight may arise from an increase in power, independence and agency stemming from the metamorphic experience. Nowhere is this better displayed than in the *Animorphs* series, in which the young protagonists acquire the physical power to fight an alien invasion through transformations into animal shape.[76] As with other contemporary formula fiction series for children, such as the *Goosebumps*, the books in the *Animorphs* series are collectible objects designed to be commercially successful. These series exploit the thrills of child protagonists coping on their own in a world of less competent adults, and dwell on a fascination with transgressive acts and the gross (cf. McGillis, 1995-96). In Applegate's series, a group of five prepubescent children – Jake, Rachel, Cassie, Tobias and Marco – initially form the Animorph resistance. The group members' secret weapon against their alien enemies, the Yeerks, is their ability to undergo animal transformations. This ability is presented as wish-fulfilling and pleasurable for a number of reasons. First of all, animal metamorphosis gives the young protagonists the physical strength/power they need to save planet earth from an invasion of the hostile aliens.[77] The text labours this point, since one word repeatedly associated with metamorphosis is "power". Here, for example, is how Jake narrates the thrills of morphing into a tiger during an attack against enemy headquarters:

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[76] The entire series consists of 54 books. For a more thorough investigation of the *Animorphs* series' formula see Maria Lassén-Seger (2002).

> I felt the morph begin. The hair grew from my face. The tail squirted out behind me. My arms bulged and rippled. They were massive! My shirt ripped. I fell forward on to my hands, now my front legs.
>
> The *power*!
>
> It was electric. It was like a slow-motion explosion. I could feel the *power* of the tiger growing inside me.
>
> I watched claws, long, wickedly curved, tearing, ripping, shredding claws, grow from my puny human hands. I could feel the teeth sprouting in my mouth.
>
> My eyes looked through the darkness like it was broad daylight.
>
> But most of all, the *power*! The sheer, incredible *power*.
>
> I was afraid of NOTHING! (Applegate, [1996a] 1997a: 168-169, my italics)

The pleasurable nature of metamorphosis in the *Animorphs* series is further enhanced because the darker undertones of the motif are kept strictly in the background. For example, the loss of speech – a typically unpleasurable circumstance associated with metamorphosis – is carefully eliminated. When shifting into animal shape the children do lose their power of speech, but not their ability to communicate with each other. They go on interacting through silent telepathy. In the text, their "thought-speak" is merely placed within special brackets (< >) and is thus typographically distinguishable from normal spoken dialogue situated in between quotation marks.

In order to present metamorphosis as enjoyable, the child characters are also allowed to play with their own identities by trying out non-human life forms in a manner that never threatens their subjectivity as human beings. Their acquisition of non-human DNA patterns takes the form of titillating fantasies of how it feels to fly as a bird, or to explore the depths of the ocean as a giant whale. Such thrills are especially emphasised since they are told as first-person narrations by the protagonists themselves, for the benefit of implied child readers who may find them no less fascinating.[78] Christine Heppermann (1998) sees this as one of the major factors making the series so popular with children.

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[77] Becoming a fierce and strong animal has, of course, completely different metaphorical implications than becoming a small and vulnerable one. In Ruth M. Arthur's *A Candle in Her Room* (1966), a girl struggling with family problems has repeated nightmares about being turned into a defenseless kitten.

As to coping with undesirable animal instincts, the process of morphing primarily involves a *bodily* change, not a mental one. As Rachel puts it,

> [W]e weren't just raptors. We still had our human intelligence. There are times to let the animal take over. There are other times when that superior human intelligence comes in handy. (Applegate, [1996b] 1997b: 7)

So animal instincts *can* supposedly take over. This usually happens when the children enter into a new shape, and it is mostly described as frightening. Still, they always manage to control the situation before it gets out of hand, and the danger is in fact more thrilling than threatening. The passage in which Jake turns into a lizard and, against his human will, eats a big, hairy spider, is certainly described with as much sensational pleasure as horror (Applegate, [1996a] 1997a: 117), and his human will does eventually reassert itself.

Yet another delightful aspect of the metamorphosis formula of Applegate's series is the children's ability to move freely in and out of animal shape. Tobias is the exception that proves the rule. At the end of the first book, he has accidentally broken the first rule of morphing by staying in morph too long. As a result, he is stuck in the shape of a hawk. This is certainly a bit unsettling, not least since doubts arise as to whether his predicament was self-induced or not. Given Tobias's fragile, victimised character – he is an orphan neglected by his guardians, and bullied by his classmates – his metamorphosis would not be difficult to interpret in terms of suicide. But the text also leaves room to hope that Tobias will in the future return to humanity, which he eventually does when an all-powerful being, the Ellimist, intervenes like a *deus ex machina* and restores his morphing ability. The only snag is that he acquires his "own human DNA. But it was just a morph. If I stayed in my old human body I would be trapped there forever. Never again to morph. Never again to be a hawk. Never again to fly" (Applegate, 1997c: 160). Even so, Tobias is presented with a choice again, and is no longer doomed to remain a hawk forever. Metaphorically speaking, he has conquered death and shown that metamorphosis may hold out a promise of eternal life.[79]

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[78] Sally Lodge (1997) reports in *Publishers Weekly* on the best-selling series' immense appeal to young consumers.

The pleasure of animal metamorphosis, which is the key ingredient of the series, can also be related to the twentieth century's radical shift in attitude towards human-animal transformation. Marina Warner ([1994a] 1995a: 72-74) argues that whereas "[m]etamorphosis out of human shape into another, beastly form used to express a fall from human grace[, b]eastly shape is now becoming an appealing alternative". Previously in this thesis, human/animal relationships were shown to be social phenomena that are constantly under negotiation. Warner's theory postulates on similar grounds that alterations in the way we perceive animal metamorphosis may be sought in the shifting attitudes towards man's superiority to the animal world. Warner bases her theory on a study of video games, but her thesis could also draw support from an overview of the motif of animal metamorphosis in children's literature. Early fantasy classics for children rarely depict animal metamorphoses as pleasurable or attractive. Charles Kingsley's *The Water-Babies* (1863), for instance, accounts for a number of degrading animal metamorphoses in a cautionary manner. The Irish people who refuse to accept Christianity are reported to have been "changed into gorillas"; the spirits of the old Greenland skippers have been "turned into mollys" because they were "saucy and greedy"; and the wise men of Gotham have "all turned into mokes with ears a yard long, for meddling with matters which they do not understand".[80] Another example is the boy-donkey transformation in *Pinocchio*, Carlo Collodi's classic *Bildungsroman* (cf. Kuznets, 1994: 141). Whereas the wooden doll's main goal is to be transformed into a human being of flesh and blood, his temporary change into a donkey signifies a regressive step down in the human/animal hierarchy.

Late twentieth-century children's authors (e.g. Lewis, Miles, Brittain: *Devil's Donkey*, Browne: *Piggybook*) still use the motif of animal metamorphosis to discipline the fictive child, thereby implicitly suggesting that a transformation into animal otherness is a degrading punishment or a fall from grace. But evidence for the new myth of animal metamorphosis as an appealing, or even redemptive, fantasy has become increasingly common. In addition to the *Animorphs* series and the previously analysed books by Anderson and Holch, further examples are Diane Duane's *Deep Wizardry* (1985), Peter Dickinson's *Eva* (1988), Will Hobbs's *Kokopelli's Flute* (1995), Gillian Rubinstein's *Under the Cat's Eye* (1997), Kate Thompson's *Switchers* trilogy, and David Almond's *Secret Heart*, in all of which the authors employ redemptive animal metamorphoses to critique the nature/culture dichotomy and to enhance ecological awareness. Stories that feature a reverse metamorphosis from animal into human child are also typically characterised by an inverted satirical perspective on human civilisation. Mary James's *Shoebag* books and Philip Pullman's *I Was a Rat! … Or the Scarlet Slippers*, for example, use the comically exaggerated outsider perspectives of a cockroach and a rat to accentuate the follies of human existence.

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[79] See Sue Easun (1994) on metamorphosis in Monica Hughes's *Isis* trilogy (1981-1983) as implying mastery over death.

[80] The quotations are taken from an on-line version of Kingsley's novel available at http://www.gutenberg.org/etext/1018 [29 March 2006].

In the *Animorphs* series, it is the borrowing of physically powerful animal bodies from which human identity can re-emerge unscathed that makes the metamorphoses seem so gratifying and enjoyable. In part, this explains the appeal of the series. But are we then also to conclude that these titillating and pleasurable adventures into otherness *empower* the Animorph children? I am thinking of power in a Foucauldian sense here, as a force that generates not only repression but also subjectivity and agency. Yet I do not mean an acquisition of physical strength to exercise *power over* others. Empowerment has nothing to do with the physically or spiritually violent oppression of other people. Instead, it is a matter of characters having the freedom to make their own choices, and to experience positive forms of autonomy, self-expression and self-awareness.

If we reconsider some of the ideological underpinning of the *Animorphs* series, pleasurable metamorphoses can seem a good bit less empowering in this important sense. The Animorphs' resistance is characterised by a militant ideology that, above all else, prescribes control and group discipline. The tight-knit Animorph community adheres to a strictly hierarchical order, with Jake as the "natural" yet reluctant leader in charge. The children's self-discipline and group solidarity emerge as an important part of the series' appeal, yet the extent to which individual desire, choice and agency are consequently repressed is very striking. "Control", in the *Animorphs* books, is just as prominent a word and concept as "power". In order to retain their only advantage over the enemy, the Animorphs have to conform to rigid rules and a paranoid secrecy. Rachel leaves no doubt about this: "We don't do anything to attract attention. We have to be secret about *everything*. Especially morphing." (Applegate, [1996a] 1997a: 80). The children's very silence functions as a "trope of power".[81] While in animal shape even their ability to communicate is silenced into telepathy, and they are always extremely careful not to be seen as a group (Applegate, 1997b: 27). In this way the Animorph children develop a system of self-monitoring their own behaviour.[82] Especially private desires, usually expressed while in animal morph, must be channelled for the common good. When Jake changes into a dog, he is tempted by the "simple happiness of the dog" to escape from his own troubles (Applegate, [1996a] 1997a: 107). But thanks to his responsible superego, he forces himself "back into painful reality" (Applegate, [1996a] 1997a: 107). Self-indulgence is portrayed as not only selfish, but positively dangerous to group security. When Cassie, morphed into a horse, is tempted to gallop exultantly out into the open, Rachel's reminder about the need for a low profile is very firm (Applegate, [1996a] 1997a: 80).

In order to maintain group discipline, the Animorphs see control over mind and body as essential. But behind the Animorphs' struggle for survival lies a deeply primitive fear that the loss of bodily control may betoken a loss of something more fundamental – a loss of self and a complete surrender to a-human forces. One reason for being afraid of the Yeerks is that they have no body. Instead, they live like parasites "in the bodies of other species" (Applegate, [1996a] 1997a: 17). A Yeerk who has taken over the body of a human being is called a "Controller", which denotes the dominating idea communicated in the series that mastery of your body equals power. By the same token, to lose control of your own body, as when Jake falls into a Yeerk pool and for a short time becomes a Controller himself, represents a frighteningly disempowering loss of self (Applegate, 1997a). Metamorphosis is, in addition, repeatedly described as a repulsive process *to watch*. Although this partly stems from a fascination throughout the whole series with matters that are referred to as "gross", the obsessively repeated assertions that morphing looks revolting cannot be dismissed as merely tantalising manifestations of the grotesque. Morphing looks ugly precisely because the children are not able to master it. According to Rachel:

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[81] See Mavis Reimer (1998: 14) on the impact of silence and secrecy in the popular children's TV-series *The Mighty Morphin Power Rangers*.

[82] The manner in which they exercise self-discipline brings to mind Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* (1977), in which he describes the Panopticon as a metaphor for the internalisation of social surveillance.

> Morphing is never pretty. And it's never predictable. It happens in ways that don't quite kill you, but sometimes come pretty close. Things come popping out or disappearing in bizarre sequence. (Applegate, 1999: 38)

That is also precisely why Cassie's morphing is so remarkable. Jake says it is "beautiful", because she is "controlling the way she morphed" (Applegate, [1996a] 1997a: 76).

A closer look also reveals that the temporary animal metamorphoses only serve to highlight the Animorphs' vulnerability, lack of influence and powerlessness as human children. The Animorphs themselves repeatedly define "a child" as somebody weak and innocent. When discussing an extinct race known as the Pemalites, they refer to them as the universe's "space-going children", naive enough not to use their own powers, and only wanting to play, dream and be happy (Applegate, 1999: 132). To the Animorphs, obsessed as they are with power and control, the Pemalites seem merely pitiable. They were foolish to trust in their enemies, and their extermination was only to be expected. Likewise, in situations where the Animorph narrators feel weak and vulnerable they tend to refer to themselves as children. Rachel's reaction on secretly watching somebody being interrogated by Visser Three, the Yeerk's supreme chief, is typical:

> In an instant I knew: I would never survive his questioning. I would tell him everything. His power was a million times greater than mine. His will was a vast, huge, irresistible thing. And what was I? Just some foolish little girl. A foolish, lost girl. Lost. (Applegate, [1996b] 1997b: 154)

While in animal disguise, the Animorphs have the physical strength to fight and kill their enemy. But insofar as they are ordinary children, they are depicted as potential victims, weak and vulnerable. The very moment before she dies, Rachel finds herself "demorphed" and "only a weak human girl" unable to protect herself (Applegate, [2001c] 2002c: 174). When Tobias-the-hawk, now a predator, thinks back on his "old [...] life as a boy", he sees himself then as "the mouse. The prey. Stalked by predators bent on flushing my head down the men's toilet. Scurrying to find a hiding-place. Rarely succeeding" (Applegate, [2001a] 2002a: 2). And in book number fifty, Cassie, when thinking back on their lives before the invasion, concludes that "none of us will ever really be kids again. Now, a hundred or more battles later, I'm not sure exactly what we are. In the eyes of the innocent world, we're still children. But in our own eyes..." (Applegate, [2001a] 2002a: 171). The heroes of the *Animorphs* series have indeed come to regard themselves as experienced and hardened soldiers rather than innocent and vulnerable children.

For these young warriors, so terrified of not being in control of their own bodies, to win and keep control over their physical form is presented as a matter of life and death. But like the parasite Yeerks, who are "almost powerless without hosts", the Animorphs are portrayed as totally powerless as individuals (Applegate, [1996a] 1997a: 17). Being powerful amounts to having physical strength, plus physical and mental self-control. Metamorphosis offers the children a strong and powerful physique, and their own obsession with control concerns everything from individual bodily desires to the process of morphing itself. The fear of their identities being exposed to the enemy feeds a paranoia that forces them into maintaining strict control of the group, which can only be held together through self-discipline and the suppression of individual desires. The text's most strongly socialising message is that a community can survive only through this rigorous kind of self-denial and co-operation.

Similarly disturbing is the fear of the Other that underpins the series, breeding a paranoia that sanctions the use of violence and warfare.[83] The indulgence in graphic violence is endorsed by an othering of the Yeerk enemy as "[e]vil incarnate" (Applegate, [2001a] 2002a: 15), and by presenting violent actions as essential for the survival of the human race: "I don't have time to argue ethics", Cassie declares. "This is war. Every minute counts. We´re fighting to save the human race" (Applegate, [2001a] 2002a: 261). It is rather ironic, though, that at the end of the series the Animorphs discover that the only solution to the war is a compromise that involves signing a peace treatise with the enemy. To manifest the new world-order, Rachel, who has become "too fond of war" and killing, has to die (Applegate, [2001b] 2002b: 169). But life in peace is only a parenthesis for the remaining Animorphs. Cassie is the only one who manages to move on with her life, whereas the boy protagonists take off into space on a new dare-devil adventure. In a concluding letter to her fans, K. A. Applegate ([2001c] 2002c: 304) declares that she "figured the Animorphs should go out the same way they came in: fighting".

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[83] See Kimberley Reynolds (2000, 2001b) on popular TV-series that exploit paranoid conspiracy theories, and on the astounding sales figures of horror fiction for children in Britain and North America as *fin de siècle* phenomena.

Metamorphosis certainly gives the Animorphs the muscular power that their immature human bodies lack. Consequently, it primarily involves a bodily change, which enables them to enjoy both the advantages of human intelligence and human communication skills, in combination with animal strength. When appearing in animal shape, they are more or less superheroes,[84] impervious to almost any harm, and potentially – as the fate of Tobias suggests – immortal. Yet the thoughts and behaviour of the Animorphs themselves recapitulate the kind of power structuring and violence of the society in which they are being socialised. Most distressing of all, perhaps, is the implication that only through morphing, only by becoming something Other than a child, can the main characters make a difference.[85] In these texts, a "child" is repeatedly referred to as somebody weak, naive, undisciplined and lacking control, whereas the contrasting traits of strength, power, suspicious cunning, and masterfulness are set up as the ideal characteristics. The ideal is *not* to be a child at all. Or at least, not a child as children are defined in these narratives. To my mind, this can hardly be regarded as empowering.

In contrast to the *Animorphs* series, where group discipline and the pleasure of physical strength and violent power over others is of greater importance than the power to exercise individual agency, Jamila Gavin uses metamorphosis in her novel *The Wormholers* as a pleasurable trope for ascribing her disabled heroine Sophie agency and an increased sense of self-awareness. The book is a complex science-fiction/fantasy novel, which explores the idea of multiple universes. Three children, Natalie, Chad and Sophie fall down a wormhole, which is a crack that leads out of their own universe. They become wormholers with no fixed existence in time or space, destined to change in form and to travel incessantly in between universes (Gavin, 1996: 77).

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[84] Several other metamorphosis stories, such as for example Diane Duane's *Deep Wizardry* and Kate Thompson's *Switchers* trilogy, feature the ability to undergo animal transformations as a "superpower" that enables young metamorphs to save the world from evil powers or ecological disasters.

[85] In an article on shape-shifting superheroes such as the Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and the Mighty Morphin' Power Rangers, Marsha Kinder (2000: 76) is similarly concerned about the way these popular television shows for children set up transformation as a prerequisite for masculine empowerment in which female characters can only partake by becoming one of the boys.

For the three protagonists the adventure clearly symbolises an inner journey. Chad for his part overcomes the resentment he feels towards his absent mother, while Natalie, who is trapped in a universe where she is moving backwards in time, resolves the childhood trauma of losing her father. For Sophie, again, who is an extremely intelligent girl born with cerebral palsy, the journey becomes one of acute liberation:

> Power. She had never quite understood what power was. She, whose every muscle refused her any control over it, who had to be strapped in her chair to stop her own limbs from hurling her about and who, when she heard her mother singing, longed to sing too and had shrieked in frustration – Sophie longed for power.
>
> Here ... she looked at her hand and her mind commanded. Lift hand. Her hand lifted. Turn head! Her head turned. She chose a direction to look; her head obeyed her desire. She chose to be still, and she was completely still.
>
> Sophie arched her neck back and opened her mouth. 'Aaah!' A rich, clear sound burst from her throat. She held the note until her breath ran out. A line of bubbles rose upwards, sparkling. She breathed in again and exploded into song. (Gavin, 1996: 79)

Voice, and the ability to control her own body, is granted Sophie when she changes into a whale-like creature and enters the Dome, which is a universe peopled with beings of superior intelligence. Sophie's new

> body was enclosed sleekly in a smooth grey skin so that her legs propelled her like a fish's tail through the clear, blue water. She could move with perfect control. She had no further memory of when she had ever sat in a wheelchair. She had no memory of where she came from. The only meaning was here in the Dome of Sound-Space Continuum. (Gavin, 1996: 111)

Becoming one of the Dome Guardians is presented to Sophie as her destiny, or what she is truly "designed for" (Gavin, 1996: 98). Still, it is not an entirely ideal existence. Since the Dome Guardians train Sophie to do without imagination and memory, her body is free while her mind is imprisoned. The motif of metamorphosis thus functions as a defamiliarising device that enables Sophie to acquire a new perspective on her human self. She struggles to find out who she is and where she has come from.

To learn that she is human "[w]ith some whale genetic input" is initially a shock, since the whale culture Sophie is immersed in regards humans as a frightening species which has ravaged the cosmos (Gavin, 1996: 127, 146-147). The picture that Gavin paints of humankind is complex and deeply ambivalent. Human beings are predicted to destroy their own species and the world they live in, yet the autonomy of the human imagination and human free will are presented as attractive alternatives to living under the totalitarian authority of the Dome Guardians. The final liberation for Sophie lies in accepting the flaws and the strengths of her human nature. She gives up the autocratic power offered to her as the new ruler of the Dome and ends up choosing the freedom of the human mind, even though it means being trapped in an uncooperative body.

Unlike the young protagonists in the *Animorphs* series, who desire metamorphic power for the sole purpose of becoming violent others, Sophie covets a new, strong body that is functional rather than violent. Gavin also expands in greater depth upon the external and internal forces that – in a Foucauldian sense – compete to empower and repress individual power. Sophie's and the Animorphs' ability to undergo pleasurable metamorphoses may come at a similar price – they all have to repress individual desires – but whereas the *Animorphs* series glorifies such behaviour, Gavin problematises Sophie's desire for individual and communal agency. Through her journey in time and space, realised in part as a metamorphosis, Sophie finds out that what she desires is not the power to dominate over others as offered her by the Dome Authority, but the "power to be where [she] belong[s]" (Gavin, 1996: 148). In *The Wormholers*, power is thus not only represented as a means of oppression, but also as a potentially positive force that allows for empowering forms of subjectivity and agency (cf. Trites, 2000: 6). Applegate's and Gavin's texts clearly illustrate the distinction that the author and feminist scholar Marilyn French (1985: 504-512) makes between having a dominating power *over* other people and having power *to* make one's own choices. Only the latter is of an empowering kind. Consequently, my conclusion is that although the Animorph children and Sophie all find pleasure in the metamorphoses they undergo, it is only Gavin who portrays her young metamorph's metamorphosis as truly empowering.

If a metamorphosis is to appear pleasurable, the person who undergoes it must obviously experience it as unthreatening to his/her sense of self. Human subjectivity is never seriously threatened in the *Animorphs* series and as a result the child characters' adventures into otherness appear delightfully titillating. Another example would be Babette Cole's picturebook *Winni Allfours* (1993) where the girl protagonist Winni's pleasure in a horse transformation in part rests on there being no apparent blurring of her human consciousness with animal instincts. Winni changes herself into a horse since her parents refuse to buy her one. Her triumphantly rebellious metamorphosis is self-instigated and as a horse she retains her voice and her human soul. The kind of protagonist in children's literature most likely to experience metamorphosis with pleasure would be just like Winni: a young, pre-adolescent child. The question remains, though, *why* the pre-adolescent child is so prone to enjoy metamorphosis?

For this connection between child-other metamorphosis and pleasure and pre-adolescent innocence Eric Linklater's classic *The Wind on the Moon* (1944)[86] is a paradigmatic text. In the first part of the novel, the two unruly girl protagonists, Dinah and Dorinda, access a world of adventure through metamorphosis. The tone of the novel is farcical, and Linklater draws a caricature of an obscure village society, Midmeddlecum, where adult authority is continuously undermined by the pranks of the two girls. In line with the romantic paradigm of childhood innocence, Linklater repeatedly contrasts the dullness of adulthood with the child characters' imaginative powers and faith in magic. This romantic notion of "child power" is taken to its extreme when Dinah and Dorinda acquire a magic potion that will turn them into any animal of their choice. The power of metamorphosis enables the two girls, in the shape of kangaroos, to engage in exciting adventures outside the sphere of home and adult control. They help a puma and a falcon escape from the zoo, and later on their contact with the animal world gives them the courage and resourcefulness needed in order to save their father from a foreign dictator.

In his defence of the light aspects of the fantastic, Eric S. Rabkin (1976: 226-227) observes that it not only reveals "our deepest fears, but also our greatest aspirations; not only our hidden shames, but also our finest hopes". The latter is certainly the case in Linklater's novel, where one adult character, Mr. Casimir Corvo, "in all Midmeddlecum the only grown-up person who ever knew the whole truth of the matter" (Linklater, [1944] 1948: 223), on hearing about Dinah's and Dorinda's metamorphic adventures exclaims that

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[86] The novel was awarded the Carnegie Medal in 1944.

> now, when you tell me that you have lately been kangaroos, I remember many things. I feel humble, as I did when I was a child; but also I feel glad and strong, because it may be true, as I thought then it was true, that nothing is impossible. (Linklater, [1944] 1948: 232)

Linklater wrote *The Wind on the Moon* when the Second World War was raging in Europe. This explains, not only the book's rather overt parallels between tyrant Count Hulagu Bloot's Bombardy and Hitler's Germany (cf. Crouch, 1962: 88), but perhaps also the author's need to provide his dual readership with comic relief and hope for the future. If so, then what better way to do it than by writing a story that celebrates the imaginary powers of the child, who often functions metaphorically as an embodiment of, or a cultural icon of the future?

The connection between innocence, experience and magical metamorphosis is also crucial to Allan Ahlberg's *Woof!* (1986). Ahlberg's book is a comic novel about a ten-year-old boy called Eric, who suddenly finds himself turning into a dog for no apparent reason. Ahlberg ([1986] 1987: 10) treats this rather disturbing event light-heartedly from the very beginning, by contrasting the incredible with the mundane details of everyday life:

> Eric first turned into a dog a little at a time in his own bed. His parents were downstairs watching television. His sister was fast asleep in the next room. The time was ten past nine; the day, Wednesday; the month, June. Until then it had been a normal day for Eric. He'd done his paper-round with Roy, and gone to school. He'd had two helpings of his favourite dinner. He'd played with Emily before tea, and Roy after. He'd watched television, had a shower and gone to bed. Now he was *in* bed and turning into a dog.

The narrator's matter-of-fact tone of voice allows no uncomfortable blurring between Eric's human nature and his dog nature.[87] On the contrary, Eric, who is characterised as "a quiet boy" and "the kind of boy who didn't make a rush for the back seat of the bus, or go mad when the first snow fell", remains almost prudishly true to his human self and his acute sense of decency even as a dog (Ahlberg, [1986] 1987: 9). Eric-the-dog successfully resists all animal urges, ranging from scratching himself with a back leg to drinking from the pond in the park or marking his territory.[88] But despite Eric's inability to enjoy the full physical pleasure of his randomly inflicted animal state, he is still able to enjoy his dog transformations as temporary moments of increased agency. Behind his dog disguise the otherwise timid and inhibited Eric dares to defy the school bully and to confess his feelings for a girl at school.

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[87] Humphrey Carpenter (1986: 898), who reviewed the book in *The Times Literary Supplement*, obviously found the plot to be disturbingly flat because of the "all too mild" adventures Eric has as a dog.

Ahlberg's *Woof!* is, to my mind, more entertaining than upsetting. The story's driving comic force stems from the odd predicaments created by Eric's sudden transformations, and from Eric and his ally Roy's speculations about the possible reasons for Eric's sudden and irregular dog transformations. The most probable cause suggested is Eric's three-year-old sister's burning desire for a dog: "Roy said, 'That's it all right: *The Power of Wishing!*'" (Ahlberg, [1986] 1987: 151). Ahlberg thus aligns himself with those authors who, like Linklater, use the pre-adolescent metamorph as a trope for a romantic notion of "child power" and childhood imagination. Eric's metamorphoses, as well as Roy's ability to *believe* in these fantastic incidents, are overtly associated with their pre-adolescent state. The boys' childishness, especially Roy's, is on a number of occasions referred to in an ironic (adult) narrative voice. Eric notices that there are still some very childish toys lying about in Roy's untidy room, for example, and at one point, when the boys are searching for information about dogs in the library, Roy is reportedly "waylaid a little with a book called *Where's Spot?*. It was about a puppy. You had to lift the flap on each page to find where it was hiding. Roy thoroughly enjoyed it" (Ahlberg, [1986] 1987: 96). Similarly, the explanations the boys come up with for Eric's dog transformations are a ludicrous mix of philosophical thoughts on reincarnation or on life as a potential dream with wilder ideas about rays from outer space or magic potions. In short, Eric and Ray are characterised as pre-adolescents whose minds, when it comes to believing in the supernatural and solving the mysteries of life, are "typically" open and creative.

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[88] A similarly wary attitude towards enjoying animalhood is expressed in for example Nina Beachcroft's *The Wishing People* (1980), where a girl and a boy temporarily change into dog and rabbit, and end up feeling guilty for having given in to animal instincts for a short moment.

Ahlberg's novel does not end with any definite answer to the supernatural mystery of metamorphosis. But significantly enough, Eric stops changing into a dog when his little sister gets a puppy of her own. In the concluding chapter, the nostalgic and romantic view of childhood as opposed to adulthood is finally openly addressed. Just as with A. A. Milne's Christopher Robin, who has to leave his enchanted Hundred Acre Wood when he goes to school, so the dog incident accentuates Eric's and Roy's approaching adolescence, which includes the loss of their childish openness to the supernatural. Three years later, their memories of their dog days have faded: "They made strenuous efforts to hang on to them, as people often do with a good dream. But time kept passing, and fresh dramas arrived (a burglary at the scout hut; a ghost at the school camp) to push the old ones out" (Ahlberg, [1986] 1987: 154). The mood of the denouement of Ahlberg's novel is rather nostalgic. Even though Eric in later years, when faced with a strange dog, cannot resist asking it to give him a sign as to whether it is actually a human, Ahlberg does suggest that a certain openness of mind is inevitably abandoned when we pass into adolescence and adulthood. In other words, as experience is gained innocence is lost.

Linklater's Dinah and Dorinda and Ahlberg's Eric and Roy are presented as pre-adolescents with the innate gift of imagination. They represent a view of childhood as the realm of innocence, where irrational and supernatural events can readily be accepted and even enjoyed. Uncontaminated by experience, these youngsters live in a world where nothing is impossible.[89] Both Linklater and Ahlberg suggest that, as we grow older, such innocent childhood pleasures are inevitably left behind and lost. Mr. Corvo laments the lost pleasures of childhood, and Eric's memories of his dog days invariably fade. But before we become rational adults who are fixed in our ways, childhood is a time when we supposedly embrace flexibility and change, a time when everything is possible.[90] Of course, this is a highly idealised view of childhood, greatly coloured by adult nostalgia. But the persistence of a belief in the metamorphic nature of childhood, and in the innocent and flexible child, may well explain why pre-adolescent metamorphs keep being portrayed as so readily susceptible to change.

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[89] On the whole, child characters tend to experience less hesitation and distress than adult characters when confronted with supernatural incidents such as metamorphosis. For this reason, Tzvetan Todorov's ([1973] 1975: 33) narrow definition of the *purely* fantastic – as that which causes both literary characters and readers to "hesitate between a natural and a supernatural explanation" – does not apply very well to fantasy for children (cf. Skyggebjerg, 2005: 26-31).

Pre-adolescent metamorphs who find pleasure in the experience of metamorphosis, characters such as Dinah, Dorinda, Eric and Ray, are a commonplace in children's literature. Another example would be Peter in Ian McEwan's *The Daydreamer*, who experiences a pleasurable animal metamorphosis framed within an imaginary daydream.[91] Peter is both silent and secretive, and therefore characterised by some adults in the story as a "difficult" child (McEwan, 1994: 7). What these adults cannot see, though, is that daydreaming is part of Peter's explorations of self and others. From being prone to losing himself in solipsistic daydreams playing sinister games with his sister's dolls (see pp. 93-95) and fulfilling his instant desires through a cat metamorphosis, Peter gradually develops an ability to empathise with others through his transformations into a baby and a grown-up. Of all his daydreams, Peter's cat metamorphosis is clearly the most pleasurable, and the most voluntary of all his metamorphic changes. First of all, his turning into a cat functions as a welcome release from the dull routines of every-day life. As Eric S. Rabkin (1976: 42) notes in his defence of fantasy, "[b]oredom is one of the prisons of the mind. The fantastic offers escape from this prison". For this very reason, Peter willingly embraces the possibility of moving his soul into the body of his cat.

Another characteristic feature of Peter's pleasurable metamorphosis is, yet again, that it does not involve any unsettling blurring of his boy's self with that of his cat. McEwan (1994: 31, my italics) elaborately describes the actual metamorphosis as an act of dressing up as a cat:

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[90] Contrasts between flexible childhood and static adulthood are a common motif in fantasy for children. See for example the end of Jane Langton's *The Swing in the Summerhouse* (1967: 159, 174), where a child-like grown-up, Uncle Freddy, "must save the [child protagonists] and their friends from being living statues forever" since they have grown up too fast and "got stuck into one shape before [they] had time to find out who [they] really are"; or Philip Pullman's *His Dark Materials* trilogy (1995-2001), where childhood is also defined by profound fluidity, since the shape of a child's daemon – that is, a form of visible "souls" in animal form – can change throughout childhood, but fixes its shape when the child gains experience and enters adulthood.

[91] Yet another example is young Nicky in Michael Elsohn Ross and Peter Parnall's picturebook *Become a Bird and Fly!* (1992) who enjoys a dream-like fantasy of taking flight.

> It was the oddest thing, to climb out of your body, just step out of it and leave it lying on the carpet like a shirt you had just taken off. […] He floated towards William Cat and hovered. The body stood open, like a door, and it looked so inviting, so welcoming. He dropped down and stepped inside. *How fine it was, to dress yourself as a cat*. It was not squelchy, as he thought all insides must be. It was dry and warm. He lay on his back and slipped his arms into William's front legs. Then he wiggled his legs into William's back legs. His head fitted perfectly inside the cat's head.

And since Peter's transformation is only skin-deep, it does not suggest any threatening loss of self. Peter becomes Peter Cat, while his cat becomes William Boy. Their bodies might have changed, but their names, traditionally signifying the self within the discourse of children's fiction, are preserved intact.[92] Furthermore, part of the pleasure of Peter's metamorphosis is that, as a cat, he has lost his ability to read human facial expressions. This makes it impossible for him to experience any uncanny fear at the sight of William inside what used to be his own body:

> William Boy looked worn out from a day of classroom and playground struggle. […] He wondered if William Boy was happy with his new life of school and buses, and having a sister and a mum and dad. But the boy's face told Peter Cat nothing. It was so hairless, whiskerless and pink, with eyes so round that it was impossible to know what they were saying. (McEwan, 1994: 36-37)

McEwan stresses the enjoyableness of Peter's cathood since it gives the boy the strength and vigour of an animal body, the freedom to go wherever he wants (even at night), and the right to enjoy being idle. His victory over the neighbouring cat increases the sense of a wish-fulfilling daydream. Symptomatically, Peter eventually returns to his human self, not of his own accord, but on the initiative of William Boy. The positive attitude towards animal metamorphosis expressed here can thus also be regarded as partly a reflection of the new myth of animal metamorphosis as an attractive alternative (cf. Warner, 1994a).

With Peter's pleasurable cat metamorphosis, McEwan aligns himself with many other authors who seem to find it "natural" to associate pre-adolescent protagonists with explicitly joyful and empowering *animal* metamorphoses. In her study on talking animals in Victorian children's fiction, Tess Cosslett (2006: 126) shows that romantic notions of the child as primitive and closer to nature were "reconstituted as the evolutionary child, more primitive and more fanciful, literally closer to animals, than adults".[93] Similar forces seem still to be at play in the contemporary texts referred to above, in which child metamorphs appear openly to enjoy their animal metamorphoses and become remarkably empowered when they acquire hybrid natures as child-animals. The image of the flexible pre-adolescent child who embraces change is yet further reinforced in these stories by the romantic myth of the primitive child, who can freely cross the human/animal border without experiencing the process as a horrifying loss of self.

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[92] See Maria Nikolajeva (2002) and Yvonne Bertills (2003) on the significance of names in connection to characterisation and identity in children's fiction.

Adult characters and the horrors of metamorphosis

According to Tess Cosslett (2006: 137-138), it was the Victorian perception of the child as the "missing link" between man and animal that resulted in charming and enjoyable hybrid child characters such as Kipling's Mowgli. Adult hybrids in Victorian fiction for adults, such as Stevenson's Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, appear far more terrifying and monstrous. In other words, the myth of the innocent child who is characterised by an innate closeness to nature has its mirror image in the myth of the rational, logical adult who is divorced from nature. In late twentieth-century children's literature featuring human-animal metamorphosis these popular myths seem to be perpetuated.

Adult metamorphs in picturebooks often lack the joyfulness associated with pre-adolescent metamorphs. In several picturebooks, adult protagonists' metamorphoses result in, or originate from, a sense of anxiety and despair. Chris Van Allsburg's *The Sweetest Fig* (1993), for instance, features a cruel, sadistic and conceited dentist, Mr. Marcel Bibot, who receives two magical figs that will make his dreams come true. He is in for a nasty surprise, however, as it turns out that instead of granting his greedy and narrow-minded wishes the figs make his *real* dreams, including nightmares, come true. Mr. Bibot's bullied dog steals the second fig and in the climactic twist at the end of the tale we learn that dogs, too, have the ability to dream:

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[93] For a discussion of the interchangeable nature of child characters with animal characters in contemporary picturebooks see Maria Lassén-Seger (2001b).

> When he woke up the next morning, Bibot was confused. He was not in his bed. He was beneath it. Suddenly a face appeared in front of him – his own face!
>
> "Time for your walk," it said. "Come to Marcel." A hand reached down and grabbed him. Bibot tried to yell, but all he could do was bark. (Van Allsburg, 1993: [27-28])

An ironic poetic justice permeates Van Allsburg's grim cautionary tale, for the oppressive Mr. Bibot suddenly finds himself in the position of the oppressed. Compared to Peter's liberating cat metamorphosis in McEwan's *The Daydreamer*, Mr. Bibot experiences precisely the uncanny horror that Peter is spared when he has to watch someone else take residence in his own body.

Another picturebook tale in which an adult character experiences metamorphosis with sheer horror is Arthur Yorinks and Richard Egielski's *Hey, Al* (1986).[94] Here animal metamorphosis turns from a pleasurable fantasy of a hallucinatory nature into a regular nightmare. "Al, a nice man, a quiet man, a janitor", who lives with his dog and life companion, Eddie, in a bleak, small, and scruffy room in New York, struggles to make ends meet (Yorinks and Egielski, [1986] 1989: [2]). One morning a colourful giant bird appears in their bathroom window. The bird invites Al and Eddie to a place where there are no worries and no cares. Interestingly enough, it is Eddie the dog – perhaps symbolising Al's animal nature, his instincts and his pleasure-seeking drives understood as his "id" – who decides that they should accept the bird's proposal:

> You can imagine that evening's conversation. Eddie was already packing.
> "*What?* Just quit my job?" Al said.
> "There's more to life than mops and pails!" Eddie insisted.
> "But –"
> "That's it, we're going. I don't want to hear another word."
> At dawn, they were both in the bathroom. Waiting. (Yorinks and Egielski, [1986] 1989: [7])

The bird takes Al and his dog to a mythical island in the sky where they enjoy a life of ease in a land of plenty. The illustrations are no longer confined to depicting Al and Eddie's cramped and bleak apartment framed on one side of the spread. Instead, throughout their fantastic

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94. The picturebook was awarded The Caldecott Medal in 1987.

journey, the lushly coloured illustrations cover entire spreads drawing readers into the magic setting.

Whereas Al initially wears a worried look on his face, Eddie is instantly rapt with excitement. Eventually, Al also grows to appreciate the luxurious idleness of their new life:

> "What a life," Al cooed. "A guy could live like this forever."
>
> The days passed blissfully. As memories of their old life slowly faded, Al and Eddie decided that this was ecstasy. (Yorinks and Egielski, [1986] 1989: [16])

But suddenly the story takes a nasty turn. One morning the two friends wake up to find themselves turning into birds (see picture 8). The birds which inhabit the island have so far waited on Al and Eddie hand and foot, but now they demonstratively turn their backs on the desperate couple. Frightened of their transformation, they flee back to the city. Like Icarus, who was overexcited by the thrills of flying and suffered for his hubris by burning his wings when too close to the sun, Eddie loses control and plunges into the open sea. Al barely makes it back to his room, and the pile of newspapers stacked outside his door challenges the interpretation that the island adventure was only a dream.[95]

Despite the moral message tacked on at the very end, when Eddie and Al are seen as reunited and happily painting their humble home in new, bright colours – "Paradise lost is sometimes Heaven found" (Yorinks and Egielski, [1986] 1989: [27]) – the story remains profoundly ambiguous. Or as one reviewer chose to phrase it, "[t]he theme here is, 'be happy with who you are,' or maybe, 'there's no free lunch'" (Marantz, 1987: 151). And the most intriguing aspect of *Hey, Al* is that the metamorphosis is without any further explanations portrayed as a horrific experience. Becoming a bird holds no attraction whatsoever for Al, who would rather mop floors than lose his human self (Yorinks and Egielski, [1986] 1989: [19-20]). The possibility that this might have something to do with the fact that he is an adult character undergoing the transformation, and not a child, is strengthened when one compares the book with an earlier work of Yorinks and Egielski which also explores the motif of metamorphosis.

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[95] Such uncanny slippage is today quite usual in fantasy picturebooks. Nikolajeva and Scott (2001: 175) refer to the technique as the "Mary Poppins syndrome", which signifies that a detail is added to the story in order to create ambivalence as to whether the supernatural events presented in the story should be interpreted symbolically or mimetically. In this case, the pile of newspapers suggests that actual time has passed while Al and Eddie have been away on their supernatural journey. This detail subverts a strict symbolic reading of their journey and suggests a mimetic reading of the fantastic event.

Yorinks and Egielski's *Louis the Fish* (1980)[96] tells a story, with similar surreal undertones, about Louis, a third-generation butcher whose childhood wish is realised when he turns into a salmon. Although this is overtly described as the happiest of events, it is covertly suggested that Louis's transformation is far less liberating and joyful – that Louis has lost his grip on reality and gone insane. The picturebook begins in a matter-of-fact tone of voice that echoes the dead-pan narrative voice of Kafka's seminal short story: "One day last spring, Louis, a butcher, turned into a fish. Silvery scales. Big lips. A tail. A salmon" (Yorinks and Egielski, [1980] 1986: [1]). Like Kafka's short story, Yorinks and Egielski's picturebook provides no direct information as to how the metamorphosis is brought about. Their narrative consists mainly of flashbacks from Louis's unhappy life up until that – supposedly happy – day when he wakes up and finds himself transformed into a fish. Already as a child he had hated meat and loved fish. Yet family tradition demanded that he spend his days selling meat. Finally, his obsession with fish makes him

> see fish everywhere. At home. On the bus. At ball games. Even his customers began to look like fish to him.
>
> Business started to fail. His health declined. He was always thirsty. (Yorinks and Egielski, [1980] 1986: [16-17])

Louis has comically absurd nightmares of being attacked by giant hamburgers and salamis. Finally, the pressures of everyday adult life are too much for him. Like Gregor Samsa, Louis wakes up one morning and finds himself altered beyond recognition.

In this elusive tale, the comic and the tragic overlap and intertwine. The illustrations are comical and cartoon-like, so softening the unsettling depiction of Louis's heart-rending loneliness, and of his upsetting nightmares and hallucinations. One illustration, however, alludes directly to the motif of insanity. It depicts Louis's father reading a newspaper showing the following suggestive heading in bold letters: "Denise goes crazy!" (Yorinks and Egielski, [1980] 1986: [10-11]).

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[96] The picturebook was named one of the Best Books of 1980 by *The School Library Journal.*

The portrayal of Louis's metamorphosis as possibly originating from a psychosis is another contrast between Cole's, Linklater's, Ahlberg's or McEwan's happily liberated pre-adolescent metamorphs and Yorinks and Egielski's tragic adult metamorphs. Whereas the former protagonists connect to the comic and carnival tradition of grotesque realism, Al's and Louis's characterisation conforms to the alienated, fragmented and privatised body of post-Romanticism. According to Allon White (1982: 55), the post-Romantic carnivalesque body lodged in bourgeois fictions is not involved in social activity but is

> privatized, cut off from social protest and pleasure and assimilated to the subjective unconscious. Less and less the figures of social celebration and communal pleasures, they are the emblems of alienated desire, paranoid fantasy, and the individual will-to-power.

The predicament of Louis may indeed be read in terms of the post-Romantic carnival of the night, where the carnivalesque body "driven in upon the interior darkness of the individual unconscious" becomes largely negative and "often indistinguishable from nightmare and sickness" (White, 1982: 61). Yet the illustrations depict Louis as the happiest of fish, ending his days contentedly in a tank in a pet store. The difference in perspective between Louis, who has always longed to become a fish, and the readers/beholders piecing together the clues given in the verbal and visual narrative, opens the story up to radically different readings. One reading is, of course, that author and illustrator play a game with the readers' expectations. A second reading gives this eerie story a taming moral interpretation perhaps more suitable for a children's book, as does the reviewer in *Publishers Weekly*, who describes it as "a parable on the importance of being yourself".[97] When Louis turns into a fish, he is seen to fulfil a childhood wish and realise his "true self". Therein lies the liberating potential of his metamorphosis. He has finally fulfilled his deepest desire. Yet what has he had to sacrifice in the process? A third reading may stress that more than anything Louis's "liberating" metamorphosis is a means of getting away from his human unhappiness. The price to be paid for such "liberation" is apparently madness, and another prerequisite for Louis's future happiness as a fish is that he forgets "everything about being a butcher [...] or even being a human being at all" (Yorinks and Egielski, [1980] 1986: [25]). The happy mindless expression on Louis's fish face in the closing illustration speaks not only of relief and contentment, but also of an utter annihilation of human mind and body (see picture 9). This last interpretation would suggest that Louis the butcher exists no more, and has sought his happiness in a symbolic death realised as a metamorphosis.

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[97] This review is quoted on the back cover of the Sunburst Book paperback edition from 1986.

To sum up the discussion in this chapter, the pleasures of metamorphosis are indeed the subject of many children's books. Yet as in the case of the *Animorphs* series, a metamorphosis that is experienced as joyful and titillating need not always be understood as empowering for the fictive child. Also, the abundance of joyful pre-adolescent metamorphs in narratives of metamorphosis for children raises several questions as to how child characters are constructed in contrast to adult ones. For the child metamorphs there are usually more pleasures in store, whereas adult metamorphs seldom enjoy their metamorphic adventures. Child-animal metamorphoses are frequently featured as appealing adventures corresponding to the new animal myth, whereas adult-animal metamorphoses typically echo the classical myth of animal transformation as disgraceful and threatening. Of course, this tells us more about our prevailing notions of childhood, adulthood and children's fiction than about the actual state of things. For the pre-adolescent metamorphs, liberating metamorphoses represent radical explorations of their still malleable identities, whereas adult metamorphs mirror the notion of fixed adult selves that are easily threatened by the assault on selfhood posed by metamorphosis.

LUDIC METAMORPHS

Having argued that metamorphic pleasure is predominantly associated with pre-adolescent protagonists, I have also suggested that the study of child-other metamorphosis may need a broader theoretical perspective of the fantastic than the reductive view suggested by Rosemary Jackson. As one way to explore the voluntary and joyful metamorphoses in children's literature, I now turn to the concepts of *play* and *playfulness* as developed in play theory. Particularly suggestive for a start is play theory's notion of ludic space.

"Ludic space" literally means "play area" and relates to the idea central to play theorists within various disciplines[98] that play is set apart from everyday pragmatic actions and enacted within a time-space of its own. In his groundbreaking *Homo Ludens: A Study of the Play Element in Culture* (1950), first published in 1949, the historian Johan Huizinga made a connection between play and order. In this way he laid the groundwork for our present understanding of play as nothing less than the main force behind human civilisation. From the participant's perspective, says Huizinga ([1950] 1955: 28),

> play is a voluntary activity or occupation executed within certain fixed limits of time and place, according to rules freely accepted but absolutely binding, having its aim in itself and accompanied by a feeling of tension, joy and the consciousness that it is "different" from "ordinary life".

The concept of a "ludic space" can thus be understood as a spatiotemporal world framed off from everyday reality by the fact that participants in play share a metacommunicative understanding that this is "play reality", not everyday reality. As the biologist Gregory Bateson (1955) argues in his seminal essay on play and fantasy, the idea of the play frame is a complex psychological construct within which the messages or signals exchanged between players are paradoxically true and untrue at the same time. Using animal play fighting as an example, Bateson ([1955] 1986: 135-136) notes that "the playful nip denotes the bite, but does not denote that which would be denoted by the bite". Thus the paradoxical essence of play lies in the metacommunicative play frame.

This chapter will focus on stories in which pleasurable child-other metamorphoses are framed as imaginary role-*play* or as transgressively *playful* fantasies. Relevant here is a distinction made by the play theorist Brian Sutton-Smith (1997) between "play" and "playful". He suggests that in order to avoid both confusing elisions and exaggerated dichotomies between the two terms (such as serious/frivolous, adult-oriented/child-oriented etc.), we should reserve *play* for "that which

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98. Play theory is today an interdisciplinary subject studied in a multitude of disciplines within both the natural and the human sciences, such as physics, astronomy, biology, neurology, ecology, mathematics, philosophy, history, psychology, psychiatry, semiotics, anthropology, folklore, sociology, political science, economics, education, statistics, communication theory, leisure science, and literary criticism. For an introduction to the wide spectrum of play theory, see Brian Sutton-Smith's *The Ambiguity of Play* (1997).

plays with the frames of the mundane and sticks to its purpose of being a stylized form of house play, truck play, contest, or carnival in which the expected routines or rules guide and frame the action in a steady way throughout" (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 148). The concept of *playful*, by contrast, should be reserved for "that which is metaplay, that which plays with normal expectations of play itself, as does nonsense, parody, paradox, and ridiculousness. Playful would be that which plays with the frames of play" (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 147-148).

The interpretation of play is yet further complicated by a difference between the ways play is conceptualised and actually experienced. As the philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1989: 102) puts it, "play itself contains its own, even sacred, seriousness. Yet, in playing, all those purposive relations that determine active and caring existence have not simply disappeared, but are curiously suspended". In short, "for the player play is not serious: that is why he plays" (Gadamer, 1989: 101). This is especially relevant for the study of child play, which often adopts the single perspective of the adult observer, who may conclude that play is a developmental experience, when for the child it may be nothing but hide-and-seek (cf. Sutton-Smith, 1997: 216). As I now turn to explore picturebook stories in which authors/illustrators suggest that the child's metamorphosis is a result of imaginary role-play, I shall inevitably assume the outsider's position of an adult observer who tries to understand child play as part of a larger construct of the pre-adolescent metamorph. In order to come to grips with the potential pleasures of metamorphosis, I shall also discuss how authors/illustrators may use metamorphic play to communicate pleasure and enjoyment especially to young readers.

IMAGINARY ROLE-PLAY

Any scholarly discussion about play and children's literature runs the risk of mixing up two separate, yet interrelated, concerns. On the one hand, scholarly readers may – with the help of theories about real-life children's play – ask what play means for the fictive playing child within the story. On the other, they may contemplate what play might mean for outside observers such as child readers and adult co-readers (including scholarly readers). Although I am mainly interested in the first question, I find that these perspectives do overlap. Play theorists with a background in psychoanalysis, child psychology and education often stress the link between play and human development. The work of the psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott has been seminal for the commonly accepted view today that child play is the main force behind human creativity and development. Winnicott (1971: 54) argues that,

> [i]t is in playing and only in playing that the individual child or adult is able to be creative and to use the whole personality, and it is only in being creative that the individual discovers the self.

Winnicott postulates that all cultural experience (including art and literature) takes place in an intermediate area between inner/personal psychic reality and external/shared reality. This intermediate area between the individual and the environment functions as a play area where children, especially young ones, can begin to learn how to find imaginary bridges between their inner and outer realities. Winnicott illustrates how so-called "transitional objects/phenomena", such as soft toys and blankets, can help children through the difficult process of losing their sense of omnipotence once they start perceiving their selves as separate from their environment. At the same time, he also makes a case for play as the driving force behind such a healthy development. Winnicott's influential contribution to play theory in general is to suggest a link between play and human real-life issues such as growth and health, communication, and the capacity to share cultural experiences, including art and literature. The utilitarian value of child play is also stressed by play theorists within child psychology and education who, drawing on Piaget and Erikson, link play to social and cognitive skills such as growth, maturation, socialisation, ego development, role taking, language acquisition, problem solving, creativity and divergent thinking (cf. Pepler and Rubin, 1982; Singer and Singer, 2005).

Not surprisingly, such ideas of play as progress have found their way into children's literature criticism where (at least hypothetical) links have been suggested between child readers, play, and children's exploration and perception of self in relation to the world around them. John Stephens (1992: 187), for one, argues along these lines when he says that one important function of play is to enable "experimentation with subjectivity, because it requires a co-operative relationship between the self and an other [...] and commonly involves the adoption of assumed roles and personalities". My first concern in the analyses that follow is to relate such general theories about real-life children's play to stories in which fictive children experiment with their subjectivities through pleasurable and liberating imaginary metamorphoses. My second concern is to discuss how different readers (child/adult/scholars) may relate to these books.

Self-exploration through a self/other conflict is indeed at the centre of Hiawyn Oram and Tony Ross's picturebook *Anyone Seen Harry Lately?* (1988) in which Harry, the boy protagonist, uses a number of imaginary metamorphic disguises as a means of avoiding disappointments, awkward duties and responsibilities:

> Whenever Harry did not like
> the way things looked,
> he disappeared
> re-appearing as some other Harry
> for Harrysaurs are not required
> to tidy rooms or hang up clothes,
> Harrylions are never left
> with babysitters half the night
> and Harryfish are free to swim
> and never told to wash their ears
> because they have none.
> So while others fought their battles face to face
> Harry sailed behind some great disguises
> and got away unscratched.
> (Oram and Ross, 1988: [1-5])

The cover illustration of the book is a crucial clue to all readers – young or old – that the boy's various transformations are imaginary role-play. It depicts a typical pretend-play scene involving parent and child. Harry's mother is standing in the foreground looking genuinely concerned, but also far too obviously unaware of the small figure standing closely behind her in the shape of a contentedly grinning "Harrygator" (see picture 10). The question in the book's title – "Anyone seen Harry lately?" – is directly linked to the mother, who is apparently the one in search of something. Both the cover and the title thus denote the *play frame* of the narrative. Borrowing terminology from play theory, one could say that the cover illustration and the title send a metacommunicative message to the readers/beholders that the events to be portrayed within the book will be set within a ludic space rather than within a mimetic setting.

Harry's great plan to escape confrontations and domestic chores by assuming alternative disguises backfires, however, when his parents, neighbours and friends themselves take up the playful game of shapeshifting. As they play along and keep asking where Harry has disappeared to, when all they can find are Harrygators tucked up in bed and Harrytanks zooming down the stairs, they challenge the play frame and the rules of the game that Harry has established. When people in his surroundings no longer seem to understand that he is at one with the various shapes he pretends to shift into, the border between Harry's Self and the Other (that is, his not-self) suddenly becomes uncomfortably blurred. The emotional impact of Harry's "invisibility" is typically communicated through a lack of parental care and affection:

> He sat unfed.
> (No one feeds strange Harrystricters.)
> He lay unkissed (no one kisses Harrybeetles)
> and wondered where he'd lost himself
> along the road to peace and quiet.
> (Oram and Ross, 1988: [12-13])

This prompts Harry to reassess his use of role-play. Yet readers/beholders are allowed a comical distance to his possibly unsettling identity crisis, thanks to the play frame around the events portrayed. Compared to Bernard's unresolved monster transformation in McKee's *Not Now, Bernard*, which is taken to extreme lengths in that Bernard's make-believe produces no response at all from his parents, Harry's tongue-in-cheek metamorphic play is the very opposite. Harry may well be forced by the consequences of his actions to gain greater knowledge about himself in relation to his surroundings. But if so, he learns this through self-representational and self-discovering *play*. He is not bullied into submission by neglectful or oppressive adults.

Such a reading is possible, if one can value a fictive child's play not merely for its socialising effect on the fictive child but also for the different meanings it has for those who observe it from outside and for the fictive child who engages in it. Brian Sutton-Smith (1997: 142-143) suggests that while play can indeed be employed as a literary trope, and in particular as a metaphor for other things, it can also be used as a non-referential enactment of pure play. Sutton-Smith illustrates the crucial difference between interpreting one and the same statement, "Brian is a pig", metaphorically and as a description of a play situation. While the metaphorical interpretation implies a snide comment on Brian's personality, the play interpretation merely depicts him as voluntarily assuming a fictive role. It is true that the function of Harry's metamorphoses in *Anyone Seen Harry Lately?* could be interpreted by an adult and/or scholarly reader as metaphorically alluding to the boy's unruly (animal) nature. But given the play frame around the story, Harry's shapeshifting tendencies seem unlikely to imply a snide remark about his character. On the contrary, Harry remains the one in charge throughout the story. He is the one who calls the rules of the game, who can choose when to enter or leave his disguises, because – from his point of view – the metamorphoses are pure *play*, not metaphorical literary tropes.

Child readers may easily sympathise with Harry's view of metamorphic play as a chance to assert his own will and agency. Given that picturebooks use both verbal and visual narration to tell their stories, authors and illustrators tend to make the inner, imaginary world – or the ludic space – of the child protagonist literally visible in the illustrations. In order to ensure that even very young, inexperienced child readers (or perhaps rather "beholders", since they are more likely to be watching the illustrations while the text is being read to them) will understand that the narratives deal with imaginary rather than "realistic" events, the child transformed into an Other is often depicted with some human attribute denoting the metonymical relationship between child and metamorph. This can be a piece of clothing, as in Oram and Ross's book, where Harry constantly wears his sneakers or his pyjamas regardless of his physical appearance; or a shadowy reflection of the child metamorph's original human shape, as in Blair Drawson's lavishly illustrated *Mary Margaret's Tree* (1996). Drawson's picturebook features a young girl who imagines herself becoming one with nature and temporarily turns into a tree. At the height of her metamorphic play, the outline of her face is still visible, reassuringly smiling, within the thick trunk of the tree (see picture 11).

The picturebooks by Oram and Ross and by Drawson demonstrate that the pleasures of metamorphic play largely derive from the child character being immersed in their play activities, yet simultaneously in charge of the rules and the duration of play. These books are very clear in their separation of the ludic space from everyday "reality". At the end of *Mary Margaret's Tree*, when the girl protagonist abandons her metamorphic game to have supper, the kitchen scene where she eats her meal is strewn with details which still allude to her previous imaginary game of returning to nature. The small drawing stuck on the fridge is especially allusive, depicting a girl in a tree-like posture signed with the initials M. M., so pointing to the connection between her previous tree metamorphosis and her creative imagination. Even more importantly, unlike Yorinks and Egielski's *Hey, Al*,[99] no visual detail challenges the play frame which denotes that Mary Margaret's metamorphosis has been imaginary. At the end of Oram and Ross's picturebook, Harry, too, gains full control of the situation, when he discovers his own, rude and obstinate self within the Harrygator he has become and urges his own imaginary characters to do the same and "find their own identity" (Oram and Ross, 1988: [19]). The decision to stop playing the game of metamorphosis belongs also here solely to the child protagonist. But as a comic twist on the very last page, Harry is seen mischievously winking to the readers/beholders behind his parents' backs. He has returned to his human "self", "tonight at any rate", but has clearly not decided to give up his role-play forever (Oram and Ross, 1988: [24]).

The pleasure that fictive child metamorphs may find in make-believe games of otherness can thus, from their own perspective, be explained by the relaxation and sense of joy and agency they derive from being immersed in their play. From my outsider scholar's perspective, however, these pleasurable "pretend" metamorphoses appear to empower fictive children – as they may do child readers who empathise with the playing child in the book – by granting them a joyful means to exert control and increase their sense of self-awareness:

> Children take pleasure in linking, through repetition, novel material with familiar material in the fairly controlled setting of pretend play. Similarly, in the course of make-believe games, they may find opportunities to express a full range of emotions, from excitement to fear, sadness, or anger, all in a framework that they control. [...] Make-believe play thus becomes a critical stratagem by which children learn to make sense of their world[.] (Singer and Singer, 2005: 166)

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[99] In fantasy picturebooks this kind of ambiguity frequently subverts the interpretation of the supernatural events as either symbolic or mimetic. Other examples of picturebooks, in which elements in the visual narrative interrogate whether the child protagonist's metamorphosis was dream or reality, make-believe or truth, hallucination or sane perception, would include for example Michael Elsohn Ross and Peter Parnall's *Become a Bird and Fly!* and Kit Wright and Peter Bailey's *Tigerella* (1993).

Psychologists such as Brian Vandenberg (1986) and Jerome L. Singer (1995), who specialise in the study of imaginative child play, view symbolic play as a crucial means whereby children develop resilience and hope in times of difficulty. Make-believe play allegedly helps children miniaturise the world's complexities into forms they can successfully manipulate (Singer, 1995: 190-191). One example of a child metamorph who overtly uses imaginary role-play to cope with an unfamiliar and unstable situation would be Filbert MacFee in Roberta Karim and Sue Truesdell's picturebook *This Is a Hospital, Not a Zoo!* (1998). Here Filbert, the hospitalised boy protagonist, eats magical animal crackers and undergoes a ludicrous series of animal transformations in order to avoid taking orders from the hospital personnel.[100] Another example would be the Korean girl Yoon in Helen Recorvits and Gabi Swiatkowska's picturebook *My Name Is Yoon* (2003). With the aid of role-play, Yoon comes to terms with her new life in America. Yoon dislikes the way her name looks and sounds in her new language, English, so when asked to write her name at school she chooses instead to present herself as various imaginary animals and objects. The make-believe shapes she assumes in her imagination become transitional objects that help her exercise control over, and eventually embrace her new environment (see picture 12).

It is hardly a coincidence that all the examples mentioned above are picturebooks. The picturebook medium seems to be a very fertile, perhaps even the *most* fertile, medium for stories of pre-adolescent protagonists whose metamorphoses are set within ludic spaces. There are at least two obvious reasons for this, which have to do with the characteristics of the picturebook medium itself, as well as with prevailing notions of its intended audience. First of all, as demonstrated above, picturebooks can represent child role-play in intriguing ways because they involve both visual and verbal narration. Interesting counterpoints between illustrations and text can signal to readers that the fantastic child-other transformation is not to be read straightforwardly as mimetic, but as set within a ludic space which denotes that the events portrayed are both pure play experience and make-believe pretence.

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[100] In this picturebook an adult character is in fact allowed to enter the child's ludic space. A doctor, who joins Filbert in a romp as an orang-utan, understands that the boy's main affliction is that he suffers from homesickness. When he is allowed to return home, Filbert stops his troublesome shapeshifting.

Secondly, the majority of picturebooks are still written and published with a young audience in mind, although, as the selection presented in this dissertation should amply demonstrate, authors and illustrators of contemporary picturebooks often use this flexible medium to experiment in intriguing ways with issues of address. Whereas Anthony Browne, for example, elegantly manages to address a dual audience, a picturebook such as Quentin Blake's *Zagazoo* might be said to address more exclusively mature readers. The picturebooks studied in this section, however, feature pre-adolescent protagonists and are primarily addressed to and marketed for a young audience. As noted earlier, certain (adult) authors, critics, and play theorists tend to regard young readers (or listeners, in case they experience the story through a mediating adult reading aloud) as especially closely associated with play and playfulness. J. A. Appleyard (1991), who has conducted a reader-response study of how we develop as readers, calls the first of five stages of readerliness "the reader as player". This stage refers to preschoolers, who have not learnt to read for themselves yet. Appleyard, who obviously is a firm believer in the idea of play as progress, links literary experiences at this stage to the concept of play understood as a mechanism with which children explore self/other relationships and thus gain confidence and trust in themselves. To him, play should be seen "as a mechanism by which the child might enact a growing sense of the world's potential meaning and of the child's identity in it" (Appleyard, [1991] 1994: 45).

Children's literature critics often use reader-response studies like Appleyard's, as well as psychological theories like Winnicott's, as evidence that there is a special connection between play/playfulness and the picturebook medium. John Stephens (1992) and David Lewis (2001) both relate learning and play especially to picturebooks addressed to a young audience. Stephens's (1992: 198-199) arguments are very close to Appleyard's: he states that picturebooks "are produced for an audience beginning to grapple with self-other interactions, and this is a major theme and significance of the mode, expressed through depictions of activities such as conflict, adventure and play". Lewis (2001: 76), on the other hand, suggests that certain characteristics of the intended audience of picturebooks correspond to certain aesthetic characteristics of the picturebook medium itself:

> The implied reader of many picturebooks is one for whom reading and the world of fiction are only gradually taking shape, and this open-endedness in the learner, this state of perpetual becoming, is matched by an open-endedness and freedom from constraint in the picturebook. Picturebook makers respond to the child's need for play with playfulness in word and image.

Lewis (2001: 48) suggests that picturebooks – which very concretely demand that readers/beholders create the narrative from mixing words and images – are best understood as *texts-as-read*. That is, the iconotext of picturebook stories is not to be defined exclusively by author/illustrator, text or reader/beholder, but by all of them interacting.[101] Whereas Stephens's quotation in part explains the preoccupation with metamorphosis *as play* in picturebooks, Lewis sees *playfulness* as characteristic of the picturebook medium in general. To my mind, both views fit the picturebooks that have been discussed in this section, since all of the narratives studied here celebrate the imaginative powers of the pre-adolescent child through the portrayal of ludic child metamorphs who find both pleasure and comfort in make-believe games of becoming an Other.

TRANSGRESSIVE PLAYFUL FANTASY

Theories of play as progress further a deeper scholarly understanding of many stories depicting child protagonists' metamorphoses as a pleasurable and liberating self-seeking activity. Yet interpreting child play exclusively in terms of adaptation, social, emotional and cognitive growth, or socialisation runs the risk of being reductive. In *The Ambi-*

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[101] Lewis's approach to literature as play is thereby similar to Gadamer's (1989), who sees human interaction with art (including literature) as a hermeneutic process that comes into being "in between" the work of art, its performers and its audience as it is being presented.

guity of Play (1997),[102] Brian Sutton-Smith concludes that the study of play and games is still too restricted to an Enlightenment view of play as progress,[103] which tends to suppress issues of power and identity, or the wild, dark and irrational side of play. As Sutton-Smith (1995: 281) also writes elsewhere, play theorists risk over-idealising childhood if they neglect "the great importance of power-striving amongst children" and "the hidden transcripts of the children's subcultural revolt against the powerful figures who dominate their own lives". In my view, play's potential beyond the frivolous can here – as in the next chapter on the traditional carnival plot pattern of stories of child metamorphosis – be helpfully explored in relation to Bakhtin's (1984) notion of utopian and temporary carnival power reversals. In the present section, the discussion will be restricted to stories in which a child character's metamorphosis – although lacking an overt play frame that separates ludic space from everyday "reality" – takes the shape of a transgressive *playful* fantasy.

Of all ludic child metamorphs, the child turning into a monster may well be the one most obviously involved in a power struggle with adult authority. Henrik Drescher's picturebook *The Boy Who Ate Around*

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[102] Sutton-Smith examines here the theoretical discourses of play scholarship and singles out seven dominating rhetorical discourses in the study of play: play as progress; play as fate (used when exploring the coercive aspects of play and games of chance, such as gambling); play as power (used when studying skills and strategies employed in order to acquire status and victory in politics, war and sports); play as identity (used to study festivals, carnivals and other cultural events that strengthen a collective sense of community); play as the imaginary (used to study fantasy and tropes within art and literature, originating in Romanticism); play as the self (a psychological approach used to understand solitary and leisure play as a means of promoting a sense of individualism); play as frivolity (used to study jesters and tricksters who nonsensically invert reality, originates paradoxically in the Puritan ethics of play, since that ethics defines play as the binary opposite of serious and sober work). Sutton-Smith then argues that every play rhetoric in isolation runs the risk of over-emphasising its own perspective. Instead, he advocates a broader dialogic study of play that would enable us to gain a wider and more flexible understanding of the elusive concept of play.

[103] The play theorist Mihai I. Spariosu (1989) also claims that throughout the history of the study of play there have been two conflicting ways of approaching the subject. One approach is to interpret play in the Platonic tradition as rational, non-violent and orderly and thus associated with cultural organisation, humanisation, catharsis, or socialisation. The other is to perceive play from an Aristotelian point of view, as prerational and, therefore, associated with power seeking, domination, and hegemony, as well as disorder, inversion, and resistance. Like Sutton-Smith, Spariosu argues that rational play concepts still dominate the discussion of play in the human sciences.

(1994)[104] opens with a classic child/adult conflict at the dinner table, where Mo is left alone and forced to finish his dinner. Instead of obeying his parents' orders, Mo embarks on a fantastic journey transforming into various ghastly monsters with a sturdy appetite for anything but the healthy dinner he is supposed to eat. Although the child-monster transformation here tends to be comic rather than horrific, it will be well worth while to dig deeper into the cultural significance of monsterhood. As Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (1996) notes, the transgressive body of the monster mirrors a culture's current fears, desires, anxieties, and fantasies. Etymologically, the word *monstrum* signifies "that which reveals", as well as "that which warns", and just "[l]ike a letter on the page, the monster signifies something other than itself" (Cohen, 1996: 4). In this section, I shall pursue what, in Drescher's story, the monstrous Other might signify.

Mo's self-chosen monster transformations can be examined from the point of view of transgression and the grotesque. Whereas transgression is concerned with breaking rules and crossing social boundaries between the acceptable and the unacceptable – or as the anthropologist Mary Douglas (1966) puts it, by observing purity or breaking the pollution taboo – the grotesque is a term that derives from art and architecture, signifying an aesthetics that keeps elaborating upon the margins of these social boundaries. Drawing on Bakhtin, the children's literature critic Andrew Casson (1997: 1) concludes that a central feature of the liminal category of the grotesque as a literary device is its ability to "amuse us and terrify us at the same time". In Casson's taxonomy, the grotesque is located in between the real and the fantastic, the comic and the horrible. The focal point of transgression in grotesque imagery is the open, unfinished, body – the antithesis of the clean and pure body associated with civilisation and idealised in Classical art and literature (Casson, 1997: 216; Haag, 1999: 12-13).

Eating is an act that involves the crossing of the liminal zones of the "outside" and the "inside" of the body, hence it is potentially dangerous (Mechling, 2000: 8). And since the body is the main concern of the transgressive, monstrous grotesque, it is hardly surprising that food and eating are central themes in a narrative of child-monster transformation. The opening scene of Drescher's picturebook, in which Mo is left alone to finish a meal he finds repulsive, echoes Heinrich Hoffmann's classic picturebook story of food and oppression in *Der Struwwelpeter* (*Slovenly Peter*, 1845) where Suppen-Kaspar, who refuses to eat his soup, ends up in the graveyard. Although Hoffmann's intent may have been to produce a dark satire that ridicules the cautionary tale, his narrative is profoundly ambiguous and such a reading is not self-evident to every reader. Be that as it may, both Hoffmann's and Drescher's stories illustrate the ambivalent symbolic meaning of food. Depending on the context, food can be either desirable or repugnant. Julia Kristeva (1982: 2) speaks of "food loathing" as "perhaps the most elementary and most archaic form of abjection", as well as a powerful instrument for rewarding or disciplining the child. And as the folklorist Jay Mechling (2000: 9) points out in an article about table manners and playing with food, children's bodies become a

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[104] The picturebook was chosen a *New York Times* Best Illustrated Children's Book in 1994 and won The Parents' Choice Award in 1996.

> site of struggle when children resist the power of adults. The struggle begins early and over [...] [the liminal zones in between the outside and the inside of the body] – that is, over adults' attempts to control the child's body by socializing its eating, urinating, and defecating.

In Western culture adults place a symbolic value on food far beyond the pure biological necessity of eating. "Like toys [...] food is a 'gift' that bears many messages, including 'I love you.' Parents of all social classes use food as rewards and punishments" (Mechling, 2000: 19).

The importance and symbolic function of food in children's literature has, since the publication of Wendy R. Katz's (1980) seminal essay, been explored from various points of view. Depending on the context, food has been seen as a substitute for oral and genital desires (Katz, 1980; Kuznets, 1994); as a representation of the nostalgic desire for a lost childhood utopia (Barker, 1982; Hunt, 1996); as a means of exercising power over others (Casson, 1997; Warner, 1998); and as a harbinger of comfort, as well as trials and danger (Nikolajeva, 2000a). The argument shared by all of these approaches is, however, that food and eating are among the most significant motifs used to express (bodily) desire within the discourse of children's literature.

Sociologically oriented studies of child rearing confirm that food fads and bad table manners are efficient means for children to defy parental authority (Newson and Newson, 1968: 205-242). These everyday concerns have left their imprint in fiction for children and in Swedish picturebooks from the 1960s onwards, dinner scenes are often used as a backdrop for staging conflicts around the integrity of the child (Hallberg, 1999: 163). Against this background, Drescher's picturebook is seen to unashamedly take sides with the oppressed child. From Mo's point of view, the string beans and cheese soufflé on his plate not only look like, but *are* "lizard guts and bullfrog heads" (Drescher, [1994] 1996: [1]). In order to avoid having to eat this revolting meal, Mo decides (ironically enough) to be polite and "eat around" his dinner.

In addition to Hoffmann's Suppen-Kaspar, Drescher's Mo is intertextually related to a number of other classical works. In 1963 Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* – probably the most frequently discussed picturebook within Anglo-Saxon children's literature criticism – set the pattern for picturebook stories where the child character's frustration and anger takes physical shape in the body of a wild beast. Screaming "I'LL EAT YOU UP!" in capital letters is Max's way of defying his mother. For this insubordination he is symptomatically "sent to bed without eating anything" (Sendak, [1963] 1992: [5]). Sendak chooses to end his story on a positive note, though. Having come to terms with his aggression during his journey to the land of the wild things, Max returns to his room where the warm supper awaiting him signals that the child/parent conflict is resolved.

Since then, numerous picturebook artists have exploited the child-monster metamorphosis motif for less artistic and more overtly coercive purposes, such as frightening the fictive child into submission and obedience. In Susie Wilde and Susan Torrence's picturebook *Extraordinary Chester* (1988), for example, a young boy behaving like a monster in front of his parents gets a fright when he suddenly turns into one. He is even kicked out of his own home by his father, who does not recognise this monster child as his own offspring. When Chester has learned his heavy-handed lesson – that it is better to be "plain" and ordinary than "extraordinary" and freakish – he also learns filial subordination and is allowed to return home again (Wilde and Torrence, 1988: [28]). In contrast to Sendak's and Drescher's picturebooks, stories like *Extraordinary Chester* employ disempowering child-monster metamorphoses to teach implied child readers the dangers of disobedience and the drawbacks of anti-social behaviour.[105] Let me hasten to note, though, that the image of the disobedient child is, of course, not constant, but just as flexible in time and place as the ever-changing views on child rearing practices. A coercive child-monster story can thus also be seen to promote a certain amount of "safe" transgressive behaviour as in Angelo DeCesare's *Anthony the Perfect Monster* (1996), in which a priggish boy does not become a "normal" child until he learns to accept his "inner monster". These stories may not be challenging as literature, but they do reveal interesting things about the ways in which the child metamorph is constructed.

Of particular note here, however, are child-monster picturebooks that challenge and play with the pattern of Sendak's paradigmatic story of the wild and aggressively ludic monster-child. In *Not Now, Bernard* David McKee plays with readers' expectations of how such stories should end. McKee uses monsterhood to expose the neglected child in a manner that radically deviates from Sendak's narrative. Yet like Sendak, neither McKee nor Drescher use the child-monster metamorphosis motif simply to create cautionary tales in which the child's aggressive and anti-social behaviour is punished or silenced. Drescher even dares to take his child metamorph's rebellion a step further. Whereas the powerlessness of McKee's Bernard is fully exposed by the boy being *eaten* and internalised within the monster, and whereas Sendak's Max only dares to *threaten* to devour his mother, the first thing Mo does having "turned himself into a ferocious green warthog monster" is to eat his mother and father who, in true grotesque fashion, are reported to be "munchy" (Drescher, [1994] 1996: [3-4]). Through Mo, a ludic child who revels in his own monstrosity, Drescher thus inverts the traditional folklore motif of Bluebeards, ogres, bogeymen, witches and child-snatchers who feast on the flesh of innocent and vulnerable children (cf. Warner, 1998). Kathryn Harrison (1994: 28), who reviewed the book for *The New York Times*, calls it "a creation myth in reverse", one which takes pleasure in destruction. Here the initially disempowered subject turns the tables on those who exercise power over him. Mo continues to eat around his meal, working his way through his home, his neighbourhood and his school, to the White House and the fifty states of America. No one is spared. He even eats his own best friend to get rid of the bad taste from his maths teacher. When Mo has devoured the entire planet earth, continent by continent, he is left alone in space. Having pursued his desire for power and omnipotence until nothing is left to conquer, Mo, like Sendak's Max, suffers the pangs of loneliness that make him regurgitate all that he has eaten and transform back into himself again.

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[105] See also F. Kaff and Doug Cushman's picturebook *Monster for a Day: Or the Monster in Gregory's Pajamas* (1979).

The differences in how Max and Mo express their anger and resist adult oppression has previously been addressed by Kara Keeling and Scott Pollard (1999), who conclude that unlike Sendak's Max, Drescher's protean child is not limited to dreaming of liberation. I would add that each story furthers this distinction by the use of metamorphosis. Whereas Max's transformation into a wild thing is framed within a fantastic journey that may be read mimetically or symbolically,[106] Mo's monster metamorphoses are depicted exclusively from Mo's point of view as purely playful and transgressive fantasy.[107] These differences must, according to Keeling and Pollard, be related to the picturebooks' historical contexts. Although Sendak's Max compared to Drescher's Mo seems more overtly humbled by his own transgression today, for its own time Sendak's picturebook was, in its open "appreciation of wildness, chaos, anarchy, unmitigated fantasy, freedom and unregulated behavior", radical enough (Keeling and Pollard, 1999: 129).

A ludic child metamorph such as Mo is, of course, just as much a product of its own time as Max is of his. Andrew Casson (1997) sees a link between the subject matter allowed in children's fiction and current images of the child. He concludes that the vogue for humorous transgression and the grotesque, which flourished in Victorian children's literature (Edward Lear, Lewis Carroll), declined in the 1870s and did not reappear with full force in British fiction for children until the 1960s (Ted Hughes, Roald Dahl). But the return of the grotesque in late twentieth-century Anglo-Saxon children's literature appears partly to rest on a more relaxed attitude towards the body and a greater willingness among authors to address implied child readers by taking sides with their oppressed child protagonists.[108] As part of this larger trend, Drescher, too, undermines any wholesome lessons child readers might learn from *The Boy Who Ate Around* with the use of grotesque body imagery. The repulsive frog's head on Mo's dinner plate oozes yellow vapour from the mouth. On the following page, the text is positioned so that it suggests Mo is actually throwing up (see picture 13). Bodily fluids and functions are exaggerated and enjoyed in a gargantuan-like fashion. Snot streams from the phallus-like snout of monster-Mo, whose body knows no borders, as it keeps shedding its skin in order to reveal new monstrous interiors. Mo's transformations echo the vitality of the Renaissance grotesque, which Bakhtin (1984) saw as focusing on the lower bodily stratum and as addressing temporary power reversals with carnival laughter.[109] Earlier child-monster picturebooks suggest that unruly behaviour will render the child lonely and devoid of parental affection. Drescher's ludic monster-child of the 1990s, by way of contrast, undermines such a lesson once and for all on the spread where monster-Mo is depicted all alone in space, punished for his gluttonous and transgressive feast, not by guilt, but by indigestion (see picture 14).

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[106] The different phases of the moon in Max's bedroom window before and after his journey suggest that a long period of time has passed and thus subvert a strictly symbolic reading of the fantastic journey.

[107] In her review for *The Horn Book Magazine* Maeve Visser Knoth (1994: 574) also interprets Drescher's picturebook as an outrageous fantasy or a child's dream.

The subject matter and the visual body imagery, as well as the layout of Drescher's picturebook, breathe a sense of playful chaos and disorder. Or as Peter F. Neumeyer (1997) says in his review of the book: the story as such

> may give you trepidation. But, in fact, Drescher's language is rich and colorful and, above all, his drawings -- superficially faux childlike -- are so outrageous, funny, silly, and zany, especially in the way they are scattered all over the page, that the book proclaims to even the most puritan viewer, "I'm a joke!"

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108. In his humorous fantasy novels – such as for example *James and the Giant Peach* (1961), *George's Marvellous Medicine* (1981), and *Matilda* (1988) – Roald Dahl celebrates the competence of his child protagonists by allowing them to triumph over oppressive and abusive adults (cf. Lassén-Seger, 1996).

109. Bakhtin did argue, rather too categorically for many later critics, that the communal, joyful and life-affirming Renaissance grotesque disappeared and was replaced by an individual, moralising and more intrinsically negative and alienated Romantic grotesque in nineteenth- and twentieth-century art. Recent studies such as Andrew Casson's *Funny Bodies* (1997) and *Seriously Weird: Papers on the Grotesque* (1999), edited by Alice Mills, show, however, that Bakhtin's understanding of grotesque realism can still help us dig deeper into the transgressive nature of such diverse twentieth-century cultural phenomena as Roald Dahl's prose and poetry for children or the British cult television series *Absolutely Fabulous*.

The endpapers are littered with fragments from the text, early sketches for the book, photos, stamps etc.[110] The title page plays a metafictional joke on readers/beholders who see the book they are about to read stuck on a monster's fork ready to be devoured. Drescher mixes a variety of techniques in a collage-like fashion and frequently uses simultaneous succession[111] in order to convey speedy movement across the pages. Moreover, the monster scenes openly resist the orderliness of framing. Monster-Mo wallows across entire spreads and there is hardly ever room on the pages to contain his entire ever-expanding body (see picture 15). In true Bakhtinian fashion, Mo's grotesque body is ambivalent, contradictory, and shifting. The appeal of liberating laughter – remember Neumeyer's words: this is a joke! – connected with the form of the carnival-grotesque can be seen as consecrating

> inventive freedom, to permit the combination of a variety of different elements and their rapprochement, to liberate from the prevailing point of view of the world, from conventions and established truths, from clichés, from all that is humdrum and universally accepted. This carnival spirit offers the chance to have a new outlook on the world, to realize the relative nature of all that exists, and to enter a completely new order of things. (Bakhtin, 1984: 34)

Since Mo controls his monster metamorphoses throughout the narrative, his escapist delight is never threatened. Not even in the end, when the transgressive and grotesque child (typical of late twentieth-century children's fiction) is allowed to win the power struggle against his parents. Throughout the history of Western children's literature, the gluttonous and excessive child has been alternately celebrated and condemned (Bergstrand, 1999: 44). In Drescher's book that child wins a glorious victory. String beans and cheese soufflé are reported to be off the menu forever and Mo even escapes the classical punishment of "no pudding" for rejecting the main course. The initial oppressive scene in which the boy was seated alone at the dinner table is exchanged for a closing feast on luscious banana splits in the company of Mo's happy parents and best friend.

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[110] John Warren Stewig (1991), who considers Drescher one of the ten most significant picturebook artists of the 1980s, comments on his unusual use of endpapers in earlier picturebooks. These tend to be unconventionally slapdash and casual, thereby creating a disconcerting bridge between the cover and the title page.

[111] Originating in medieval art, simultaneous succession is a technique frequently used in picturebooks to convey movement. It refers to the depiction of an object or a character several times on the same page or doublespread so that the viewer is encouraged to decode the string of objects/persons as one and the same entity moving in time and space (cf. Nikolajeva and Scott, 2001: 139-145).

Both Oram and Ross's and Drescher's picturebooks follow the circular/carnival pattern typical of child metamorphosis. Yet the endings in each book suggest that the temporary power reversal enacted within the ludic space of metamorphosis may not, after all, be over. The denouement of *The Boy Who Ate Around*, especially, could be regarded as simply frivolously escapist, but it did have an impact on reviewer Kathryn Harrison (1994: 28), who admits that reading of Mo's imaginary tantrum being rewarded with ice cream instead of vegetables made her nervous. Harrison's reaction is grounded in her position as an adult critic and a parent, which leads me to wonder how child readers might experience stories in which child metamorphs are shown to have the upper hand. Drawing on studies of reading as a form of play, I can at least postulate that Harry's imaginary shapeshifting and Mo's liberating monster metamorphoses communicate to implied child readers a deeply attractive compensatory sense of freedom and agency otherwise unattainable in their everyday lives. Jack Zipes (2000a: xviii) uses a similar explanation to account for the long-lived appeal of fairy tales featuring metamorphosis, when he says that they

> awaken our regard for the marvellous *changing* condition of life and [...] evoke in a religious sense profound feelings of awe and respect for life as a miraculous process which can be altered and changed to compensate for the lack of power, wealth, and pleasure that most people experience.

The recent unprecedented success of J. K. Rowling's *Harry Potter* books (1997-) may also be explained in similar terms. In Rowling's series the Romantic child hero, initially disguised as a nobody, eventually turns out to be the one person powerful enough to save the world. Such escapist delights in reading need not be regarded in negative terms as false imaginary compensation. On the contrary, the most interesting (and perhaps also enduring) of child-monster narratives avoid being coercive, and show how adult authors/illustrators actively seek to connect with their young audience. These stories appear to communicate a sense of joy to readers, young or old, whether they explore the powers of a child protagonist's imagination or expose and temporarily reverse child/adult power relations. Children's own play fantasies are reportedly ludic spaces created to deal with emotions; and studies of childlore reveal that the carnival spirit is part of children's own stories, jokes, riddles and games (cf. Casson, 1997). Stories for children in which pleasurable child-other metamorphoses are employed to expose, ridicule, and reverse child/adult power hierarchies could thus be said to tap into issues of particular relevance for their young audience.

The ludic child metamorphs' resistance and – albeit temporary – reversal of power should not be overlooked simply because it is comic, imaginative or playful. Playfulness and humour can function as excellent means for subverting social order and for undermining power structures. The anthropologist Galina Lindquist (2001: 15), for one, argues that "[t]he ability to experience power, albeit in illusory ludic space, is one of the greatest attractions of play". Moreover, subversive subject matter can be more easily tolerated when treated playfully or within a play frame because such messages are received as not serious (cf. Lindquist, 2001: 21-22). As shown, criticism of *The Boy Who Ate Around* has been mixed. Whereas one reviewer found the book slightly disturbing, the other made it seem less shocking by proclaiming that it need not be taken seriously. Consequently, framing monster metamorphosis as pure play or as a playful fantasy may function as necessary stylistic devices, conventions or disguises, for telling controversial stories.

To sum up the main thrust of this chapter, theories of play and playfulness help to explain ways in which pre-adolescent characters' metamorphoses in picturebooks are framed. When the child's metamorphosis takes on the form of imaginary play, insights are to be drawn from ideas of play as progress. When the child's metamorphosis, behind a disguise of playful frivolity, is used as a trope for expressing child agency and the reversal of power, light is shed by ideas of the transgressive and the grotesque and of play as power. Overall, play theory offers a wider understanding of the construction of the pre-adolescent metamorph in picturebooks. In the next chapter, the discussion of pleasurable metamorphoses will continue by focusing on the possible implications of the traditional carnival pattern on which most stories of child-other metamorphosis are based.

CARNIVALESQUE METAMORPHS

Stories featuring child-other metamorphoses tend to follow a clear narrative pattern of beginning, middle and end. Whereas the beginning is typically spent building up to the climax in the middle when the actual metamorphosis occurs, the end usually depicts a resolution to the conflict caused by metamorphosis. Most of the stories I have discussed so far resolve the narrative by transforming the child back into a human being again.

A strong tradition of such circularity and closure is typical not only of narratives of metamorphosis for children, but also of children's literature in general. A "return-to-reality closure" is especially predominant in classical fantasy fiction for children, where adventurers return home, dreamers awaken, and magical beings depart in the end (Gilead, [1991] 1992: 80-81). In part, the circularity is an inheritance from myth and fairy tale. In fairy tales featuring metamorphosis the hero's or heroine's task is often to break a spell and restore the original shape of the enchanted character. Many less interesting stories of child-other metamorphosis borrow the theme of spell-breaking from fairy tales in a casual manner that simply purports to be amusing. Such is the case with Barbara Dillon's *What's Happened to Harry?* (1982), where a witch lures a young boy into her house on Halloween night, robs him of his human shape and gives him a dog's body, which he then spends the rest of the story trying to get rid of.

The circular plot pattern of fantasy literature for children in general, and of metamorphosis stories in particular, raises the question whether such stories can be held genuinely to empower the fictive child and to subvert child/adult power relationships. If a child character acquires greater agency only temporarily during an animal or monster metamorphosis, for example, does not a return to humanity at the end reinstate status quo? Or to rephrase the question, does circular closure automatically negate the empowering power reversal that the fictive child may have experienced as a metamorph?

My understanding of circular metamorphosis as a carnivalesque narrative device originates in Bakhtin's *Rabelais and His World* (1984), where carnival is seen as representing and celebrating an inversion of, as well as a temporary liberation from, the prevailing order. Paradoxically, carnival signifies not only a time away from order, but also a return to the initial order at the end of the narrative. A question that preoccupies much scholarly debate on the carnivalesque in literature and in history is, thus, whether or not carnival has the potential to be subversive. In his insightful study on domination and resistance, the political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott (1990: 175) defines the Bakhtinian concept of the carnivalesque as "a realm of release". But does carnival laughter only displace and relieve social tensions to restore harmony, he wonders. Although Scott (1990: 178) sees some truth in this assumption, he ultimately argues that regarding carnival power reversal *only* as a safety-valve for preserving hegemonic power is essentialist and misleading; it ignores the actual social history of carnival. Carnival power reversal is a complex phenomenon, he argues, which probably serves many different purposes including making it possible for subordinates to openly criticise and ridicule dominant power figures. A similar attitude towards the carnivalesque will be adopted here, where some metamorphosis narratives for children will be demonstrated to interrogate and temporarily subvert child/adult relationships within the safe framework of children's fantasy literature.

Drawing on Bakhtin's theories, John Stephens (1992: 132-139) has further modified the idea of the carnivalesque in relation to children's literature by introducing the concept of "time out". According to Stephens, "time out" is a literary strategy frequently employed in children's literature in order to grant child characters time away from their everyday selves in order to be able to experience adventures outside the sheltered realm of innocent or uninitiated childhood. This device also provides the author with a means to liberate the fictive child from the constraints of authority, which in stories for and about children is usually *adult* authority. In both fantastic and realistic children's literature there are numerous plot conventions used for "getting rid of the grown ups", so introducing the carnivalesque. In this respect the approach to "time out" is broader here than in Stephens's study where he only applies this narrative technique to fantasy novels. Carnival plot conventions include setting the adventure within the frames of magic travelling (whether in time or between alternative worlds), within a dream, or simply within school-free summer holidays. In all these ways child characters can enjoy the autonomy to experience an adventure on their own.

The possible subversive impact of carnivalesque stories for children I partly understand as undermining adult authority. Mary J. Harker (1991: 41-42) makes a similar connection between "[t]he decrowning and inversion of the official medieval ecclesiastical and feudal culture requisite in the celebration of carnival" and "a destabilization of adult authority" within the discourse of the Canadian author Brian Doyle's children's books, and Alison Lurie's (1990) study of the subversive power of (mainly Victorian) children's literature takes the same line. Although Lurie ([1990] 1998: x) may be criticised for not supporting her approach theoretically, she still makes the important general observation that

> [t]hese books, and others like them, recommended – even celebrated – daydreaming, disobedience, answering back, running away from home, and concealing one's private thoughts and feelings from unsympathetic grown-ups. They overturned adult pretensions and made fun of adult institutions, including school and family.

On a similarly general level, Rosemary Jackson draws on psychoanalytical theory in order to identify the subversive drive of the fantastic mode – the mode within which metamorphosis operates – as revealing desires which have been repressed for the sake of cultural continuity. Although I am not inclined to see psychoanalytical theory as an absolute necessity for a true understanding of the fantastic in the way Jackson does, I value her references to Bakhtin as someone who "points towards fantasy's hostility to static, discrete units, to its juxtaposition of incompatible elements and its resistance to fixity", including unified notions of character (Jackson, 1981: 15). Carnival misrule thus "permits 'ultimate questions' about social order, or metaphysical riddles as to life's purpose" (Jackson, 1981: 15). In other words, fantasy has a disturbing and subversive potential since it problematises representations of what is "real" and interrogates the ways in which we unconsciously and consciously structure our perception of our selves and the world we live in. Most radically, stories of metamorphosis undermine the idea of the unified self.

Whereas Lurie argues that *all* children's literature has the potential to be subversive, Jackson expresses her belief in the subversive potential of *all* fantasy literature. My interests here, however, are more specifically concerned with whether the idea of carnival "time out" can be successfully applied to stories where child characters undergo circular metamorphic adventures. The examples selected for analysis here are all narratives featuring children undergoing *animal* metamorphoses. These are particularly well suited for the discussion in hand, since the child's animal metamorphosis usually allows for increased agency, as well as for experiences that lie beyond the sheltered realm of childhood.

During early and mid twentieth century, the use of child-animal metamorphosis in stories for children underwent profound changes.[112] Not until then do we encounter stories that involve a deeper psychological exploration of what it means to become an animal. Margaret Blount ([1974] 1975: 48) mentions Edith Nesbit's "The Cat-hood of Maurice" (1912), T. H. White's *The Sword in the Stone* (1938), and Paul Gallico's *Jennie* (1950) as among the first to put "[*r*]*eal* human souls in animal bodies – as distinct from humans whose appearance has been changed by magic". My own reason for regarding these stories as paradigmatic is rather that they appear to be the first deeper psychological explorations of human-animal metamorphosis featuring *child* characters.

In itself, the idea of depicting a human self within an animal body was, at the time, not new.[113] By the turn of the nineteenth century children's literature was gradually becoming more child-centred, and animal "biographies" which encouraged child readers to imagine themselves in the position of animal heroes were in good supply (cf. Avery and Kinnell, 1995: 72-74; Cosslett, 2006), the most influential and long-lived example being Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877). Yet stories featuring *children* actually undergoing a fantastic bodily change from human into animal, and thereby struggling with their new animal persona, tend first and foremost to raise questions concerning humankind rather than to offer a defence of animal rights. In what follows I shall compare the key texts by Nesbit, White and Gallico with stories from the 1980s and 1990s. I hope to show their status as paradigms that changed the nature of child-animal metamorphosis stories for children, and to illustrate the constant flux and change of the motif up to the present day.

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[112] For a broader study of changes in the child-animal metamorphosis motif see Maria Lassén-Seger (2004).

[113] In for example Dr. Aikin and Mrs. Barbauld's *Evenings at Home* (1792-1796) the story of "The Transmigrations of Indur" relates the adventures of a Brahman who acquires the ability to transmigrate his rational soul in between various animal forms. The story aims to amuse and instruct its young audience by providing an insider's perspective on life as an antelope, a goose, a dormouse, an elephant, a whale, a bee, and a dog.

METAMORPHIC DISPLACEMENT

Carnival "time out" which involves metamorphosis can be broadly understood as a narrative displacement or alienation. Robyn McCallum (1999: 104) argues that social, temporal, cultural or psychological displacement of a literary character is often used to explore interrelations between individuals, subjectivity, society and language. Many authors use metamorphosis as a carnivalesque displacement for that very purpose: to put the fictive child in a position where he/she can try out new subject positions, and where the very authority that the child has escaped from can be interrogated.

Metamorphic displacement was employed for didactic purposes in early cautionary tales in which the wicked child was chastened with a punishment that fitted the crime. As previously shown, Charlotte Maria Tucker's Victorian moral fable, *My Neighbour's Shoes*, features a selfish and cruel boy who is reformed as a result of several transformations into those "others" he has mistreated. Edith Nesbit's short story "The Cat-hood of Maurice" appears at first to be much the same; its boy protagonist is punitively transformed for treating his cat, Lord Hugh, so cruelly.[114] From a strictly socialising point of view, both stories use metamorphosis as a means of showing the difference in perspective between the bully and the bullied. By being forced to look at matters from the victim's point of view, both protagonists gain an insight they otherwise lack, and they learn to become more emphatic. But whereas Tucker's tale is very straightforward about its moralising intent and does not upset the child/adult power hierarchy, the ironical tone of the narrative voice in Nesbit's story obscures such black-and-white moralising and turns her narrative into a playfully mocking version of a cautionary tale.

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[114] As my previous analysis of Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* has shown, authors keep using literary metamorphosis to induce young metamorphs' to improve their manners well in to the twentieth century. In for example Thomas Paisley's *The Dog Days of Arthur Crane* (1976) a dog transformation – albeit pleasurable at first – eventually forces a spoilt middle-class teenage boy to re-evaluate his behaviour and goals in life.

Nesbit employs a narrative voice that takes sides with the misbehaving child protagonist and thereby encourages readers to look at things from Maurice's perspective as well.

> [I]t is difficult for an outsider to see these things from the point of view of both the persons concerned. To Maurice, scissors in hand, alive and earnest to snip, it seemed the most natural thing in the world to shorten the stiff whiskers of Lord Hugh Cecil by a generous inch. (Nesbit, [1912] 1988: 7)

And when accused of cruelty, Nesbit's introspective narrator allows readers to share Maurice's thoughts on the matter:

> 'I didn't mean to be cruel,' Maurice said. And, what is more, he spoke the truth. All the unwelcome attentions he had showered on Lord Hugh had not been exactly intended to hurt that stout veteran – only it was interesting to see what a cat would do if you threw it in the water, or cut its whiskers, or tied things to its tail. […]
>
> He hadn't meant to be cruel; he was sure he hadn't; he wouldn't have pinched the cat's feet or squeezed its tail in the door, or pulled its whiskers, or poured hot water on it. He felt himself ill-used, and knew that he would feel still more so after the inevitable interview with his father. (Nesbit, [1912] 1988: 8-9)

Contrasting Maurice's increasingly long list of crimes with his claimed innocence, Nesbit manages to sympathise with her protagonist and reveal his egocentricity at the same time. Instead of inviting readers to judge Maurice for his appalling treatment of a defenceless animal, she turns the incident into a comically exaggerated back-drop for a conflict between Maurice and his parents. This conflict culminates as Maurice's exasperated parents decide to send their boy to Dr. Strongitharm's Dickensian reform school "for backward and difficult boys" (Nesbit, [1912] 1988: 10). But magic and metamorphosis suddenly seem to come to Maurice's rescue. Typically for Nesbit, the element of magic is introduced into the everyday setting without any hesitation. At first it appears as if metamorphosis will provide Maurice with a means of getting out of this predicament. Symptomatically, it is *he* who first suggests that Lord Hugh should try to be a boy and see how he likes "[l]ickings, and lessons, and impots, and sent back from breakfast to wash your ears" (Nesbit, [1912] 1988: 11).[115] And when the cat provides him with the necessary magic words, he himself voluntarily instigates the exchange of bodies.

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[115] According to *OED* "impot" is a schoolboy's abbreviation for "imposition".

But the cat transformation is not as liberating as Maurice had expected. If Lord Hugh is sent to reform school, Maurice's week at home in the shape of a cat is rather miserable. He realises that the cat has tricked him into switching bodies and that he cannot undo the transformation since he now lacks the ability to speak. Upon Lord Hugh's return, Maurice braces himself for being bullied by the boy, but as it turns out the cat-turned-boy returns a broken spirit. Boy and cat have both met with similar fates: while Maurice has been beaten by the cook and chased by the butcher's dog, Lord Hugh has been "caned and shut up in a dark room and given thousands of lines to write out" (Nesbit, [1912] 1988: 22). Consequently, Lord Hugh does not mind joining Maurice in speaking the magic words that enable them to switch back into their own bodies. For Maurice, it is not the change of species as such which has been disempowering (as it used to be in traditional child-animal metamorphosis stories such as Collodi's *Pinocchio*), but the fact that he is put into the position of someone weaker than himself. Ironically, Maurice thinks that being a boy is hard enough, but as a cat he learns that animals are just as vulnerable subjects to those in power.[116]

The most likely source of inspiration for Nesbit's short story is F. Anstey's best-selling fantasy novel *Vice Versa* (1882), which features the reversal of power when a young boy magically exchanges bodies with his own father.[117] But whereas Anstey, writing for an adult audience,[118] focuses in on the adult character who has to spend a hellish week at his son's boarding school, where his pompous ego is constantly deflated as he is exposed to the powerlessness of being young again, Nesbit turns her attention towards the young protagonist and his futile attempt at escaping the dependence of childhood. Metamorphosis in Nesbit's tale proves to be, not simply a means of teaching the child protagonist a lesson in empathy, but also a vehicle to expose, albeit in an ironical manner, the equally disempowered positions of child and animal, who are beaten into submission by "well-meaning" adults. Or as Lord Hugh puts it, "a boy's life a dog's life" (Nesbit, [1912] 1988: 23). In Nesbit's tale the human child is hardly superior to the animal, but rather its equal in powerlessness and vulnerability.

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[116] The boy who accidentally exchanges bodies with his cat in Satoshi Kitamura's comic picturebook *Me and My Cat?* (1999) comes to a similar conclusion when he notices that life as a cat "was as tough and complicated as it was for humans" (Kitamura, 1999: [17]).

[117] See Nicholas Tucker (1987) on the anti-authoritarian thrust of *Vice Versa*. Subverting the rigid child/adult power relations that underpin a strict Victorian upbringing, Anstey's novel exposes and ridicules adult cruelty towards children.

[118] The novel is subtitled "A Lesson to Fathers" and was not originally written or published for a child audience.

Ian McEwan's *The Daydreamer*, which is structured around a series of metamorphic displacements framed as the boy protagonist Peter's daydreams, includes an episode where boy and cat exchange bodies that is in some ways similar to the one in Nesbit's story. Once again, the motif of metamorphosis is partly a means to displace the fictive child in order to enhance character development. Yet Peter's transformations also have an overtly anti-authoritarian thrust. He is portrayed as a quiet, withdrawn boy addicted to compulsive daydreaming, and therefore classified by adults as a "difficult" child. His daydreams provide him with a refuge of his own, since "[g]rown-ups knew that something was going on inside that head, but they couldn't hear it or see it or feel it. They couldn't tell Peter to stop" (McEwan, 1994: 8). Peter's appealing and uncanny fantasies of metamorphosis allow him to explore new subject positions on his own, unmonitored by the adults in charge.

But compared with Nesbit's non-hesitant use of magic and of an authoritatively omniscient (adult) narrator, McEwan's use of metamorphosis and narrative voice is far more complex, if not always so successful. McEwan frames each metamorphosis as a dream, yet the line drawn between dream, reality and fantasy is slippery and frequently interrogated, and McEwan also introduces an implied adult author who is supposed to be Peter himself as a grown-up. At its best, this metafictive technique allows McEwan (1994: 7) to explore the differences in experience and perspective between child and adult: "[i]t was not until he had been a grown-up himself for many years that Peter finally understood. They [adults] thought he was difficult because he was so silent". At its worst, the superior adult narrator sounds awkwardly patronising:

> Peter himself learned as he grew older that since people can't see what's going on in your head, the best thing to do, if you want them to understand you, is to tell them. So he began to write down some of the things that happened to him when he was staring out of the window or lying on his back looking up at the sky. When he grew up he became an inventor and a writer of stories and led a happy life. (McEwan, 1994: 14)

Talking down to his child audience in this manner, McEwan produces what Roger Sale (1978) calls "a false rhetoric", or what the narratologist Barbara Wall (1991) identifies as "double address". The narrator addresses adult and child narratees simultaneously, but on unequal terms.[119]

Even so, McEwan's novel intriguingly explores potential differences in child/adult power relations and introduces metamorphosis as an ambivalent source of pleasure and fear, growth and regression. Like Nesbit's Maurice, McEwan's Peter willingly agrees to exchange bodies with his cat in order to escape a disadvantaged position. For whereas Maurice seeks to avoid being punished by his parents, Peter wishes to escape his mundane life as a human boy:

> There were times when it seemed to him that all he had ever done in his life, and all he was ever going to do, was wake up, get up, and go to school. It did not make it easier that everyone else, grown-ups included, had to get up on dark winter mornings. If only they would all agree to stop, then he could stop too. But the earth kept turning, Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday came round again, and everyone went on getting out of bed. (McEwan, 1994: 26-27)

Yet the outcomes of Peter's and Maurice's cat transformations are very different. For Peter, life as a cat is as laid-back and pleasurably free from human responsibility and adult restrictions as he could wish for. And unlike Maurice, who finds it a great relief to be rid of "those undignified four legs, those tiresome pointed ears, so difficult to wash, that furry coat, that contemptible tail, and that terrible inability to express all one's feelings in two words – 'mew' and 'purr'" (Nesbit, [1912] 1988: 23), Peter is not at all keen to reverse the process and return to humanity. McEwan's tale thus illustrates the modern myth of animal metamorphosis, portraying it as an appealing alternative to being human. The plot pattern of metamorphosis may still be circular in both narratives, but the return to human shape is notably a much more unsatisfactory solution for Peter, who upon his return to his own body finds that it "did not really fit him" and "[t]wo legs" no longer "seem enough" (McEwan, 1994: 38-39).

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[119] Reviewer David Leavitt (1994: 54) in *The New York Times Book Review* also comments on McEwan's "unhappy tendency to talk down to his readers in a way that he could never get away with in an 'adult novel'". Reviewer Andrew Davies (1994: 20) in *The Times Educational Supplement* also laments the unnecessarily explanatory tone of voice in the novel's introductory chapter.

As part of a whole range of other transformations within the novel, Peter's cat metamorphosis stands out as the most pleasurable one (see pp. 116-117). Unlike Maurice, Peter is not horrified to see his cat posing as "himself". As far as Peter is concerned, he has regressed so far into the instinctual life of the animal he finds "beautifully non-human" that he is no longer capable of reading human facial semiotics:

> William Boy looked worn out from a day of classroom and playground struggle. Boy-cat and cat-boy lay down together in front of the living-room fire. It was most odd, Peter Cat thought, to be stroked by a hand that only the day before had belonged to him. He wondered if William Boy was happy with his new life of school and buses, and having a sister and a mum and dad. But the boy's face told Peter Cat nothing. It was so hairless, whiskerless and pink, with eyes so round that it was impossible to know what they were saying. (McEwan, 1994: 36-37)

Peter's cat functions as his *Döppelganger* or *double*, which is a motif that both Rosemary Jackson (1981) and Robyn McCallum (1999) claim to be "frequently used in narrative to explore the idea that personal identity is shaped by a dialogic relation with an other and that subjectivity is multiple and fragmented" (McCallum, 1999: 75). McCallum draws on Bakhtinian and Lacanian theories of subjectivity in order to show that the double in much contemporary fiction for teenagers is used to represent an aspect of the developmental process. Such seems the case with McEwan's novel, too. Although Phil Baker (1994: 25) entitled his review in *The Times Literary Supplement* "studies in solipsism", Peter's episodic metamorphic adventures gradually move beyond solipsistic play and pleasure seeking (through his doll and cat transformations), becoming increasingly a means for him to gain experience and empathy by stepping into the shoes of other human beings (through his infant and adult transformations). *The Daydreamer* thus ends on a positive note, celebrating change and the yet unknown mysteries of adult life to come, such as falling in love:

> [Peter] stopped and turned to look at the grown-ups one more time. In the shade of the parasol they leaned towards each other as they talked. He felt differently about them now. There were things they knew and liked which for him were only just appearing, like shapes in a mist. There were adventures ahead of him after all. [...]
>
> He turned and faced the ocean. It was sparkling, right to the wide horizon. It stretched before him, vast and unknown. One after the other the endless waves came tumbling and tinkling against the shore, and they seemed to Peter like all the ideas and fantasies he would have in his life.
>
> [...] for nothing could keep still, not people, not water, not time. (McEwan, 1994: 95-96)

The difference in tone between the scornful remarks about the narrow-mindedness of adults at the beginning of the book, and the coming to terms with having to grow up at the end, is correspondingly large.

To conclude my comparison between Maurice's and Peter's "time out" in animal shape, both Nesbit and McEwan use the motif of metamorphosis to displace their child characters. Both authors employ non-didactic narrative voices that invite readers to sympathise with their young protagonists. Nesbit shows that her main character Maurice is not a stereotypical "bad boy", but someone who does mischief to his cat because he lacks the ability to empathise with his victim. McEwan also aims at sympathising with his boy protagonist, although the adult voice commenting on the events in retrospect is not always convincing. Whereas Nesbit's tale is straight-forwardly comical in the way Maurice's refuge into animalhood backfires, McEwan sounds a more serious note and allows for greater ambiguity when he links animal metamorphosis to conflicting issues such as pleasure, growth, and regression.

A return to self takes place at the end of both stories. The framework is clearly and safely carnivalesque. The time away from oneself, when the reigning order of things is upset, ends in a return to the initial order, or to use Stephens's (1992: 133) words: "disguise situates carnival in parentheses". Yet despite the return to status quo, in the end neither tale comes across simply as a lesson in how to outgrow solipsism. Because Nesbit and McEwan both use the motif of metamorphosis to radically question the notion of childhood as an idyllic and happy state. Disillusioned by his "time out" as a cat, Maurice has no objection to return to humanity again. Peter, on the other hand, is more outspokenly critical about returning to human shape. Both boy protagonists embark on their metamorphic adventures willingly, and when they return they clearly do not remain unaffected by their temporal change of shape. Instead, their metamorphic adventures seem to confirm what they initially suspected, that being a child also means being restricted by adults in power – and that sometimes magic and dreaming are the only means of escaping the confinement of those restrictions.

Within children's literature, the tradition of using animal metamorphosis as a means whereby the fictive child gains experience, empathy, and a greater understanding of others, life and the world has been strongly preserved. A new mode for this kind of "learning through becoming" was set by T. H. White's brilliantly comic and controversial *The Sword in the Stone* published in 1938.[120] The novel was successful, but it did receive mixed criticism from reviewers, who were unsure whether it was appropriate reading for children (cf. Blount, 1974; Lurie, 1990; Gallix, 1996). Marcus Crouch (1962: 66), for example, illustrates his ambivalent attitude towards the book when he praises its originality, yet insists that, due to its originality, it has to be "a book for adults which some children have adopted". Today, we can avoid such unfortunate and narrow generalisations about books for children by viewing the novel as an example of cross-writing, that is a book aimed at *both* an adult and child audience. Or as Adrienne Kertzer (1985: 281) puts it, as a children's literature classic that "does not fit itself to any pre-defined, narrow concept of a child reader", but rather "challenges the child". T. H. White himself found it impossible to determine whether the book is for grown-ups or children (Gallix, 1996: 282), yet he wrote it with a child audience in mind, wanting it to resemble Masefield's *Midnight Folk*, which he deeply admired (Brewer 1997/98: 129).

The Sword in the Stone tells the story of the Wart, later to become the legendary King Arthur, who is prepared for kinghood by his most unusual teacher, Merlyn. This curious magician, who lives backwards in time, enables the Wart to enter into various animal shapes as part of his education. As a fish, he meets the King of the Moat and learns about power; assuming the shape of a merlin hawk, he learns about military life; as a snake, he receives a historical account of man's evolution from a snake's point of view; as an owl, he meets Athene the goddess of wisdom and learns about time and man's tiny, but destructive role in a huge universe; and finally as a badger, he learns about man's power over, and responsibility towards, animals. The essence of Merlyn's education is captured in this quotation:

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[120] *The Sword in the Stone* was published as a separate volume in 1938, but reappeared, accompanied by three (also previously released) sequels within *The Once and Future King* in 1958. Each sequel in the tetralogy had been heavily revised. Finally, the quartet was completed with a fifth sequel, the posthumously published *The Book of Merlyn*, in 1977. The original 1938 version of *The Sword in the Stone* is, however, the text explored in this study, since this first version of the novel more openly addresses children and today has a stronger status as a children's classic than any of the sequels in White's Arthuriad.

> "The best thing for disturbances of the spirit," replied Merlyn, [...] "is to learn. That is the only thing that never fails. [...] Learn why the world wags and what wags it. That is the only thing which the poor mind can never exhaust, never alienate, never be tortured by, never fear or distrust, and never dream of regretting. Learning is the thing for you. (White, [1938] 1971: 265)

And the chief lesson the Wart has to learn is to reject the idea that might is right. A similar education through metamorphosis is undertaken by other young protagonists in several later fantasy classics for children, such as Will in Susan Cooper's *The Dark Is Rising* sequence (1965-1977), and Ged in Ursula K. Le Guin's *Earthsea* sequence (1968-2001).

Children's literature critics who comment specifically on the Wart's metamorphoses, such as Margaret Blount (1974), Ann Swinfen (1984) and Adrienne Kertzer (1985) celebrate their imaginative richness and stress their importance as an ideal means of education. They see White's use of metamorphosis as a brilliantly inventive way for the boy protagonist to be prepared for his future kingship. Throughout each metamorphic adventure the Wart proves himself to be brave, adventurous and eager to learn, but also humble, idealistic and empathetic. His adventures *reveal* to himself and others who he really is: a boy worthy of becoming a king. In a children's literature context, an understanding of the Wart's metamorphoses as a means of learning about life is perhaps the most obvious interpretation. Yet, to my mind, such a reading turns a blind eye to the subversive thrust in these peculiar magic incidents. To find alternative ways of reading White's novel, one has to turn to commentators outside the field of children's literature studies. For example, to Marilyn K. Nellis (1983), who explores White's anachronistic humour in terms of social commentary. Or to Barry Weller (1997), whose queer reading uncovers hints of sadism and transgressive sexuality in the text; and to Debbie Sly (2000), who finds the Wart's metamorphic lessons contradictory and loaded with cultural allusions, rather than with a post-Enlightenment idealisation.

Admittedly, the Wart's vividly imagined animal adventures constitute fascinating lessons in natural history. What better way to learn about the natural world than to actually become part of it? Yet the outside appearance of the boy's metamorphoses need not be taken to imply that the only purpose of the transformations is to teach him about *animal* life. Margaret Blount ([1974] 1975: 262) claims that the animal, birds and fish characters "are neither transformed humans nor curious circus performers, […] but their own secret selves made audible, speaking to the Wart and to us in human metaphor". The alternative reading I shall present here originates in my view that White uses the "animal metaphor" playfully to explore areas of adult life and to expose his young protagonist to experiences he would otherwise be excluded from.

All the animals the Wart encounters mirror human traits, not primarily animal ones. Barry Weller (1997: 230, my italics) sees Arthur as humankind's representative who learns "from other species the arbitrariness and limitations of *human* social forms" and Debbie Sly (2000: 156) finds that White's "animal characters are often unnaturalistically literary in their conversations". The King of the Moat, for instance, is a caricature of a disillusioned despot obsessed with power. Both his appearance and his "lesson" to the Wart are of a comic, yet also deeply distressing, kind:

> The great body, shadowy and almost invisible among the stems, ended in a face which had been ravaged by all the passions of an absolute monarch, by cruelty, sorrow, age, pride, selfishness, loneliness and thoughts too strong for individual brains. There he hung or hoved, his vast ironic mouth permanently drawn downwards in a kind of melancholy, his lean clean-shaven chops giving him an American expression, like that of Uncle Sam. […]
>
> "Love is a trick played on us by the forces of evolution," continued the monster monotonously. "Pleasure is the bait laid down by the same. There is only power. Power is of the individual mind, but the mind's power alone is not enough. The power of strength decides everything in the end, and only Might is right. (White, [1938] 1971: 63-64)

The constant use of overt anachronisms, such as the reference to Uncle Sam in the quotation above, is according to Marilyn K. Nellis (1983: 73) White's way of tying the modern and the medieval world together for humorous purposes, as well as social comment and criticism. To this I would add that White, in the same seriously playful manner, throughout the novel employs animal metamorphoses to introduce his young protagonist to radically disillusioned, ironic, and anti-authoritarian perspectives on issues such as class, politics, science, warfare and heroism. If not approached through comical magic transformations, these areas would be restricted to the sphere of adults and exclusive of children.

The tone of the novel is, in fact, at times more pessimistically sinister than optimistically educational, since T. H. White uses the characters the Wart encounters while in animal shape as mouthpieces for a deep mistrust and critique of human beings in power. Nowhere is this more explicit than in the snake's account of mankind's destructive role in evolution, or in Athena's account of the universe having existed in peace for aeons, until

> [in] the ultimate twinkling of an eye, far tinier in time than the last millimetre on a six-foot rule, there came a man. He split up the one pebble which remained of all that mountain with blows; then made an arrow-head of it, and slew his brother. (White, [1938] 1971: 240)

White's poetic and progressive ideas of time and the universe, as well as his pacifist ideals and bleak view of mankind and its progress, combine to make the novel a veritable oddity among the books published for children in his time. It is, perhaps, symptomatic that White is allowed to express his dark view of humankind within the neutral form of what some critics still consider a harmless and comic children's book. J. B. S. Haldane, who published his *My Friend Mr Leakey* in 1937, just before White's novel, also takes the opportunity to express some snide remarks about humanity:

> Mr Leakey thanked us for giving him such easy jobs. 'You see, turning people into animals is almost natural. Only a few million years ago our ancestors were animals, and I expect our descendants will be animals too, and rather nasty ones, if the human race doesn't learn to behave itself a bit better. Turning people into animals is one of the oldest and simplest sorts of magic. Don't you remember how Circe turned Ulysses' sailors into pigs? And even now a lot of people get turned into pigs every year by eating too much enchanter's nightshade. There's plenty of it in Wiltshire, which may account for the excellent hams you get from there. (Haldane, [1937] 2004: 92)

Haldane's passage is just an odd remark, playing frivolously with the supposedly shapeshifting powers of the plant enchanter's nightshade (Circaea Lutetiana) and the Greek sorceress, Circe. His tone of voice is much less sinister than White's constantly returning attacks on human nature. Still, both texts undoubtedly reflect the historical context in which they were produced. The horrors that mankind is capable of were pressingly obvious for those who had outlived one world war and now foresaw another one coming. In troubled times such as these, it may have been safer to employ the subversive powers of comedy and fantasy to express a declining faith in the goodness of man.

In view of all this, Rosemary Jackson's (1981) categorical description of White's novel as belonging to the marvellous or "faery" literature seems hard to justify. What Jackson (1981: 33, 154-155) sees is a "minimal functional narrative, whose narrator is omniscient and has absolute authority", thereby discouraging reader participation, leaving problems of social order untouched, and invoking a passive relation to history. Granted, it is humorous and romantic. But the Wart's happy and innocent childhood existence is continuously called into question by the "lessons" he is exposed to during his animal metamorphoses. White knew how to handle these touchy topics in a subtle and playful manner. Instead of forcing his controversial ideas on the audience, he embedded them within joyful magical adventures for perceptive readers to pick up if they so chose to.

The bitter pill of mankind's inclination to cause disaster to the natural world is indeed made more palatable for a young audience through the Cinderella-motif, which features the Wart rising from his lowly status as an orphan towards royalty. The comic inversions of the medieval romance; White's parodic and sarcastic treatment of the myths of England; his humorous merging of the notions of the past and the present; his incessant playful treatment of non-linear time; the child protagonist's naive outlook on life – these are all features which combine to make the novel truly comical, and to counterbalance the more unsettling and anti-authoritarian message of the transformation passages. But to reduce this novel to a comedy – or to a romantic account of a historical past – is to do the text serious injustice. Unfortunately, some critics continue to overemphasise these characteristics,[121] and the reworking of the novel into an action-packed Disney film in 1963, wholly optimistic in tone, has probably compounded the damage.[122] White's dark and questioning view of human goodness and progress is embedded in the circular temporality of the Wart's metamorphic adventures. But for a reader (young or old) who does not read only for the comfort of finding adventure and romance, it is definitely still there.

Animal metamorphosis allows the Wart to peep into adult life. Together with Nesbit, who uses the motif to show that neither child nor animal are better off when it comes to being bullied by the adults in charge, White appears to have set the scene for a new kind of metamorphosis story for children: abandoning didacticism in favour of subversive perspectives on childhood innocence and idyll, and on human (adult) rationality and authority. The result is stories that are perhaps more child-centred, but also less optimistic about what growing up will mean for its child characters. The child's time in animal form is now increasingly often used to depict an adventure out of childhood

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121. Many of the scholars who uncover potentially disturbing subject matter in *The Sword in the Stone*, such as politics (see Petzold, 1986; Gallix, 1996), pacifism and violence (see Brewer, 1997/98), or sexual anxiety and misogyny (see Worthington, 2002), base their analyses on the later heavily revised version in *The Once and Future King*. White added two metamorphic lessons to the revised version: one where the Wart enters a dystopian totalitarian society of ants and one where he joins a utopian society of sociable and pacifist geese. The entire tetralogy charts Arthur's lifespan from childhood to maturity and old age and does therefore complicate the notion of audience yet further. Most critics argue that for each sequel the address becomes increasingly adult (see e.g. Lupack, 2001; Worthington, 2002). The revised texts in the tetralogy attract discussions on subversive subject matter more easily, since White, who by now had experienced the horrors of World War II, apparently decided to be more outspoken in his social criticism and antiwar politics (cf. Sly, 2000). Yet some critics resort to unfortunate generalisations by equating books for children with simplicity and the affirmation of a prelapsarian idyll, while ascribing greater complexity and subversion to literature written for an adult audience. For example Heather Worthington (2002: 99) regards White's tetralogy as an "evolution from children's story to adult fiction" where the "simple and fantastical narratives of childhood develop into the realism inherent in the complex psychological narratives of modern adult fiction". Such preconceptions about what to expect from children's literature will undoubtedly result in readings that gloss over potential subversive subtexts.

122. Attesting to the popularity of White's retelling of the Arthurian legend, Allan Jay Lerner and Frederick Loewe reworked *The Once and Future King* into the Broadway Musical *Camelot* in 1960. The musical was later followed by a movie version in 1967.

into adulthood, and as a means of exposing, interrogating, and affirming the borders between childhood innocence and adult experience.

Adventures into adulthood

Paul Gallico's *Jennie* published in 1950 is a story where metamorphosis constitutes an actual adventure out of childhood into adulthood. It tells the story of eight-year-old Peter, who after having been involved in a traffic accident undergoes a magical transformation into a cat. The boy-cat is literally thrown out to fend for himself on the streets, where he meets and falls in love with a feline stray called Jennie Baldrin. Once again Blount (1974) and Swinfen (1984) arguably over-emphasise the animal point of view of the narrative. Peter's transformation does undoubtedly provide the writer with an intriguing set-up for exploring a cat's senses, behaviour, conduct, point of view and so on. But Peter is above all else a *boy* trapped in a cat's shape and it is primarily his human worries and desires that haunt his adventure into the animal kingdom.

At the core of the novel lies his relationship with Jennie, a former domestic cat who has lost her faith in humankind when abandoned by her family. Whereas Jennie educates Peter in matters of street life, he eventually manages to restore her ability to trust and love. Peter's relationship with Jennie is fused with a curious blend of motherly devotion and romantic love, echoing other children's classics such as J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan* (1928), where yet another Peter seeks a mother/lover figure in his girl companion Wendy. The fantastic adventure thus functions subversively as a narrative device for the surfacing of the protagonist's otherwise repressed desires. At the outset of Gallico's novel, readers are told that Peter's "mother, who was young and beautiful, never seemed to have much time for him, or prevent him yearning hungrily for a cat of his own" (Gallico, [1950] 1963: 12). The love and comfort that his mother cannot provide him with is projected onto the image of Jennie and the cat adventure becomes, in part, a test of his mother's love and affection. At the end of the novel, the interconnectedness between Jennie and Peter's mother is literally manifested when the two female voices blend into one:

> 'Peter! Peter my darling! Don't leave me. Don't leave me now...'

> Through the darkness Peter heard Jennie Baldrin calling to him again. Or was it Jennie? The words of the pleading cry seemed still to be hers and yet the voice somehow sounded different, though no less filled with love and heartbreak. And never before had she called him darling…. […]
>
> ‘Peter...Peter...Come back to me....’
>
> Someone was sobbing, but it was not like Jennie’s gentle lament that used so to touch his heart. These sounds were filled with deep pain and suffering that told him of someone who was desperately unhappy, unhappier even than he had been. He opened his eyes to see who it was. […]
>
> He lowered his lids momentarily to escape from the dazzling brightness, and when he looked again found that he was indeed gazing into his mother’s eyes. How soft, liquid, and deeply tender they were, and as loving as Jennie’s when she gazed at him. Now they were filled with tears too, as Jennie’s had been.... (Gallico, [1950] 1963: 229)

As a consequence of this, it might seem hard to read Peter’s metamorphosis as a “time out” from parental authority, but Peter’s interest in Jennie is clearly not only filial. Nowhere is this more evident than in his encounter with Lulu, whose “deep, husky, and disturbing” voice lures him away from Jennie’s steadfast company (Gallico, [1950] 1963: 182):

> ‘Do you like tea? Do you like coffee? I *love* olives. Wasn’t it a nice day next Thursday?’
>
> ‘Never mind answering!’ she cried in her deep voice before Peter could even so much as think of a reply, and got up and danced away from him with one shoulder all hunched up and crooked – ‘Come on, dance with me, all sideways and twistabout. Up you go, and *down* you go, and AROUND you go; now RUN!!’
>
> Swept away, Peter found himself dancing sideways beside her, then leaping up into the air and turning all about before he came down, and then when he landed on the pavement, running, running, running with her as hard as he could. He could not remember when he had ever had so much fun or been in the presence of such a wholly fascinating and enchanting creature. (Gallico, [1950] 1963: 184)

Lulu is a heavily stereotyped scatter-brained *femme fatale* in feline form who is as irresistible to Peter as she is unreliable and fickle: “not once since he had first laid eyes on Lulu had Jennie crossed Peter’s mind. He was completely bedazzled by the gay, fascinating, and irresponsible little Siamese” (Gallico, [1950] 1963: 189). Unable to hold on to a topic of conversation for longer than two seconds, Lulu prattles on about anything from her alleged royal ancestry to her fondness for hair-ribbons. Thinking only of herself, she loses interest in Peter after a few days and ends the affair leaving Peter hurt and bewildered (Gallico, [1950] 1963: 194-195).

Taking into account Peter's relationships with Jennie and Lulu, his adventure is as much an adventure out of childhood innocence into adult experience, as it is a fantasy out of human into animal shape. Thinking that by running off with Lulu he has lost Jennie for ever, Peter feels worse than ever, knowing "now how much lonelier and unhappy one can feel after one has lost someone who has grown dear" (Gallico, [1950] 1963: 200). He sets off to find Jennie and "tell her that he had meant nothing by what he had done and that he cared for her and for her only" (Gallico, [1950] 1963: 201). Gallico ([1950] 1963: 234) depicts Peter's new cat persona as a "small, helpless object loosed in a gigantic and overpowering world" and his novel is, admittedly, in many respects jarringly sentimental. In the American edition, the change of title into *The Abandoned* reinforces the sentimentality. The new title removes the focus from Peter's love interest in Jennie – perhaps perceived as a tad inappropriate for a young audience – in favour of promoting a reading that concentrates on a sentimental view of the adventures of two social outcasts.

Whereas Margaret Blount ([1974] 1975: 260-261) reads Peter's cathood as a moral lesson, Ann Swinfen (1984: 24-26) maintains that the book is primarily about Peter growing up more generally. Both readings are problematic, however, in view of the ending, unsatisfactory though it is. The novel closes when Peter lays down his life in a fight for Jennie. But he dies only to wake up as a boy again, discovering that his adventure was only a dream. The dream ending is a common narrative technique for creating closure within children's fiction and, in this case, probably also for glossing over the controversial issues touched upon within carnivalesque adventures. The most famous parallel is probably Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). The major drawback with this technique is its possibly disappointing effect on the reader, who will have committed to the fictional world of the fantastic with a willing suspension of disbelief, only to find at the end that "it never really happened". Peter himself feels as cheated as any reader might feel when he wakes up to find that his feline adventures were but a dream:

> He wept for many reasons […] but mostly, perhaps, his tears were shed because it was his first encounter with that depth of human sadness that comes with waking from a dream of aching and throat-catching beauty to find it already fading and the dear partner thereof lost beyond recall. (Gallico, [1950] 1963: 232)

And J. R. R. Tolkien ([1964] 1975: 20) even excluded fantastic narratives framed as dreams from true fantasy literature, since he felt they robbed readers of the essence of fantasy understood as "imagined wonder".

The element of play in carnivalesque adventures is appropriately stressed by Maria Nikolajeva (2000a), who calls the device a "picnic in the unknown", thereby emphasising that we are not dealing with real rites of passage but temporary, playful adventures away from the security of home and self. Gallico's novel is an extreme example of this, since Peter upon waking from his dream remembers Jennie's features "for the last time before they faded away and vanished, and in their stead left something that was neither memory nor dream nor fantasy but only a wonderfully soothing sense of homecoming, well-being, and happiness" (Gallico, [1950] 1963: 233). Peter's memories of his adventures of love and death fade and disappear as the

> door into that other world he had left for ever […] shut and he could see no more. […]
>
> But with the closing of the door had come a wonderful sense of peace and security. Behind it were locked all the dark terrors conjured up by his fantasies and his fears. He was afraid of nothing any longer […]. It was as though during the long hours that he had been asleep and dreamed the dream that he could no longer remember, they had taken fear away from him and he could never again experience it in the same form as before. He felt that never in his life had he been quite so happy. (Gallico, [1950] 1963: 234-235)

Peter's experiences while in cat form need to be forgotten or repressed so that he can return to uninitiated and innocent childhood where his love for Jennie is sublimated into his more appropriate love for his mother. As a consequence, Peter's fantasy of growing up is abruptly stunted.

But can we categorically claim, as Nikolajeva (2000a: 134) does, that dream-endings and loss of memory "negate" maturation and initiation? Even if the dream ending may be a frustrating narrative cliché from a reader's point of view, the technique could reflect a need to adhere to the narrative plot conventions of fantasy for children, as well as the prevailing norms for what is considered appropriate reading for children. The feminist critic Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1985) argues a case for nineteenth-century women novelists which may also apply to authors of children's literature. According to DuPlessis (1985: 7), romance plots had to conform to two types of ending: either "happy", in which case female protagonists ended up in socially acceptable courtship or marriage, or "tragic", with heroines dying as a judgement of their social and sexual failure. Yet DuPlessis points out that there often is a disjunction here between narrative discourses and their resolutions. Even a tragic ending involving death does not necessarily simply reflect and affirm female oppression in society. It may also express "a symbolic protest against the production of a respectable female and the connivances of a respectable community" (DuPlessis, 1985: 16). A similar paradox seems to be at play in the novels studied here, where authors both subvert and affirm childhood innocence and idyll through animal metamorphosis framed as temporary magic or dream incidents. According to Roger D. Sell's (2000) communicational account of literature, this would be authors' only hope of communicating their anti-authoritarian subject matter to a young audience at all, since successful communication builds the new onto the old and thereby reassures so that it can disconcert. The general principle at work here is one of rhetorical co-adaptation (cf. Sell, 2002: 5-9). From the point of view of the dual audience of children's books, authors employ such co-adaptation both to protect child readers and to mollify adult co-readers.

So while dream endings often may seem to negate initiation, they do not always manage to negate the subversive potential of carnival completely. As David Rudd (1999b: n. pag.) notes: "[c]losure in children's books is […] usually fairly emphatic, to reinstate the status quo, to bracket off the fantasy. Such uneasiness shows, though – often in rather mechanical manoeuvres at the end, which belie the more passionate matters within". Although authors may produce pat circular endings as a concession to convention, readers are free to enjoy the more fascinating stuff dealt with in the narrative. In his study on the politics of reading in early-modern England, Alan Sinfield (1992) takes a very radical stance on this matter, declaring that there is no security in textuality in the sense that no author can control the reading of his or her text.[123] In particular, Sinfield (1992: 48) alerts us to *the power of the middle* of stories, maintaining that readers do not have to respect closures, but may insist that the middle of texts arouses expectations that by far exceed the closure. This is most certainly true of many circular metamorphosis stories. For instance, in Ulf Stark and Anna Höglund's Swedish picturebook *Jaguaren* (1987, *The Jaguar*, my translation), the boy protagonist Elmer turns into a jaguar. For one night he leaves the safety of home to roam the city jungle, where he defeats the mean dog next door and befriends a mysteriously attractive female cat. During this nightly adventure Elmer experiences fear, death and love. In the end he returns home, resumes his own shape and is carried to bed by his mother. The ending ambiguously suggests that everything might have been a dream, yet it is probably Elmer's exciting nocturnal experiences, rather than the return-to-reality closure, that will fascinate and stay in the minds of readers.

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[123] Building on cultural materialist theory Sinfield (1992: 49) argues that this argument is crucial for literary criticism because it posits that a text can never be intrinsically or essentially subversive but "is always a site of cultural contest".

In an article on such conformist forms of closure in children's fantasy fiction Sarah Gilead ([1991] 1992: 81) seeks to re-evaluate the function of these framing devices by suggesting that "the return seems in fact to pose many more questions than it settles". Far from always providing a neat solution to the narrative, return-to-reality closure often brings about a clash between the fantastic and the realistic, which might call our perception of both worlds into question. Furthermore, the device also often reveals the child, as both subject in, and reader of fantastic narratives, to be the target "for possibly conflicting adult projects, such as socialization and escape. *Well or thinly concealed is the fact of fantasy as object of adult desires and as response to adult anxieties and wishes*" (Gilead [1991] 1992: 101, my italics). Like the story of Elmer, the matters within Gallico's dream adventure are indeed of such a passionate and subversive kind – allowing the fictive child experiences beyond the realm of uninitiated childhood – that no final surrender to a conventional plot pattern could ever obliterate their impact on the child protagonist or the reader altogether.

Gallico's *Jennie*, like White's *The Sword in the Stone*, deal with such unusual "adult" subject matter for their time that many critics find it difficult to see them as children's books. In later child-animal metamorphosis narratives the motif is put to a similar use, but here the erotic undertones are even more explicit. William Rayner, for instance, uses animal shape in his *Stag Boy* as a narrative technique for exploring sexual relations between a teenage boy and girl metaphorically. Looking back on the "lure of those dark journeys" when Mary rode ecstatically on the back of Jim-the-stag, the narrator notes that these incidents stood in bright contrast to their daily relationship (Rayner, 1972: 125). In day-time they met

> with the memory of their midnight journeys strong on them, but somehow, as boy and girl, they could not get close to each other in the same way. [...] Mention of their night journeys was taboo. They were timid, too much aware of other people's opinions and of their own youth and ignorance. Only in their wordless journeys through the dark did all worries and embarrassments fall away, leaving them free and happy, and *innocent*. (Rayner, 1972: 126-127, my italics)

To a contemporary teenage audience, Rayner's attempt to create a secret space where his young protagonists can act out their private desires might seem somewhat contrived and banal. From the point of view of this discussion, however, it is interesting to note an author so outspokenly concerned to preserve a strong sense of innocence about his young characters, while at the same time allowing their sexual desires to surface within the carnivalesque frame of metamorphosis.

We saw a similar device in the *Animorphs* series. But there the game of acting out repressed desires while in animal shape was never allowed to exceed a platonic relationship between the young protagonists. Needless to say, one factor to be taken into account is always the age of the child characters. Yet Melvin Burgess's *Tiger, Tiger* (1996) shows that, within the seemingly safe framework of temporary carnivalesque animal metamorphosis, even a young metamorph can reach sexual maturity. Steve is still a child when he encounters Lila, a Spirit Tiger, who transforms herself into a girl in order to escape being killed by gangsters. Steve finds himself to be equally frightened and fascinated by the uncanny tiger-girl who seeks his help:

> The door swung suddenly open and a girl ran out. Her skin was the colour of the dawn sky. She flung herself down at his feet. [...]
>
> Steve stared down at her in horror. She was wearing nothing but an old blanket. Her shoulders were heaving in distress. […]
>
> [...] Her nakedness scared him, although he couldn't help trying to peer and see her body under the blanket. She was beautiful and exciting. (Burgess, [1996] 1998: 43-45)

Kipling's *The Jungle Book* (1894) contains a chapter entitled "Tiger! Tiger!" in which Mowgli kills his tiger enemy Shere Khan. Burgess inverts Kipling's story by writing a tale of a boy who deeply admires tigers and wishes to understand and protect them. The environmental message in Burgess's novel is pronounced. Mankind's desire to domesticate and exploit wild animals for their own benefit is interrogated and especially so by occasionally interspersing passages that are narrated from Lila the tiger's point of view (cf. Burgess, [1996] 1998: 10-13).

At the close of the story, Lila's and Steve's obscure relationship culminates as he follows her into the wilderness, where she changes him into a tiger and they mate:

> he was racing along, racing, full of power he'd never had before. The world was full of scent and sound he had never known. [...] And the smell of his own kind, of Lila. How vivid and how rich the dark night was...
>
> Lila called him again. [...] Tonight, he was on Lila's trail. Transformed, he was no cub, either. Lila, thinking herself the last of her kind, had made for herself a tiger.
>
> Steve never knew what happened that night. [...] There were no memories, just feelings. Dreams of play and prey, vivid, unaccountable and full of meaning that ebbed away. There were no witnesses – only the tawny owl who hunted voles and mice in the moon shadows under stone walls and white boulders, who saw two tigers, frost in their shaggy coats, mating that night under Pen-y-Ghent. (Burgess, [1996] 1998: 136-137)

Not only does Burgess's young boy protagonist have his first sexual experience while in mature animal shape, he also fathers a tiger cub as a result of his nightly adventures. In an interview, Burgess has himself stated that several of his novels grew out of reading the *Animorphs* books. But he wanted to take the fictional game of otherness a step further into the forbidden subjects that are merely adumbrated within that series.

> If you look at my books there is an animal theme running through them, and like nearly all other animal stories, they are really about the human relationship with animals. Lately I've been taking that one step further and using animals as metaphors. You can see it in *Tiger Tiger*, and especially in *Bloodtide*. *Lady* is another step along that path. I was very interested in the Animorph books when they came out but very disappointed in the very limited way they used the idea of the animal within, so to speak, and I remember comparing it with Kafka in Metamorphosis, where the transformation into a beetle is treated as being completely real. I wanted to do something like that. (Burgess, n.d. [on-line])

According to Burgess, he uses human/animal relations in his teenage fiction to explore sex, desire and irresponsibility. In *Tiger Tiger*, which is addressed to slightly younger readers, the impact of such metamorphic transgressions into adulthood is still safely framed as a circular "time out" in animal disguise. Symptomatically, the boy's fate in this novel echoes the paradoxical fate of Gallico's Peter. On the surface, both boys have to forget their temporary maturation and return to innocent, inexperienced boyhood again at the end. A slight difference here is, however, that the experience has more obviously altered Steve:

> Steve was different now. […] He had no memories of the previous night, no knowledge of having been a tiger. But he knew that Lila had made him an unimaginable, unaccountable gift, and that he would never be the same again. He had grown up overnight in a way no one had ever done before. She had left inside him forever a streak of the tiger in his soul. (Burgess, [1996] 1998: 140-141)

Whereas Gallico's Peter faced and conquered his fears as a result of his dream of metamorphosis, Burgess takes the narrative game a step further insisting that Steve's metamorphosis indeed has initiated him into adult life. Burgess's use of the metamorphosis motif in *Tiger Tiger* thus foreshadows the collapsing of the circular metamorphosis pattern, which he is to carry out in full in his later picturebook *The Birdman* (2000), and in his teenage novel *Lady: My Life As a Bitch* (2001).

AFFIRMING AND SUBVERTING CHILD/ADULT RELATIONS

I initially asked whether the circular/carnival plot pattern, which is the traditional pattern of stories of child-other metamorphoses, can have a subversive and an anti-authoritarian thrust even despite the return to the status quo at the end. My conclusion is that the carnival pattern of metamorphosis provides authors with ample means of playing with subversive subject matter within the safe framework of "time out", but that circular endings can also be paradoxically both affirmative and subversive. Gallico's *Jennie* and Burgess's *Tiger, Tiger*, in particular, raise questions about initiation, since the child characters' rite of passage, which was begun within the carnivalesque adventure, seems to be thwarted in the end when the boy protagonists return to home and self to become as innocent and inexperienced in the mysteries of adulthood as they were previous to their metamorphoses. Yet the stories of Nesbit, McEwan, White, Gallico, and Burgess – despite their circular plot patterns – challenge and undermine child/adult power relations when they expose the powerlessness and vulnerability of the fictive child, deconstruct nostalgic (adult) notions of childhood innocence and idyll, and interrogate and mock adults in power, adult authority and institutions. The carnival plot pattern is apparently a potently ambiguous narrative device for affirming and subverting child/adult relations.

Stories of child-other metamorphosis inevitably reveal something about the construction of the fictive child in relation to the adult world. During the last twenty years, however, the continuing discussion around the construction of the fictional child and children's literature as a tool for adult indoctrination of the young (see in particular Rose, 1984; Nodelman, 1992; Lesnik-Oberstein, 1994, 1998, 2004; and Zornado, 2001) has tended to deny that contemporary children's literature might be truly subversive of child/adult power structures. Jack Zipes (2001: 166) makes a similar claim when he writes that

> [c]ontemporary Western films and plays that portray young people triumphing over their stupid or naive parents create an illusion of benign and caring governance of the young. What Bakhtin described as the radical carnivalesque humor in his book on Rabelais is impossible today because we cannot turn society on its head. The revolutionary has become impossible. We are left with truncated forms of mad gestures that belittle authoritarianism but offer little hope for alternative forms of communication.

Zipes claims that this undermining of adult authority is the result of a process of increasing cultural homogenisation, commercialisation and commodification of Western children's culture including literature. Although he walks a tightrope between rendering all child readers mere victims of adult indoctrination and voicing his severe criticism of the cultural poverty in a society "influenced by capitalist market conditions and the hegemonic interests of ruling corporate elites" (Zipes, 2001: xi), he ends up arguing what to me seems to be a radically reductive idea of contemporary children's fiction. Setting Zipes's moral and ethical concerns aside, his statement to my mind too closely echoes Karín Lesnik-Oberstein's (1994) categorical thesis that subversion is an illusion in contemporary children's literature, a reductive claim for which the stories investigated here lend little support. Most of these narratives open up to a variety of alternative readings – including ones that reveal an on-going negotiation of child/adult relations –, not least since the motif of metamorphosis as such enacts a blurring or transgression of the human/non-human boundary.

Very *a propos* here is David Rudd's (2004a) suggestion about the hybridity of children's literature. Rudd makes a case for the child reader who is no passive victim of the text, but who might well be capable of reading against the grain, deconstructing the text, or even rejecting it. Adopting a Bakhtinian approach to the dialogic nature of the sign, he acknowledges that any literary texts – including those written for children – are open to alternative ways of reading. Bakhtin's concept of dialogics makes every reader, including child readers, co-authors of the texts they read. Rudd not only argues that children are capable of reading interrogatively. He also claims that the negotiation of the child/adult binary is part of the very essence of children's literature poetics. Power relations between children and adults have been under negotiation in children's literature ever since it became an institutionalised form of literature. Using Homi Bhabha's (1994) notion of hybridity to imaginatively encapsulate the ambivalence surrounding images of child- and adulthood which permeate children's literature, Rudd ascribes to both the intended audience of children's fiction, and to the texts themselves, depth and complexity. Moreover, this approach acknowledges a disturbing potential within children's fiction since literary texts for children constantly recognise the frailty of the borders we construct between child- and adulthood. The hybridity of children's literature would also – in part – explain the marginalised status of children's literature in relation to the literary canon.

One of my main concerns here has been to show that child/adult relationships are constantly at the centre of stories of child metamorphosis. Becoming something Other than a child inevitably says something about the constructions of the child and the non-child, that is adults. Literary metamorphosis is one of many other carnivalesque techniques used by authors to displace the child, expose and reverse the power imbalance between child and adult and create freedom for the child or direct criticism towards characters representing adult authority. In some cases, the young protagonists displaced into animal shape are even allowed to temporarily experience "adult mysteries", such as total independence, sex and death, from which they are usually sheltered.

These stories also illustrate the anthropocentric view of narratives of child-animal metamorphosis. Authors typically employ child metamorphs' "time out" in animal disguise to address human issues. What it is to *really* become an animal is, of course, also a major part of the narrative game and of the pleasure of reading about fantastic events that cannot be explained rationally; but for better or worse, the stories analysed here are all anthropocentric. The lively writing and sheer playfulness with which these authors displace and distort the point of view of a human child with that of an animal accentuate the fact that multilayered texts are always open to different readings. Still, these rich and complex stories would certainly seem to be deliberately framed as comic, exciting and playful carnivalesque adventures, so as to pass as literature for children despite their subversive potential.

SUMMARY

In this part of the thesis I have used mainly play theory and carnival theory in order to suggest a deeper understanding of stories featuring pleasurable, joyful, and even frivolous accounts of child-other metamorphosis. Unlike the dominating trend in twentieth-century fantasy for adults, metamorphic change in children's literature is not used only to express alienation and repressed desires, but just as often to communicate joy, pleasure, play, increased agency and the reversal of power. An overt socialising or coercive purpose is less apparent in these stories. Through otherness, the child protagonists gain experience about their own selves, and engage actively in power struggles with adult authority rather than consent to it.

A closer study of the pleasurable child metamorphoses reveals a number of different constructs of the fictive child, from the child who engages in metamorphic role-play for pure pleasure to the child who finds refuge in daydreaming about transformation. In many stories pleasurable metamorphoses are interconnected with the state of pre-adolescence in the sense that young metamorphs willingly embrace their supernatural transformations, or in the sense that their change of shape originates from a state of childhood innocence. In other stories, the carnivalesque, transgressive and ludic child openly expresses a desire for increased power and agency, and enjoys a temporary power reversal through metamorphosis.

The pre-adolescent metamorph, who joyfully embraces metamorphosis, is a commonplace within picturebooks and fiction for children. Agency and power reversal lie at the heart of these stories. The tone varies between being serious, as in for example Gavin's *The Wormholers* where metamorphosis constitutes an acute physical liberation for a disabled child, and frivolously comic, as in for example Drescher's *The Boy Who Ate Around*, where the motif is employed playfully to create disorder and thereby results in an imaginary empowerment of the rebellious child. But the lack of hesitation shown by pre-adolescent characters when confronted with supernatural metamorphoses also reflects authors' idealist and nostalgic adult image of the developing child as someone who is in constant flux and change. Picturebooks especially bear witness to a dominant tendency to depict metamorphosis as playful, joyful and empowering when associated with pre-adolescent characters, whereas adult characters experience metamorphosis as horrific or deeply ambivalent assaults on their world-view and sense of self.

I argue for a reading of the binary image of the flexible child versus the static adult for two reasons. First of all, in order to show that childhood is still largely constructed in opposition to adulthood and vice versa. Because, whatever one might feel about the inherent truth-value of such constructions one cannot, as Brian Sutton-Smith (1997: 115-116) argues, ignore the fact that "the disjunction of childhood innocence and adult maturity is [...] an essential part of modern ideology. Children are a social stratum that is set apart". Secondly, in order to illustrate that, although this binary opposition between child and adult may seem to favour the child above the adult, it also affirms a stereotypical myth of the innocent, immature, adult-to-be child and an equally stereotypical myth of the experienced, mature, fully developed adult. From a developmental perspective, childhood is usually depicted as a transitional state characterised by change and, as a result, the child is looked upon as someone who has a natural ability to accept and play with physical change. Such a view of childhood purports to celebrate the childlike, but also conveys a problematically essentialising view of childhood that, of late, has increasingly come under question within children's literature criticism. Numerous studies explore the Western socio-historically constructed image of the child and childhood and reveal its deep roots within the Romantic Movement, which celebrated the innocence and the imagination of the child genius. The effect of this image has been noted to be roughly twofold. On the one hand, it leaves room for adults to invest hope for the future in an image of the child, which embodies change and renewal. On the other, such childhood essentialism exaggerates the child/adult dichotomy up to the point where one can only focus on the differences between the two, rather than on the similarities. The picturebooks on human-other metamorphosis mirror this perceived difference of essence between childhood and adulthood.

In keeping with my view of the poetics of children's literature, I have asked whether pleasurable and circular metamorphoses can be understood to empower the fictive child and/or interrogate child/adult power relations. The texts analysed show that the motif is frequently used to ascribe increased agency and power to child characters – although having the "power to" assert oneself, rather than having "power over" others, is pronounced to be more in line with my view of empowerment. Yet the study shows no absolute correlation between pleasurable and empowering metamorphoses. In Applegate's *Animorphs* series, for example, the dual nature of power is both repressing and a source of agency and subjectivity for the child protagonists. Explorations of the carnival plot pattern also give evidence of another kind of deep-seated ambiguity in child-other metamorphosis stories. In the most radical narratives, where liminal child metamorphs move back and forth between innocence and experience, the circular plot pattern is a framing device used by authors to neutralise the anti-authoritarian thrust of the contents within.

Drawing on studies of reading as a form of play, one can postulate that child readers of stories of liberating metamorphoses might empathise with and share in the child metamorphs' enjoyment of a power, freedom and independence that they otherwise lack. Consequently, I argue that the metaphor of the young reader as a "player" (cf. Appleyard, 1991; Lewis, 2001) might benefit from being broadened so that it does not *only* focus on seeing the playful child reader as a developing reader and a human being in the midst of becoming. Instead, a fruitful analogy could be made between the way in which child players, within their own play societies, seem to deconstruct, rather than mirror, the reality they live in (cf. Sutton-Smith, 1997: 166) and the idea that child readers are not necessarily the passive receivers of socialising messages that some researchers of children's literature would have us believe, but may be just as capable as any other readers of active participation in the meaning-making process of reading fiction. This would provide children's literature critics with a more nuanced perspective on the poetics of children's literature, without having to romanticise the idea of the child at play, or having to see child readers as powerless victims at the mercy of adult indoctrination and control.

VICTIMISED AND LOST CHILD METAMORPHS

In the pursuit of the unpleasures and pleasures of child-other metamorphosis so far, each new story analysed has revealed the complex and ambiguous uses to which this motif has been put. And the ambiguity seems to increase as one turns to stories where metamorphosis is linked to issues of fear, refuge and irreversibility. These narratives form a category of their own, since the child metamorphs' unpleasure or pleasure here appears to be blurred by factors linked to the origins and radical outcome of their transformations. First of all, there are numerous narratives where young protagonists undergo metamorphoses *out of fear, despair* or *necessity*, or in order *to find refuge from* abuse, depression, gender entrapment or death. Secondly, towards the end of the twentieth century an increasing number of stories of child-animal metamorphosis portray young protagonists who either choose to remain in, or find themselves trapped in, permanent metamorphosis. What do authors wish to communicate to readers by using the motif of metamorphosis in these radically ambiguous ways? And can these kinds of metamorphoses be read as empowering and/or disempowering for the young metamorphs? These are the key questions to be addressed in this fourth part of the thesis.

FINDING REFUGE IN METAMORPHOSIS

In terms of empowerment or disempowerment, the motif of metamorphosis is a slippery concept. A disempowering punishment through metamorphosis, for example, might result in an improvement of character that could be thought of as empowering for the child in the long run. The issues are no less complex in the stories where physical transformation functions as a means of refuge for child metamorphs. The first stories to be analysed here are two British teenage novels, which employ metamorphosis as a powerful trope for depicting child characters who are victims of sexual, or emotional and physical, abuse – Lynne Reid Banks's *Melusine* (1988) and Gillian Cross's *Pictures in the Dark* (1996).

Historically speaking, there is nothing essentially new about using the motif of metamorphosis to represent a refuge from the threat of abuse. In myth and fairy tales a merging with nature in the forms of arboreal or animal transformations is frequently used to grant marginalised or persecuted (female) heroines agency or refuge from harm (cf. Pratt, 1981; Tatar, 1992: 120-139; Warner, [1994b] 1995b: 353-358). Classic examples from Greek mythology include Daphne, Arethusa and Syrinx, who escape rape through transformations into tree, river, and reed. And in Western fairy tale tradition Grimms' "Allerleirauh" and Perrault's "Donkeyskin" are the two most well known stories where girl protagonists flee incestuous relations by dressing up as animals. Although the relationship between metamorphosis, myth and legend is more overtly expressed in *Melusine*, Banks's and Cross's novels both draw heavily upon such intertexts. Unlike myth and fairy tales, however, these fantasy novels are character-driven, as well as plot-driven, in an attempt to delve deeper into the psychological implications of the abusive situations portrayed.

WITHDRAWING INTO ANIMALITY

In *Melusine* the real and the fantastic intertwine in a manner that relies on the tale's emotional credibility, rather than its mimetic truth-value. Banks introduces a metamorphic character from French mythology, the serpent-woman Mélusine, into a contemporary setting in order to tackle symbolically the sensitive topic of an incestuous relationship between father and daughter. The French legend of Mélusine has been used to inspire a great number of literary works. In the medieval versions of the tale, Mélusine is a beautiful fairy who on Saturdays changes into a serpent from the waist down. In order to preserve this secret from her husband she makes him promise not to see her on this particular day. When he breaks the pact, Mélusine disappears, along with the prosperity of their family (cf. Krell, 2000; Seifert, 2000). There are many different European versions of the Mélusine legend. But central to all versions are the serpent-woman's dual nature as beautiful woman and hideous snake (alternatively fish or mermaid), her role as tempting seductress (men cannot help falling in love with her despite her disfigurement), the husband's promise, and the transgressions of that promise which result in Mélusine's disappearance.

According to Michael Cart (1996: 202), one of the last taboos to fall in the sexual arena of teenage fiction is incest. From a psychological point of view, shapeshifting would presumably be a very potent metaphor for the depiction of sexual abuse, since one of the main symptoms associated with victims of incest is their propensity to isolate themselves from peers and to form alternative personalities in response to trauma (cf. Reynolds, 2001b: 17). Brenda O. Daly (1992: 6) makes such an extra-literary link between fact and fiction about victims of incest when she reports that:

> [i]n severe cases of sexual abuse, which often begin in early childhood […], psychological splitting may occur to such an extent that neither personality is aware of the other. In especially brutal repetitions of childhood sexual abuse […] multiple personalities may result.

According to Daly, the donning of an alternative identity – even in a playful sense – may also effectively be used in narratives as a powerful trope for representing the abused child's potential self-hatred and desire to escape from her own body. So does Lynn Reid Banks manage to use metamorphosis as a metaphor for this highly sensitive subject matter? And if she does, can the result be said to be both ethically and aesthetically persuasive?

The novel is exclusively focalised through the boy protagonist Roger, who together with his parents and sisters is spending a summer holiday in a run-down chateau in the French countryside. Roger finds himself drawn to the castle owner's teenage daughter, Melusine, whom he tries to befriend. The girl's reptilian, button-eyed, thin-lipped face; her gliding walk; the strange feel of her skin; her striking likeness to the mythic snake-woman Mélusine as depicted in carvings in a local medieval church; as well as her allusive surname, Serpe[124]: everything adds to Roger's increasing sense of the girl's strangeness. Secretly witnessing a scene in which Melusine is fondled by her father, Roger's ill-ease increases, although he cannot at this point in the story formulate to himself what he finds so upsetting:

> Yes, he couldn't shake the idea off: there was definitely something repulsive about the scene he had half-witnessed across the stone window-sill.
>
> [...] He kept seeing the two people in the armchair. There had been movements – like a struggle. He knew it was none of his business and that it was beyond what he was ready to understand. He told himself just to forget about it, but he couldn't. (Banks, [1988] 1990: 61)

Like pieces in a puzzle, the clues gradually come together in Roger's mind. Shortly after the incident quoted above, a snake begins to visit Roger at night and the terrible feeling of "a heavy, dumb, living weight mount[ing] on to the bottom of his bed" leaves him terrified (Banks, [1988] 1990: 62). When he realises that Melusine's room is located right above his, he gradually makes the connection between this frightening presence in his room at night and Melusine:

> [H]e touched Melusine's arm.
>
> He was so sure it was her that he wasn't afraid, just astounded. What on earth was she doing in his bed...?
>
> 'Melusine...?' he whispered incredulously – and moved his hand along her arm, that special, warm-cool, hard-soft skin he had touched before which could only be hers.
>
> But it wasn't. Because the arm went on and on and wasn't an arm at all.
>
> It wasn't skin, either. A couple of seconds of touching it told him it wasn't skin. He didn't know what it was, but it was nothing human, though it quivered with life. As his hand followed the wholely un-arm-like curve of the thing on the bed, it moved. It moved! And at the same moment a flash of lightning through the little round window illuminated, just for a split second, what lay under his hand.
>
> But he didn't need the shock of seeing it. He had already realized, in a mental flash more blinding than any lightning, that what he was touching was not skin but scales. Not a girl's arm, or a man's, but the long, firm body of a huge snake. (Banks, [1988] 1990: 92-93)

> *She knows*, he though. *She knows that I know. Perhaps she wanted me to find out. Otherwise why did she keep coming into my room? Perhaps she can't help what she does when she's...like that. Or perhaps...perhaps she's lonely. Or frightened.* (Banks, [1988] 1990: 97)

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[124] Alluding to the Latin word for snake, *serpens*.

The reason for Melusine's usually nocturnal change of shape slowly becomes apparent to Roger. In Gothic fashion, the chateau functions as an emblem of the emotional state of its residents. When Roger begins to realise what dark family secrets are being silenced behind the chateau walls, the facade of the chateau literally begins to crumble and fall apart to reveal what is hidden within. In a crucial episode, Roger and his father explore a tunnel they have found beneath a fallen gatepost. The passage leads them to the very heart of the secret tower, which Melusine has forbidden Roger to enter. There they discover the remains of Melusine's dead sister and witness the snake-girl's last struggle with her father.

Throughout the novel there is a tension between Roger's curiosity about Melusine's secret and his wish to protect himself from knowing the sheer depth of her misery. He thinks, at first, that her awful secret is her snake transformation, but realises eventually that her shapeshifting ability is a symptom of yet another, deeper secret (Banks, [1988] 1990: 99). Since Melusine never acts as focaliser, the readers do not have any direct access to her point of view. In fact, the solving of Melusine's metamorphic mystery remains instrumental to the central motif in the novel, which is Roger's coming-of-age. In the scene where Roger begins to overcome his fear of Melusine's animal other and decides to sleep in his old room again even though he knows the snake-girl will visit him, "his voice unexpectedly cracked down into a deeper register" (Banks, [1988] 1990: 96).

An additional reason why Melusine is never used as focaliser can be found in the conventions of genre. Teenage novels dealing with incest where the victims tell their own stories are still rare.[125] Clearly, the ambition in Banks's novel is to mediate, through Roger, a sense of pity and understanding for Melusine:

> maybe danger triggered it.
>
> So that other part of her wasn't evil. No more than she was. She was just – like those others, ordinary in her head, but – handicapped. Wanting to be like everyone else, but cursed with this *thing*, that overtook her, that she could do nothing about, that set her apart from the rest of the world.
>
> Poor Melusine! he thought. Poor, poor thing!
>
> And he understood why he had no more fear of her, or even of the creature she sometimes was. The fear had just got lost in pity. (Banks, [1988] 1990: 99)

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[125] One exception is Francesca Lia Block's *The Hanged Man* (1994), which "is told in the first-person voice of the victim herself" (Cart, 1996: 206).

When Roger reaches a fuller understanding that "suffering can change people" he can "let [Melusine] know that he was with her, not afraid of her, that, as much as an ordinary person could, he understood, and did not shrink from her in this awful form" (Banks, [1988] 1990: 117, 119). Roger's efforts to accept and understand Melusine's plight are thus pivotal for his maturation.

But for the depiction of the abused child metamorph, using a narrative technique that never allows readers to share Melusine's feelings and thoughts without them being mediated through Roger also has its drawbacks. This is not to assume that the book *ought to* have been about Melusine rather than Roger, but stems from my interest in the ideological implications of Banks's metaphorical use of the snake-girl metamorph. Most importantly, the lack of inner representation of Melusine inevitably means that her version of the story is obscured and silenced. Robyn McCallum (1999: 51) notes that there are ideological implications associated with narrative perspective and that characters who are only mediated through the point of view of other characters run the risk of being inscribed as objects within the discourse of others and are thus denied subjectivity. This is certainly the case with Melusine, whose main role in the novel is easily reduced to being a mere catalyst for the development and maturation of Roger.

Neither is the issue of Melusine's lack of voice, which is even further accentuated by her broken English, gender neutral. The intertextual relationship between the snake-girl in the novel and in previous retellings of the legend provides further arguments for such criticism. The mythological figure of Mélusine is a complex and elusive image that tends to be associated with the duality of the dark and the demonic or the light and the angelic, or alternatively with transgressive androgyny and hybridity. Central to her characterisation is the transgressive nature of her metamorphic (or hybrid) body, which raises the issue of "the problematic relations between the female body and power" (Brownlee, 1994: 19).[126] Her physical being is a monstrous blend of attractive femininity and repulsive snake, the biblical symbol of evil. Mélusine has traditionally been represented in a dual fashion either as a descendant of the demonic Lilith, who represents the destructive nature of feminine erotic power, a "man-eater", an ogress; or as an emblem of the good and innocent "'child-woman', ageless source of poetic inspiration" (Krell, 2000: 376). Banks alludes to this split image of the legendary Mélusine in a pivotal scene just before Roger makes the final connection between Melusine's victimisation and her snake metamorphosis. He reads about the legendary snake-woman in a local guidebook which says that

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[126] A.S. Byatt has also used the myth of Mélusine in order to explore issues of female liminality, power and agency in her Booker-prize winning novel *Possession: A Romance* (1990).

> an older tale suggests that she is a direct descendent of the serpent who tempted Eve in the Garden of Eden, and as such the incarnation of evil, while at the same time being the instrument of God. What is common to both tales is that Melusine is the embodiment of both good and evil, being a woman – Eve herself, perhaps – by day and a snake by night. (Banks, [1988] 1990: 114)

The split image of Mélusine presented here is uncannily reinforced when Roger suddenly realises that the intricate pattern on the table inlaid with coloured stones where he sits represents a "sinister", yet "also beautiful and piteous" snake (Banks, [1988] 1990: 115).

In Banks's reshaping of the legend of the snake-woman, Melusine – in the eyes of Roger – initially bears some traits of the mythical seductive temptress, who possesses supernatural powers to entice the opposite sex. As Roger watches her being mesmerised by a street entertainer pretending to be an Indian snake-charmer, he is himself mesmerised by

> *some* power. For a timeless moment he felt what it was like to be hypnotized. Only it was much more Melusine who hypnotized him, not the music itself. His family, the crowd, the actors, the square – they all faded away into a sort of golden mist, like the river-mist that had covered the ground that morning. Only Melusine, her wreathing, swaying movements, her staring eyes, remained real and effective to him. 'Watching' was not an intense enough word for what he did to her. He drank her with his eyes. He knew that if she turned and beckoned to him, he would have to cross the open space between them and go to her. (Banks, [1988] 1990: 48-49)

Again, the complete lack of insight into Melusine's version of the events portrayed reduces her in this scene to an object of Roger's curiosity and desire. Throughout the novel, the limited perspective that readers have on Melusine contributes to a blurring of the border between the "real" and the legendary snake-girl, which in turn adds to the titillating feeling of mystery surrounding her persona. Even at the very end, when she literally sheds her snakeskin and begins her recovery process, her thoughts and feelings are hidden from the reader. Thus, Melusine's completely opaque character remains a mystery to readers throughout the book.

Yet the implication that Melusine in Banks's novel becomes – as a result of her suffering – a hideous and abominable creature is appropriately disturbing, given the subject matter addressed. Her snake metamorphosis is a complex and powerful metaphor for what abuse has turned her into. Her snake's body is simultaneously a disempowering physicalisation of her shame and an empowering means for her to survive and cope with her situation. The empowering aspects of her metamorphic powers are demonstrated in the episode where she transforms herself into a snake in order to save Roger's sister from drowning (Banks, [1988] 1990: 73-79). Revealing her snake nature to Roger is also Melusine's way of calling for help. Roger never finds out whether she comes into his room at night to hide from her father or to seek his help (Banks, [1988] 1990: 120), but as a result of these nightly visits he learns that Melusine is like the snake depicted on the inlaid table: trapped "[d]oing what it had to do and being hated for it" (Banks, [1988] 1990: 115). Thus, Roger is forced to see the person behind an act he finds otherwise incomprehensibly abominable.

Imagining monsters

Gillian Cross's *Pictures in the Dark* also takes the form of a mystery novel where metamorphosis is the central clue to the discovery of child abuse. From the very beginning of the novel, Cross establishes this metamorphic mystery in a subtle way through the use of photography. Charlie Wilcox, who is an eager member of the Camera Club at school, takes a picture of a black and orange shadow in the river, which haunts him for an explanation:

> Something struck across the pool of light, swimming fast. The smooth orange surface was fractured by a strong, V-shaped pattern of ripples and Charlie's silhouette cracked into jazzy, irregular stripes. [...]
>
> Whatever had made the ripples was just beyond the light. The point of the V was chopped off, drawing attention to the darkness at the edges of the picture. Leaving people free to imagine monsters. (Cross, [1996] 1998: 2-3)

When Charlie gets to know a new boy at school – a young outsider called Peter Luttrell – he gradually begins to suspect that the shadow in the water, which he believes to be an otter, is somehow connected with the strange boy. The photograph, which is so abstract that it invites spectators to "imagine monsters", foreshadows in a subtle manner the mass-hysteria that will later on spread at school where Peter's strangeness causes some of his classmates to believe he has evil powers.

Like Roger's discovery of Melusine's ability to change her shape, Charlie's discovery of Peter's secret takes place slowly and reluctantly. Charlie has to fight an initial feeling of dislike for the small boy with the strange eyes, whom he instinctively fears, resents and pities:

> His eyes were very pale, like water over pebbles, and Charlie had the most extraordinary urge to grab him by the shoulders and shake, as hard as he could. Shake and shake, until the strange, obstinate look was wiped off his face. (Cross, [1996] 1998: 8)

But in the end, Charlie has to accept the supernatural explanation that, in order to survive emotional and physical abuse – at home, as well as at school – Peter finds his only refuge in shifting his soul into the body of an otter. As in *Melusine*, the abused child's metamorphosis functions both as a means of finding refuge from abuse and as a metaphor for the mental state of the abused and traumatised child. But for Peter, who is the child victim in Cross's novel, the physical transformation is even more obviously depicted as a desperate last resort to stay sane by "going free" whenever he feels captured in abusive situations (Cross, [1996] 1998: 174).

Like Lynne Reid Banks, Gillian Cross chooses to make the metamorphic child victim the focalisee, rather than the focaliser, of the novel. Peter's odd withdrawn behaviour makes him the school's scapegoat and an easy victim of bullying. In the entire novel, there are only two brief passages in which Peter's own voice is audible. First, he produces a map of the local river for Charlie, which reveals his peculiar knowledge of "[h]undreds of intricate, secret details" about life in and around the river (Cross, [1996] 1998: 143). Secondly, Charlie accidentally finds a poem written by Peter, called "My Bedroom", which reveals how he is forced to spend his nights locked in a garden shed. But like the blurry, suggestive photograph that began the story, the true meaning of Peter's poem is hidden behind the slipperiness of language. The poem is a school assignment and, whereas Charlie (and the reader) can detect a cry for help expressed between the written lines, Peter's uninitiated teacher has read the poem metaphorically and given the following "crisp and practical" comments:

> *An interesting way to deal with a nightmare, but I'd have liked a bit more detail. And you have used the word 'soft' four times. Please try to vary your vocabulary.* (Cross, [1996] 1998: 155)

Since Peter's point of view is thus hardly ever shared by the readers, it is difficult to sympathise with him immediately and readers are made painfully aware of how easy it is to adopt the bullies' notion of the frighteningly odd and distanced boy. As the passage quoted earlier on shows, even Charlie finds it difficult not to be provoked by the trance-like state of mind that Peter falls into whenever he is accused or threatened. As with the characterisation of Melusine, the lack of a direct interior perspective into Peter's thoughts and feelings adds yet another layer to his victimisation.

In Cross's novel the dysfunctional father/son relationship takes symbolical shape primarily through a juxtaposition of the human/animal, or civilisation/wilderness, dichotomies. The Luttrell house is an immaculate fortress that reflects the emotional state of its residents. According to Charlie, "[t]he whole house was organized to death" (Cross, [1996] 1998: 22). But

> [b]eyond the back gate, the tidiness stopped. Bang. The whole, careful, ultra-tidy view was completely ruined by the river that sprawled behind the wall, making a joke of the Luttrells' garden. (Cross, [1996] 1998: 23)

And it is into this unkempt wilderness that Peter flees from his father's attempts to break his will. Peter's subdued sister Jennifer also attests to their father's inability to deal with things beyond his control, including the wild animal that roams their tidy garden at night: "he hates mess. [...] He was just about managing until that thing started coming into the garden. That was the last straw" (Cross, [1996] 1998: 61, 87).

A text that compares well with Cross's novel in this respect is Elizabeth Coatsworth's *Pure Magic* (1973).[127] Johnny Dunlap plays here the typical role of the focalising friend, who sympathises with an odd newcomer at school, Giles Dumont. Giles is a hybrid "were-fox", half human and half animal, and Johnny's first impression is that

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[127] Also published in a later American edition as *The Were-Fox* (1975) and in a British edition as *The Fox Boy* (1975).

> [h]e was different from any of the other children, rather small, quick-moving when he did move, with a brush of reddish-gold hair and a th[i]n face with gold-brown eyes and a sidelong smile. (Coatsworth, [1973] 1975: 17)

For the readers, however, Giles's metamorphic character is no uncanny mystery to be gradually revealed, since the initial chapter depicts the two friends enjoying a secret nightly adventure in the woods as fox and boy. Instead, the central conflict to be revealed and resolved is the resentment Giles's father feels for his son's dual nature, which he has inherited from his mother's side. The bond between father and son is in due course restored when Mr. Dumont saves his son from a foxhunt. So Coatsworth, too, uses the trope of child-animal metamorphosis to stage Oedipal tension between father and son. Yet she does not use the motif to explore as complex a state of mind as Peter's fear of abuse and feelings of entrapment encompassed in Cross's novel, but more in line with the tradition of fairy tales about animal spouses and metamorphosis as a test of parental affection.

Like Giles, however, it is clearly the wild and animal otherness associated with Peter that triggers feelings of fear and anger for him among those he encounters. Peter's surname, Luttrell, which alludes to the Latin name for otter, *Lutra lutra*, covertly signifies his part-animal nature. More readily accessible to young readers is probably the depiction of Peter as an entrapped animal in the crucial scene where Charlie tries to comfort the boy, who has suffered a vicious assault from a group of girls at school:

> 'Are you OK?' Charlie said.
>
> Still Peter didn't move. Charlie had a strange feeling that he was somewhere else altogether, cut off in a private place where the sounds and the light fell in quite different ways. His eyes were like glass. [...]
>
> Looking into them, Charlie felt as if he had double vision. He still saw Peter – scrawny and irritating, with a red mark on his forehead where the conker had hit him – but *he was also seeing a wild creature*. He could hear the light, nervous breathing and feel the terror.
>
> Very slowly, as if he were reassuring a frightened animal, Charlie reached out a hand and let it fall gently on to the tense, trembling shoulder in front of him.
>
> And Peter turned his head and bit it. Hard. (Cross, [1996] 1998: 70-71, my italics)

The bite is doubly important since it overtly visualises the "animalness" of Peter's fear and gives Charlie a kind of "double vision" that enables him to see the world from a different, animal/wild, point of view.

Having learned the depth of Peter's fear, Charlie's empathy for the persecuted boy deepens even further.

There are, however, few who choose to side with Peter and Charlie finds himself torn between his new interest in photographing wild-life, looking for the otter, and learning increasingly disturbing things about Peter's dysfunctional family life. Meanwhile, Charlie's jealous cousin Zoë grows ever more firm in her belief that Peter has put a spell on Charlie. In the horrifying closing scenes of the book, Charlie witnesses from afar how Zoë and a friend nearly drown Peter in an attempt to find out whether he has the power to cast the evil eye on others. The girls tie Peter up and throw him into the river in order to perform a traditional trial by ordeal: if he is a witch he will float, if not, he will drown. The scene is no less unsettling in its vivid expression of the girls' act being, simultaneously, one of astounding ignorance and premeditated calculation.

At the time when Cross's novel was written and published in Britain, mass-hysteria and scapegoating were very topical indeed. A public debate around the demonisation contra idealisation of the child had begun already in the 1990s with widespread media coverage of juvenile crime, culminating with the incident that shook the British nation in 1993 when two ten-year-old boys abducted and killed two-year-old toddler James Bulger (cf. Goldson, 2001; Reynolds, 2001a). In her 1994 Reith Lectures, Marina Warner ([1994a] 1995a: 45) notes that

> [t]he shock of James Bulger's death was deepened by his murderers' ages, yet their trial revealed a brutal absence of pity for them as children. It was conducted as if they were adults not because they had behaved with adult consciousness, but because they had betrayed an abstract myth about children's proper childlikeness.

Other studies of the public discourse on the Bulger case – and in particular its representation in the national press – reveal similar concerns about the public outcry and harsh legal treatment[128] of James Bulger's perpetrators. The criminology scholar Alison Young (1996), the sociologist Chris Jenks (1996), and the Swedish media researcher Margareta

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[128] The two ten-year-olds are the youngest prisoners ever on life sentences in Britain (Young, 1996: 113). As part of the demonising discourse, no proper account was taken of contextual issues such as child poverty, youth exclusion, the children's physical and mental health, education or social stability/instability (Goldson, 2001: 40). Margareta Rönnberg (1998: 51) notes for example that only twenty minutes of the seventeen-day-long trial was spent investigating the boys' mental health.

Rönnberg (1998) all argue that the public opinion that held the crime to be of an exceptionally heinous nature derived from the perpetrators being children who had acted in a way no children should. In contrast to James Bulger, who media represented as the quintessential innocent child, the two ten-year-olds were portrayed as intrinsically evil "aberrations of children, approximations of what a child might be, or fraudulent impostors. [They] *appear* to be children but are not: they are more like evil adults or monsters in disguise" (Young, 1996: 115). Since the boys were unable to live up to the ideal image of the innocent child, they became incomprehensible evil freaks, demonised Others – and therefore legitimate targets for the fear and hatred of the public.[129]

But Cross's depiction of the children's assault on Peter does not buy into any such simplistic binary discourses of essentially innocent or evil children. Both adult and child characters in the novel find Peter's sullen elusiveness provoking, but – like Roger's discovery in Banks's *Melusine* – one of Charlie's main insights is that Peter is not "evil" in a metaphysical sense (cf. Cross, [1996] 1998: 175). Zoë, who condones her persecution of Peter by believing that he is "evil" (Cross, [1996] 1998: 145) is also brutally exposed to her own misconception. Still, Zoë is not depicted as a stereotypical, sadistic bully that thrives on picking on those who are weaker for the sheer fun of it. Although she is not a very likeable character, Charlie-the-focaliser's perspective on his troublesome cousin is coloured by an ambivalent mixture of big-brotherly fondness and irritation. Charlie is too close to Zoë to be able to see both the bad and the good in her. The final awful, and nearly fatal, assault on Peter that she carries out with a friend, is depicted as resulting from her ignorance, and from her primitive fear of Peter's otherness, not from any innate propensity in *her* to be evil. The novel thus explores and unpicks society's idea of the victimised and othered child, as well as the mechanisms behind mass-hysteria and the attractions of scapegoating.

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[129] Children killing other children is regarded as an index of a society in crisis and speculations about who is responsible – that is, who is to blame – tend to run wild. In the attempts to explain the crime, the young perpetrators were not only demonised within the public discourse on the Bulger case. Blame was also sought in the parenting of the two boys, and in particular in the behaviour of their mothers who were depicted as othered "non-mothers" – too smothering or too neglecting – and in over-simplified speculations about the influence of video violence (cf. Young, 1996; Rönnberg, 1998).

Even so, for the portrayal of the abused child metamorph, the scene when Peter leaves his body during the final assault in order to take refuge in animal form is problematic. Given the narrow focalisation in the novel, readers learn nothing about the events from the point of view of the victim, and the spotlight is directed even more obviously than earlier onto Charlie, who heroically saves Peter-the-otter from being killed by his own father. As with the narrative structure in Banks's novel, the limited and distanced perspective that readers have of the abused child focalisee, Peter, makes him an instrument for the heroic actions, as well as maturation, of the focaliser Charlie. Learning Peter's secret and taking the responsibility that comes with that knowledge, Charlie is able to show his courage and ability to empathise with others. In other words, this is not primarily Peter's, but Charlie's story.

As I noted previously, the events explored during the course of the novel interrogate a simplistic binary understanding of "good" and "evil". According to Cross's tale, adults and children alike may perform immoral acts as a result of their ignorance and fear of that which is Other. Perhaps, in order to soften such a harsh lesson of life, Cross ([1996] 1998: 213) brings on a hasty reconciliation between Peter and his father:

> 'It's all right,' Mr Luttrell said. His voice cracked, but he kept on speaking. 'Everything's going to be all right.'
>
> He reached out for the limp hand that was lying on the edge of the stretcher, but Peter flinched, drawing it away sharply. His eyes widened in a steady, unblinking stare. Strange and remote.
>
> 'No,' Charlie muttered, under his breath. '*No!*'
>
> He glanced at Mr Luttrell, expecting his face to freeze. Expecting him to snatch his hand back and turn away from the stretcher.
>
> But he didn't. He left the hand lying where it was and he stared back into Peter's distant, glassy eyes, meeting that unnerving gaze. Not turning away, even when the tears started rolling down his face, streaking his smooth-shaved cheeks and seeping into his immaculate, snow-white collar.
>
> Peter's eyes changed, and he blinked. With a great effort, as if he were coming out of some distant place, he focused on his father's face. Very slowly, he moved his hand back to the edge of the stretcher, and Mr Luttrell's fingers closed round it.

From a realistic point of view, the effort seems unconvincingly sudden and rather contrived. Cross's earlier convincing depiction of the depth of Peter's emotional injuries makes it difficult to believe that they would be as simply overcome as the scene quoted above suggests.

In this respect, my reading of the novel differs somewhat from that of Clare Bradford (2001: 154-155), who argues that metamorphosis is a trope used also for depicting Peter's growth and development. According to her, metamorphosis here metaphorically expresses the boy's struggle to gain individual identity and autonomy. Invoking the Lacanian theory of the unconscious and subjectivity, Bradford reads Peter's shapeshifting as a materialisation of his unconscious. Since subjectivity is constructed through language, Peter cannot gain a sense of self until he enters the symbolic, which he does when he meets his father's gaze in the climactic scene quoted above. To me, however, the concerns of Peter (the focalisee) remain, throughout the novel, subordinate to the coming-of-age of Charlie (the focaliser). In the end, the most central theme in the novel is the lesson about personal integrity and responsibility that Charlie learns when he chooses to stand up against public opinion at school, his own family and relatives, his best friend, and his teachers, in order to defend and protect Peter. As a result of Charlie's adventure with the shapeshifting boy, he gains a new, optimistic outlook on life which reassures readers that "[w]herever he turned, whenever he lifted his camera, there would be something new and beautiful" (Cross, [1996] 1998: 216). The utopian ending may, in too arbitrary a fashion, seem to gloss over the escalating nasty turns that events take in the novel. Yet it cannot obliterate the impact of Cross's shatteringly vivid account of ignorance, brutality, mass-hysteria and power abuse as an equal part of the lives of children and adults.

To conclude, Banks and Cross closely associate metamorphosis with issues of fear and shame, agency and refuge from abuse.[130] Both writers use metamorphosis to represent complex psychological processes in metaphorical dress. Neither Melusine's nor Peter's transformation seems entirely voluntary, but springs from a necessity to deal with overwhelmingly tragic circumstances. Their shapeshifting occur mainly at night, in the dark, to enforce the disempowering secrecy around the abuse they suffer. Yet the transformations also empower the abused child characters to some extent by bringing them an increased sense of agency. As a snake Melusine can perform an act of heroism (rescuing Roger's sister) and escape the confinement of her bedroom to visit Roger. And for Peter the change into an otter implies an even greater freedom to roam in the wilderness.

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[130] Many of the picturebooks previously discussed in this thesis, such as Anthony Browne's *The Tunnel* and William Steig's *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble* and *Solomon the Rusty Nail*, link fear and metamorphosis. Another example is *Once When I Was Scared* (1988) in which Helena Clare Pittman and Ted Rand use the imagery of animal metamorphosis to illustrate a boy protagonist's fear of travelling through a dark woods at night. His transformations into a fox, a bobcat, and an eagle – all swift and strong animals – are merely suggested in the text, but very explicitly visualised in the illustrations, to communicate a sense of the metamorphoses being the boy's imaginary strategies to cope with his fear of the dark.

There is a profound difference between Melusine's and Peter's transformations, though, in terms of empowerment. Whereas Melusine expresses deep shame for her snake nature and is reduced to tears on the occasion when Roger tells her he has seen her imitating a snake-dance (Banks, [1988] 1990: 52), Peter seems to find joy and contentment in the freedom he experiences as an otter (Cross, [1996] 1998: 130). For him, water – the element the otter feels most at home in – implies a temporary forgetfulness of his human misery and he describes his metamorphosis in terms of "going free" (Cross, [1996] 1998: 174). Furthermore, Peter's metamorphosis into an attractive animal such as the furry otter, member of an endangered species, is titillating and mysterious rather than horrific, and also more obviously a trope for his resistance against his oppressive and paranoid father.[131] Melusine's transformation into a cold-blooded snake, on the other hand, has far more sinister connotations and remains a trope more open to ambiguous associations with shame and monstrosity.

In both novels, the mystery surrounding the metamorphic child's otherness is used as a means through which the delicate topic of child abuse can be approached symbolically. The stories are not focalised through the abused children themselves, but through a protagonist who gradually discovers the awful "secrets" of the mysteriously othered child metamorphs. The gaps created in the text, which are gradually filled in with the focalising protagonists' increasing knowledge, are obviously an effective means of creating suspense and keeping readers intrigued and attentive. Yet there is reason to question – from an ethical point of view – whether the narratives provide enough information to give a fair representation of the complex issues they explore. This question is especially relevant, since these novels are written for a young audience that may initially be as naive about matters of child abuse as the focalising characters of the novels.

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[131] Christine Wilkie-Stibbs (2000) also reads Peter's transformation into an otter as his way of both escaping abuse and resisting oppression (from his father). Yet I think her Lacanian/Kristevan approach to the novel as an example of the embodiment of the *féminine* in language reads too much into the text. Seeing the otter as "a psychotic fantasy of return to the mother and an attempt to re-experience a pre-Oedipal, pre-lingual, Semiotic *jouissance* that stands in opposition to the Law " (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2000: 84) is rather difficult when we have no first-hand access to Peter's own experience of being an otter. Gillian Rubinstein's *Foxspell* or Melvin Burgess's *Lady: My Life As a Bitch*, on the other hand, would presumably open up more easily to such psychological readings since they provide internal representations of the metamorphic protagonists' desire to withdraw into animality.

Clearly, there is a desire on the authors' part here to tread very carefully in verbalising experiences of such traumatic kind that they have become impossible for those involved to articulate. Both Melusine and Peter are incapable of speaking about the abuse they suffer. Instead, the authors use their metamorphic bodies to draw the readers' attention – and in some respect also that of the focalising protagonists' – to their awful secrets and, perhaps inadvertently, to ask for help. In her study of Holocaust fiction for children, Lydia Kokkola (2003: 15-46) argues for the benefits of using silence as a kind of tactful communicative act in order to be able to deal with the unspeakable. The narrow focalisation strategy that is employed in both Banks's and Cross's novels could thus be defended for similar ethical reasons. Consequently, avoiding any interior representation of the abused child characters may have been motivated by a wish to treat the subject matter with the respect it deserves, as well as the desire to cushion young readers from the controversial subject matter explored. The limited and distanced perspective on Melusine and Peter offered to readers, surely provides the authors with a convincing reason for not having to explore the nature of their abuse in unexpurgated graphic detail.

Still, the use of this narrative technique is a double-edged sword and its drawbacks cannot be ignored. Both Melusine and Peter are othered and silenced characters that lack the empowered subject position that would allow them to tell their own stories. They are inevitably given roles that are secondary to those of the focalising protagonists. Comparing the two novels, the information gaps are, however, far more extensive and potentially disturbing in Banks's *Melusine*, where readers are left in the dark on a number of important issues raised in the novel. For example, did Melusine cause her father's death or not? How did she manage to recover from her split personality all on her own? And what will happen to Roger as a result of him telling his school psychologist about Melusine? Apparently, the psychologist suspects that Roger has made the story up in order to be able to communicate to her about incestuous relations within his own family.

Lydia Kokkola (2003: 26) notes that withholding information from child readers is a complex matter, since they are likely to lack the contextual knowledge needed to fill in missing information in reticent texts.

> Thus children's literature that is reticent is, in a way, doubly reticent – and perhaps even dishonest. On the other hand, such indirection may also be an adult strategy to protect young minds that are not yet prepared for history's grimmest truths, while simultaneously preparing them for it. In brief, the decision to withhold information walks the thin line between the desire to protect [child readers] and confusing them. (Kokkola, 2003: 26-27)

In Banks's and Cross's novels the balance between these two conflicting concerns is clearly not always well handled. For each author the need to give the story a hopeful denouement seems to have been an imperative concern, even to the extent that both novels may be accused of providing pat solutions to the issues of grave complexity they so convincingly deal with within the story.

Peter's final meeting with his father in Cross's novel seems far too sudden and contrived to bring readers any genuine hope of their future reconciliation. Similarly, the death of Melusine's father is a conventional and over-simplified plot resolution. Furthermore, the maintenance of silence as a vital part of Melusine's recovery seems to go beyond what may be defended as ethical concerns for uninitiated readers. Breaking the silence and secrecy around incestuous relations is generally regarded as the first step towards a possible recovery for the abused child (cf. Daly, 1992: 8). This is also what happens when Roger, assisted by his parents, uncovers Melusine's secret. But once the secret is out in the open, so to speak, there seems to be no further need to investigate the matter any further. Instead, silence is reintroduced as a means of protection and healing. Roger reportedly feels as if he "betrays" himself and Melusine when he breaks the pervasive silence and tells Melusine's story to the school psychologist (cf. Banks, [1988] 1990: 181).

In defence of the ending of Banks's novel one could argue that this is Roger's story, not Melusine's, and it is *his* need for closure that the writer aims to satisfy. And in some respects, Banks does succeed in rewriting the legend of Mélusine. When the girl's snake alter ego is revealed, she need not disappear along with the family fortune as in the legend. Instead, she can rid herself of her snake persona (read: her shame) and return to the chateau where Roger locates her and they open the front doors "to the fresh air and the golden evening sun for the first time in perhaps a hundred years" (Banks, [1988] 1990: 190). Although it remains highly questionable – perhaps even ethically irresponsible – to suggest that by withdrawing into isolation, the deeply disturbed girl would manage to solve her emotional problems all on her own, Melusine has begun restoring the mansion in a symbolic act of reclaiming her past and her future.

The strength of Banks's and Cross's novels does not lie in their utopian or romance plot resolutions, however, but rather in their convincing depiction of how their young protagonist-observers deal with knowing about child abuse. Once again, the pat endings hardly manage to gloss over the powerful subject matter handled in the middle of the narratives. Using metamorphosis to symbolically explore the emotional abyss of a child abused has apparently both its benefits and drawbacks. Judging by Banks's *Melusine* and Cross's *Pictures in the Dark*, it seems as if metamorphosis might be a trope more suitable for communicating a refuge from fear and despair than it is for depicting redemption.

IMMORTALISING GRIEF

In Banks's and Cross's teenage novels animal metamorphosis is used as a physical manifestation of the abused character's mental distress and the time spent in animal shape is thus strictly a *temporary* means of refuge for the maltreated child. Neither Peter nor Melusine can begin to recover emotionally until they give up their shapeshifting abilities. Or, to put it slightly differently, the fact that they stop transforming is used to signify their impending recovery. Melusine looks "almost supernaturally new and beautiful" after she has shed her ugly snakeskin, which Roger finds and buries (Banks, [1988] 1990: 154), and following close upon the reunion between Peter and his father, Charlie concludes that he will probably never see the otter again (Cross, [1996] 1998: 214). Thus a return to humanity signals the mental recovery of the abused child.

But temporary withdrawals into animal shape are not the only way in which metamorphosis provides young protagonists with refuge from undesirable experiences and despair. Many novels – some of them to be studied in greater depth later on – feature alienated and displaced young protagonists who find animal metamorphosis to be an appealing means of escaping the pains of growing out of adolescence and entering adulthood. In terms of empowerment and disempowerment such narratives remain profoundly ambiguous since they stage symbolical "deaths" of their young protagonists, who either find their present existence and future prospects too bleak to bear, or the allure of the instinctual, irrational world of the wilderness too irresistible. Lilith Norman's *A Dream of Seas* (1978),[132] Gillian Rubinstein's *Foxspell*, and Melvin Burgess's *Lady: My Life As a Bitch*, are some examples of late twentieth-century teenage novels where adolescent protagonists find in metamorphosis a refuge from a problematic initiation into adult life. Since Rubinstein and Burgess end their novels on a note of uncertainty as to whether or not the protagonists will choose to assume animal form forever, this section will focus on Norman's novel, which presents a more pronounced form of closure.[133]

The protagonist in the Australian writer Norman's *A Dream of Seas* is an alienated teenage boy caught up in a life crisis. The boy, who lacks a name but is called Seasick or Seasie by his friends, has recently lost his father in an accident and moved with his mother from the bush to the seaside. Seasie is incapable of sharing his grief with his mother and feels acutely out of place in his new environment. He feels "chained to the land" and his new home is marked by a "flat, unsettled strangeness. An edgy feeling of familiar things in all the wrong places" (Norman, 1978: 45, 11). Instead, Seasie finds himself instantly drawn to the sea. As he watches the surfers in wetsuits from afar they resemble seals, and he decides to "be a board-rider, half-seal, half-person. I'm going to be part of the sea" (Norman, 1978: 10).

In this short novel Lilith Norman creates an eerie atmosphere of reality and dreams intertwined. This she does mainly through the use of bi-focalisation, in that narrative point of view is divided between the boy protagonist and a young seal. It should be noted, however, that the narrative is not exclusively focalised through the boy and the seal. The narrator also holds an omniscient perspective on the characters and comments frequently in an adult voice about matters that lie beyond the scope of the young boy/seal protagonists. For example, at one point readers are told that Seasie "missed his father still. So did his mother, only he never knew" (Norman, 1978: 50). A strong link between the boy and the seal is, however, immediately established, even if the shift in internal focalisation from boy to seal, who are both referred to as "he" in the text, is not immediately signalled clearly to the reader. The first passage where the seal is internally focalised – describing the seal pup's traumatic experience of being born and having to leave the "darkness", "peace" and "soft smoothness" of his mother's womb – follows instantly upon Seasie falling into a comatose sleep (Norman, 1978: 14). When the boy wakes up in the morning he feels "twice uprooted" (Norman, 1978: 15). The seal's experience thus appears to be part of his subconscious and his dreams, and Seasie feels "a sharper sense of loss this morning, as though somewhere during the night he had been torn again from his home" (Norman, 1978: 15).

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[132] The novel was chosen as a Hans Christian Andersen Honour Book by IBBY in 1980.

[133] Also, Rubinstein's novel has previously been discussed in relation to animal metamorphosis and male initiation, and Burgess's novel will be dealt with in the following chapter on non-circular stories of metamorphosis.

Real or imagined, the seal functions as the boy's animal "double". They both feel alienated from their peers and are gradually separated from their nurturing mothers, who move on in life to have other husbands/males and children/pups. Both boy and seal share a fear of death and a deep desire for the exhilarating "freedom" that comes with belonging to the sea. Still, the seal is clearly depicted as enjoying advantages in life that the boy lacks. Unlike human beings, the seal does not have to look for meaning, structure or purpose in life. Of "[a]ll the stained and rotting debris that people had thought they needed to survive", but which now lies wrecked at the bottom of the sea, "[t]he seal needed none" (Norman, 1978: 43). It only visits the wrecks in search of food. The seal lives for the moment; its pleasures are instinctual and devoid of reasoning:

> There was no place down there for seals. Yet when the seal died even he might end up down there. For when the sharks had torn and worried his body, and the fish had snapped up the floating fragments, and the smaller fish had nibbled and picked his bones, some small particles might be left to drift slowly, endlessly, down. Down to the blackness from which he had been born.
>
> But, now, the seal was alive.

> He was his world, in a way no animal, dragged by gravity, buffeted by hurricane and snow, rain and drought, heat and cold, could ever be. He was in his world, held by it. They were one. (Norman, 1978: 43-44)

Seasie longs for a "oneness" with the sea similar to that of the seal's experiences. Rosemary Jackson (1981: 76-77) regards such a longing for *entropy* – or the pull towards "a point of absolute unity of self and other, subject and object, at a zero point of entropy" where identity is meaningless – as the very essence of the tension expressed in modern narratives of metamorphosis. In his study which approaches literary metamorphosis from the point of view of allegory, Bruce Clarke (1995: 57), too, elaborates upon the idea of metamorphosis as an "allegory of the death drive – absolute en-tropy, the complete literalization of the figurative". Such forces are indeed at play in Norman's novel. Unable to come to terms with an existence that inevitably involves change, separation, death and decay, the boy's longing for a carefree existence grows increasingly stronger until the final climactic paragraph of the novel where he willingly merges with the seal and the sea.[134]

In Norman's novel the sea is a complex metaphor. Death through metamorphosis is here no longer the end of life as such, but brings readers comfort by signifying the continuity of life in a new form – hence its attraction.[135] As to the use of seascape within a literary discourse in general, Heather Scutter (1999: 42) notes that "[l]and and sea are physical and natural entities, but landscape and seascape are constructs shaped by people". Scutter (1999: 46) goes on to argue that the coast and the sea are closely connected with representations of Australian identity and that the beach frequently connotes marginality, vulnerability, pleasure and freedom. For children's and teenage literature especially, life on the beach often constitutes an ideologically complex metaphor for pleasure and regression:

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[134] N.M. Browne's fantasy novel for teenagers *Hunted* (2002) features a similarly alienated teenage metamorph. Having been ruthlessly beaten by a gang of girls, Karen slips into a coma. Parallel to her lying unconscious in hospital, she resumes life in a secondary fantasy world in the shape of a fox. Gradually her fate intertwines with a young man called Meowl with whom she plays a crucial part in a rebellion against an evil oppressor. Finally, Karen chooses to stay with Meowl in the fantasy world where she regains her human form. In the primary world, however, she is considered disappeared and/or dead, although she continues to visit her grandparents occasionally in the shape of a fox.

[135] Wordsworth's "Immortality Ode" is an illuminating intertext here. Part IX of the poem links the notion of the immortal sea to the Victorian idea of pure childhood versus corrupt adulthood.

> [i]f you want your child protagonist to grow up, you have to remove her/him from the coastscape. To live by the sea is not only to escape the landscape, but also to indulge in an extended childhood or holiday, to take what is usually represented as an idyllic interlude as a permanent way of life. It follows […] that to continue living by the sea is to indulge in hedonism and escapism, to dwell in Neverland, to refuse to grow up. The concluding movement away from the coast parallels the movement away from childhood and towards what is perceived as grown-up engagement with the imperatives of culture and civilisation. (Scutter, 1999: 53-54)

Such a polarisation of inland and coast, the bush and the beach, maturation and regression, is clearly visible in Norman's novel. On discovering the boy's fascination with the sea, his new teacher half-jokingly exclaims:

> 'Oh no!' she groaned. 'Not another seasick surfie! It seems I've got a whole class of little pagans, worshippers of sun and sea. I had hoped you'd be different, coming from the country.' (Norman, 1978: 21)

But the boy's longing for the sea is far deeper than any ordinary "surfie['s]". It is a longing he has no desire to give up, but yearns to fulfil. Consequently he does not resent being called Seasick from then on, even though his school-mates initially use the name to tease him, since he fully embraces the notion that he is "sick *for* the sea, not from it" (Norman, 1978: 21).

Apart from alluding to immortality, hedonism, pleasure and regression, the sea in Norman's novel also functions as an ambivalent metaphor for decay, death and rebirth. On his first encounter with the beach, the boy finds that it is "old and stained" (Norman, 1978: 9). It is not "like the posters of beaches: shining golden sands, brilliant sea, and a boy and his dog racing across them" (Norman, 1978: 9). Instead, it is the home of scavenger sea birds feeding on the "dead and dying" and, even more importantly, it is "the world" of his drowned father (Norman, 1978: 17, 21). Learning to skateboard or swim is not enough for Seasie, who yearns to escape the noise and the stifling throng of people on land, the confinement to the ground he walks upon, and be reunited with his drowned father. The concrete statue of a mermaid that he finds on the beach, gradually eaten away by the sea, is an emblem for his thinly disguised death wish. Like the merpeople of fairy tales and selkie stories, a longing to be elsewhere permeates

Seasie's existence on land and the statue of the mermaid thus foreshadows the fate of this lost boy.

Heather Scutter (1999) defines the central problem in teenage fiction as the reconciliation between the once and future self, the blissful pastoral of childhood and the counter-pastoral of disillusioned adulthood. She concludes very appropriately for the novel under study here that what is central to teenage literature is "the lost or displaced child, the wild child, the feral child scavenging in a world blasted by some apocalyptic disaster, whether on a personal, national or global scale, the bounds of life described as prison or jungle or both" (Scutter, 1999: 11). Seasie's disaster is indeed of a most personal nature:

> *He* didn't accept it. He knew that it wasn't true. That his father wasn't dead, not the way grown-ups meant. He was part of the blue sea-world. Waiting. (Norman, 1978: 54)

For Seasie, who cannot accept death, there can be no growth in life either. Thus his final rebirth into a seal has a tragic ring to it despite the narrator's reassuring emphasis on pleasure and freedom:

> Beneath him the waiting shadow, seal and boy, called to him to merge again, boy and seal into one. […] A sudden cramp racked all his bones so that he cried out, a short, barking cry. It seemed that blood and bone and cell and muscle were wrenching apart and re-forming. He slid sideways off the board, and sudden muscles closed his slitted nostrils and his dart-pointed ears. He rolled beneath the surface for long minutes as the pain lessened, steadying himself with oar-shaped hands as the sea sleeked his fur. Bristly whiskers caught and held vibrations that were not the sea, and he dived, flashing torpedo-fast after a school of fish. He came at them from below, rolling on his side and on his back, teeth fastening into white fish flesh. Here there was no up or down, nor any weight.
>
> Suddenly, exultantly, the boy was free.
>
> He burst out of the water in a great curve, his body gleaming silkily in the dull light. He reared his neck and shoulders out of the water and gazed towards the shore. It was not a place he knew any more […] these odd, regularly-shaped rocks would never be his home again.
>
> His home was craggy and rough, flecked by the long cold rollers of the icy seas far to the south. He turned his back on the land and swam away in the joy and freedom of the sea.
>
> On the beach a small boy leaned over the thick pitted railings of the promenade and watched.
>
> 'Look,' he cried. 'Look, Mum. Look at the seal!' (Norman, 1978: 67-68)

This inverted selkie-story obviously attempts to immortalise grief through metamorphosis in the manner of ancient myth. Norman also covers up, or softens, the symbolic impact of Seasie's fantastic metamorphosis by adding to the depiction of seal-life a hyper-realism.[136] But given the young protagonist's overwhelming sense of alienation and his inability to connect with his own feelings of grief and bereavement, his final metamorphosis also generates a disturbing subtext in which a regressive dream/fantasy is fulfilled through suicide.[137] The shift in narrative perspective in the very last sentences of the novel (in the quotation above) strengthens the ambivalence of Seasie's longing for entropy and his final seal metamorphosis. If Seasie's transformation signifies redemption, it certainly seems to do so at the cost of a loss of human self.

Lilith Norman's *A Dream of Seas* may not be a clear-cut example of literary dystopia, but it certainly foreshadows that later trend. Research on Western teenage fiction shows that the dystopian trend is a prominent *fin de siècle* phenomenon not only in Australian, but also in British, American, and Nordic books for teenagers (cf. Plotz, 1988; Svensson, 1996; Scutter, 1999; Nikolajeva, 2000a). Australian teenage dystopias of the 1980s and 1990s are, in particular, increasingly preoccupied with portraying children who "refuse the perceived values of the adult world, that is, [...] refuse to 'grow up'" (Scutter, 1999: 33). So what do authors want to communicate to their audience by writing stories such as these? Scholars who have studied dystopia in teenage fiction are often deeply ambivalent about the values and identity politics expressed in these narratives. On the one hand, the trend is seen to be part of an inevitable transformation and development of literature written for children and teenagers. Maria Nikolajeva (1996, 2000a), for one, argues that the increasingly common deviations from conventional closure or "happy" endings in literature for the young is a sign of the "coming-of-age" of children's literature. And Heather Scutter (1999: 286) makes a similar claim when she argues that the dystopian trend shows that modernism has finally caught up with literature written for children and teenagers. Still, both Nikolajeva and Scutter criticise the fact that *fin de siècle* teenage novels seem so preoccupied with depicting death or self-denial as the only possible ways of dealing with growing up. The "idyllophobia" that haunts Swedish teenage fiction at the turn of the millennium has, according to Sonja Svensson (1996), become a genre convention of such weight that those who dare criticise or interrogate it tend to be ridiculed for voicing mere moral panic. Despite this threat, Svensson – like Scutter and Nikolajeva – dares to ask whether or not the "dirty realism" typical of these teenage novels is always aesthetically and ethically motivated. Is it always ethically defensible for adult authors to project their own angst for the future, their grief for the loss of childhood innocence and their disappointment in adult life, onto their young audience?

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[136] See for example the acknowledgements at the beginning of the book where Norman thanks people who have provided her with facts about the Australian fur seal.

[137] The Norwegian author Torvald Sund's controversial book *Eg er med deg, Kim* (1989, *I Am With You, Kim*, my translation) also features a metamorphosis that reads like a symbolical suicide. The bullied and alienated boy Kim mysteriously turns into a cod, and his brother – who is the focaliser – must free himself from their dominant mother and come to terms with letting his brother go.

My main concern in exploring the motif of seeking refuge in animalhood is, however, not to judge authors for their choice of subject matter but to highlight the ambiguous implications of resistance, resignation and regression in the motif of metamorphosis. Whether Seasie's metamorphosis in *A Dream of Seas* – as well as Tod's in *Foxspell* and Sandra's in *Lady* – are utopian "happy returns" to nature or tragic refusals to enter adulthood is difficult to say. On the contrary, much of the fascination of authors and readers alike with these stories probably lies in this uncertainty. I will, though, suggest a tragic reading here, since I find a strictly utopian one problematic, partly because these novels are permeated by an acute (and topical) sense of ecological disaster, and partly because the young metamorphs are represented as deeply unhappy or mentally distressed. They seem forced to choose animal otherness because they are under the sway of disempowering circumstances.

In his analysis of the Norwegian author Tormod Haugen's *The Lizards Are Coming* (*Øglene kommer*, 1989), Harald Bache-Wiig (1995), too, approaches literary metamorphosis as a highly ambivalent metaphor, capable of generating both dystopian and utopian readings. Haugen's novel explores dystopian motifs central to his other works, such as society and family life in crisis, betrayed children and failed childhoods, and characters who suffer from loneliness and isolation, as well as problems of failed communication (Bache-Wiig, 1995: 217). An acute sense of apocalypse is generated when the civilised world the protagonists inhabit gradually is overtaken by jungle. In the end, those who survive the decline of civilisation undergo a transformation into giant lizards or dinosaurs. Haugen's novel thus offers no realistic solution to the pervasive feeling of crisis, but expresses deep resignation in the form of a flight into the fantastic, into metamorphosis. The question Bache-Wiig asks is: Should we view such a final twist in the plot as a utopian ending? Norman's *A Dream of Seas* raises the same question. Is the only possible hopeful resolution to a dystopian story of this kind a supernatural ending where the protagonist seeks refuge in metamorphosis?

Irving Massey (1976: 17) notes that, although the purposes of literary metamorphosis are many and impossible to classify, "it is obvious that [it] has something to do with the search for identity, or in some cases its antithesis, the refusal to develop". Ultimately, Massey (1976: 2) leans heavily towards connecting *all* forms of literary metamorphosis with "a desperate choice" rather than with growth and development. Although I have previously criticised Massey's interpretation of literary metamorphosis as not applicable to the many examples found in children's literature of joyful metamorphoses, I do find it pertinent for the stories explored in this section. Seasie's final emergence with seal and seascape reads, to my mind, as an act of regression rather than as a positive development. The seawater brings about forgetfulness, an impossible reunion with his dead father and a return to the "darkness", "peace" and "soft smoothness" that is remarkably similar to the womb of the seal pup's mother.

GIRLS MERGING WITH NATURE

In the stories explored in this chapter, metamorphosis intervenes in the lives of the young protagonists as a crisis that brings about radical change. The situations the young metamorphs find themselves in are characterised by a sense of despair so overwhelming that a change seems imperative for their survival. Melusine, Peter and Seasie all find some form of consolation and liberation in their metamorphic experiences, although their transformations bear witness to their status as victims and/or outsiders and arise from their feelings of shame, fear, alienation and/or grief. No less acute is the despair of young protagonists who find themselves caught in and entrapped by the prevailing gender expectations. Also for them, metamorphosis may present a last resort and a possible means of refuge.

Since metamorphosis typically is presented as a pivotal experience in the life of young protagonists about to become men or women, the motif naturally raises questions about gender. An earlier section discussed differences in the uses of the motif in girls' and boys' coming-of-age stories. In this section, the focus will be on girl metamorphs and their association with nature. Traditionally, both women and children alike have assumed an othered and marginalised position in society – and, due to their affinity with the domestic sphere, they have been thought of as essentially closer to nature (cf. Foucault, 1967; Hourihan, 1997). Such ideological implications have shaped our use of language[138] and the literary tradition, including women's and children's literature. These literatures have for a long time been marginalised forms of fiction within the Western literary canon and share certain narrative strategies for writing about confinement and otherness (cf. Paul, 1987). The feminist children's literature critics Shirley Foster and Judy Simons (1995: 25), however, question an absolute analogy between women's and children's literatures arguing that the former speaks from a position of subject-experience, whereas the latter is the product of adult authors who write about childhood experiences in retrospect. Yet in terms of power relations in literature, all of these feminist scholars make the important point that, in a society that marginalises women and children, the female child is potentially twice as oppressed as the male (cf. Österlund, 2005: 43).

Many of the stories featuring girl metamorphs very overtly express a close association between girlhood and nature, and for female protagonists metamorphosis is often realised as a harmonious merging with nature (cf. Lassén-Seger, 2001c). One example is the young girl, Mary Margaret, in Blair Drawson's picturebook *Mary Margaret's Tree* (1996). In spring Mary Margaret plants a tree in her garden and suddenly finds herself literally becoming one with nature. While her newly planted tree miraculously shoots up into the sky, Mary Margaret shrinks into the size of an insect:

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[138] For example Shulamith Firestone (1970) has demonstrated a prevailing association of women and children with an animal state in slang. She notes that whereas "children are 'mice', 'rabbits', 'kittens', women are called 'chicks', 'birds' (in England), 'hens', 'dumb clucks', 'silly geese', 'old mares', 'bitches'. Similar terminology is used [...] only about *oppressed* males [...] – and then it is used more rarely" (Firestone, [1970] 2003: 80).

> Gathering her courage,
>   Mary Margaret climbed the mighty trunk.
> It was green,
>   green,
>   green among the leaves!
> She made her way to the top of a tall branch. (Drawson, 1996: [7])

Mary Margaret climbs the tree and takes refuge in the heart of a flower high up in the lush green tree, where she spends the days and nights of summer.[139] The surreal illustrations covered with exotic fruit, birds and flowers accentuate the fantastic and playful dimension of Mary Margaret's return to nature. Seasons pass and the girl spends winter hibernating in a cave comfortably surrounded by the sleeping wild animals of the forest. When spring returns, Mary Margaret experiences full unity with nature. She grows roots and green buds emerge from her fingers, plaits, glasses, head and body:

> Spring arrived at last, and Mary Margaret
>   awoke from her slumber.
> She began to feel a strange sensation.
> Her feet grew roots, and her fingers sent out
>   little green shoots.
>   Leaves began to appear.
> "How very unusual," said Mary Margaret. (Drawson, 1996: [25])

The illustration strengthens the impression of the pleasurable and playful nature of her arboreal transformation (see picture 16). Apparently Mary Margaret is *not* distraught by her metamorphosis, and she is independent enough not to mind being "unusual". The following spread shows the metamorphosis completed (see picture 11), with the following soothing sentence beneath: "Soon there was a brand-new tree, and the tree was Mary Margaret" (Drawson, 1996: [27-28]). Drawson's picturebook is indeed a clear example of how a close association between female agency and nature results in the girl actually *becoming one with nature*.

Whereas Mary Margaret lives in peace with birds and beasts until she literally becomes one with her environment – visually realised as a tree where birds nest – Ella, in Kit Wright and Peter Bailey's picturebook

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[139] Horizontality and verticality are familiar topoi in girls' stories (Österlund, 2005: 69). Whereas horizontal passivity represents the obedient "good" girl, vertical movement is a recurring motif in depictions of classical tomboys, whose physical activities – including tree climbing – symbolise their agency (Österlund, 2005: 67-74, 224).

Tigerella (1993), becomes a tiger at night, roaming the Milky Way and playing with the star constellations. Ella's nightly escapade is a typical "time out" adventure tinged with a sense of refuge and rebellion since the tiger transformation allows the prim girl protagonist to transgress the gendered limitations imposed on her as a "good girl". On the surface Ella is a model child and her transgressive tiger nature is a well-preserved secret securely framed within her nightly adventures, hidden from the gullible adults who think Ella is "[g]ood as gold and nice as pie" (Wright and Bailey, [1993] 1994: 7).

In contrast to these two girl characters, who primarily find solace and room for increased agency in nature,[140] boy metamorphs tend, traditionally, to be depicted as conquering the wilderness rather than being integrated with it. Feminist and postcolonial readings of Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*, for instance, accentuate that the picturebook repeats the plot pattern of male adventure or quest narratives. Originating in the story of Odysseus, such stories draw on imperial myths of Western patriarchal superiority, reason and civilization over chaos, emotion and wilderness (Ball, 1997; Hourihan, 1997; Shaddock, 1997-98). Sendak's picturebook has inspired numerous later picturebooks on the theme "conquering the beast within" (of which the ones I have come across predominantly feature boy protagonists). But it is also interesting to note that the depiction of boy metamorphs in more recent picturebooks, such as Anthony Browne's *The Tunnel* and Ulf Stark and Anna Höglund's *The Jaguar*, appear to have been influenced by feminist concerns. These boys do not triumph in the traditional manner of the patriarchal male hero. On the contrary, in Browne's book the cold and insensitive brother remains passively petrified until his compassionate sister saves him. And in Stark and Höglund's story the boy protagonist learns that tenderness is a much more valuable trait in matters of the heart than violence and aggression.

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[140] The Swedish picturebook *Fanny och fåglarna* (1995, *Fanny and the Birds*, my translation) by Margareta Strömstedt and Tord Nygren depicts the girl protagonist's transformation into a bird even more explicitly as a flight into nature providing escape from emotional distress.

Images of female entrapment

The girl protagonists of the picturebooks mentioned above are fairly young, which may explain why the pressure to conform to acceptable girl behaviour is not portrayed as downright unrelenting. Instead, these pre-adolescent girl characters are allowed to interact in a playful and harmonious way with nature. But pressure to conform to prescribed gender expectations increases when girls enter adolescence. And for teenage girl protagonists who attempt to seek solace and self-discovery in the realm of nature and wilderness metamorphosis is often no longer a playful or harmonious incident. Diana Wynne Jones's short story about unrequited love, "The Girl Who Loved the Sun" (1990), addresses these issues directly. In an overt attempt at rewriting the traditional role of the sylvan girl as victim, Jones ([1990] 1999: 70) refers to previous female characters in myth and fairy tales who have sought a refuge from abuse by turning into trees:

> There was a girl called Phega who became a tree. Stories from the ancient times when Phega lived would have it that when women turned into trees, it was always under duress, because a god was pursuing them, but Phega turned into a tree voluntarily. She did it from the moment she entered her teens. It was not easy, and it took a deal of practice, but she kept at it. She would go into the fields beyond the manor house where she lived, and there she would put down roots, spread her arms, and say, "For you I shall spread out my arms." Then she would become a tree.

The "stories from ancient times" that Jones refers to in this quotation would be the numerous myths and fairy tales in which women find refuge from sexual pursuit through a flight into nature (cf. Pratt, 1981; Tatar, 1992).[141] In the most paradigmatic example, the myth of Daphne, Peneus saves his daughter from Apollo's unwelcome pursuit by turning her into a laurel tree. The transformation is conducted on the request of Daphne since she would rather take on a different shape than become the victim of sexual assault.[142]

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[141] In Ovid's *Metamorphoses* tree transformations are mainly inflicted upon female characters, although there are exceptions such as Cyparissus, who accidentally kills a tame deer given to him by Apollo and is immortalised in his grief in the shape of a cypress tree.

Instead of perceiving myth as an expression of essential human values transcending time and culture, they are here – in the sense of Roland Barthes – seen to represent socially constructed images of ideology and gender. Barthes (1972: 110)[143] historicised myths, claiming that although they are ancient, they are not eternal narratives:

> for it is human history which converts reality into speech, and it alone rules the life and the death of mythical language. Ancient or not, mythology can only have an historical foundation, for myth is a type of speech chosen by history: it cannot possibly evolve from the 'nature' of things.

From a gender perspective, the myth of Daphne paints a dire portrait of female entrapment. In ancient Greek and Latin poetry plants are often used as metaphors juxtaposing virginity and death with fertility, growth and life (Forbes Irving, 1990: 128-138). Daphne's transformation is thus deeply ambivalent – perhaps even morbid as Forbes Irving suggests – in its allusions to life and growth, as well as death and stagnation.

Annis Pratt (1981) is not content with regarding the Daphne myth as merely morbid. In her study of the archetypal patterns in women's fiction she identifies the myth as a "rape-trauma archetype", where "nature represents freedom, solace, and protection" for the female character pursued by a rejected male protagonist (Pratt, [1981] 1982: 25). For my use of Pratt's theories it is of great importance to emphasise that she does not use the concept of the (Jungian) archetype to signify concepts that are absolutely fixed and universal. On the contrary, she interrogates the construction and conception of female gender expressed in Western myth and literature. Pratt investigates the narrative patterns and topoi (which she calls archetypes) that repeatedly depict female maturation as disappointment and a process of "growing down" rather than "growing up". She concludes that the implications of this narrative pattern, which is one of the most frequent plot structures in women's fiction, are deeply ambivalent since it manifests "an acute tension between what any normal human being might desire and what a woman must become" (Pratt, [1981] 1982: 6).[144] Caught between violation and entrapment, the flight into nature provides Daphne with a means of refuge from abuse. Yet her destiny tragically shows that flight is her only possibility of escape unless she wants to succumb to her male pursuer.

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[142] The changes of shape in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* typically signify punishment, grief, and refuge from harm. Thus the motif of an arboreal transformation does not necessarily imply an overtly empowering means of refuge for the pursued female character, but remains profoundly ambivalent. For example Phaeton's sisters are immortalised in the shape of trees when they are grieving for their dead brother. Myrrha is turned into a tree for having tricked her own father into an incestuous relationship and finds punishment in her metamorphosis, as well as release from her shame. Finally, Bacchus transforms the women of Thracia into trees as a punishment for the murder of Orpheus.

[143] Originally published in 1957.

The motif of female characters merging with nature is also prominent in Western fairy tale tradition. Again, the point of view *vis-à-vis* fairy tales adopted in this thesis is primarily concerned with ideology and gender. Jack Zipes ([1986] 1989: 2) has done pioneering work on historicising fairy tales, arguing that students of these – also supposedly universal and eternally appealing – texts can no longer ignore the connection between their aesthetic components "and their historical function within a socialisation process which forms taste, mores, values, and habits". Fairy tales, like myths, "are historically and culturally coded, and their ideological impact is great" (Zipes, 1994: 4).

Whereas Pratt convincingly finds a metaphor for female entrapment in Daphne's mythic arboreal metamorphosis, Ruth B. Bottigheimer (1987) makes a similar discovery in her study of female activity and passivity in the Grimms' fairy tales. Bottigheimer (1987: 78) notes that trees in particular play a significant role in Grimms' stories of female exile, isolation and silence:

> Many silenced heroines, fleeing from wild animals or pursued by men or by witches, take refuge in trees, and fill their quiet hours with spinning and sewing, traditional female occupations.

The test for the female protagonist is, typically, one of endurance and the goal is frequently to save a loved-one from evil. In Grimms' "The Twelve Brothers" and "The Six Swans" the heroine spends years perched in a tree in order to save her brothers. And in "Sweetheart Roland" the heroine transforms either herself or her beloved into water, an animal and a plant in order for them to find refuge from their evil stepmother.[145]

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[144] See also Elizabeth Butler Cullingford (1989), who contrasts W.B. Yeats's poem "A Prayer for My Daughter" with Sylvia Plath's "Virgin in a Tree". Whereas Yeats's poem expresses his hopes for his daughter in images of a tree metaphor that defines the female ideal as "hidden", "rooted", objectified and subordinate, Plath responds in her poem by representing the myth of virgins transformed into trees as a hideous imprisonment.

Alluding overtly to these previous sylvan girls of myth and fairy tale, Jones sets her story in a no-man's land typical of the fairy tale populated with stock characters such as the heroine, mother, father, suitor and servants. Despite the fairy tale character gallery and setting, the central themes explored are typical motifs from teenage fiction, such as the search for self through a power struggle with the parents (cf. Trites, 2000). Feminist issues are of a central concern here since Phega embodies the desire to do something other with her life than what is conventionally expected of a young woman. Phega's parents find their daughter's arboreal desires offensively abnormal, as well as a hindrance for a prospective marriage with a man her father can trust to look after the manor when he is gone (Jones, [1990] 1999: 73).

Jones's attempt to rewrite the traditional role of the victimised sylvan girl begins by reversing the power imbalance of former stories by representing the girl protagonist's metamorphosis as self-induced. Phega *chooses* herself to undertake this act of transgression – symptomatically interpreted by those around her as witchcraft or a sign of madness. Becoming an imitation of a tree is not enough for her. She wants to be "a wholly new kind of tree" and thus recreates herself as an entirely unique hybrid of tree and human, oak and fruit tree (Jones, [1990] 1999: 84). But is a simple reversal of the agent of metamorphosis sufficient to make Phega's transformation empowering to herself, and a subversive comment on the fate of previous sylvan girls in the history of Western narrative?

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[145] Another fairy tale variant of the topos of female characters finding refuge in nature is animal metamorphosis (primarily into donkey, cat, or bear) which takes female heroines across thresholds which could not otherwise be crossed (Warner, 1994b). This widespread topos also includes forms that do not involve any actual change of shape, but a disguise in animal furs. Grimms' "Allerleirauh" ("All-Fur" or "Thousandfurs") and Perrault's "Donkeyskin" ("Peau d'Ane") are fairy tales of the Cinderella type, featuring young girl protagonists forced to disguise their beauty and social status under the cover of dirty, ragged animal fur or skin in order not to be married to their own fathers (cf. Tatar, 1987, 1992; Warner, 1994b). Similar to the rape-trauma topos in myth, these female protagonists' decision to disguise themselves in animal skins to hide from their fathers' lust is deeply ambivalent since it is not voluntary or strategically chosen, but driven by fear (cf. Scott, 1996-97).

The lack of playfulness and pleasure associated with Phega's arboreal transformation does induce a sense of duress that rings true to a depiction of the growing pains of adolescence. With "willing agony" she "forced her buds to unfurl, because that was where her senses now were. They spread with myriad shrill agonies, like teeth cutting, and she thought it had killed her" (Jones, [1990] 1999: 85). Phega's final transformation is both mentally and physically demanding – even painful – and partly implies wisdom and growth. But once accomplished, her sylvan shape turns out to be a disappointment that leaves her resigned and forever trapped, immobile and silent:

> Phega knew the sun was right and that her bargain had been her own illusion. It was very bitter to her; but she had made a change that was too radical to undo now, and besides, she was discovering that trees do not feel things very urgently. She settled back for a long, low-key sort of contentment, rustling her leaves about to make the best of the sun's heat on them. It was like a sigh. (Jones, [1990] 1999: 86)

Despite the narrator's pronounced assurance at the beginning of the story that Phega's arboreal transformation is different from the ones portrayed in ancient stories, her tree metamorphosis remains a similarly ambiguous metaphor of female entrapment. Considering that Phega longs for the power and strength she associates with certain kinds of trees – "[o]ak was constancy, and ash was change" (Jones, [1990] 1999: 76) – one neutral reading of the denouement is that she is punished for making the fatal wish of desiring immortality. Such a reading is supported by the fact that the ending does give an aetiological explanation to the girl's metamorphosis. The place where Phega-the-tree stands is called Boar's Hill after Phega's suitor Evor whom she – upon his own request – transforms into a wild boar.

Yet a reading of the short story that looks specifically at the imagery of gender, power and agency reveals that Phega is perhaps not as free to choose her destiny as is initially suggested. On the contrary, she is misled by her desire to please someone else, the sun: "All I do, I do in the remote, tiny hope of pleasing you and causing you to love me as I love you", she professes (Jones, [1990] 1999: 74). But the sun, which is constantly referred to with a male pronoun, is indifferent to Phega's desire to please him:

> The sun glanced down at her. Phega stood at that instant between hope and despair. It seemed that he attended to the wordless words.

> But the sun passed on, beaming, not unkindly, to glance at the real apple trees that stood on the slope of the hill.
>
> I need to be different in some way, Phega said to herself. (Jones, [1990] 1999: 71)

Ultimately Phega's desire to become a tree is paired with a wish for submission and adoration. In truth, her metamorphosis is no more than a shift from one entrapment into another. She finds the companionship with her infatuated suitor Evor to be stifling:

> Phega found – and her surprise increased – that she was comfortable with Evor. But however amicably they talked, it was still as if she was only half alive in the sun's absence – though it was an easy half life – and, as the evening wore on, she felt increasingly confined and trapped. […] [I]t was like a cage over her head. And she realized that her growing liking for Evor was causing it. (Jones, [1990] 1999: 81)

Still, choosing a solitary calling above that of the traditional happy-marriage-ending of fairy tales and stories of romance brings neither joy nor liberation to Jones's sylvan girl. Phega, who initially harbours a desire for independence, power and strength, has to pay a high price for transgressing the limits imposed on her gender. In the end, Phega's metamorphosis is as irreversible and tragic as that of Daphne. Phega may have chosen her own destiny, but transforming back into human shape is beyond her powers. A resistant reading of the traditional sylvan girl metaphor is simultaneously suggested and undermined by the tragic denouement.

It is intriguing that although Diana Wynne Jones sets out to rewrite the myth of the sylvan girl she falls back on the conventions of classic girls' stories and women's literature.[146] Drawing on Annis Pratt, Maria Nikolajeva (2002: 44) notes that female characters who seek freedom, refuge and solace in nature (the "green-world archetype") from culture's demand that they repress and silence themselves as part of their coming-of-age, are among the most common female protagonists in children's fiction. In Phega's case it means that, since she does not choose to be "happily" married, she has to be resigned to a bitter and tragic fate.

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[146] Karen Sands-O'Connor (2002: 22) notes that Diana Wynne Jones's authorship in a larger context examines a dominant tendency in post-1945 British fantastic fiction to use history and myth "to reflect not a glorious past but an uncertain present and a hopeless future". Many of Jones's novels share a bleak view of the present and the future. In particular, her stories often suggest that marginalised groups in contemporary British society, such as female and minority children, will suffer in a nation that looks for answers in the past.

Jones's sylvan girl may have come far from the pursued Daphne of Greek mythology, but she is still haunted by the disempowering message of tradition: for girls who transgress or do not conform to reigning gender expectations there is no truly empowering resolution. As before, the sylvan girl is destined to seek refuge in nature when no other options are available. The tragic ending, however, is not a simple reflection or affirmation of female entrapment, but also expresses a symbolic resistance – albeit an unsuccessful one – towards gender entrapment (cf. DuPlessis, 1985). Jones's short story shows us just how internalised repression and submission can be in literary representations of teenage girls who try to find refuge from gender entrapment by merging with nature.

The range of stories studied in this thesis suggests that arboreal transformations are still predominantly associated with female protagonists. One exception is Bill Brittain's *The Wish Giver* (1983), in which a foolish, lovesick young girl accidentally wishes that the object of her affections were to "put down roots" in her community. As a comic reversal of the Daphne myth – which is overtly referred to in the story – the young man literally does so by turning into a tree. Still, from a gender perspective Brittain's story affirms rather than subverts gender stereotyping, since it features stereotypical characters from romance literature such as the silly and romantic girl, the fickle Casanova or the false lover, and the true lover who awaits steadfastly in the background. More importantly, though, there are revealing differences between the sylvan girls of myth and fairy tale and the young man who suffers a similar fate in Brittain's book. Firstly, readers are distracted from the young man's suffering by the fact that he receives a "fair" punishment for being a conceited flirt. Secondly, he does not have to remain a tree forever but is liberated by the rueful girl, who is taught to curb her silly romantic fancies and turn her affections towards a more mature young man.[147]

Judging by the stories studied in this thesis, the convention of the green-world archetype is apparently still strong within contemporary storytelling about girls' metamorphoses and may, in part, explain why male metamorphs still by far outnumber female metamorphs.[148] The texts that underpin this thesis (see Appendixes 1 and 2) show a remarkable increase in stories with girl metamorphs from the 1980s and 1990s onwards, as well as in stories featuring collective characters of both genders. Yet stories of male metamorphs are far more common throughout the time period investigated. This may well mirror the fact that the male gender is still perceived (by those who write and publish children's books) as the "neutral" gender. Books featuring boy characters are expected to appeal to both boy and girl readers, whereas books featuring female protagonists are regarded as conspicuously gendered and appealing to a mainly female audience.

But this study also suggests that explanations may be sought in the different manner in which the traditions of male and female literary metamorphosis have developed. The motif of metamorphosis is typically used as a catalyst in the life of young metamorphs, bringing on a crisis that may, in its most extreme cases, result in their coming-of-age or eternal regression/death. The issue of selfhood is thus central to narratives of human-other metamorphosis, but as Annis Pratt ([1981]

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[147] A more intriguing attempt to use a tree metamorphosis as a kernel event in a young boy's life is found in the Norwegian picturebook *Plommetreet* (1984, *The Plum Tree*, my translation) by Hans Sande and Olav Hagen. This is a first-person narrative of a boy who accidentally swallows a plum stone and finds himself turning into a plum tree. The transformation is initially pleasurable, but eventually forces the boy to run away from home and live a solitary life rooted as a tree in the mountains. Years later, a compassionate and caring family gains his trust and helps him shed his hardened tree exterior. The boy's metamorphosis reads as an ambivalent metaphor for an illness that makes him withdraw from human companionship. He finds solace in becoming a tree, yet his transformation also alienates and entraps him. Notably, though, the boy's metamorphosis is reversible. His final return to human shape and his reconciliation with his father resound with a hopefulness that the traditional stories of female sylvan girls lack.

[148] This study does not explore metamorphosis in "high fantasy", which is set exclusively in secondary worlds, but is restricted to stories where magic intervenes in a primary world. This may also – in part – account for the smaller number of girl metamorphs, who seem to occur more frequently in "high fantasy" where a more utopian and liberating view of gender transgression seems possible.

1982: 11) points out, “feminine archetypes of selfhood have been lost from [Western] culture and even consciousness for hundreds of years”. In the versions of myth and fairy tale that have survived, been canonised and retold for children and teenagers, female metamorphs transform in order to seek refuge from violation at the cost of their agency, voice and freedom. This may explain why authors of late twentieth-century metamorphosis stories still find it easier to use the motif to address the quest for selfhood of male protagonists and why Phega's attempt to do better than her sylvan ancestors is destined to fail.

This chapter has dealt with stories that employ metamorphosis as a means of refuge from abuse, grief, alienation, or the limits imposed by gender. In Banks's *Melusine* and Cross's *Pictures in the Dark*, sexual, emotional and physical abuse is explored symbolically through metamorphosis. Although the motif is a powerful trope for representing the psychological state of an abused child, the narrative stance and the pat endings of both novels pose various ethical problems. Authors may wish to protect their young readers from the controversial subject matter in hand, but simultaneously they silence the abused child metamorphs and make them passive objects of the male focalisers' curiosity and compassion. The increasing tendency in teenage novels from the late 1970s onwards, exemplified by Norman's *A Dream of Seas*, to use metamorphosis as a means for alienated and displaced teenage characters to avoid the bleak prospect of growing up, is no less ethically questionable. These novels stage the final metamorphoses of their teenage protagonists as ambivalent metaphors, since they immortalise grief yet simultaneously read as symbolic deaths or ways of escaping adulthood.

The motif of refuge was approached from a gender perspective, too. The main question asked was why girl metamorphs still are predominantly associated with a merging with nature? An answer was sought in the different traditions of male and female literary metamorphosis. Whereas pre-adolescent girl metamorphs traditionally find solace in becoming one with nature, boys tend to be depicted as conquering the wilderness rather than being integrated with it. The narrative pattern of myth and fairy tales featuring sylvan girls appears to be long-lived and difficult to subvert, despite writers' efforts to do so. For the female metamorphs in myth and fairy tale, metamorphosis usually functions as an ambivalent means of refuge. The lack of a literary tradition of successful and empowering female initiations through metamorphosis, may explain why authors keep favouring male, rather than female, protagonists in stories about young metamorphs.

BREAKING WITH TRADITION THROUGH IRREVERSIBLE METAMORPHOSIS

When it comes to pinning down variations in the uses of the metamorphosis motif, one obvious way is to examine how the stories end. Having previously focused on the uses and implications of the traditional carnival or circular pattern of the motif, it is now time to devote some attention to narratives that break with this tradition by introducing irreversible metamorphoses.

As I have already hinted, there is an emerging tendency within late twentieth-century narratives of young metamorphs to resist the rigid circular plot pattern of carnival "time out". In *The Daydreamer*, Ian McEwan lets his boy protagonist express a desire to remain in animal shape, and in *Tiger, Tiger*, Melvin Burgess allows his boy metamorph to remain slightly affected by his sexual experiences as a mature animal. Such tendencies foreshadow the disintegration of the rigid circular plot pattern of child-animal metamorphosis and make way for a new kind of metamorphosis story, written primarily during the 1980s and 1990s, in which authors deliberately let the child protagonists remain in *animal* shape, possibly for ever. Maria Nikolajeva (2002: 168) notes that the traditional "happy ending" of children's fiction in most cases presupposes both a structurally *closed ending* of the plot and psychological *closure* for the protagonist. Late twentieth-century narratives for children, however, increasingly often invite multiple interpretations of the plot resolution through *open endings* and multiple interpretations of the character development through *aperture*. The necessity to differentiate between the resolution of plot structure (with the terms *closed ending/open ending*) and the resolution of character development (with the terms *closure/aperture*) is of utmost relevance for the stories about to be analysed here. Authors who choose to end their narratives in irreversible metamorphoses may give their stories radical open endings, but, the question which often remains open to debate is whether they suggest narrative closure or aperture for their protagonists.

Considering the strong tradition of closed endings and narrative closure in fiction for children in general, and in fantasy for children in particular (cf. Gilead, 1991), open endings and narrative aperture stand out as even more interesting phenomena. J. R. R. Tolkien (1964) and Bruno Bettelheim (1976) – both writing about fantastic literature and fairy tales – are two of the most influential scholars to stress the importance of closed endings and closure in fiction for children. They refer to these phenomena in terms of "the happy ending", though, since they ascribe to this kind of plot pattern therapeutic as well as socialising qualities. "Happy endings" are indeed stock ingredients in classic fairy tales. The quest undertaken by protagonists in fairy tales featuring metamorphosis is, for example, predominantly to break the magic spell and restore closure in the sense that the enchanted characters transform back into their original human form.

Children's literature scholars, such as Fred Inglis (1981) and Rosemary Ross Johnston (2002) have continued to argue that an optimistic thrust, as well as optimistic endings, are essential to the poetics of fiction for children. According to Inglis (1981: 279), "[w]e tell children of a more nearly excellent world […] not in order to anaesthetize them but as a prompt to the future. Or so the best novelists do". While Inglis, perhaps rather too categorically, defines "good" children's books as those expressing hope and happiness for the future, Johnston (2002: 148-149) voices a need for an ethics of hope in children's fiction. Consequently, it seems fair to say that up till quite recently expectations of closed endings and closure in books for children have indeed been predominant.

So why this sudden *fin de siècle* interest among children's writers in stories of irreversible metamorphosis? In the analyses that will follow, I shall argue for various readings of such open-ended narratives. At the end of this chapter, possible answers will be suggested as to why irreversibility is such a frequent trait in late twentieth-century stories of child-other metamorphosis.

THE RETURN OF THE ETERNAL CHILD

Roald Dahl's *The Witches*, published in 1983, is among the first English-language stories for children to rewrite the metamorphosis motif by leaving the child in animal shape at the close of the story. It is a humorous fantasy tale about a young boy – whose name is never revealed – who falls into the hands of child-hating witches. The witches transform him into a mouse, as part of an evil plan to turn all children of England into mice so that they will be exterminated. And although the boy manages to defeat the witches, at least temporarily, he is never restored to human shape at the end. Much has been written about the unsuitability and censorship of Dahl's children's books (see Culley, 1991; Bergson-Shilcock, 2002), about his use of transgressive and grotesque humour (see West, 1990; Casson, 1997), and the possible thematic and stylistic reasons for his huge international success among child readers (see Sarland, 1983; Bosmajian, 1985; West, 1985; Rees, 1988; Petzold, 1992; Rudd, 1992; Royer, 1998). Yet very few critics have dwelt in more depth upon the rather surprising ending of *The Witches*.

This at first seemingly tragic ending does, in fact, bring about a neat solution to the protagonist's regressive desire never to grow up.[149] The denouement also preserves adult authority over the fictive child. The boy protagonist is an orphan left in the care of his elderly grandmother. But his guardian is in bad health, which means that he is soon threatened with abandonment again. Being restricted to the lifespan of a mouse becomes the ultimate answer to the boy's regressive wish to remain a child forever. In the following quotation the mouse-child wonders whether his grandmother knows how long a human being in the shape of a mouse might live:

> "A mouse-person will almost certainly live for three times as long as an ordinary mouse," my grandmother said. "About nine years."
> "Good!" I cried. "That's great! It's the best news I've ever had!"
> "Why do you say that?" she asked, surprised.
> "Because I would never want to live longer than you," I said. "I couldn't stand being looked after by anybody else." […]
> "How old are *you*, Grandmamma?" I asked.
> "I'm eighty-six," she said.
> "Will you live another eight or nine years?"
> "I might," she said. "With a bit of luck."
> "You've got to," I said. "Because by then I'll be a very old mouse and you'll be a very old grandmother and soon after that we'll both die together."
> "That would be perfect," she said. (Dahl, [1983] 1985: 195-196)

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[149] See Mark I. West (1985) for a closer study of Dahl's children's fantasies, in particular *James and the Giant Peach*, and the theme of psychological regression.

It is indeed a perfect ending from the boy protagonist's point of view as well. The fantastic intervention of metamorphosis serves as a neat excuse for him to flee the pains of facing an adult life on his own.

Anne-Marie Bird (1998) is one of the few critics who comment on the unconventional ending of *The Witches*. She also refers to the non-circular metamorphosis as "a necessary act of wish fulfillment resolving what is arguably the greatest of childhood fears – namely, separation anxiety" (Bird, 1998: 120). Early on in the book, the boy protagonist admits that he feels closer to his grandmother than to his own mother. Towards the end of the novel, when he describes their secluded life together, a tone of secure happiness and comfort prevails. Grandmother "had a way of fondling me behind the ears with the tip of one finger. It felt lovely" (Dahl, [1983] 1985: 196). Such passages, tinged as they are with sensual pleasure, underline the intensely close relationship between grandparent and mouse-boy: "[s]he was wearing a lace dress and the lace kept tickling my nose. […] 'Have *you* ever heard my heart humming away, Grandmamma?' I asked her. 'Often,' she said. 'I hear it when you are lying very close to me on the pillow at night'" (Dahl, [1983] 1985: 197).

The narrative perspective further ensures that this reassuring, regressive, turn of events will not be punctuated by any tragic or threatening undertones. *The Witches* employs first-person narration, which is rarely used in traditional fantasy for children, but has become increasingly common in postmodern fantasy for children (cf. Nikolajeva, 2000a: 153, 181). As late as in 1992, John Stephens (1992: 251) argued that fantasy stories for children narrated in the first-person were very rare. If one looks at stories of metamorphosis, it is also quite obvious that this narrative device is not used by authors very frequently until fairly late towards the end of the twentieth century.[150]

In *The Witches*, narration is conducted from what the narratologist Gérard Genette (1980) refers to as an extradiegetic-homodiegetic perspective where the narrator and focaliser is "outside" the story, as well as a character within the story. The narrator begins the second chapter of the book by asserting that "I myself had two separate encounters with witches before I was eight years old", thus signalling that the "I" of the novel is narrating past experiences in retrospect (Dahl, [1983] 1985: 12). From there on, readers learn that the "I" is simultaneously the narrator, the focaliser and the main protagonist of the novel. Unless the first-person narrator turns out to be unreliable, this narrative technique – which seems to merge the perspectives of focaliser and narrator – is an effective means to manipulate readers into identifying with the narrator/focaliser/protagonist and adopting his/her point of view (cf. Stephens, 1992; Bal, 1997). According to Mieke Bal (1997: 146), such "a character-bound focalizor […] brings about bias and limitation", since readers learn about the events accounted for only from a single, subjective perspective. Furthermore, the effect of the narrative perspective in *The Witches* is increased by the fact that the character narrating the events is also the one undergoing the metamorphosis.

Genette and Bal, however, both suggest that in terms of focalisation there is no fundamental difference between a first-person and a third-person perspective. In both cases "an external focalizor, usually the 'I' grown older, gives its vision of a fabula in which it participated earlier as an actor, from the outside" (Bal, 1997: 158). The retrospective retelling of events already passed implies that the focaliser approaches his younger self from a distance, which is similar to that of a third person perspective. In *The Witches*, first-person narration accordingly also functions as a means to assure young readers that the young protagonist will be safe in the end, since he is there to tell the story about his two encounters with the witches in retrospect:

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[150] Narratives presented from the first-person perspective of the young metamorphs themselves appear more frequently from the 1990s onwards. Early examples include Thomas Paisley's *The Dog Days of Arthur Cane* (1976), Roald Dahl's *The Witches* (1983), and Rosalind Barden's *TV Monster* (1988). Examples from the 1990s onwards comprise Patrice Kindl's *Owl in Love* (1993), R.L. Stine's *My Hairiest Adventure* (1994), K.A. Applegate's *Animorphs* series (1996-2001), Will Hobbs's *Kokopelli's Flute* (1995), Carol Sonenklar's *Bug Boy* (1997) and *Bug Girl* (1998), Mary Hooper's *The Peculiar Power of Tabitha Brown* (1998), Satoshi Kitamura's *Me and My Cat?* (1999), and Melvin Burgess's *Lady* (2001). Some of these stories are more challenging texts than others. For example Dahl uses first-person narration to add a sense of authenticity to his tale, whereas Kindl and Kitamura successfully employ this narrative perspective to give their stories an ironic twist. Yet it seems as if formula fiction narratives in particular, such as K.A. Applegate's *Animorphs* and R.L. Stine's *Goosebumps* series, exploit first-person narration mainly in order to increase the thrilling impact of their titillating and grotesque stories.

> From the first I escaped unharmed, but on the second occasion I was not so lucky. Things happened to me that will probably make you scream when you read about them. That can't be helped. The *truth* must be told. The *fact* that I am still here and able to speak to you (however peculiar I may look) is due entirely to my wonderful grandmother. (Dahl, [1983] 1985: 12, my italics)

But in terms of creating an illusion of author, narrator and focaliser being one and the same, choosing between a narrative voice in the first-person and the third-person does make a crucial difference. In *The Witches*, such an illusion is further strengthened by the author's never revealing the boy protagonist's name. In the quotation cited above, words such as "truth" and "fact" also serve to emphasise this metafictive illusion, blurring the border between author and narrator, reality and fiction. Incidentally, Dahl plays the same metafictive joke upon his readers more overtly in two of his earlier books, *James and the Giant Peach* (1961) and *The BFG* (1982), where he in the end reveals the protagonists to be the authors of the books in question.

In *The Witches*, Dahl's detailed descriptions of his antagonists' revolting appearances and habits are gruesome and unrestrained.[151] But in the case of the boy's irreversible metamorphosis, the voice of the boy narrator never attempts to awaken any feelings of horror or discomfort in readers. Instead, it presents this as the happiest ending imaginable. Although the boy's transformation into animal form is inflicted upon him as a traditionally disempowering spell, Dahl's boy protagonist immediately accepts his new being, and the author puts much effort into convincing readers of its advantages. Only a couple of sentences after the metamorphosis has taken place, the boy makes the following remarks about his new mouse-body:

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[151] For discussions of misogyny in *The Witches* see Catherine Itzin (1985), David Rees (1988), Michele Landsberg (1988), Jonathon Culley (1991), Anne-Marie Bird (1998) and Amanda Bergson-Shilcock (2002).

> I was feeling quite remarkably well. *It is not a bad thing after all*, I thought to myself, *to be tiny as well as speedy when there is a bunch of dangerous females after your blood*. (Dahl, [1983] 1985: 117)

One important reason for this positive outcome of the metamorphosis is that there is no potentially unsettling blur between the boy's human identity and that of his newly acquired animal form. Unlike, for instance, Eustace in C. S. Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*, who is separated from human company by his loss of speech and human eating habits, the boy in Dahl's book is nothing but a human being in animal disguise. Nor does Dahl's boy protagonist experience any loss or limitations of his human abilities such as speech and movement, which were typical of the narratives previously discussed where child characters turned into dolls, minerals or objects. In the text he is referred to as a "mouse-person" or "a human in mouse's clothing" (Dahl, [1983] 1985: 132) and much is made of the fact that he can still talk: "I got the shock of my life when I heard my own voice, my own perfectly normal rather loud voice, coming out of my tiny mouth. It was wonderful. I was thrilled" (Dahl, [1983] 1985: 118).

The mouse transformation is also overtly referred to as a relief from responsibilities such as going to school, supporting oneself financially, and military service:

> You are probably wondering why I wasn't depressed at all. I found myself thinking, *What's so wonderful about being a little boy anyway? Why is that necessarily any better than being a mouse? I know that mice get hunted and they sometimes get poisoned or caught in traps. But little boys sometimes get killed, too. Little boys can be run over by motor-cars or they can die of some awful illness. Little boys have to go to school. Mice don't. Mice don't have to pass exams. Mice don't have to worry about money. Mice, as far as I can see, have only two enemies, humans and cats. My grandmother is a human, but I know for certain that she will always love me whoever I am. And she never, thank goodness, keeps a cat. When mice grow up, they don't ever have to go to war and fight against other mice. Mice,* I felt pretty certain, *all like each other. People don't.*
>
> *Yes,* I told myself, *I don't think it is at all a bad thing to be a mouse*. (Dahl, [1983] 1985: 118-119)

As if the narrator was not convincing enough delivering this monologue, the author has chosen to italicise the passages that appear to be the immediate thoughts of the narrator's previous, younger self caught in a moment of metamorphic crisis. The italics make the message painstakingly clear: being an animal is in many ways to be preferred to being human; and remaining an animal will not mean the end of parental love and protection for the young protagonist.[152]

As a regressive fantasy, *The Witches* has a lot in common with J. M. Barrie's *Peter Pan*. Especially if one interprets Barrie's story as Alison Lurie ([1990] 1998: 131) does, in terms of "an elaborate dream fulfillment of intense but contradictory childhood wishes – to be grown up at once and never to be grown up; to have exciting adventures and be perfectly safe; to escape from your mother and have her always at hand". In Dahl's *The Witches*, the boy's transformation guarantees that he will always remain under adult, maternal protection. Like Peter Pan, he cannot grow up, and metamorphosis is the key to fulfilling this regressive wish.

Another major issue at stake in Dahl's *The Witches* is metamorphosis as a *test* of parental affection – if we understand the grandmother as functioning *in loco parentis* (cf. Trites, 2000). The narrator keeps repeating that no matter what the boy looks like, his grandmother will always love him. This is compounded by contrasts with another child character, Bruno Jenkins. Bruno is another victim of the witches' mouse-maker potion, yet readers are not invited to empathise with him nor think very favourably of him. He is depicted as a dull, spoilt, self-centred, over-weight coward and serves simply to emphasise the opposite characteristics of our clever, helpful and brave hero. The success of the boy hero's metamorphosis is also emphasised in comparison with Bruno's suggested failure. Bruno's parents are most unwilling to accept that their son has become a rodent. Not only is his mother terrified of mice; she also owns a cat, which is her favourite creature. What eventually happens to Bruno is not revealed, but in a passing conversation at the end of the book the mouse-boy and his granny agree that they "wouldn't be surprised if his father gave him to the hall-porter to drown in the fire-bucket" (Dahl, [1983] 1985: 194).

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[152] There are also authors/illustrators who simply choose to ignore any unsettling side-effects of the child's metamorphosis. For example Lawrence David and Delphine in *Beetle Boy* (1999) and Frances Minters and Diane Greenseid in *Chicken for a Day* (2000) routinely employ the motif of metamorphosis to ensure their young protagonists parental affection. Being a story "inspired by" Kafka's "The Metamorphosis", *Beetle Boy* is especially disappointing. Here Gregory Sampson wakes up one morning to find that he has become a giant beetle. However, all uncomfortable associations to Gregor Samsa's deeply disturbing insect transformation are avoided and the result is a mildly wacky story of a boy who finds that despite his sudden bug appearances, his family and best friend still love him. The reverse metamorphosis at the end of *Beetle Boy* finally renders any closer association between the fate of Gregor and Gregory further than their names truly far-fetched.

In terms of the denouement of *The Witches*, readers are given another surprise, since – if they are familiar with the fantasy genre – they would expect magic to wear off at the end of the story. They would expect the child-animal metamorphosis to be reverted in the end. David Rees (1988: 148) clearly feels cheated out of such a "proper" ending when he concludes that the end of the book "robs the story of its expected resolution, and leaves a nasty feeling that evil has triumphed. (The suggestion that [the boy] likes being a mouse does not convince)". But what does this irreversible metamorphosis really imply? Does it really leave readers with unanswered questions?

To me it looks as if Dahl, despite the unexpected final twist in the plot, is not doing anything radically new with the metamorphosis motif as such. What might on the surface seem like an innovation is in fact a reworking of the classic theme of a return to eternal childhood. Only this time, everlasting childhood is free from negative associations. Unlike Barrie's *Peter Pan*, which as Margery Hourihan (1997: 75) argues lacks closure because there is no return for Peter nor "an open ending rich with possibilities for the future", the ending of *The Witches* is a curious blend which promises both a secure, eternal childhood and an exciting future. While Peter Pan's regression has a dark and tragic thrust, the ending of Dahl's book reads like the beginning of a great adventure:

> My grandmother picked me up off the table and kissed me on the nose. "Oh, my goodness me, we're going to be busy these next few weeks and months and years!" she cried.
>
> "I think we are," I said. "But what fun and excitement it's going to be!"
>
> "You can say that again!" my grandmother cried, giving me another kiss. "I can't wait to get started!" (Dahl, [1983] 1985: 208)

Dahl has thus effectively closed his text to any threatening associations with animal metamorphosis as a refusal to grow up. The ending does foreshadow possible dangers in the future, but mostly excitement, comfort and joy.

Still, the mere fact that the traditionally carnival pattern of metamorphosis is broken in this book is apparently disturbing for many adults. This is especially evident if one compares Dahl's novel with two adaptations of the text: Nicolas Roeg's 1989 film version *The Witches*;

and theatre *Pieni Suomi*'s performance in Finnish called *Kuka pelkää noitia?*[153] given in Helsinki in the autumn of 1994 (cf. Lassén-Seger, 1996, 2000). In both the film and theatre versions, a new "good" witch is introduced in order to appear at the very last moment as a *dea ex machina* who turns the mouse-boy into a boy again. Anne-Marie Bird (1998), who mainly explores the book and the film version in order to show that the latter contains a much more explicitly misogynistic subtext than Dahl's original text does, concludes that the radical change of ending in the film adaptation goes to show that the film has other major concerns than the boy protagonist's story and its resolution. To this I would add that the change also appears to have been made in an effort to bring the ending more in line with the expected pattern of a circular resolution of the child-other metamorphosis plot as the only prerequisite for a "happy" end and true closure.

In an interview, Roeg responds to Dahl's unhappiness with the film's ending by claiming that the denouement of the book could not be transferred directly onto the screen without being "painful to the spirit of the book" (Jones, 1990: 51). Roeg also states that he wanted to take more responsibility than Dahl for his young audience, who may find the original ending "to be distressing their imagination" (Jones, 1990: 51). What Roeg clearly overlooked – or possibly found too undesirable to portray – is that as far as the boy protagonist is concerned, this *is* thematically and psychologically a "happy" ending, albeit a regressive one.

THE FERAL TEENAGE METAMORPH

In 2001 another British non-circular metamorphosis story caused a commotion even ahead of its release. When the media picked up on the indignation voiced by some youth campaigners,[154] this fuelled the public's interest for the publication of Melvin Burgess's teenage novel, *Lady: My Life As a Bitch*. This is the story of a seventeen-year-old girl,

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[153] This is also the title of the Finnish translation of the book. (In English *Who's Afraid of Witches?*).

[154] In August 2001, Family and Youth Concern vice-president Eric Hester told the BBC that "[t]his is quite the nastiest piece of children's literature that I have ever read". Available: http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/arts/1480163.stm [29 March, 2006].

Sandra, who is transformed into a dog when she offends a homeless alcoholic who has magical powers. After her initial feelings of horror and confusion, Sandra gradually grows to appreciate the wild, instinctual life of a stray dog – so much so, that she in the end chooses to pass up her chance to become human again.[155]

Like Dahl in *The Witches*, Burgess tells his story in the voice of the metamorph protagonist, but he uses this narrative perspective to create a much more ambiguous and less reassuring fantasy come true. First of all, the young protagonist in Burgess's novel is allowed to express deep feelings of bewilderment and ambivalence about her predicament. Sandra's transformation is envisioned as a traumatic experience that induces her to take stock of her whole life, her actions and her relationships. Neither does Burgess, in Dahl's way, give any metafictive comment to the story. Sandra might have lost her ability to speak when she turns into a dog, but as a narrator she is (of course) using her human voice to communicate with readers. The element of pure fictionality is thus much stronger in Burgess's novel and several reviewers have stressed its allegorical structure. Nicholas Tucker (2001), for example, sums the book up as "an allegory about the conflict between repression and freedom".

In many other senses, too, Dahl's and Burgess's novels are strikingly different in their use of metamorphosis. In part this reflects the difference in target audience, young children or teenagers. Whereas Dahl employs metamorphosis to create a comforting regressive fantasy of being able to remain in a protected and dependent state of childhood, Burgess uses the motif to provide his teenage protagonist with an alternative to what can seem a very boring life as a responsible adult: the independent, instinctual "here-and-now" of animalhood. Besides, unlike the boy protagonist in *The Witches*, Sandra-as-Lady is no mere human in disguise. Marina Warner (2005) notes that many contemporary stories of metamorphosis reflect a new interest in split, doubled and multiple selves and that Burgess's *Lady* is part of that trend. The consequences of Sandra's animal nature go deep, and she keeps alternating between human and animal consciousness:

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[155] For a comparison between Dahl's and Burgess's uses of metamorphosis in *The Witches* and *Lady* see Maria Lassén-Seger (2003).

> My feelings were swinging violently from side to side. One minute I was filled with bursts of joy at the way my feet moved, at the wind on my face, the sights and sounds and the flocking of scents around me. […] The thrill of the chase! That cat that I'd nearly caught. Oh, yes, there were still pleasures for me in this world. I promised myself one thing – that before I became myself again, I'd catch a cat and tear it to pieces and lap up the blood as it oozed onto the tarmac…
>
> And then, in the next second I was filled with self disgust. Cat's blood – ugh! Disgusting! I was a *girl*! How could I think such thoughts? (Burgess, 2001: 18-19)

Despite this occasional wavering between human and canine consciousness, Sandra gradually gives in to her new animal senses, instincts and desires. She runs with the pack. She hunts and kills for food and fun. And she thoroughly enjoys herself, just like she used to enjoy her hedonistic life-style as an irresponsible teenager experimenting with sex and drugs.

The elaborate descriptions of Sandra's experiences as a bitch on heat explain the controversy surrounding the book. Her frank rejoicing in her hybrid nature – "[h]unting, playing, chasing, shagging. [...] it was just one thick, misty soup of hormones and sex" – (Burgess, 2001: 133) poses a threat to adult moral values of responsibility and decorum. The public debate focused on the need for a system for parental guidance or consumer information that would protect readers from exposure to undesirable subject matters such as sex, drugs and violence (see e.g. Bedell, 2001; Brooks, 2001; Thorpe, 2001; Tucker, 2001). What may have made Burgess's harsh, realistic, down-to-earth take on the metamorphosis motif even harder to stomach is that previous teenage novels featuring young metamorphs typically explore desire metaphorically – as in Norman's *A Dream of Seas*, for example – and not in such open graphic detail as in *Lady*.[156]

Prior to the publication of *Lady*, Melvin Burgess had already made himself a reputation as a controversial writer who keeps expanding the boundaries of teenage fiction (cf. Brooks, 2001; Spring, 2001; Tucker, 2001).[157] Talking about his own writing, Burgess himself frequently reveals that he is well aware of the transgressive and often dystopian thrust of his writing. He admits to being drawn to teenage fiction for this very reason, and he often claims that he aspires to write honestly, and that it would be dishonest to deceive his teenage readers with simplistic happy endings (see e.g. Gibbons, 2001; Burgess, 2004). Often his choice of narrative technique is part and parcel of the provocative thrust of his novels. In his break-through Carnegie-winning novel, *Junk* (1996),[158] he deals with teenage heroine addiction, mostly through multiple first-person narration (all in all ten different voices) without any authoritative adult voice-over telling readers what is right or wrong, moral or immoral. The characters portrayed are thus constructed intersubjectively through a polyphonic interplay of voices and perspectives (cf. Nikolajeva, 2002: 88-109).

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[156] Commenting on his own writing, Burgess says that *Lady* grew out of an idea to write a story about lust, desire and irresponsibility for young women, since traditional books for girls tend to treat the subject of sexuality chiefly from the point of view of romance (see e.g. Jenkins, 2002; Burgess, 2003).

[157] Burgess is also an author particularly captured with the motif of metamorphosis. Apart from *Tiger, Tiger, Lady*, and *The Birdman*, his dystopian fantasy epos *Bloodtide* (1999), based on the Icelandic Volsunga saga, features shapeshifting gods.

Burgess is, in other words, known to let his characters speak for themselves without interruption, and for this he has been criticised[159] as well as praised by reviewers.[160] According to some critics, the use of such "amoral" narrative techniques shows too great a faith in young readers' abilities to grasp the fictionality of the events narrated. But in his article on *Junk* David Rudd (1999a: 121) notes that

> there is no simple morality in the book, yet morals are expounded everywhere; all characters have a view, although none has a clean sheet – something that makes us, as readers of all these different voices, query our own stance. […]
>
> This ineluctable relativism is what makes Burgess's book superior to most that tackle this subject, and, seemingly, makes it so acceptable to young people. It has a brutal honesty with its disavowal of the usual adult know-it-all voice.

The same thing could be said to apply to *Lady*, where the open ending and narrative aperture stimulate readers to take a more active part in interpreting the events reported. This I find to be a much more constructive view of open-endedness, aperture and multi-voicedness in teenage novels than assuming that young readers are an easily manipulated, passive audience which is only capable of reading for identification.

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[158] Published in the United States as *Smack*.

[159] Also his teenage novel *Doing It* (2003) attracted great media attention. Two months before it was due to be published, British children's laureate Anne Fine (2003) declared in a review that she found the book to be nothing but "filth". Fine pleaded to the publishers to pulp their copies and let the book be published by an adult imprint if anyone would have it.

[160] *Junk* was awarded the Carnegie medal and the Guardian Award in 1997. It has also been adapted for the stage, and into a radio play and a TV film.

So, although Dahl and Burgess both use irreversible metamorphosis as a means of expressing their protagonists' desire to avoid human responsibilities and their refusal to grow up, their novels differ profoundly in tone. Another major difference between Dahl's preadolescent metamorph and Burgess's teenage metamorph is that Sandra gradually seeks and accepts a separation from her family. Her metamorphosis is framed from the very beginning as a test of parental love that is destined to fail miserably. Burgess (2001: 20) seems to be much aware of writing not only against the tradition of the circular metamorphosis plot pattern, but also against the traditional resolution where love and recognition undo the spell of metamorphosis:

> It was just *so* typical of my mum not to recognise me. All right, I was a dog, but she was my *mother*. She should've known who I was even if I'd turned into a clod of earth. […] No wonder I felt so betrayed. No wonder I'd turned into a stupid, pointless dog.

Sandra's metamorphosis is played out against a rather cliché-ridden background of teenage/parent conflict. Her father, who left the family when she was nine, is idealised in his absence, whereas her single mother has become the target of her self-hatred and resentment. Later on in the novel, though, Sandra's view of herself and her parents becomes more nuanced, and eventually she is allowed to watch – as a dog, unnoticed – the grief which her disappearance causes her family. Towards the end of the novel, where her mother finally recognises her despite her dog appearance, there is even a typical scene of reunion in store for Sandra:

> 'Oh, Sandra! Oh, my darling, darling darling – Oh, Sandra, what's happened to you? What have they done?'
>
> She bent and scooped me up with her arms, and held me tightly to her, kissing me and loving me and weeping tears. […]
>
> My mum! What about her? Can you believe it? How many people could pick their daughter out of a horrible hairy face full of fangs and a tongue like a face flannel? Could your mum do that for you? 'Cause my mum did it for me! (Burgess, 2001: 169)

But the reconciliation between Sandra and her mother is short-lived. When the rest of Sandra's family start talking her mother out of believing that the stray dog is her missing daughter, Sandra decides that "life as a dog [is] pretty bloody good" compared to being a girl (Burgess, 2001: 191).

In this way the entire novel works out to be one long, rather uneven discussion with the readers about the pros and cons of being animal or human (female), thereby also voicing an implicit threat to the notion of adult superiority and hegemony. Sandra's emotions are intense and often contradictory, swinging from one extreme to the other. Sometimes she is home-sick and longs to be human again. But then again, she sees "the world of man" for what it is: "stinking cars and food in jars, and the world wrapped up like a toy for big pale monkeys. Sod them!" (Burgess, 2001: 65). As I have argued previously (see pp. 199-200), such a dystopian view of human and adult civilisation has become something of a trend within Western teenage fiction of the 1990s.[161] Sandra's confused inner monologue does at times also give room for the voices of her new friends Mitch and Fella. Like Sandra, they, too, are humans who have been transformed into dogs, and they function in the novel as two opposite voices competing to convince Sandra about the best way to go about her future. Whereas Fella feels that "[b]eing born into a human body was like being born in a prison cell", Mitch passionately argues that a life lacking responsibility is not a life at all, but is "just existing from day to day" (Burgess, 2001: 45-46). From the final outcome of the novel, we deduce that Sandra will eventually follow the advice of Fella, fulfilling the new animal myth in her decision that animalhood is the more compelling alternative. Yet a question remains as to whether Sandra's transgressive metamorphosis is to be regarded as regressive or liberating and empowering?

Burgess refrains from letting his protagonist cross over completely into animalhood during the course of his narrative. Like any other child-animal metamorphosis story, this one, too, focuses on what are primarily human problems highlighted in a meeting with the animal other (cf. Lassén-Seger, 2004). As the competing voices of Mitch and

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161. Burgess's feral teenage metamorph in *Lady* has a literary predecessor in Peter Dickinson's monkey-girl in *Eva* (1988). Dickinson's science-fiction novel tells the story of a thirteen-year-old girl, Eva, who wakes up from a coma after a severe car accident to find that her life has been saved by a transference of her neurones into the body of a monkey (Kelly). Eva is a post-disaster feral teenager whose hybridity foregrounds issues of civilisation versus wilderness. But Eva also enjoys being an animal; she endorses her animal sexuality despite the fact that it horrifies her parents; and she openly rebels against adult authority by merging with her animal nature.

Fella demonstrate, the question of human responsibility versus animal irresponsibility is the quintessential theme. At the end of the book, however, nothing seems to hold Sandra back from preferring animal life to life as a human being. She feels rejected and judged by her own family, she is bored by school and the casual sexual relationships she has had as a girl, and she has no sound friendship relations to miss, and no prospects for the future:

> [A]ll people ever want to do is to judge you. If you don't look right, you're wrong; if you don't behave right, you're wrong, no one wants to know you. It doesn't make any difference how much you need them or how much you love them, or how much they love you. If you don't fit – out! You're a slut, you're no good, you're worth nothing! Out! Out! (Burgess, 2001: 190)

Faced with this bleak view of human life, Sandra finds animal life as "life at the edge", where you "steal or starve", live or die, irresistibly appealing (Burgess, 2001: 136). In this respect, Sandra's dog metamorphosis exposes her disempowering social circumstances as a young girl, and her final choice to remain a dog becomes an ambiguous metaphor for both her resignation and her liberation,

> I was never much good at being a person, me. It's so hard! It's hard, it's hard, being a person. I lay there on that bed and I thought, God, this is going to go on for another seventy years! Seventy years of people pushing you into being something you're not. […] What's the point? Why bother? I wasn't ambitious, I wasn't going to change the world. All I wanted was to have a good time. I mean! (Burgess, 2001: 192-193)

Sandra's decision to remain Lady is prompted by her wish to escape the dreariness of adult life, including the complexities of human responsibilities and relationships. But, as Geraldine Brennan (2001) in her review for *The Times Educational Supplement* notes, Sandra "chooses a dog's life because there is no choice". Just as for the young male protagonist in Gillian Rubinstein's *Foxspell*, who also sees animal metamorphosis as a last refuge from a life filled with too many hardships, so apparently for Sandra, animalhood is a last resort.

Animal metamorphosis in *fin de siècle* teenage fiction appears to be increasingly used to depict a symbolic refusal to grow up in a society that holds no hope for the teenage protagonists. This is why metamorphosis functions as a highly ambivalent metaphor for both resistance and resignation. Unsurprisingly, the role of the young protagonist's parents is of crucial importance in these narratives. Roberta Seelinger Trites (2000) suggests that parental presence, which usually takes the form of child/parent conflict, could be a significant factor when defining teenage fiction as such. Trites (2002) provides economic, as well as psychological, explanations for this long-lived topos in teenage fiction. While industrialisation in the Western world resulted in longer childhoods which made teenagers a financial burden rather than an asset to their parents, the Lacanian reading of the Oedipal myth insists on conflict and separation as the key to individuation. "For adolescent literature", Trites (2002: 9) argues, "this translates into a necessary form of the Oedipal struggle that seems (at times maddeningly) unavoidable for Western authors of adolescent literature". Exemplified by both Burgess's *Lady* and Rubinstein's *Foxspell*, the motif of irreversible animal metamorphosis can constitute a cathartic, symbolic answer to such child/parent conflicts. Sandra, although to some extent reconciled with her mother, still feels that "the person she wants me to be isn't the way I am" (Burgess, 2001: 174). Consequently, one could argue that Burgess has created a story which on the surface might seem to expand the boundaries of teenage fiction by being outspoken about certain sensitive subject matters, but which on closer inspection conforms to a quite typical pattern of teenage/parent conflict.

The profoundly interrogative and possibly eternal metamorphosis at the end of *Lady* is staged as a symbolic leap away from the burden of human worries and responsibilities. Literally, this leap for freedom is visualised as Sandra-as-Lady jumps out of her old bedroom window where she has just chewed her schoolbooks, clothes and childhood toys to pieces, to join Mitch and Fella:

> I don't want to be a human being. I never was a human being in the first place. I want to be quick and fast and happy and then dead. I don't want to grow old. I don't want to go to work. I don't want to be responsible. I want to be a dog!
>
> 'Jump!' barked Mitch. 'Jump! Jump! Jump!'
>
> 'Jump! Jump!' barked Fella.
>
> There were feet behind me on the stairs, the door burst open. Mum ran in.
>
> 'Don't go!' she cried. [...]
>
> My legs gathered under me. The window was open. I jumped. (Burgess, 2001: 199-200)

Since Burgess refuses to be politically correct about what may and what may not be put in a book for teenagers, his take on the metamorphosis motif is neither protective of the readers nor particularly concerned with giving all the answers. Here, there can be no such snug interpretations of metamorphosis as a pleasant – albeit regressive – return to childhood as in Dahl's *The Witches*. Sandra is a more disturbingly transgressive and hybrid metamorph than Dahl's mouse-boy, and the open ending of *Lady* is characterised by profound narrative aperture.

Sandra's credo corresponds with what many adults fear and accuse teenage culture of being: a time of self-gratification and living for the moment. In this respect, *Lady* not only explores what it might be like to be a young girl at the beginning of the twentieth century, but also draws on those very adult fears and preconceptions about youth today. Heather Scutter (1999: 251) very appropriately points out that

> [t]here is an extensive adult anxiety about the disappearing child and the disappearance of childhood. The child seems to be getting out of hand, going out of bounds, moving beyond control. The spaces into which the lost child moves are variously inscribed as feral, wild, chaotic, corrupt, evil.

A feral or ludic – and on top of that, *female* – teenage metamorph, such as the one featured in *Lady,* clearly has the potential to upset the safe boundaries upheld in society between innocence and experience, as well as childhood, adolescence and adulthood. Burgess's novel may well read as a comic allegory of the powerlessness of the young, but it is simultaneously a horror story for the adults in power.[162] In a society permeated by a widespread belief that young people are somehow turning feral – that is, criminal and/or antisocial (Jeffs and Smith, 1996: 1; Goldson, 2001: 34-35), it is no wonder that *Lady* was received with a public outcry.

UNCANNY METAMORPHS

At the end of the twentieth century, Melvin Burgess is the British author writing both for younger children and teenagers who experiments most frequently with the motif of child-animal metamorphosis. Cooperating with the illustrator Ruth Brown in 2000 he produced the picturebook *The Birdman*, which features an uncertain ending of no return for the boy protagonist, Jarvis, who is transformed into a robin. Jarvis encounters a mysterious man selling caged birds. He buys a robin out of pity, claiming that he will set it free, but the temptation to keep the bird caged and singing for him makes him go back on his promise. "You'll get used to it", he tells the bird – but the bird falls ill and stops singing (Burgess and Brown, 2000: [9]). That night the birdman returns and changes the boy into bird and vice versa. The following morning, Jarvis-the-bird is let out of the cage and turned out of his own home, left to be a bird, perhaps for ever.

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[162] The LitCritters, which is a group of British teenage book critics studying at Cramlington Community High School in Northumberland, also suggest that Burgess is probably "out to shock (the adults)" (Barnard, 2001: 18). In fact, these young critics find the book to be "about more than sex" and praise it "for its true-to-life dialogue and for talking to teenagers instead of at them" (Barnard, 2001: 18).

Since this is a transformation that takes place against the child's own will, the picturebook can be read moralistically, as a story of crime and retribution. Like Eustace in Lewis's *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader* and Monsieur Bibot in Van Allsburg's *The Sweetest Fig*, Jarvis simply gets what he deserves. For this reading, the figure of the robin is pivotal,[163] since it alludes to the lines of William Blake's poem "Auguries of Innocence", where a captured robin symbolises human cruelty towards god's creation:

> To see a world in a grain of sand
> And a heaven in a wild flower,
> Hold infinity in the palm of your hand
> An eternity in an hour.
> A robin redbreast in a cage
> Puts all heaven in a rage. [...]
> He who shall hurt the little wren
> Shall never be beloved by men. [...]
> Kill not the moth nor butterfly,
> For the Last Judgment draweth nigh. [...]

Metamorphosis is thus the ultimate disempowering punishment (an eye for an eye) for Jarvis's selfish abuse of power over the caged bird. As I have noted elsewhere, such blunt retribution is seldom inflicted on young metamorphs without the addition of a softening denouement in which the children repent and are duly returned to their human shape. Again, Burgess writes against the traditional plot pattern of metamorphosis stories for children.

His choice of narrative perspective and his use of open-endedness and narrative aperture in *The Birdman* are factors that add other dimensions to the story, however, beyond those of a pure moralising cautionary tale. Using the concept of the uncanny, I shall read *The*

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[163] The robin is Britain's national bird. It is a popular figure of ballads, nursery rhymes, songs and poetry. Popular notion has it that it is unlucky to kill or keep a robin, and according to Christian legend, a drop of blood coloured the robin's chest when the bird tried to pull thorns from Christ's crown.

Birdman as a story designed to evoke horror rather than moral indignation. Freud ([1953] 1997: 217), who developed the notion of the uncanny in life, art and literature, defines the concept as that which horrifies us by bringing strangeness to what otherwise is well known and familiar:

> [T]his uncanny is in reality nothing new or alien, but something which is familiar and old-established in the mind and which has become alienated from it only through the process of repression.

In psychoanalytical terms, the uncanny – which in part also may explain the impact of the grotesque – is thus evoked by a return of the repressed (cf. Mills, 1999). The German word "*unheimlich*" is etymologically better suited to reflect the dual nature of the uncanny as "the opposite of '*heimlich*' ['homely'], '*heimish*' ['native']" or "the opposite of what is familiar" (Freud, [1953] 1997: 195). Animation of inanimate objects, magic and sorcery, as well as man's attitude to death are some of the real-life factors and literary motifs which Freud mentions as examples of the frightening turning into the supernaturally uncanny.

In *The Birdman* uncanniness is evoked through the use of the metamorphosis motif, and especially through the way in which the story ends. The disempowering transformation itself is depicted almost as a bodily assault upon the young protagonist; and like the boy in Nesbit's "The Cat-hood of Maurice", Jarvis is horrified at the sight of his own body occupied by an Other:

> The birdman touched Jarvis on the forehead. He opened his mouth to yell but all that came out was a shrill piping note. His arms and legs shrank, his skin grew feathery.
>
> The next thing he knew, the man was tenderly tucking him inside the little reed cage, and his tiny wings were beating, beating, beating against the reed bars of his prison…
>
> Over in his bed he could see the robin going through the last stages of the change from bird to boy. The birdman was nowhere to be seen.
>
> But as the boy who lay in his bed turned over, Jarvis saw to his horror that he had his own face.
>
> He and the robin had changed places completely. (Burgess and Brown, 2000: [17-20])

This event, where the young protagonist's consciousness is severed from his body and he finds himself looking at his former self now suddenly turned into a stranger, can be read as a variant of the motif of doubling. Freud suggests that a belief in an immortal soul may have been the first "double" of the body invented as a means of preservation against death and extinction. When one becomes aware of one's mortality, "the 'double' reverses its aspect. From having been an assurance of immortality, it becomes the uncanny harbinger of death" (Freud, [1953] 1997: 211).

In *The Birdman*, the illustrations that accompany the nightly transformation scene increase the feeling of uncanniness further by evoking a sense of dream and reality intermingled. According to Freud ([1953] 1997: 221), "[a]n uncanny effect is often and easily produced when the distinction between imagination and reality is effaced, as when something that we have hitherto regarded as imaginary appears before us in reality, or when a symbol takes over the full functions of the thing it symbolizes". Modern, complex picturebooks often play upon such visualisation of the imaginary. In *The Tunnel*, for instance, Anthony Browne creates a nightmarish visualisation of an inner journey as the young girl protagonist runs through a forest come alive in order to save her petrified brother. In *The Birdman*, readers can see the moment of Jarvis's metamorphosis on two consecutive spreads. The first one (see picture 17) depicts the now unnaturally large, almost human-sized bird tucked into bed beside the frightened, wide-eyed boy. Their colours are blending into one another and there is movement indicated in the lines of Jarvis's hair and bedclothes towards the figure of the sleeping bird. The following spread (see picture 18) shows the transformation completed in the foreground, with a fluttering bird in a cage and a boy asleep in his bed. On the wall in the background the vague shadows suggest the figure of a leaping boy inside a bird's image and the birdman's witch-like profile hovers threateningly in the right-hand corner. Featuring the movement from bird to boy, this second illustration turns readers' and beholders' attention to the metamorphosis as liberating from the bird's point of view.

The verbal narrative also stops the internal focalisation of Jarvis once the bird transformation has taken place, which increases the uncertainty of the ending. The third-person narrator thus makes Jarvis's abandonment complete by no longer informing readers of the boy's thoughts or feelings, which made us sympathise with him and understand his horror in the first place. Moreover, since readers no longer have access to Jarvis's point of view there is no knowing for sure whether the exchange of bodies during the night actually took place, or whether it was just a bad dream. If readers choose to believe that the supernatural event of metamorphosis has taken place and that Jarvis is now caught in the body of the bird, the disturbing motif of the double is yet again emphasised when the new bird-as-Jarvis, in the closing lines of the book, echoes the words of the former Jarvis. “Go on … you’ll get used to it” (Burgess and Brown, 2000: [23]), he tells the boy now silenced and imprisoned in the shape of a robin, as he turns him out of his own home and closes the window. In a spine-chilling moment readers then realise that there can be no return trip for the boy turned bird. As with David McKee’s *Not Now, Bernard*, such a reading of the ending highlights the ultimately disempowering turn of events for the child protagonist, who is left to deal with his transformed self on his own, recognised and missed by no-one.

In order to illustrate the impact of the narrative perspective chosen in *The Birdman*, I will compare it to two other picturebooks featuring irreversible young metamorphs: Henrik Drescher’s *The Strange Appearance of Howard Cranebill Jr.* (1982)[164] and Gary Crew and Steven Woolman’s *Caleb* (1996). While Drescher’s picturebook evokes no feelings of the uncanny whatsoever, *Caleb* does so, but in a tellingly different manner than *The Birdman*. Drescher’s picturebook is a playful reworking of the classic folktale motif of a childless couple who, for a period of time, are blessed with a child of mysterious ancestry. Mr. and Mrs. Cranebill’s child, who turns up on their doorstep in a basket, has a long pointy nose and soon shows an unusual interest in climbing trees and associating with storks. Eventually Howard fulfils what has been suggested by his name and his unusual physical feature: he turns into a stork (see picture 19). The story ends as he leaves home, flying south, but with his parents comfortably assured that he will “return the following spring, to build his nest in the tall pear tree in the backyard” (Drescher, 1982: [26]).

Despite the irreversible metamorphosis, Drescher’s story is playful and lightly comic, with no threatening undertones of loss of self or uncontrollable change. One explanation for this is to be found in the choice of narrative perspective. Readers never share the child character Howard’s point of view and this allows them to keep a comic distance to the supernatural turn of events. Also, Drescher's story offers its young audience a comforting closure, in that Howard's true self is eventually revealed to, and accepted by his parents.[165] The narrative voice in *The Birdman*, on the other hand, first invites young readers to feel the child protagonist's horror at his entrapment, and then abandons him altogether, which serves to further strengthen the traumatic feeling of a loss of freedom and self. Closed endings and narrative closure give readers a sense of security, whereas open endings and narrative aperture more easily cause discomfort and worry.

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[164] The picturebook was chosen a *New York Times* Best Illustrated Children’s Book in 1982.

Gary Crew and Steven Woolman's *Caleb*, on the other hand, sets out to create a feeling of mystery and horror using a radically different narrative perspective from that of Burgess and Brown in *The Birdman*. The narrative is told in the first-person, but the narrator is *not* the character undergoing the metamorphosis and readers will soon find that the narrator remains unreliable and quite surprisingly naive about the mysterious events he reports. His name is Stuart Quill, and he remembers his days as a young biology student and his odd fellow student, Caleb van Doorn, who disappeared under strange circumstances. Stuart tells his tale in classic Edgar Allen Poe style, evoking an eerie feeling of uncertainty as to whether or not the supernatural incidents hinted at in the story are true. His retrospective eye-witness account underscores the uncanny feeling of the supernatural intruding upon the everyday, but compared to Jarvis's bird transformation, Caleb's suggested final horrendous transformation into a giant insect has a completely different impact on readers. One major reason for this is that throughout the story Caleb – just like Banks's Melusine and Cross's Peter – functions as a focalisee, who is being viewed exclusively from the outside, so that readers are never allowed to share any of his thoughts or feelings. With his insect-like eyes, voice and eating habits, Caleb epitomises the completely othered monster – half human, half insect – whose strange appearance generates "loathing in all who crossed his path" (Crew and Woolman, 1996: [2]). When, like his father, he passes *on* (and not *away*) into a giant insect, the event is

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165. The same goes for R.L. Stine's *My Hairiest Adventure* (1994), which is part of the formula fiction horror series *Goosebumps*. When Larry begins to grow hair all over his body he is disgusted and horrified, until he finds out that he – and all the other children in the community – are the result of a scientific experiment and they are now turning into the dogs they originally were.

designed to create a feeling of disgust and fear in readers (cf. Crew and Woolman, 1996: [10]).

Caleb embodies Gothic grotesque monstrosity. He transgresses a number of cultural taboos designed to keep chaos separated from order, and animal wilderness separated from civilised man: he is a mixture of insect and human, he is one of the living dead, he feeds on human flesh and acts out a (destructive) insect sexuality. Given the subject matter referred to here, Caleb is no ludic child, but a monstrous teenage freak. Whereas the horror resulting from the metamorphosis in *The Birdman* rests upon the reader sharing Jarvis's tragedy, Caleb's monstrous transformation has the potential to frighten readers since he transgresses into something othered and inhumanly evil that poses a threat to all humankind. From events which took place prior to Caleb's metamorphosis, readers can infer that he feeds on raw meat, is capable of killing in order to survive, and is somewhere "out there", "waiting and watching" (Crew and Woolman, 1996: [45]).

For picturebooks, which many people still associate primarily with a very young audience, *Caleb* and *The Birdman* explore rather unusual and unsettling subject matters. *Caleb*, however, is marketed for a teenage or even adult audience (cf. Saxby, 1997: 202), and its creators have felt no need to protect sensitive readers.[166] On the contrary, Woolman's illustrations encourage readers to pick up on the clues alluding to Caleb's monstrous nature unconsciously dropped by the naive narrator in the verbal narrative.[167] On the cover, for instance, Caleb's human face is visualised as a grotesque collage consisting of insects. Apart from this picture, Caleb's human face is never visible in the illustrations within the book. Instead, his monstrously dual nature is hinted by the exaggerated perspective from which he is depicted and, at one point, by his shadow on the wall taking on the contours of a large insect (see picture 20). Woolman's illustrations are also filled with imagery from Gothic horror, such as full moons, shadows and light, ancient houses, and dark and winding staircases. And every page is strewn with crawling insects undergoing metamorphosis, mating or devouring each other.[168]

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[166] Gary Crew, together with different illustrators, has produced several other picturebooks for an older audience. Crew is especially well-known for his uncanny horror stories in picturebook form, such as *The Watertower* (1994, illustrated by Steven Woolman) and *The Figures of Julian Ashcroft* (1996, illustrated by Hans de Haas).

[167] For a fuller investigation of the interaction between visual and verbal narrative in *Caleb* see Jane Doonan (1997).

The Birdman on the other hand, is designed and marketed for a somewhat younger readership, and offers tamer readings of the strong stuff accounted for in the verbal narrative. The blurb on the back of the first edition suggests that the story is about "the power of temptation over conscience, with a resolution that is both magical and thought-provoking". Such a reading advocates an allegorical interpretation of the story, which tries to gloss over both the harsh moral message of the picturebook and the uncanny impact that the ending's openness and aperture may have on readers empathising with the boy metamorph. The impact of the uncanny is also qualified by an interesting difference in modality between the verbal and the visual narrative. I use modality here in the way Maria Nikolajeva and Carole Scott (2001: 173) have developed the term as a means by which picturebook readers/beholders can "decide on the degree of truth" in the communication they receive. Melvin Burgess's text is very much set in the here-and-now, not signalling any location or setting in particular, yet referring to contemporary markers such as school and police. Ruth Brown's illustrations, on the other hand, set the events in a milieu evoking the past with images of carnival, a Southern European rural landscape, and the characters' ragged theatrical clothing. Since the illustrations evoke a sense of a dream-like, fairy tale world, they do somewhat lessen the uncanniness of the verbal story, where the supernatural clashes more brutally with the everyday, causing greater hesitation in the readers/beholders.

The most telling reassuring illustration of all, however, is the one on the cover, where Jarvis, the birdman and the robin are depicted in a friendly, almost embrace-like, triangle-shaped position (see picture 21). The image of the masked birdman gazing down upon Jarvis with a friendly and gentle smile stands in stark contrast to his sneering voice and haunting presence in the book's verbal text. Furthermore, on the book's last spread, Brown finally demystifies the scary figure of the birdman completely, by removing his frightful mask and revealing the face of an elderly, tired, gentle-looking man surrounded by birds. But does this suffice to take the edge off the uncanny altogether? I think not. Readers/beholders can never be absolutely sure whether the incidents have taken place within the fictional world of the narrative or within the mind/dream of the young protagonist. The aperture ending and final fate of Jarvis remains a mystery and there is no secure sense of closure. The sinister uncertainty surrounding his disempowering transformation awakens uncomfortable feelings of a disappearance into otherness, of a loss of one's self, and of the ultimately most uncertain transformation of all, through death.

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[168] Jane Doonan (1997) notes that Woolman displays the insects for our inspection as if they were specimens taken from a naturalist's notebook, but suddenly makes them come to life, turning either body or head to gaze out of the page into the eyes of the reader. This increases, in my view, the uncanny effect even further.

CHOOSING HYBRIDITY

The stories studied in this chapter so far have been interpreted from the point of view of regression, resistance and resignation, as well as the uncanny. In all cases there was some degree of disempowerment of the young metamorphs through the final irreversibility of their metamorphoses. Neither Dahl's mouse-boy, Burgess's teenage bitch, nor Burgess's and Brown's robin-boy have much choice but to adapt to animalhood. In order not to over-emphasise the regressive, dystopian or tragic nature of irreversible metamorphoses, however, this final section will scrutinise stories where the ending in fact liberates and empowers the young metamorphs in a utopian sense. The main text under study is Babette Cole's picturebook *Winni Allfours* (1993). Other relevant examples will be brought in more briefly for comparison.

By now, it is fairly obvious that for child-other metamorphoses to be empowering for young protagonists they have to be voluntary. If accidental or imposed from outside, in order to be empowering the transformations have to result in the protagonist at some point gaining agency, voice and the choice of whether or not to remain transformed. This is the most obvious difference between the young metamorphs' fate in the previous stories discussed in this chapter and the ones to be dealt with here. *The Witches*, *Lady*, and *The Birdman* all depict metamorphoses inflicted upon the young characters (by adult characters) against their will. Some of these young metamorphs eventually come to terms with their transformations, such as the boy turned mouse in Dahl's book and the girl turned dog in Burgess's book. Yet their positive attitudes towards their metamorphoses are so intermingled with their desire to regress, or to resign from human life, that they seem not entirely, nor convincingly, empowering. In stark contrast to this, Cole uses metamorphosis explicitly to endow her young protagonist with agency, independence and, above all else, a sense of having a choice.

In *Winni Allfours*, Cole has created a girl character who takes control of metamorphosis in order to get what *she* wants. Winni wants a pony more than anything else, while her parents do not "approve of people who own ponies" (Cole, [1993] 1995: [3]). As in the case of the child-monster stories discussed previously, food is used as a means of exerting control or power over others. Winni's parents are strict vegetarians, and even at school Winni is only allowed to eat carrots. When the school dinner lady drops the remark that over-eating carrots might turn Winni into a horse, Winni seizes the opportunity to make her dream of a pony come true in a rather unusual way.

Compared to some of her previous picturebooks, such as *The Trouble With Mum* (1983) and *Princess Smartypants* (1986), in *Winni Allfours* Cole does not make much use of counterpoint in the text and image interaction. Still, the illustrations are not merely decorative, but do have something significant to add to the narrative. First of all, when Winni turns herself into a horse, the actual transformation is visualised, rather than accounted for in the verbal narrative. Using simultaneous succession, Cole depicts the different stages of Winni's metamorphosis in a sequence of snap-shots against a white background over the entire spread, so emphasising the climactic impact of the event (see picture 22). Secondly, Winni-the-horse is not completely dehumanised in the illustrations, and this, too, is important to the liberating impact of the transformation. As a horse, she retains her voice and her human soul, and her plaits remain as visual markers of her interior girlhood. The possibility of reading Winni's transformation as liberating and empowering is thus strongly connected to the clearly preserved distinction between her human consciousness and any unsettling animal instincts. In other words, her metamorphosis is symbolic rather than mimetic.

But what does it actually signify? The choice of turning herself into a horse is Winni's own, which in part guarantees the fun of the experience. But the act of transforming herself into a horse is not only a means for her to achieve regressive wish-fulfilment. It is also an effective way of resisting authority by defying her parents. Like the trickster hero of the folktale, Winni achieves victory by being cunning. She turns the vegetarianism that her parents have forced upon her into the very means of her power reversal. When Winni's metamorphosis is revealed to them they are duly "horrified" (Cole, [1993] 1995: [11]), not least since their daughter's change of shape means that they lose control over her. Winni-the-horse is not as manageable as Winni-the-girl, and the transgressive nature of the girl's metamorphosis is overtly reflected in her disobedience to her parents. Food is once again a core issue in the reversal of power positions and control. Winni's first offence is to eat her father's lawn and flower beds. Her second is to ruin her parents' organic vegetable patch, where she also manages to rid herself of her school uniform as a symbolical tribute to her new-won freedom. Finally, she sheds the last remains of adult control, runs away from home, and joins the other ponies in the neighbourhood. She builds a career as a racehorse, and with her father who is scared stiff on her back, wins the Grand National, beats the world record, and wins "pots of money for everyone" (Cole, [1993] 1995: [26-27]).

Her triumph is all brought about by her pleasurably playful and empowering transformation. But her metamorphosis is also a means by which a reversal of power is brought about and the impact of this message of child anarchy, especially on young readers/beholders, should not be over-looked simply because it its comic and playful. James C. Scott (1990) elaborates on the subversive thrust of orally transmitted trickster stories and early European "world-upside-down" drawings and prints, which celebrated the persistence, agility and revenge of the underdog. Scott (1990: 167-168) argues that these forms of popular culture constituted a vital part of the "hidden transcript" of dissent and resistance to the official and dominant culture:

> The world-upside-down tradition can, of course, be taken to have no political significance whatever. As a trick of a playful imagination – a simple jeu d'esprit – it may mean nothing more than that. More commonly, the tradition is occasionally seen in functionalist terms as a safety-valve or vent that, like carnival, harmlessly drains away social tensions that might otherwise become dangerous to the existing social order.

But Scott believes that this is not the whole story. Instead he argues that for these subversive stories to pass under the eyes of authority, they had to be *disguised* as playful and fantastic so as not to appear too offensive. "If [such counterculture] is muted or ambiguous, this is because it must be evasive if it is to be public at all" (Scott, 1990: 172). In my analysis of Henrik Drescher's *The Boy Who Ate Around* I earlier suggested that playfulness and humour could provide a safe frame for undermining and interrogating social order and power structures. The same applies to Cole's picturebook, which subverts the notion of childhood dependence even further. Whereas Drescher's book conforms to the traditional carnival plot pattern of child-other metamorphosis, Cole's readers are in for a surprise ending.

The radically subversive thrust of Cole's picturebook is manifested at the very end where Winni refuses to change back into a girl. Winni is herself responsible for, and in charge of her horse transformation. Despite her mother's tempting offer to buy her a pony and feed her "lots of hamburgers and chips to eat" until she "would change back into a little girl" again, she recklessly defies the proposition (Cole, [1993] 1995: [28]). "And go back to school!", Winni replies. "No thanks, this is far more fun!" (Cole, [1993] 1995: [29]). The deliberately cheeky final page of the book, where Winni declares she will not give up horsedom, ultimately confirms Winni's liberation and her newly gained agency and independence. The picture shows the horse-girl literally lashing out in joyful protest – she will *not* conform or restrain herself according to what is expected of her. Not only is this denouement a successful play upon the readers' expectations of how child-other metamorphosis stories are traditionally resolved. It also indicates a radical empowerment of the young girl protagonist. Winni's liberation is not only allowed within the safe frames of imaginary play or temporary carnival, but is of a truly transgressive nature.

Winni Allfours is neither a complex narrative nor an unsettling story designed to disturb or provoke young readers. On the contrary, as in the case of Burgess's *Lady*, it is probably adult readers who would find the unregulated joyfulness of Winni's hedonistic life-style disturbing. For, despite the light and comic approach to the metamorphosis motif, this picturebook does indirectly interrogate and comically subvert sensitive issues and ingrained assumptions about the ideal form of child/adult power relations. What is highly interesting here is that the very medium of this narrative, that is the picturebook form itself, in practice addresses a readership consisting of both young readers/listeners and adult co-readers. Like previous picturebooks portraying child/adult power struggles and child aggression – such as Drescher's *The Boy Who Ate Around* – Cole's *Winni Allfours* calls for a reading situation where adults and children are jointly exposed to a radical mockery of adult hegemony and child subordination. Stories like these illustrate that adult hegemony over the child is never complete and that one crucial trait of children's literature is to acknowledge and negotiate the complexities and inadequacies of child/adult relationships.

Cole's picturebook is also particularly interesting when considered from a gender perspective, since it subverts the traditional image of a good, submissive girl. Compared to Kit Wright and Peter Bailey's Ella in *Tigerella*, which was published the same year as *Winni Allfours*, Cole's girl protagonist is far more active and radical.[169] Ella's tiger adventure is safely framed as a carnivalesque adventure whereas Cole allows Winni to transgress without any reservations whatsoever. Winni's transformation is presented as a personal triumph. She exults in her hybridity and the independence she gains from it.[170]

But how are we to understand the potential impact of this radically irreversible ending on young readers? If, as I suggested in the chapter on ludic metamorphs, reading is a form of play, Winni's liberating adventure may well invite young readers to join in her illusory triumph. From the point of view of children dependent on the care of elders, *Winni Allfours* can be read as a liberating and utopian fantasy of unconditional independence, especially since this liberation is accompanied by the assertion of parental affection. Winni's parents may not like what their daughter has changed herself into, but they stoutly refuse to sell Winni to a horse dealer interested in making a profit out of the horse-girl's racing skills (cf. Cole, [1993] 1995: [21]). Brian Sutton-Smith (1997) and Galina Lindquist (2001), with their ideas on the attractions of experiencing power within illusory ludic spaces, bring attention to issues of power inherent within the concept of child play, and their observations also lend further support to the possible subversive impact of Cole's picturebook. Apparently drawing on psy-

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169. Josie Winship Ramstad and Ethel Mitchell Benson's picturebook *Ferocious Sarah* (1979) tells the story of a girl who acts out her anger through a lion transformation. Like Wright and Bailey's Ella, Sarah undergoes a secret temporary rebellious metamorphosis. But in the end, she also returns to being a good and obedient girl.

170. This reading can be defended also in the light of Cole's entire picturebook production. One of Cole's specific trademarks is to treat complex and serious issues – such as death, divorce and gender stereotyping – comically and interrogatively, in a topsy-turvy fashion that takes sides with the child characters.

chologist Erik Erikson's ideas about child play, Galina Lindquist (2001: 21-22) suggests that

> [i]n ludic spaces the disempowered [...] can 'hallucinate social mastery', imagining, feeling, and trying on power and freedom. It is a commonplace of play theorizing that much of child play is compensation for the general feeling of disempowerment.

Brian Sutton-Smith (1997: 54) also links play to the literary imaginary when he suggests that "[p]lay as an irrational act of gaining pleasure through one's own illusions" is "a major central preoccupation of humankind" visible in "the creation of illusory cultural and theoretical worlds", as in science, music, dance, and literature.

Children's literature is a hybrid form of literature where concepts of childhood and adulthood, as well as child/adult power relations, are constantly being negotiated, and where enacted playful fantasies of metamorphosis are valuable not only for the effects they might have on the growth and maturation of child readers, but also for the pleasure they bring them. Sutton-Smith draws on research within childhood psychology to show that child play need not first and foremost be understood as a means of creating images of reality for therapeutic purposes. Instead, children's play fantasies are ludic spaces created to deal with feelings and emotions:

> The unreal worlds of play and festival are like that of the novel or the theatre. They are about how to react emotionally to the experience of living in the world and how to temporarily vivify that experience by transcending its usual limits. Life in the ludic lane can never be understood simply in terms of that which it interprets realistically, the so-called real world. It must be about mockery as well as mimicry. (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 158-159)

The ideology of play as progress is often used by adults to organise and conquer children's play behaviour for fear that, if not rationalised, it "will escape their control and become frivolous or become an irrational representation of child power, child community, phantasmagoria, and childish ecstasies" (Sutton-Smith, 1997: 205). Such a take on playfulness is not easily applied to Cole's picturebook, in which the ludic child exults in her escape from parental control through metamorphosis. Cole handles the motif of metamorphosis in a manner closer to a view of play associated with power seeking, inversion and resistance (cf. Spariosu, 1989). Thus, rather than idealising childhood as a blissful state of innocence, or child play as primarily exercises in growing up, Cole exposes both young and old readers to the hierarchical nature of child/adult relationships by mocking and reversing those very hierarchies.

In fantasy literature featuring the supernatural event of metamorphosis, subversiveness will arise from the way metamorphosis points beyond categorisation and causes a collapse of differences. Although most theorists of the modern literary fantastic tend to see the motif of metamorphosis as tragic, and the hesitation such a supernatural transformation causes in the readers as the true hall-mark of subversive fantasy, metamorphosis in children's literature is often able to combine the comic and playful with issues of liberation, and with the interrogation of child/adult power relationships. Babette Cole does so admirably in *Winni Allfours*. Another example is found in Patrice Kindl's teenage novel *Owl in Love* – dealt with in the earlier section on coming-of-age stories – where the teenage shapeshifting protagonists, Owl and Houle, also choose hybridity. The denouement of Kindl's novel is as subversive as that of Cole's picturebook, since it does not portray the young metamorphs having to choose between becoming *either* animal *or* human, but allows them to remain hybrid shapeshifters.

As I have shown, pre-adolescent metamorphs like Cole's horse-girl and Dahl's mouse-boy may in a rather uncomplicated ludic fashion resume animal shape and enjoy it. Teenage metamorphs like Burgess's bitch-girl and Dickinson's monkey-girl, on the other hand, are more often torn and forced to choose between *either* becoming animal *or* returning to human shape. In Kindl's *Owl in Love* the young metamorph's search for self also arises from a sense of fragmentation and alienation. But in marked contrast to Sandra-as-Lady's and Eva-as-Kelly's quests for self, Kindl does not set up a binary opposition between being *either* human *or* animal. Both Owl and Houle finally gain a sense of self and identity by choosing to reveal and accept their hybrid human/animal natures in the face of an uncomprehending adult world:

> Mr. Lindstrom was smiling faintly. "[…] I'm amazed I never noticed the similarities between you and Owl before."
>
> Houle bowed his head in stiff courtesy toward his father. "That's because we are of the same kind." His eyes blazed silver for a moment. He held himself proudly, with a new self-confidence I had not seen in him before.
>
> "I don't blame you, or my mother, for not knowing about me. It would be too much to expect." […]
>
> Houle smiled at me. "[…] Owl will teach me to enjoy it, rather than flee from it." (Kindl, [1993] 1994: 200-201)

Kindl subverts the rigid dualism between culture-bound categories such as wilderness/civilisation, nature/culture, and self/other, which pervade most stories of teenage-animal metamorphosis. This distinction becomes very clear from a comparison with "Simon's Tale" in Avi's *Tom, Babette, & Simon: Three Tales of Transformation* (1995), where a proud young man is punished through a humiliating transformation that turns him into a hybrid freak, half man and half bird. When, thoroughly humbled at the end of the story, he sacrifices his life for another, he is rewarded for his unselfish behaviour by being resurrected into a "complete bird [...] whole and free" (Avi, [1995] 1997: 100). The reward in this traditional cautionary tale of metamorphosis is clearly that of shedding hybridity and assuming a unified form.[171]

I have already argued that narrative endings have not only aesthetic, but ideological implications. Rachel Blau DuPlessis (1985: 2-3) notes that:

> literature as a human institution is, baldly, organized by many ideological scripts. Any literary convention – plots, narrative sequences, characters in bit parts – as an instrument that claims to depict experience, also interprets it. No convention is neutral, purely mimetic, or purely aesthetic. […]
>
> One of the great moments of ideological negotiation in any work occurs in the choice of a resolution for the various services it provides. Narrative outcome is one place where transindividual assumptions and values are most clearly visible, and where the word "convention" is found resonating between its literary and its social meanings. […] It is where subtexts and repressed discourses can throw up one last flare of meaning[.]

From an ideological point of view, the endings of *Winni Allfours* and *Owl in Love* serve two purposes. Firstly, their denouements serve a feminist purpose since they ascribe to the girl protagonists (Owl and Winni) voice, choice and agency. Secondly, whereas the majority of authors of stories for children and teenagers featuring metamorphosis use the motif as a means of affirming the existence of duality and boundaries, comfortingly celebrating an ontological reality in such distinctions, Cole's and Kindl's narratives celebrate in-betweenness and the blurring of distinctions.

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[171] Dickinson's *Eva* also features a teenage metamorph who comes to terms with her split human/animal identity by choosing between becoming either human or animal: "You couldn't just invade a chimp body and take it over with your human mind, [...] you'd never get to be whole that way" (Dickinson, [1988] 1991: 43). Eva's quest for wholeness means giving in to her animal nature whilst repressing her humanness (cf. McCallum, 1999: 84-89). Accompanied by a group of chimpanzees, she takes flight into one of the few remaining jungles left on the polluted planet. The concluding chapter reveals that Eva has found happiness and hope for the future within the chimp society, but that she is overcome by memories bringing back to her a "pang of ancient loss, a child with long black hair ice-skating in a yellow track suit. Me, whispered the ghost, the real Eva" (Dickinson, [1988] 1991: 230).

So is it a coincidence that two of the most liberating metamorphosis narratives are stories about girls written by female authors? Research on girls' reading habits suggests that it is not. Holly Virginia Blackford (2004: 120), who has conducted an empirical reader-response study of girl readers, found that girls were particularly drawn to animal fantasies, in which the physical strength and agency of the animal form was especially appealing. Moreover, girls were seen to use animal metamorphosis in their own stories and fantasies, as a way of enacting themes of regression, freedom and social change. Younger girls used the motif as an escape from the limits of being a young girl and so as to, in particular, "engage with powerful questions about what it means to be a girl and experience body and desire" (Blackford, 2004: 126). In some cases animal metamorphosis was used to express androgyny, gender fluidity or a utopian fantasy of becoming something Other that exists beyond the rigid constructions of gender (Blackford, 2004: 127). Such a utopian celebration of hybridity is characteristic also of Cole's and Kindl's stories, where gender transgression is envisioned as supernatural fantasy, not everyday realism. The denouements of their stories also serve an ideological purpose somewhat resembling the postcolonial agenda. In a metaphorical way they "bring difference into the foreground, and by doing so […] remind us just how unnatural the division of human beings into hierarchical groups is" (McGillis, 1997a: 12-13). Kindl's *Owl in Love* and Cole's *Winni Allfours* stand out as refreshing, tongue-in-cheek fantasies of animal metamorphosis that resist previous established plot patterns, as well as a rigid categorising into different species.

DRAWN BETWEEN SOCIALISATION AND SUBVERSION

So what might be the reasons for this trend of irreversible child metamorphoses – often resulting in open endings and narrative aperture – in late twentieth-century stories for children and teenagers? The trend has been booming from the 1980s onwards, and on into the new millennium. One way of approaching these texts is to see them as *fin de* *siècle* phenomena. In his *The Sense of an Ending* (1967), Frank Kermode elaborates upon the way in which humanity thrives on epochs. Kermode notes that the sense of an ending gives us an opportunity to position ourselves beyond that imagined end and look back upon and evaluate the epoch as a whole. It is a human urge to over-simplify the past by projecting our existential anxieties on to history in terms of neat patterns. Yet Kermode (1967: 97) concludes that "there is a real correlation between the ends of centuries and the peculiarity of our imagination, that it chooses always to be at the end of an era".

Some stories about irreversible metamorphoses, such as Norman's *A Dream of Seas*, Dahl's *The Witches*, Rubinstein's *Foxspell*, and Burgess's *Lady*, portray animalhood as a means of regression and refuge for the young metamorph. The authors' use of metamorphosis here appears to express a *fin de siècle* anxiety about the child growing up. This anxiety could be linked to an increasing concern among students of children's literature and childhood in the West at the end of the twentieth century with what Kimberley Reynolds (2001a) refers to as a "crisis of childhood". The works of Neil Postman (1982), Jacqueline Rose (1984), Marina Warner (1994a), Chris Jenks (1996), Pam Foley, Jeremy Roche and Stanley Tucker (2001), Kimberley Reynolds (2001a), Jack Zipes (2001) and Joseph L. Zornado (2001) are some of the many recent studies reflecting an anxiety for the changing conditions of childhood. These scholars pay particular attention to the victimisation and commercialisation of childhood, and to the deconstruction of the dichotomous images of the Dionysian and the Apollonian child.

Since most stories of irreversible metamorphoses deal with child-*animal* transformations, another possible extra-literary explanation for this trend is the changing attitudes towards human/animal relations. The new animal myth implicitly expresses strong criticism of contemporary civilised society and an anxiety for the future of humankind. In the light of the re-evaluation of human/animal relations, to prefer animal shape to human – as in Dickinson's *Eva* and Burgess's *Lady* – or to reverse the human/animal power hierarchy – as in Burgess and Brown's *The Birdman* – could be a "politically correct" way of rejecting the notion of human superiority over the natural world. Stories such as these question mankind's right to exploit nature for its own benefit. Many late twentieth-century child-animal transformation stories ending in reversible, as well as irreversible, metamorphosis clearly do carry this implicit ecological message. Yet even so, the stories investigated in this thesis all remain primarily anthropocentric.[172] Animal otherness is typically a fictional device which authors use to mirror and highlight the existential problems and crises of human beings. Thus, although the altered way of thinking about human/animal relations is not necessarily the primary *cause* of the emergence of these stories, the new animal myth is, to my mind, certainly *reflected* in stories of irreversible child-animal transformations.

This brings me to a third extra-literary factor possibly associated with the trend discussed here: the postmodern sense of a split self, which has recently come to influence also fiction for children. Robyn McCallum (1999: 255) expands upon the complex view we take of notions such as "self" and "identity" today, as subjective, constructed entities:

> [T]he idea of an essential, unique and individualized self has been systematically interrogated and deconstructed virtually since its inception, and poststructuralist deconstructions of the essential self merely explicate an implicit predisposition within the humanist tradition. [...] The gods have departed, and, in the absence of religious and philosophical "truths", we are ultimately left with fictions, theories and ideologies as to the nature, purpose and meaning of what we conventionally refer to as "selfhood."

Consequently, fiction influenced by postmodern ideas of a fragmented self would quite naturally be preoccupied with exploring selfhood in terms of transgression into otherness. Bruce Clarke (1995: 49) suggests a direct link between postmodern concerns and narratives of irreversible metamorphoses when he claims that:

> Postmodern speculations cease to imagine metamorphosis as an alternation between or chimerical combination of discrete organic forms – ass, swine, snake, dog, or what have you. In a world of absolute simulation, there is no return trip, nowhere now for a reverse metamorphosis to revert.

Clarke draws on the ideas of the French social theorist Jean Baudrillard (1988: 49) who, in his *The Ecstasy of Communication*, laments the disappearance of the metamorphic body of the fable in the following manner:

> Psychological body, repressed body, neurotic body, space of phantasy, mirror of otherness, mirror of identity, the locus of the subject prey to its own

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[172] In her study on realistic animal stories for children, the sociologist Kathleen R. Johnson (2000) also claims that the majority of these narratives express an anthropocentric view of human/animal relationships. Johnson's study is, however, marred in my view by the fact that it treats *all* children's literature as a form of popular fiction.

> image and desire: our body is no longer pagan and mythic but Christian and metaphorical – body of desire and not of the fable.

Baudrillard (1988: 44) concludes that this postmodern body of desire, which has been reduced to a division of surfaces, is “a fractal body which can no longer hope for resurrection”. Thus the roundtrip is no longer an obvious resolution for the postmodern metamorph. Dickinson’s *Eva* and Burgess’s *Lady*, for example, transgress and blur human/other dichotomies, with no redemptive return to humanity for the young metamorphs at the end. These narratives rest on the ontological assumption that the human self is indefinitely fragmented and malleable. They expose their readers to postmodern concerns by featuring literary characters whose sense of body, soul and self is subjected to radical slippage between Self and Other. In Cole’s *Winni Allfours* and Kindl’s *Owl in Love* such a radical state of hybridity is even condoned and celebrated.

The fourth and final issue relevant for this discussion is of a more literary kind. Authors writing stories ending in irreversible metamorphoses can hardly be unaware of the tradition within which they are writing. Their desire to break away from the circular/carnival mode and introduce new ways of retelling the motif need also be taken into account as a possible reason for this shift in plot pattern. Frank Kermode (1967) and Harold Bloom (1973) have both explored Western literary history from the point of view of a thesis/anti-thesis development, or an aesthetics of contrast. In modern Western society – or in print cultures as opposed to oral cultures according to Walter J. Ong (1982) – literary criticism generally regards originality and departures from the norm as expressions of literary merit. Kermode, for instance, acknowledges the importance of peripeteia, which satisfies the readers’ wish to have their expectations falsified, while Bloom has coined the term “anxiety of influence” to describe the notion of poetic originality and creativity being based on departures from the canon.

Kermode’s (1967: 24) own feelings about this phenomenon are representatively ambiguous: while he acknowledges the dangers of making novelty the only indication of artistic value, he simultaneously reveals his own anxiety over influence in sentences such as “we should expect only the most trivial work to conform to pre-existent types”. More constructive, in my opinion, is his observation that novelty in the arts always involves a dialogical communication with what has gone before. Without this correspondence to a previous tradition, artistic novelty is nothing more than noise, since "[t]he innocent eye sees nothing" and "the innocent ear hears nothing" (Kermode, 1967: 102). This mediating approach lends itself well to a better understanding of traditional children's literature where imitative features have had a very strong and long-lasting foothold (cf. Nikolajeva, 1988). Yet lately, signs of an increasing anxiety of influence have become visible also in fiction for children and teenagers (cf. Nikolajeva, 1996). Today, it is therefore no longer uncommon within children's literature to depart from traditional "happy endings" or the circular/carnival plot pattern, nor to present open endings and narrative aperture rather than closed endings and narrative closure (cf. Nikolajeva, 2000a). The metamorphosis stories discussed here must clearly also be seen as part of this larger development within fiction in general, as well as within fiction for children and teenagers in particular.

Stories of irreversible child-animal metamorphosis can thus be regarded as *fin de siècle* phenomena influenced by the new animal myth, by the postmodern sense of a split self, and by the authors' wish to prove their originality by rewriting the motif. Moreover, these stories provide us with a nuanced and even challenging perspective on fiction for children and teenagers, categories of literature which are still considered by many scholars to be primarily socialising in intent, and to respond to an adult urge to guide children towards growing up and becoming adult. John Stephens (1992: 42), for one, claims that closure in children's literature is of special interest owing to the socialising intent of children's literature, and that such "[i]ntentionality can only be fully attributed to a text from the perspective of the close". There is no denying that children's literature is historically closely linked with socialising and pedagogical concerns. But there may be a danger in becoming too reductive if one pushes this idea of children's literature too far.

The texts under study in this thesis illustrate, on the contrary, the great diversity of narratives that can be gathered under the multifaceted, and often pragmatically defined heading "children's literature". The glaringly obvious socialising intent of less subtle stories about child metamorphs such as Stephen Manes and Michael Bass's *The Boy Who Turned Into a TV Set* (1979) or Rosalind Barden's *TV Monster* (1988) stand in stark contrast to the narratives discussed here. Manes and Bass's, as well as Barden's, picturebooks are cautionary tales – albeit with a comical twist – about the dangers of watching too much television, and they remain on the whole aesthetically unsatisfying, and do not overtly invite alternative readings.[173] Profoundly ambiguous narratives, such as Burgess and Brown's *The Birdman* or Burgess's *Lady*, have on the other hand been shown to invite a variety of readings and interpretations. Drawing on reception theory, Maria Nikolajeva (1996: 82) argues that literary open-endedness and narrative aperture can be understood – on a positive note – as "telling gaps" that powerfully affect readers. Adopting this point of view, I also find that these stories, more overtly than didactic ones, invite young readers to participate actively in the meaning-making process of reading literary texts. Readers have to try to make sense of open endings by using whatever few and often ambiguous clues are offered in the text. As to the deeply ambivalent images of the young metamorphs portrayed, I would like to draw a parallel to Ellen Pifer's (2000: 234) study of the image of the child in contemporary twentieth-century writing for adults, where she notes that "if [...] the novels or stories produced by some of the best contemporary writers articulate the ambivalence and complexity of our current attitudes toward children, such stories may help to lay the groundwork from which more productive cultural images arise". Open-endedness and aperture can thus be regarded as literary devices that increase the complexity of texts, since they may stimulate readers to actively pose questions to texts and try to interpret them in various ways.

Introducing the notion of "a chronotope of childhood" Rosemary Ross Johnston (2002) elaborates with the idea that authors write also for the adult the child reader will become.[174] Therefore, Johnston concludes, narratives for children are permeated with a forward thrust or an ethics of hope. Whereas this is a characterisation that still suits a large number of children's books, it is not so easily applicable to stories featuring irreversible metamorphoses. On the contrary, many of these narratives communicate little hope for the young metamorphs' future as human adults. While the protagonists in *The Witches*, *The Birdman* and *Lady* do experience a separation and trial typical of the initiation plot pattern, the final stage of the three-fold initiation, the return, is omitted. Thus, the idea of reading for identification and the enhancement of growth and maturation, which Johnston's theory about the chronotope of childhood largely rests upon, are not applicable here. Instead, other ways of reading the texts and interpreting them are at stake. But what are they exactly?

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[173] Another metamorphosis story with a similarly overt coercive agenda is Mark Teague's *Frog Medicine* (1991) which tells the story of a boy who almost turns into a frog when he does not do his homework.

[174] Johnston (2002: 137) uses Bakhtin's concept of the literary chronotope to "rethink depictions of narrative time-spaces in ideological terms, as subjective, changeable, and interwoven with the observer's positionality".

By way of answer I have already argued that these narratives reflect a desire for originality by breaking with the strong intertextual tradition within children's literature as a whole and fantasy literature in particular. But there are thematic answers as well, which were suggested in the analyses of specific texts. Initially I set out with the assumption that *all* stories ending in irreversible metamorphoses would automatically employ the motif as a metaphorical means for the fictive child to regress or seek refuge from growing up. But as in my previous analyses of stories of circular/carnival metamorphoses, I found that stories of irreversible metamorphosis also cover a whole spectrum of possible uses. The carnivalesque distortion of power hierarchies was characterised both by a pull towards suggested subversion *within* the fantastic adventure and a pull towards confirming status quo at the end when the framing device of circular metamorphosis reinforces the temporary nature of the "time out". In this chapter, a closer study of irreversible metamorphoses revealed that the motif is used to express anything from the child protagonists' regression and uncanny horror to their refuge and liberation. The mood of these texts was also seen to vary from the joyfully playful to the spine-chillingly uncanny.

SUMMARY

The motif of metamorphosis in the stories addressed in this part of the thesis has been predominantly associated with fear, refuge and irreversibility. Fear and abuse prompt the young metamorphs in *Melusine* and *Pictures in the Dark* to assume animal shape. The fatherless boy protagonist in *A Dream of Seas* is driven by a split desire to regress and be immortalised through metamorphosis. And the female protagonist in “The Girl Who Loved the Sun” tries to escape gender entrapment by turning herself into a tree. All these metamorphs are victimised, alienated or entrapped in some form or another. They seek to find redemption, with various results, in metamorphosis. In the end of *Melusine* and *Pictures in the Dark*, the abused snake-girl and otter-boy are presented with brighter – albeit rather unconvincing – future possibilities. In *A Dream of Seas* and “The Girl Who Loved the Sun”, though, a haunting feeling of regression and failure permeates the final fates of the seal-boy and the tree-girl.

Stories where authors, for one reason or other, refuse to restore order and return the young metamorphs to human form again, produce a similar variety of readings. Some of these narratives, such as *The Witches,* read as reassuring regressive fantasies. Others, such as *The Birdman*, read as horror stories with a moral undertone. *Lady*, again, appears to be unsettling and disturbing in its open enactment of a futurelessness for the feral teenager. This narrative epitomises animal metamorphosis as pleasure-seeking regression, as well as a desperate attempt at trying to escape the entrapment of approaching adulthood. *Winni Allfours* and *Owl in Love*, on the other hand, celebrate hybridity and the collapsing of the human/animal binary and present metamorphosis as liberating and utopian. Again, it is not possible to infer any particular “message” connected to the narrative plot pattern of irreversible metamorphoses. Authors are instead shown to use the motif to expand upon and negotiate complex issues such as innocence and experience, power and powerlessness, security and danger, freedom and oppression, as well as resistance and resignation.

Departing from the carnival plot pattern of metamorphosis is a trend that culminates in the 1980s and 1990s. I have suggested that these stories are complex reflections of a *fin de siècle* anxiety about the state of childhood and the future of children. But the stories also reflect the new animal myth, a postmodern sense of split self, as well as an anxiety of influence on the part of authors who try to achieve originality by departing from the traditional carnival plot pattern. Among the narratives analysed in the second chapter, there is a huge difference between texts that are reassuring and texts that are disturbing. Whereas *The Witches* presumably lends itself to comforting readings, *Lady* exemplifies a metamorphosis story that challenges readers by offering subject positions that do not invite a straightforward identification with the protagonist.

Ideology and subversion in literature can, according to Allon White (1982), be discussed theoretically when a text deals with themes that transgress genre distinctions or social and cultural taboos, norms and structures. But Robyn McCallum (1999: 128) reminds us that "the ideological value and significance of concepts such as alienation and transgression can only be ascertained contextually". Therefore it would be a misconception to argue that all stories of metamorphosis – or all stories of irreversible metamorphosis – are transgressive and subversive by definition. As I have shown, *The Witches* in fact reads very well as a regressive fantasy with a conformist ending. On the other hand, McCallum (1999: 128) underlines that

> actions or experiences are not in themselves inherently transgressive, alienating or conformist. Rather, they are defined as such in relation to existing social codes and structures, these codes being subject to social and historical change.

The circumstances surrounding *The Witches* – in particular the rewritten endings of the film and theatre versions – and also the reception of *Lady*, testify that these books have challenged (at least adult) readers' expectations and transgressed certain cultural rules and taboos. Finally, my analyses of *Winni Allfours* and *Owl in Love* show that the motif of irreversible metamorphosis *can* be used also to more overtly subvert child/adult relationships and human/animal dichotomies.

This leaves me with the question of whether the texts studied in the second chapter tend to empower or disempower their young protagonists. Children's authors often use metamorphosis, and animal metamorphosis in particular, as a means to increase the protagonists' agency beyond the realm of sheltered childhood, or to escape abuse and entrapment. At the end of the story, young metamorphs have to return to human shape and childhood innocence or give up being human and becoming adult altogether. In the latter case, the stories appear to express an adult anxiety about contemporary society and mankind's future, which is projected onto the depiction of the fictive child who "fails" to grow up and enter adulthood. This is nothing new in itself. Such stories may even be seen as new versions of the classical tales of the eternal child. The resolution of *The Witches*, for example, appears curiously similar to the "happy death-bed" plots of puritan children's literature in the 1600s and 1700s. In those days fictive children had to die in order to remain innocent (cf. Plotz, 1988; Reynolds, 1994). Today, fictive metamorphs suffer a symbolic death through animal metamorphosis for other reasons, such as their desire to escape adult responsibility and suffering, or gender entrapment. Such implications can to my mind only be understood as a disempowering of the fictive child. To quote Peter Coveney (1967: 340):

> It is not remarkable perhaps when major authors see the child as a symbol of growth, life, and fertility, as a means for establishing human values in an increasingly secular age. It is, however, remarkable when a society sees the child as a symbol of dying, as life that is 'better dead'.

A Dream of Seas, *Eva*, *Foxspell*, and *Lady* are some examples of stories in which the depiction of feral teenage metamorphs appears to be permeated by the adult authors' uncertainty about how to depict a growing child in an empowering manner.

Most stories of irreversible metamorphosis analysed here are profoundly ambiguous in their depiction of futureless or lost young metamorphs. *Eva* and *Lady* feature ludic and transgressive teenage protagonists who certainly subvert the general conception of how "good girls" behave. Yet the denouements of the novels make it increasingly unclear whether Eva-as-Kelly and Sandra-as-Lady are empowered or disempowered by their animalhood. *A Dream of Seas* and *Foxspell* also feature disempowered, alienated and futureless teenage metamorphs. An acute loss of self is also central in *Caleb* and *The Birdman*, where the ambiguous endings increase the horrific impact of these uncanny stories. Again, *Winni Allfours* and *Owl in Love* stand alone in their utopian celebration of animal metamorphosis as a means of unconditionally empowering the young metamorph.

CONCLUSION

The aim of this dissertation has been to explore authors' uses of the motif of child-other metamorphosis in late twentieth-century English-language texts written for children and teenagers. The broad scope of the study was prompted by the lack of previous research on this motif in children's literature. As the analyses suggest, the motif is a very flexible trope and it is impossible to provide a schematic overview of its uses that is true to the diversity of the actual texts. Instead, I have chosen to single out certain thematic aspects that are especially pertinent to fiction for children and teenagers. The thesis is therefore a motif study with a special focus on the representations of child metamorphs. The categories, which form the backbone of the three separate parts of the study, are the images of

- wild and uncivilised child metamorphs
- innocent, playful, and rebellious child metamorphs
- victimised and lost child metamorphs

Wild and uncivilised child metamorphs

Representations of *wild and uncivilised metamorphs* (including unpleasurable ones) have traditionally been used for didactic purposes and as a forceful means to communicate a socialising message to implied child readers. The driving force behind such coercive narratives would presumably be the adult desire to educate, socialise and control the represented images of children. Many of the late twentieth-century narratives studied here (by e.g. Lewis, Fletcher, Horseman, Langton: *The Swing in the Summerhouse*, Norton: *Fur Magic*, Paisley, Lawler and Parker, Miles, Kaff and Cushman, Manes and Bass, Ramstad and Benson, Jones: *The Magicians of Caprona*, Brittain: *Devil's Donkey*, Browne: *Piggybook*, Barden, Wilde and Torrence, Browne: *The Tunnel*, Teague, Wright and Bailey, DeCesare, Anderson, Holch) still fit this description, since they portray young metamorphs who are all successfully socialised with the aid of temporary transformations into beasts or objects. These stories are relevant for the discussion of the social-constructionist view of childhood, and of the adult colonisation of the child as the Other, since the subject/object split of human/animal relations and transformations into the inanimate can mirror the implicit power imbalance of a child/adult dichotomy. But my analyses of child-animal metamorphoses in coming-of-age stories and narratives of deeply unpleasurable child metamorphoses into beasts and inanimate objects (such as rock, or a doll) also show that authors' uses of animal imagery and objectification need not always result in moralising allegories in which young protagonists are forcefully socialised into model children and teenagers. Instead, I have tried to show that authors use the motif for a variety of other purposes as well: to celebrate spirituality triumphing over reason (Almond); to communicate gender stereotyping, entrapment and transcendence (Rayner, Kindl, Rubinstein: *Foxspell*); to picture the simultaneously frightening and appealing bodily and sexual changes that adolescents undergo during puberty (Rayner, Kindl, Holch); to deconstruct the image of the wild and monstrous/animal child (McKee, Blake); to stage dramas of crisis, rebirth and regression (Steig); to preserve childhood innocence through abuse and entrapment (Kennedy); and to deconstruct innocence through a child's perverse fantasies (McEwan).

Innocent, playful, and rebellious child metamorphs

Images of *innocent and rebellious metamorphs* appear in stories in which the young protagonists' transformations are depicted as joyful experiences associated with play, imagination, resistance and liberation. Within the context of children's literature, the pleasurable aspects of the motif appear to be especially relevant. But the lack of scholarly theorising on joyful forms of fantastic metamorphoses reflects a prefer-ence on the part of fantasy critics for dark and sinister stories which tends to exclude children's literature from their studies.

Firstly, I argue that, just as unpleasurable metamorphoses do not necessarily always disempower child metamorphs, so pleasurable metamorphoses need not always empower young protagonists. To become less childlike by acquiring greater physical strength through metamorphosis, and thereby to gain power *over* others (Applegate), is not regarded as empowering, whereas to acquire agency and self-awareness through the metamorphic experience (Gavin) is.

Secondly, pleasurable metamorphoses appear to be predominantly connected to an adult, romantic image of the pre-adolescent child as supposedly unthreatened by, and therefore open to, the metamorphic experience. Whereas wild/uncivilised and victimised/lost child metamorphs appear as frequently in picturebooks as in regular fiction for children and teenagers, ludic and joyful teenage metamorphs appear much more rarely in teenage novels. And when they do, they tend to be disturbing (Dickinson, Kindl, Burgess: *Lady*). In many of the texts studied here, there is a strong link between representations of joyful metamorphosis and the state of childhood/pre-adolescent innocence (Linklater, Ahlberg, McEwan). Especially in picturebooks, a crucial difference can be observed between ludic child metamorphs who enjoy and embrace their change (Sendak, Ross and Parnall, Cole, Wright and Bailey, Drescher: *The Boy Who Ate Around*, Drawson) and adult metamorphs who respond to metamorphosis with horror (Yorinks and Egielski: *Hey, Al*, Van Allsburg). Both types of stories reflect and uphold a binary representation of children as innocent and/or flexible and of adults as experienced and/or static. The juxtaposition of pre-adolescent children with adults who approach metamorphosis with a Todorovian hesitation and fear of the intervention of the supernatural forms an essentialising child/adult dichotomy by which the difference between childish flexibility and static adults is strongly exaggerated.

Thirdly, I use play theory and the concept of ludic space to analyse stories in which metamorphosis is framed as child play (Oram and Ross, Drawson) or as a playful fantasy (Sendak, Drescher: *The Boy Who Ate Around*). Ludic child metamorphs are typically pre-adolescents characterised by childhood innocence, but their playful metamorphoses also help them to assert their own will and rebel against parental authority. The play frame provides a setting in which child metamorphs are empowered to explore problematic situations in their own way, and to increase their sense of agency and self-awareness (Pittman and Rand, Karim and Truesdell, Recorvits and Swiatkowska). My analyses have also suggested that authors can employ ludic space as a safe frame for telling stories that reverse and interrogate child/adult power structures.

Fourthly, I argue that child-other metamorphoses resulting in temporary reversals of child/adult power relations can be understood as a carnivalistic device. Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque – as a means to both subvert and affirm power structures – helps to pinpoint a subversive potential in metamorphosis stories that end in the traditional way with the child metamorphs returning to their human selves. Arguing that the middles of stories are just as important as their endings, my analyses show that some authors use the motif of animal transformation to displace child metamorphs and to deconstruct notions of childhood idyll (Nesbit, McEwan). In the spirit of carnival "time out", other authors use the motif to allow young metamorphs insights into adult secrets that lie outside the realm of innocent childhood (White, Gallico, Rayner, Burgess: *Tiger, Tiger*). Again, the pattern of carnival circularity functions as a safe frame for telling stories with disturbing subtexts.

Victimised and lost child metamorphs

In the final part of the thesis, representations of *victimised, abused and futureless metamorphs* have been shown to blur even more the notions of pleasure/unpleasure and empowerment/disempowerment, since metamorphosis here is used as a paradoxical metaphor for entrapment and liberation. The young, victimised metamorphs studied here undergo metamorphosis out of sheer desperation. Some of them seek refuge from sexual abuse (Banks) and bullying (Cross, Browne: *Hunted*), others from grief (Norman) and gender entrapment (Jones: "The Girl Who Loved the Sun"). But a much needed refuge does not necessarily result in a successful liberation, and these metamorphs' attempted escapes from their sufferings can therefore have both positive (liberating) and negative potential, the negativity taking the form of metaphorical regression, or of a tragic manifestation of the futurelessness of the young protagonist under duress. Generally speaking, the endings to these stories are of two kinds. They are either rather contrived, in an effort to communicate utopian hopefulness (Banks, Cross), or resigned and/or sinister, as when representing the metamorph's distress resulting in a decision to give up being human (Rubinstein: *Foxspell*, Burgess: *Lady*) sometimes thinly disguised as a death-wish (Norman), or when enforcing the rigidity and tragedy of gender entrapment (Jones: "The Girl Who Loved the Sun").

Another group of stories which feature futureless young metamorphs are the narratives in which the traditional circular/carnival ending is exchanged for a resolution where the young metamorphs *remain* transformed. Just as authors use the carnival pattern to create stories that both subvert and affirm child/adult power relations, so they also employ irreversible metamorphoses for a variety of conflicting uses: to stage reassuring fantasies of an eternal childhood (Dahl) or a return to the protagonist's "true" animal nature (Drescher: *The Strange Appearance of Howard Cranebill Jr.*, Stine), to deconstruct stereotypical images of the child (McKee), to immortalise grief or stage disturbing symbolic deaths of young metamorphs who wish to regress from growing up (Norman, Rubinstein: *Foxspell*, Burgess: *Lady*), to expose and problematise the turmoil of adolescence through feral teenage metamorphs (Norman, Dickinson, Kindl, Rubinstein: *Foxspell*, Burgess: *Lady*), to evoke the uncanny and the horrific (Crew and Woolman, Burgess and Brown), to enforce and interrogate gender stereotyping (Jones: "The Girl Who Loved the Sun", Rubinstein: *Foxspell*), and to tell utopian fantasies that subvert child/adult relations and rigid constructions of gender (Cole, Kindl).

Finally, I should stress that I have not seen the three selected representations of child metamorphs as rigidly opposed to each other. Nor have I expected that the fictional texts under study would fit neatly into one category only. On the contrary, I have wanted to show that the question of whether unpleasurable and pleasurable child-other metamorphoses empower or disempower the fictive child is often open to debate.

Metamorphic (un)pleasure and power

But however much dichotomies may tend to over-simplify complex matters, some form of categorisation is unavoidable when trying to map the most obvious uses of the metamorphosis motif. One main dichotomy that arises from the narratives analysed is the portrayal of child-other metamorphoses as either unpleasurable or pleasurable. Within twentieth-century fiction for children, both options are strongly represented. Identifying metamorphosis as a source of pleasure or unpleasure for the child metamorph may at first seem like a fairly straightforward and mechanical task. However, when linked to the question whether authors use metamorphosis to disempower or empower the fictive child, the issue becomes increasingly complex.

Ultimately, the issue of whether a metamorphosis is to be regarded as empowering or disempowering for child protagonists raises ideological concerns about child/adult power relations. In my view, disempowered child metamorphs appear in narratives in which metamorphosis is predominantly a heavy-handed tool for socialisation and adult control over the child. Disempowering metamorphoses typically deprive child metamorphs of their human voices, restrict their ability to move and act, and render them vulnerable and powerless. Empowered child metamorphs, on the contrary, appear in narratives where authors use metamorphosis to give children voice and increased agency, or for the purpose of explicitly interrogating essentialist notions of cultural dichotomies such as childhood and adulthood, masculinity and femininity, wilderness (animal/nature) and civilisation (human/culture).

Obviously, the cause of the physical transformation influences the way in which the metamorphosis is interpreted. Generally speaking, metamorphosis is more likely to be unpleasurable and disempowering when imposed from outside (e.g. Kennedy), and more likely to be pleasurable and empowering if it is self-willed and under the metamorph's own control (e.g. Cole). Yet the narratives analysed in this thesis clearly demonstrate that there is no simple correlation between outside agents of metamorphosis, unpleasure and disempowerment; or, for that matter, between self-instigated metamorphosis, pleasure and empowerment. Dahl's mouse-boy turns his involuntary metamorphosis into a personal triumph, and Rubinstein's and Burgess's reluctant fox-boy and bitch-girl both end up choosing animal life over human. Though self-instigated and pleasurable metamorphoses are more likely to empower child metamorphs (e.g. Cole, Kindl, Drescher), this, too, is not always the case. Rayner's stag-boy and Jones's tree-girl, for example, are teenage metamorphs who yearn for alternative ways of being male and female, but end up equally disappointed in their respective metamorphoses.

Towards ambiguity and complexity

The key question raised in this study is whether the narratives studied can be understood as primarily socialising (affirming the child/adult power hierarchy), subversive (challenging child/adult power relations), or perhaps both? In response to that query, the broad study of child-other metamorphoses conducted here reveals that in contemporary stories of this kind metamorphosis is less obviously socialising/didactic and increasingly ambivalent and postmodernist. There is a remarkable difference between the traditional didactic stories in which the child protagonist is punished, chastened or forced into submission through metamorphic change, and the transgressive nature of later narratives (cf. Lassén-Seger, 2003). In these, the child metamorph is allowed to indulge more openly in nocturnal pleasures, dangers, and violence, often alluding to adult mysteries such as love, sex and death. Authors' uses of the metamorphosis motif have in fact become increasingly ambiguous and complex over time. Stories of metamorphosis, just like children's literature at large, seem to have grown increasingly explicit in their hybridity (cf. Rudd, 2004a: 38). That is, the adventures out of self into otherness have become less didactic and more open to symbolic and subversive readings, which target the child as a maturing individual interacting with adults in power and societal concerns.

The bodies of late twentieth-century child metamorphs are metaphorical (or rather metonymical) expressions of complex human issues such as identity, subjectivity, agency, gender, and sociality. As a result, it has become increasingly difficult to decide whether the motif is to be considered empowering or disempowering for the particular fictional child in question. For example, the radical open endings of novels where young metamorphs may or may not choose to give up life as human beings altogether (Rubinstein: *Foxspell*, Burgess: *Lady*) both deconstruct and reinforce dystopian representations of the futureless child. In addressing complex topics such as the construction of gender, ethical issues, and child/adult power relations, these stories also ultimately victimise their young protagonists, giving us cause to wonder just how empowering the event of metamorphosis really is. What kind of a future will the young metamorphs have if adulthood is not envisaged as an even remotely desirable alternative?

Whereas Marina Warner (1998) emphasises the simultaneously comic and tragic potential of literary metamorphosis, Irving Massey (1976) chooses "the gaping pig", the emblem of carnival, as an image of the paradoxical nature of metamorphosis. Does the facial expression of "the gaping pig" signify genuine laughter or a scream of desperation, he wonders. In adult twentieth-century fiction, according to Massey, human-other metamorphosis is tragic. Twentieth-century children's fiction, on the contrary, uses metamorphosis in what I have shown to be a very wide variety of ways. Firstly, such narratives express a tension between the urge to comfort and discomfort their young readers. Some narratives read very well for comfort and regression (e.g. Steig, Dahl), whereas other texts challenge young readers by providing them with subject positions that do not openly invite reading strategies of identification (e.g. McKee, Kennedy, Jones: "The Girl Who Loved the Sun", Kindl, Rubinstein: *Foxspell*, Crew and Woolman, Burgess and Brown, Burgess: *Lady*). Secondly, most of the narratives studied here employ metamorphosis in order to explore crises and concerns in the lives of young people, and often without the slightest intention of furthering the growth and maturation of the young protagonists. In other words, surprisingly many of the stories are *not* primarily lessons in growing up. It has been especially interesting to note that examples of the varied and artistically highly commendable uses of literary metamorphosis can be found in all of the literary categories studied here: in picturebooks, as well as in fiction for children and teenagers.

Classical and contemporary metamorphs

Metamorphosis is a central ingredient in both myth and fairy tales (Bakhtin, 1981; Thomas, 1989). But what influence has the metamorphosis tradition in myth and fairy tales had on the modern texts scrutinised in this thesis? Are the hopes and desires, the fears and antipathies, embodied in ancient fairy tales still part of today's fantastic narratives? Previous students of metamorphosis in literature written for an adult audience maintain that there are differences between ancient and modern narratives of metamorphosis (see e.g. Massey, 1976; Jackson, 1981;

Clarke, 1995; Mikkonen, 1997; Warner, 1998, 2002). Do these differences apply to the children's literature texts that I have studied?

Early myth and fairy tales are generally considered to express a mythical world-view in which a protean notion of human identity and subjectivity allows for accounts of metamorphosis that are positive and poetic. This is not to say, however, that the transformations are always desirable or pleasurable for the characters involved. In fact, the action-centred plot patterns of myth and fairy tale refrain from commenting upon the inner experience of the metamorph in any depth, and consequently provide readers with few clues as to whether the change of shape should be interpreted as empowering or disempowering. Contemporary narratives of metamorphosis for adults, on the other hand, typically pose a threat to the adult protagonist's sense of self and are therefore experienced by adult metamorphs as unpleasant and unsettling. As for the children's narratives I have explored, both variants can be found. The pre-adolescent child's world of fantasy and play often provides a setting with mythical dimensions in which metamorphosis can be non-threatening (e.g. Oram and Ross, Drawson) or a liberating adventure into otherness (e.g. Cole, Wright and Bailey, Drescher: *The Boy Who Ate Around*). But many young (especially teenage) metamorphs also encounter metamorphosis with deeply felt ambivalence; their minds have been separated from their bodies and they have to come to terms with their new "othered" existence as metamorphs (e.g. Steig, Dickinson, Burgess: *Lady*).

Scholars have also noted that metamorphoses – as well as other fantastic incidents – in modern and postmodernist narratives for adults have increasingly lost any direct explanation or clear purpose. Whereas a degrading metamorphosis in classical texts such as Greek myths, Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Apuleius's *The Golden Ass*, or fairy tales are typically imposed by gods or by magic for some moral reason, metamorphosis in Franz Kafka's short story "The Metamorphosis" lacks any such underpinnings. Modern metamorphs like Kafka's Gregor Samsa are figures of exile and negation, tragicomically fleeing from hierarchical powers and uncanny confinements, and with no redemptive closure in store (Clarke, 1995: 44-45). This tends to confirm that the symbolical meanings of metamorphosis have altered over time. Of old, classical narratives of metamorphosis were more closely linked to a teleological function (cf. Jackson, 1981: 81). Lucius's asinine transformation, for instance, suggests a connection between what he is and what he becomes. As a result of poetic justice, Lucius is turned into a physical representation of his inner nature. A similar metonymical connection between man and ass is frequently explored in stories for children, from Carlo Collodi's *Pinocchio* onwards. But whereas classical myths and fairy tales tend to report events set in the remote past or in "once upon a time", Kafka's short story has a setting that is closer to the mimetic. Gregor's metamorphosis takes place abruptly and inexplicably, and his transformation into an insect is depicted as a personal nightmare rather than a cosmic miracle. Some of the metamorphoses I have investigated in children's literature also show signs of a more postmodernist notion of the fantastic. A majority of the transformations studied here are the result of magic, but the metamorphic event is not necessarily set within a universe where magic is commonplace. Some of the young protagonists – in teenage literature especially – experience Todorovian hesitation when confronted with supernatural metamorphoses (e.g. Rayner, Rubinstein: *Foxspell*, Burgess: *Lady*), and the key issue under negotiation here is whether the young metamorphs will accept or reject their fantastic new personas. Admittedly, there are few texts that introduce metamorphosis without providing some explanation or purpose for it. In that sense, McKee's *Not Now, Bernard* is perhaps the narrative most radically open to interpretation within the entire range of texts studied. Like Kafka's short story, McKee's picturebook demands that its readers/beholders actively try to make sense of the otherwise inexplicable events portrayed.

Pre-Romantic metamorphosis stories tend to depict the psyche, or the soul, as completely separated from the body, whereas postmodernist texts often play upon a connection between the two. Consequently, animal metamorphosis in fairy tales is almost always a temporary condition and the metamorph usually retains the human attributes of speech, thought and feeling (Thomas, 1989: 149). Classical metamorphs, such as Apuleius's Lucius, are also typically restored to their original shapes in the end, having gained as a result of their ordeals deeper insight into their own selves. But as with scientific insights into the natural metamorphoses of insects, for instance, the characterisation of literary metamorphs gradually changed to become more fragmented and open to differences, inconsistencies and plurality within the self (Warner, 2002: 75). Corresponding to this change in the depiction of the metamorph, towards the end of the twentieth century an increasing number of stories for children and teenagers appear in which the young metamorph's human psyche is blurred with animal instincts. In formula fiction (Applegate) such intrusions of animal instincts are merely used as titillating threats. But in more complex narratives (e.g. Rayner, Kindl, Rubinstein: *Foxspell*, Cross, Burgess: *Lady*), the young protagonists are more deeply affected by the psyche of the animal form they acquire. Authors need to preserve something of the metamorph's human consciousness if they are to be able to give any inner representation of what it feels to become an Other at all. Stories which end by suggesting the metamorph's loss of human consciousness (e.g. Norman, Yorinks and Egielski: *Louis the Fish*, Rubinstein: *Foxspell*) open up to disturbing suggestions of suicide, hallucination or psychosis.

Finally, I would like to stress that these differences between metamorphosis in classical narratives and contemporary fantasy fiction are not hard and fast, but are open to debate. Our attitudes towards metamorphosis keep changing and are far more differentiated than my summary can suggest. For example, Rosemary Jackson's (1981) thesis that literary metamorphosis is growing increasingly tragic and threatening is, in part, contested by Marina Warner's (1994a) ideas that the new myth of animal metamorphosis implies pleasure and redemption rather than shame and degeneration. Metamorphosis into a *non-linguistic* state of being used to be a punishment – think only of Circe's transformation of Odysseus's men into swine, or the transformation of Lot's wife into a pillar of salt – but has now become an appealing alternative for many young metamorphs (e.g. Norman, McEwan, Rubinstein: *Foxspell*, Cross, Burgess: *Lady*). It is therefore essential to remember that although the authors' uses of literary metamorphosis, and the readers' ways of interpreting it, may vary, the motif itself always possesses the potential to express tragic or comic, disempowering or empowering circumstances.

Metamorphosis continued

Despite the huge amount of scholarly interest in fantasy literature for children, the motif of metamorphosis has been surprisingly neglected. To fill this void, I chose to conduct this motif study with a focus on representations of the child metamorph. This approach has been by no means exhaustive, and future research could take several different directions.

Firstly, further studies of the metamorphosis motif in children's literature could help modify and develop our understanding of the mode of the literary fantastic. In particular, a greater emphasis on positive and joyful forms of fantasy is needed to undermine preconceived ideas of them as lesser forms of fantasy.

Secondly, this study focuses mainly on representations of *child* metamorphs. A gender perspective is occasionally applied in order to emphasise that no constructs of the child are gender neutral. But there is more that could be done in terms of studying metamorphosis from the perspective of gender and power. For instance, it would be interesting to know whether female metamorphs with the emancipatory potential of Kindl's and Cole's girl protagonists appear more frequently in the kinds of narratives that were *excluded* from this study, such as high fantasy and stories of shapeshifting werewolves and vampires.

Thirdly, there is obviously more work to be done on the motif of metamorphosis in the other kinds of narratives that were excluded from this study: stories of transformations in size and age, inverted metamorphoses from animal to human form, retellings of myths and fairy tales, and horror fiction. As a Scandinavian scholar, I would also like to explore whether the motif has had the same impact in Nordic children's literature as in English-language children's fiction.

Finally, I am especially intrigued by the radical *fin de siècle* change in the pattern of stories of child-animal metamorphosis. The narratives of irreversible metamorphoses suggest that authors no longer regard the child as an impeccable icon of innocence and hope for the future. With this scenario in mind, future stories of child metamorphs could be very interesting. Will there be a backlash to the traditional uses of metamorphosis for coercive purposes? Or will stories of hybrid child metamorphs continue to explore and disturb the slippery borders between nature/culture, child/adult, pleasure/unpleasure, and empowerment/disempowerment?

Epilogue

The remarkable shifts in the uses of the motif of metamorphosis reflect changing attitudes about human/animal relationships, and about the relationship between the constructions of childhood and adulthood, often depicted as a difference in power. The stories explored here repeatedly expose the power imbalance between children and adults through metamorphosis. When child metamorphs partake in adventures that eventually bring them back to their human shapes again, power structures are most often only temporarily reversed. Yet owing to the increased agency and the power reversals that child metamorphs experience within the frames of carnivalesque adventures, many stories communicate a profound sense of joy, pleasure, and playfulness. In contrast, the emergence of stories of irreversible metamorphosis reveals a deep anxiety about the loss of childhood and the ageing of young protagonists. Few narratives could better serve as representatives of the disempowered position of children and teenagers.

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that authors articulate not just some single use of the metamorphosis motif, nor just some single essentialist notion of child metamorphs. Instead, the range of stories investigated shows that metamorphosis may bring fictive children both unpleasure and pleasure, empowerment and disempowerment, and it can both subvert and affirm child/adult power relationships. That late twentieth-century children's literature expresses such ambiguous views of children and childhood is in my view more cause for gratitude than criticism. It demonstrates that authors of fiction for children and teenagers are doing what they should be doing. They are continuing to facilitate the negotiation of child/adult relations.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 1: PRIMARY TEXTS

List of all primary texts consulted featuring young metamorphs.

Ahlberg, Allan [1986] (1987) *Woof!* London: Puffin Books.
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Nesbit, Edith [1912] (1988) "The Cat-hood of Maurice", in *The Magic World*. London: Puffin Books, 7-24.
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Stine, R.L. (1994) *My Hairiest Adventure* [Goosebumps 26]. New York: Scholastic.
Teague, Mark (1991) *Frog Medicine*. New York: Scholastic.
Thompson, Kate [1997] (1998) *Switchers* [Switchers 1]. London: Red Fox.
Thompson, Kate [1998] (1999) *Midnight's Choice* [Switchers 2]. London: Red Fox.
Thompson, Kate [1999] (2000) *Wild Blood* [Switchers 3]. London: Red Fox.
White, T.H. [1938] (1971) *The Sword in the Stone*. London: Lions.

Wilde, Susie and Susan Torrence (1988) *Extraordinary Chester*. Santa Barbara, CA: Red Hen Press.

Wright, Kit and Peter Bailey [1993] (1994) *Tigerella*. London: Scholastic.

APPENDIX 2:
PRIMARY TEXTS IN CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER

Chronological list of all primary texts including the nationality of the authors.

-1950

A.L.O.E. [Tucker, Charlotte Maria] (1861) *My Neighbour's Shoes*. (ENG)
Molesworth, Mrs. [Mary Louisa] (1904) *The Ruby Ring*. (ENG)
Nesbit, Edith (1912) "The Cat-hood of Maurice". (ENG)
Masefield, John (1935) *The Box of Delights*. (ENG)
Haldane, J.B.S. (1937) *My Friend Mr Leakey*. (ENG)
White, T.H. (1938) *The Sword in the Stone*. (ENG)
Linklater, Eric (1944) *The Wind on the Moon*. (ENG)

1950s

Gallico, Paul (1950) *Jennie*. (ENG)
Lewis, C.S. (1952) *The Voyage of the Dawn Treader*. (ENG)

1960s

Fletcher, David (1961) *The Children Who Changed*. (ENG)
Langton, Jane (1962) *The Diamond in the Window*. (US)
Sendak, Maurice (1963) *Where the Wild Things Are*. (US)
Horseman, Elaine (1964) *Hubble's Bubble*. (ENG)
Norton, Andre (1965) *Steel Magic*. (US)
Arthur, Ruth M. (1966) *A Candle in Her Room*. (ENG)
Langton, Jane (1967) *The Swing in the Summerhouse*. (US)
Norton, Andre (1968) *Fur Magic*. (US)
Steig, William (1969) *Sylvester and the Magic Pebble*. (US)

1970s

Rayner, William (1972) *Stag Boy*. (ENG)
Coatsworth, Elizabeth (1973) *Pure Magic*. (US)
Paisley, Thomas (1976) *The Dog Days of Arthur Cane*. (US)
Lawler, Ann and Nancy Winslow Parker (1977) *The Substitute*. (US)
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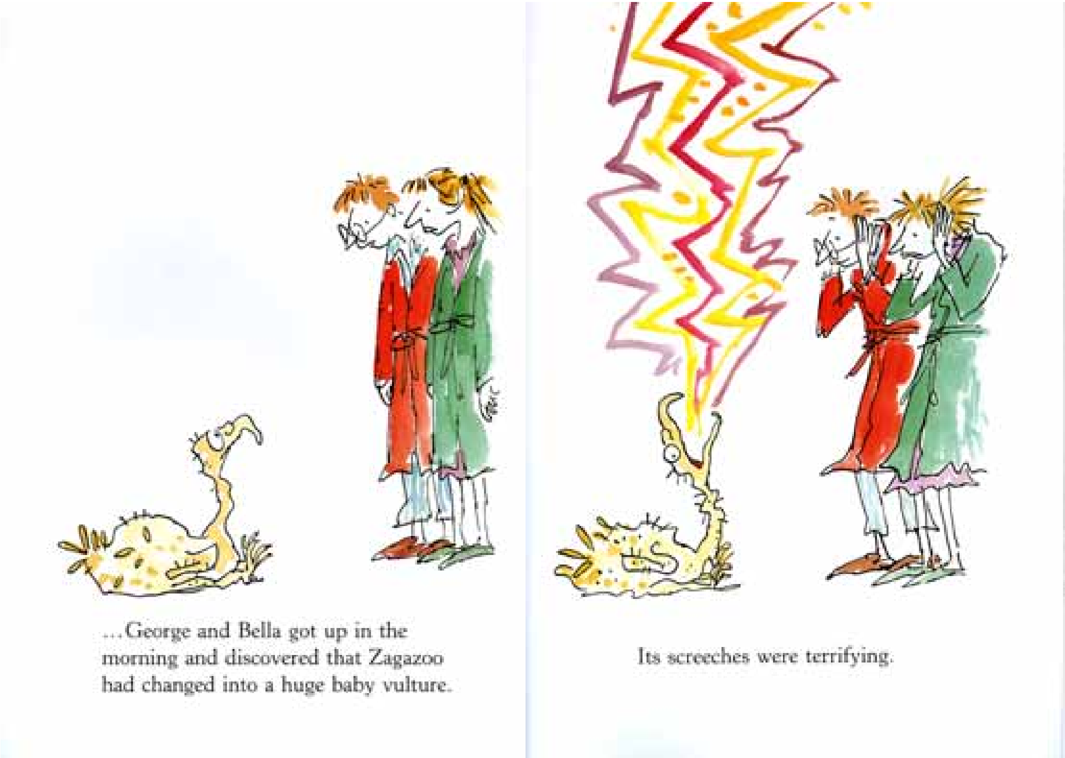
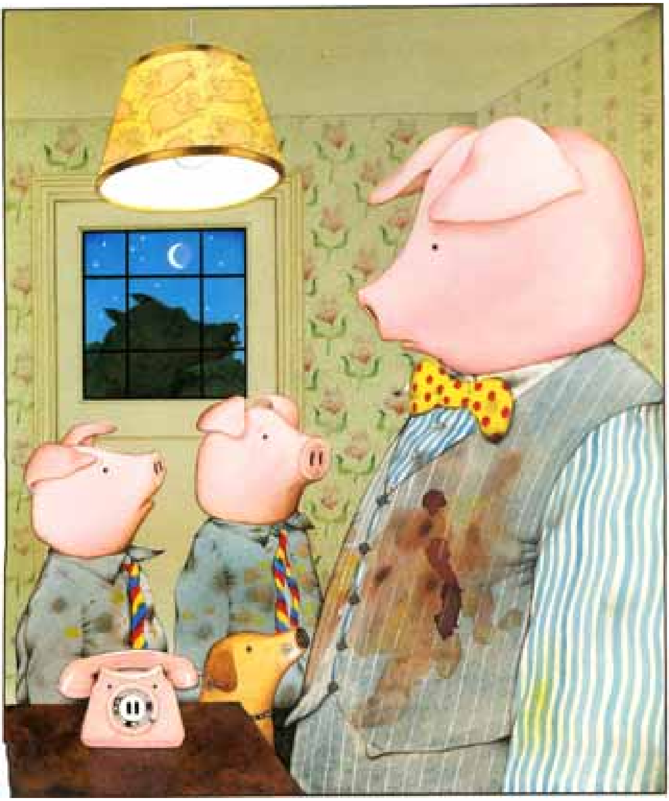


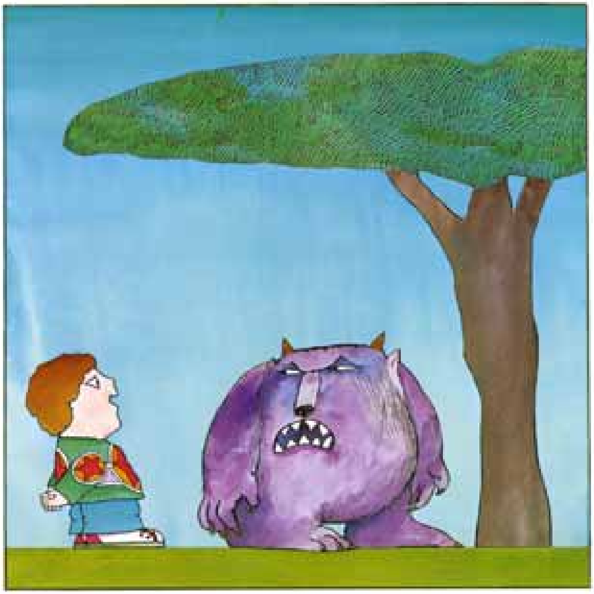
…George and Bella got up in the morning and discovered that Zagazoo had changed into a huge baby vulture.

Its screeches were terrifying.

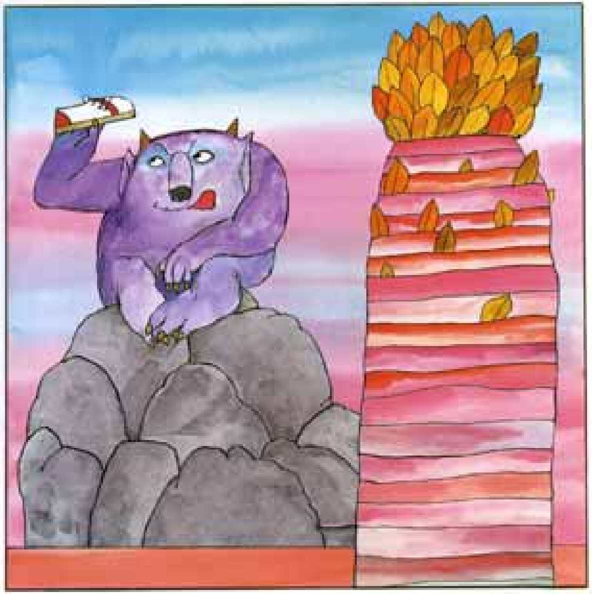
Picture 1: Blake, Quentin [1998] (2000) *Zagazoo.* London: Red Fox, [8-9].



Picture 2: Browne, Anthony [1986] (1996) *Piggybook.*
London: Walker Books, [19].

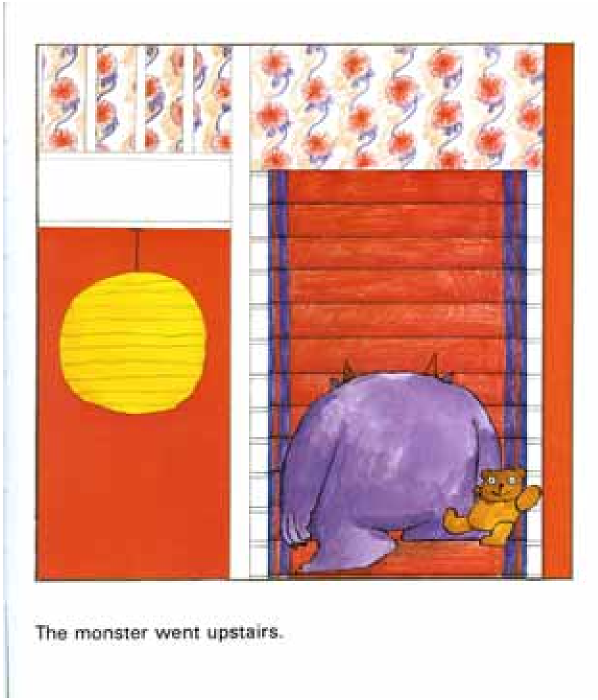


"Hello, monster," he said to the monster.

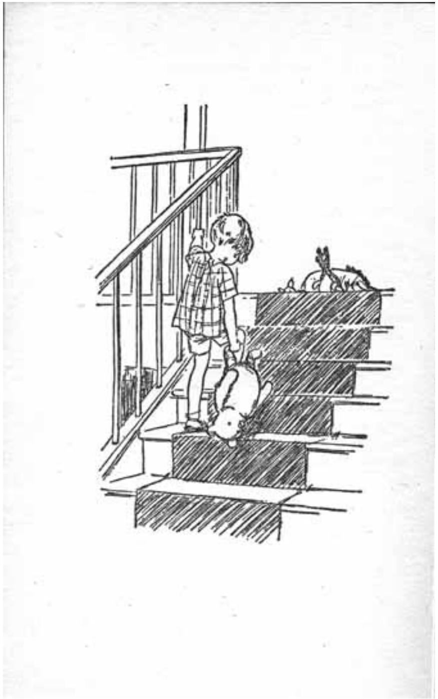


The monster ate Bernard up, every bit.

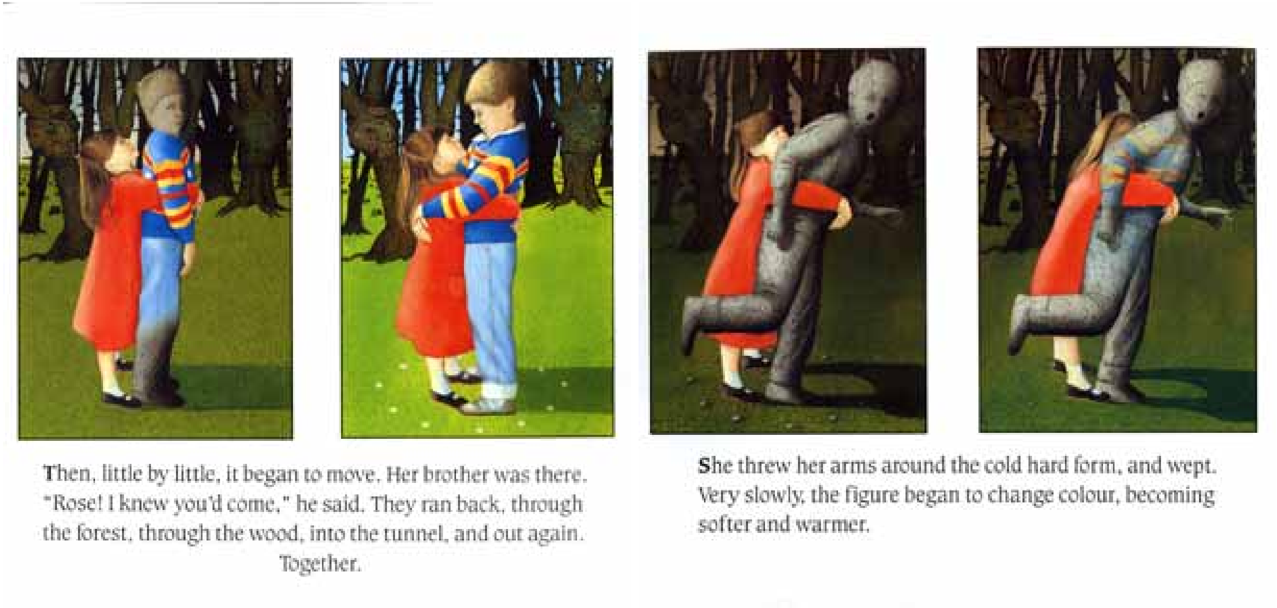
Picture 3 and 4: McKee, David [1980] (1990) *Not Now, Bernard.* London: Red Fox, [8-9].


The monster went upstairs.

Picture 5: McKee, David [1980] (1990)
Not Now, Bernard. London: Red Fox, [22].



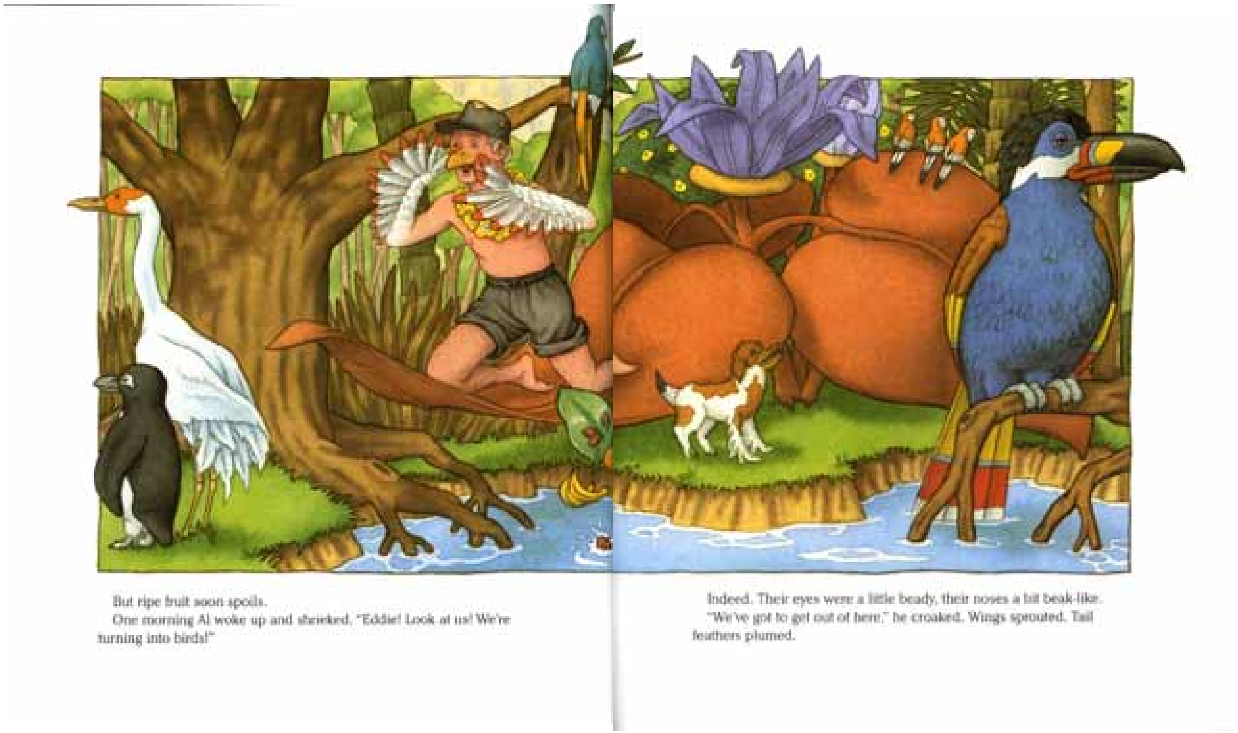
Picture 6: Milne, A.A. [1926] (1978):
Winnie-the-Pooh.
With decorations by E.H. Shepard.
London: A Magnet Book, [146].



Then, little by little, it began to move. Her brother was there. "Rose! I knew you'd come," he said. They ran back, through the forest, through the wood, into the tunnel, and out again.
Together.

She threw her arms around the cold hard form, and wept. Very slowly, the figure began to change colour, becoming softer and warmer.

Picture 7: Browne, Anthony [1989] (1997) *The Tunnel.* London: Walker Books, [21-22].



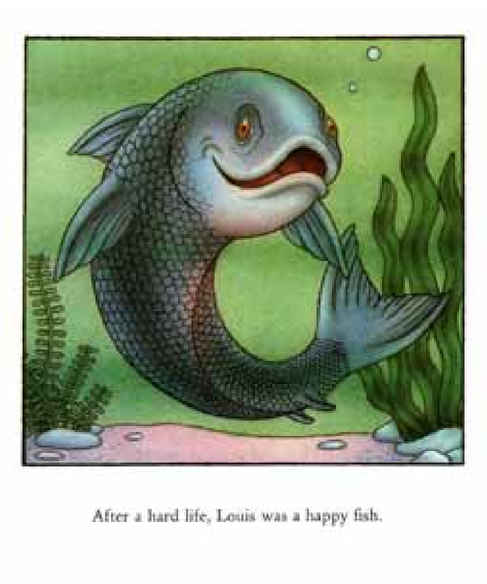
But ripe fruit soon spoils.

One morning Al woke up and shrieked, "Eddie! Look at us! We're turning into birds!"

Indeed. Their eyes were a little beady, their noses a bit beak-like.

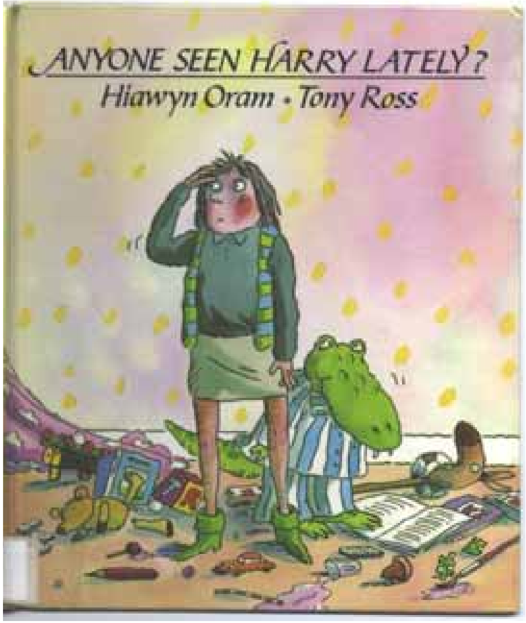
"We've got to get out of here," he croaked. Wings sprouted. Tail feathers plumed.

Picture 8: Yorinks, Arthur and Richard Egielski [1986] (1989) *Hey, Al.* New York: A Sunburst Book, [17-18].

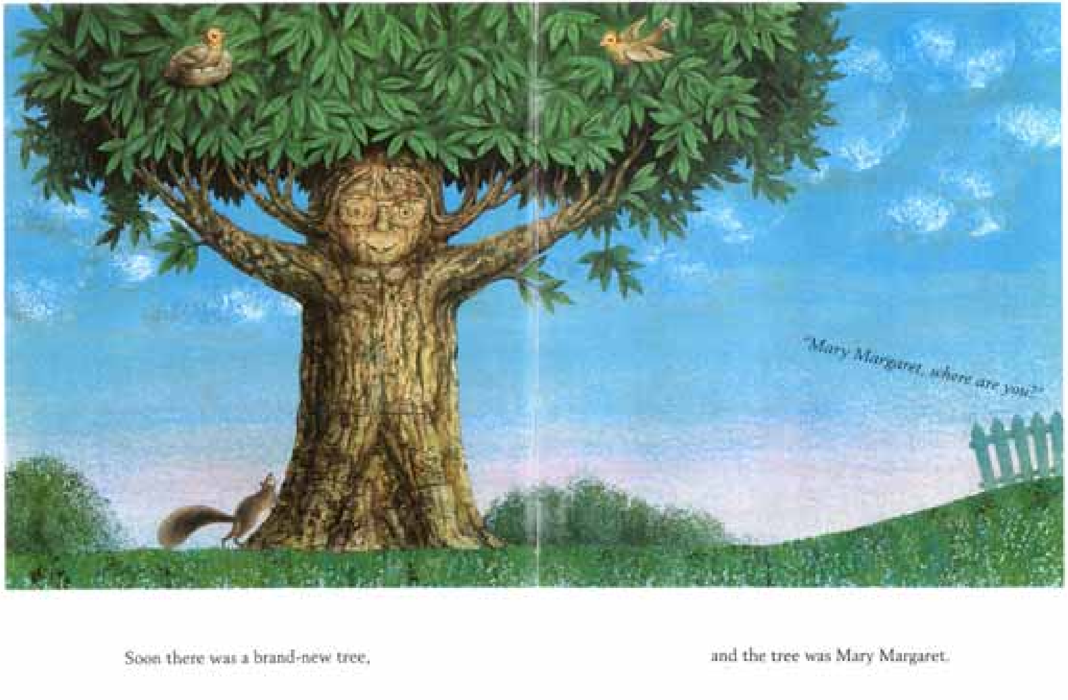


After a hard life, Louis was a happy fish.

Picture 9: Yorinks, Arthur and
Richard Egielski [1980] (1986)
Louis the Fish. [New York]:
A Sunburst Book, [26].


ANYONE SEEN HARRY LATELY?
Hiawyn Oram · Tony Ross

Picture 10: Oram, Hiawyn and Tony Ross
(1988) *Anyone Seen Harry Lately?*
London: Andersen Press.

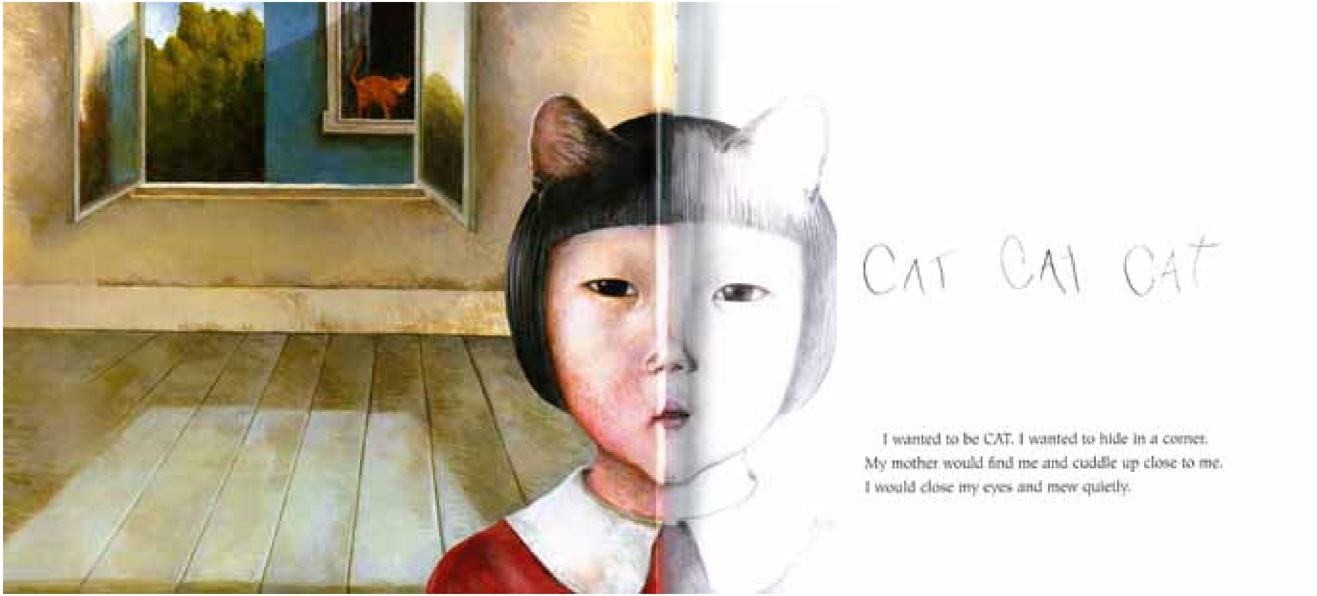


"Mary Margaret, where are you?"

Soon there was a brand-new tree,

and the tree was Mary Margaret.

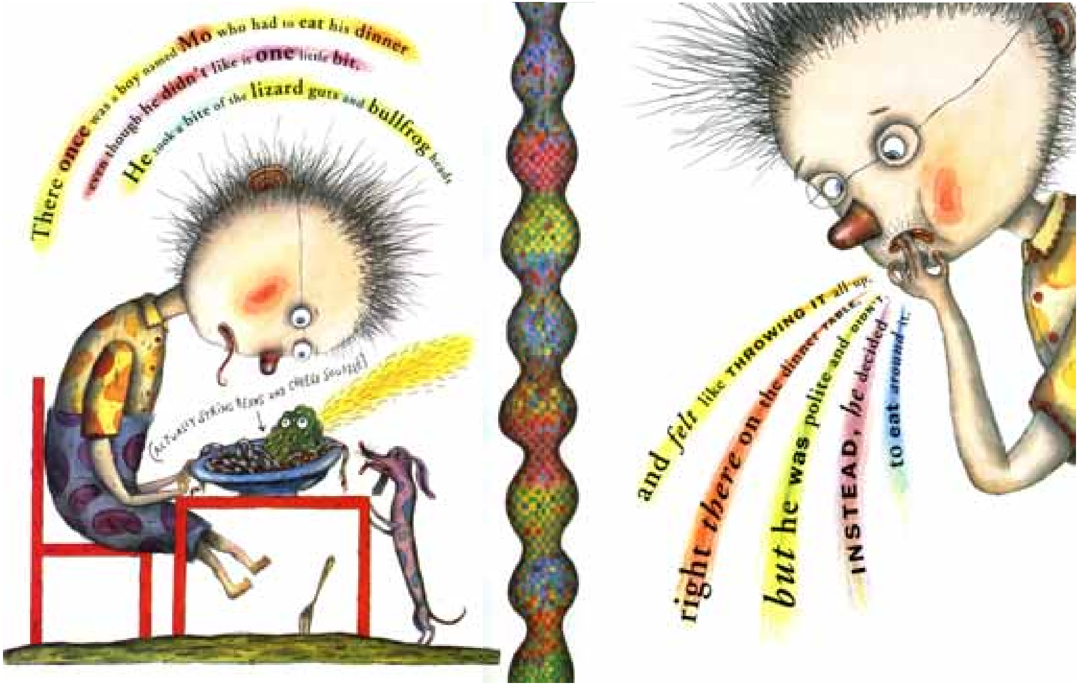
Picture 11: Drawson, Blair (1996) *Mary Margaret's Tree.* New York: Orchard Books, [27-28].



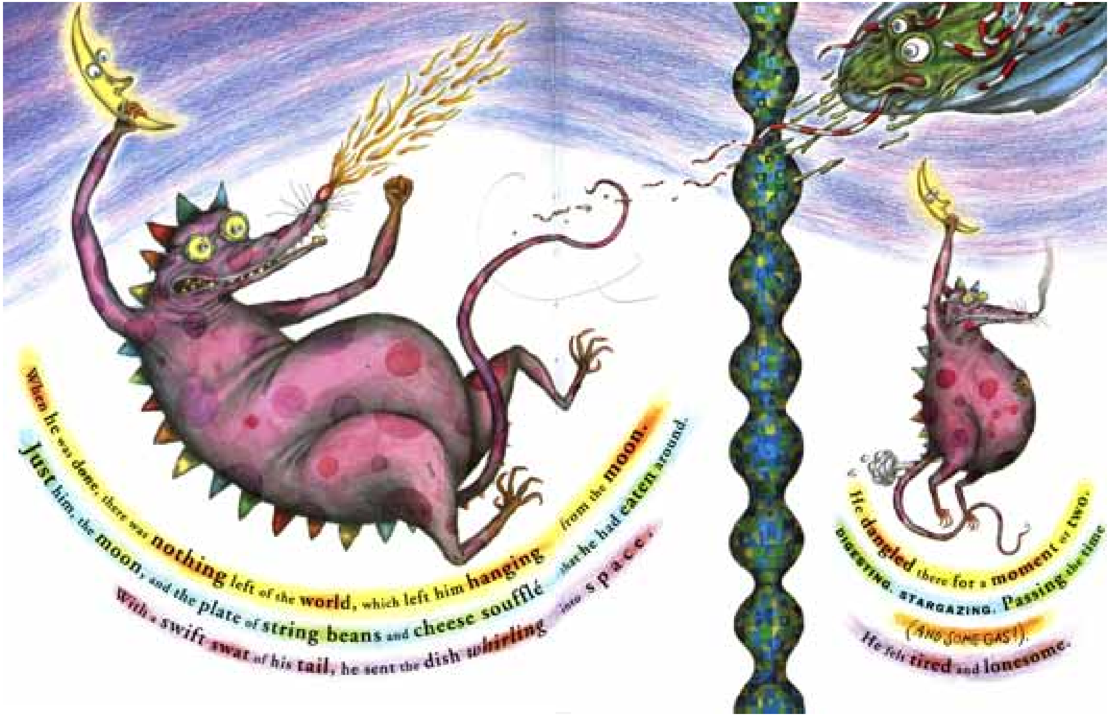
CAT CAT CAT

I wanted to be CAT. I wanted to hide in a corner.
My mother would find me and cuddle up close to me.
I would close my eyes and mew quietly.

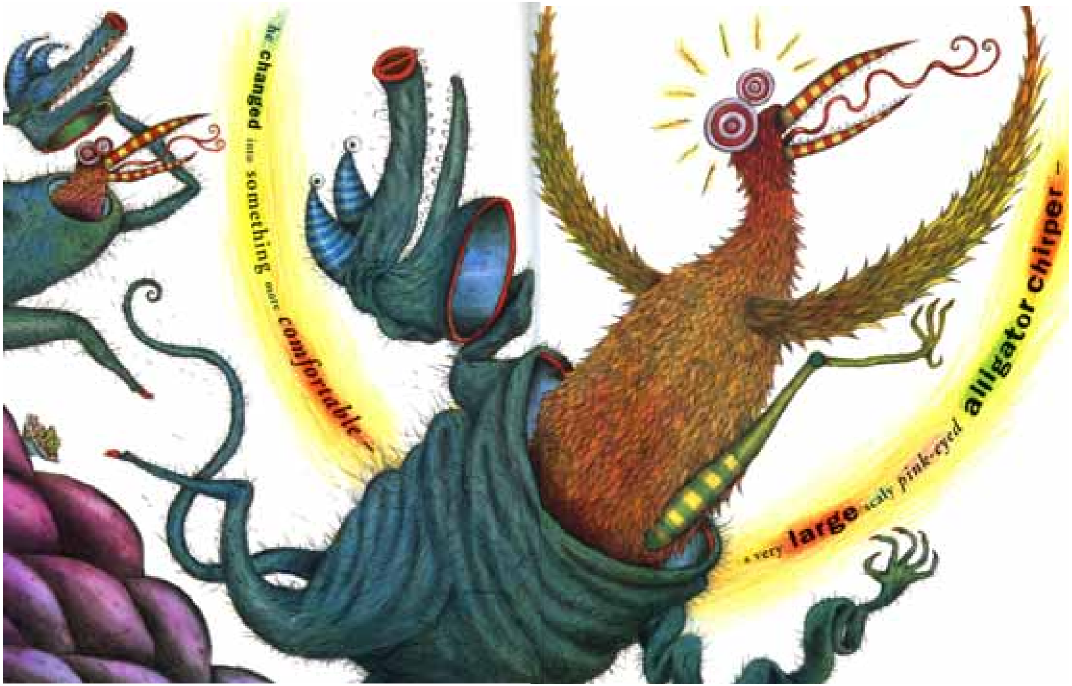
Picture 12: Recorvits, Helen and Gabi Swiatkowska (2003) *My Name Is Yoon.* New York: Frances Foster Books, [9-10].


There once was a boy named Mo who had to eat his dinner
even though he didn't like it one little bit.
He took a bite of the lizard guts and bullfrog heads
(ACTUALLY STRING BEANS AND CHEESE SOUFFLE)
and felt like THROWING IT all up,
right there on the dinner TABLE.
but he was polite and didn't.
INSTEAD, he decided
to eat around it.

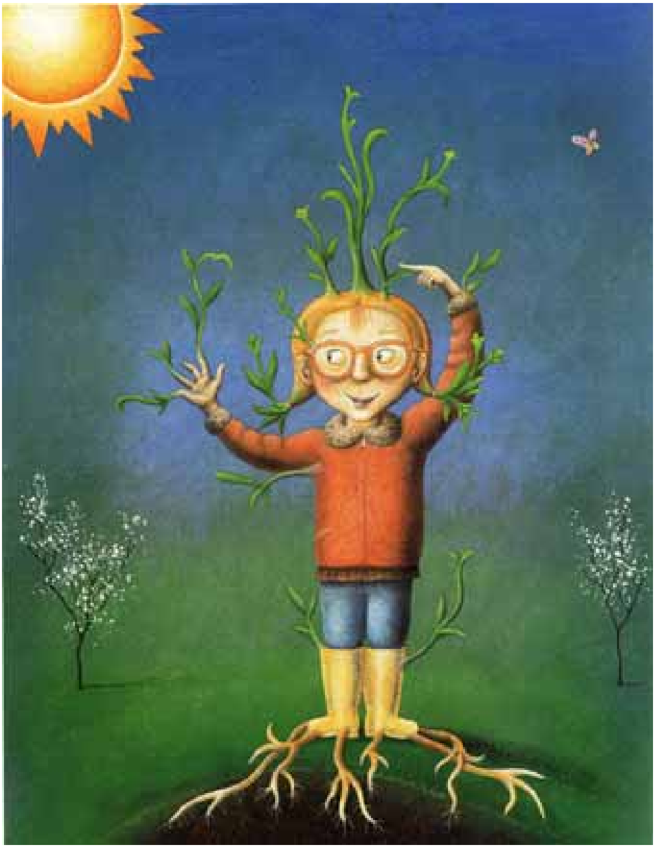
Picture 13: Drescher, Henrik [1994] (1996) *The Boy Who Ate Around.* New York: Hyperion Books for Children, [1-2].


When he was done, there was nothing left of the world, which left him hanging from the moon.
Just him, the moon, and the plate of string beans and cheese soufflé that he had eaten around.
With a swift swat of his tail, he sent the dish whirling into space.
He dangled there for a moment or two.
DIGESTING. STARGAZING. Passing the time
(AND SOME GAS!).
He felt tired and lonesome.

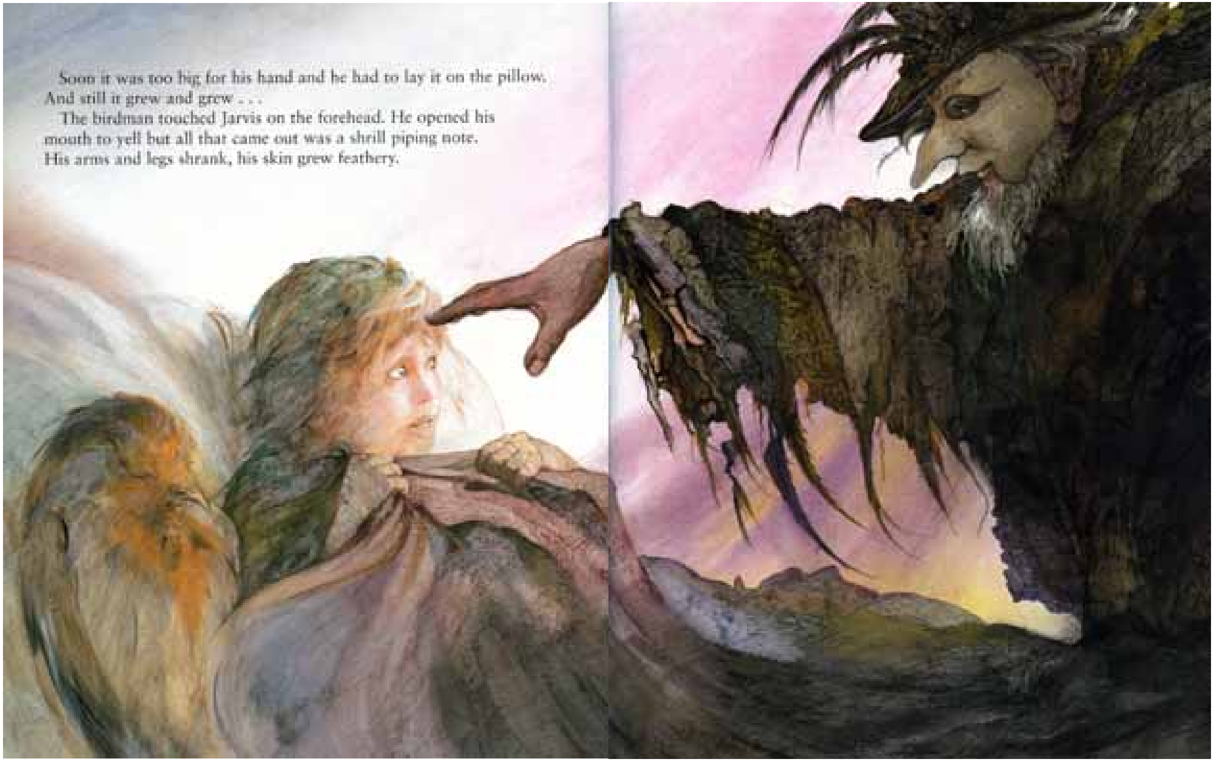
Picture 14: Drescher, Henrik [1994] (1996) *The Boy Who Ate Around*. New York: Hyperion Books for Children, [27-28].


he changed into something more comfortable –
a very large scaly pink-eyed alligator chirper –

Picture 15: Drescher, Henrik [1994] (1996) *The Boy Who Ate Around.* New York: Hyperion Books for Children, [9-10].



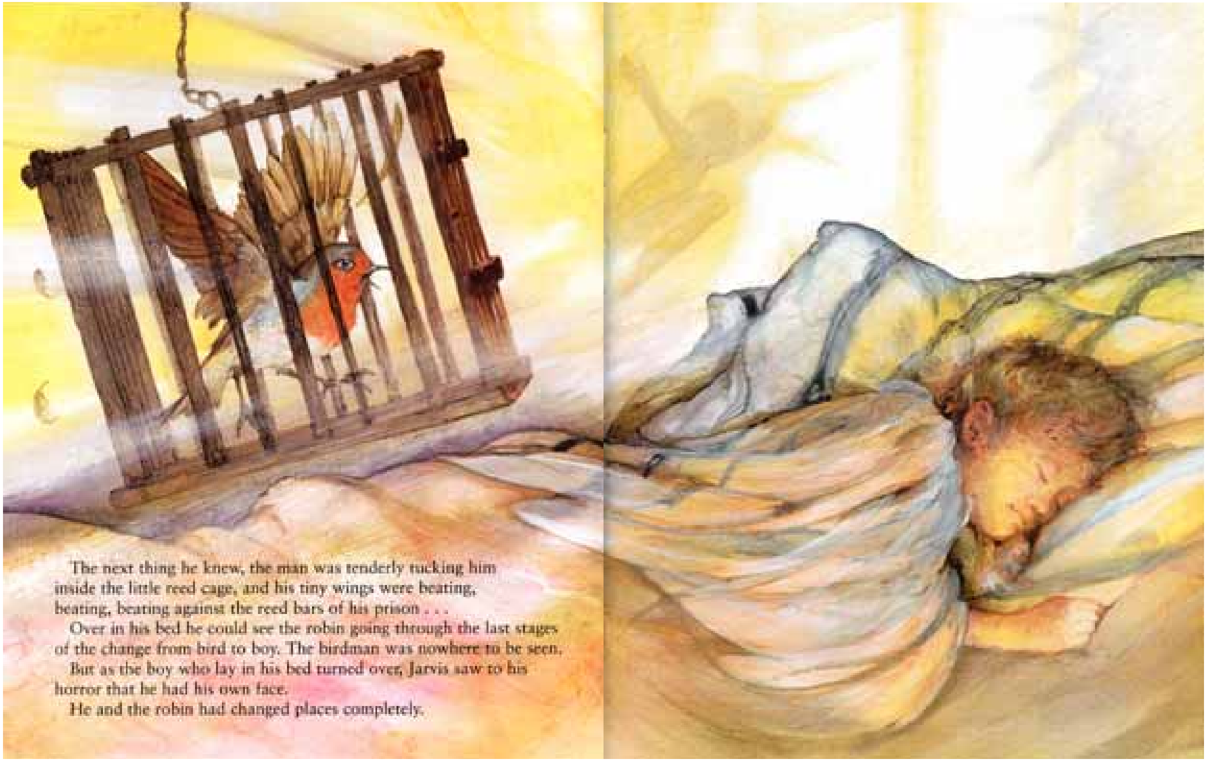
Picture 16: Drawson, Blair (1996) *Mary Margaret's Tree.*
New York: Orchard Books, [26].



Soon it was too big for his hand and he had to lay it on the pillow. And still it grew and grew . . .

The birdman touched Jarvis on the forehead. He opened his mouth to yell but all that came out was a shrill piping note. His arms and legs shrank, his skin grew feathery.

Picture 17: Burgess, Melvin and Ruth Brown (2000) *The Birdman.* London: Andersen Press, [17-18].



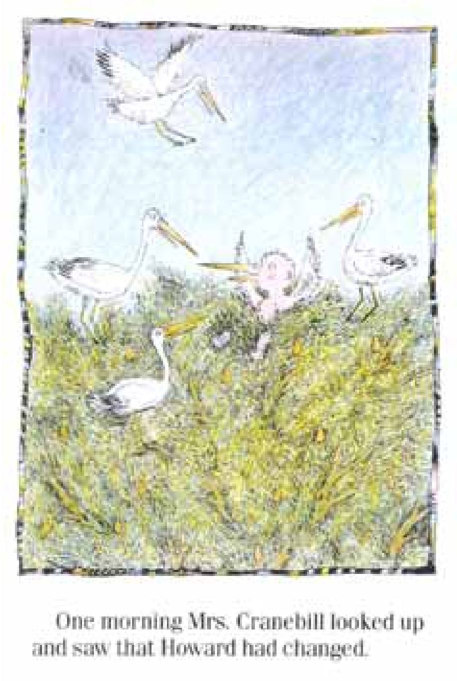
The next thing he knew, the man was tenderly tucking him inside the little reed cage, and his tiny wings were beating, beating, beating against the reed bars of his prison . . .

Over in his bed he could see the robin going through the last stages of the change from bird to boy. The birdman was nowhere to be seen.

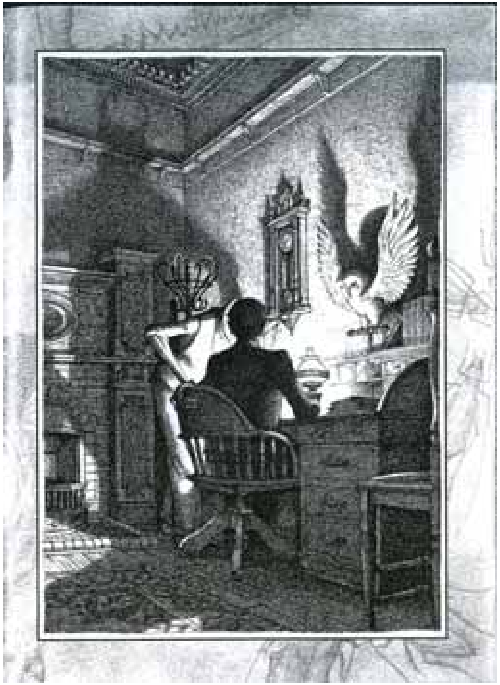
But as the boy who lay in his bed turned over, Jarvis saw to his horror that he had his own face.

He and the robin had changed places completely.

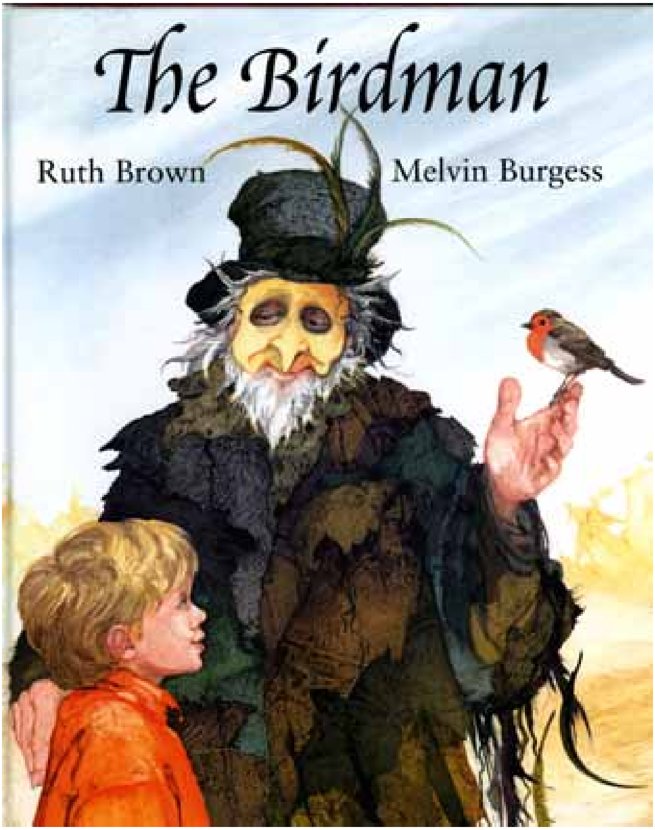
Picture 18: Burgess, Melvin and Ruth Brown (2000) *The Birdman.* London: Andersen Press, [19-20].


One morning Mrs. Cranebill looked up
and saw that Howard had changed.

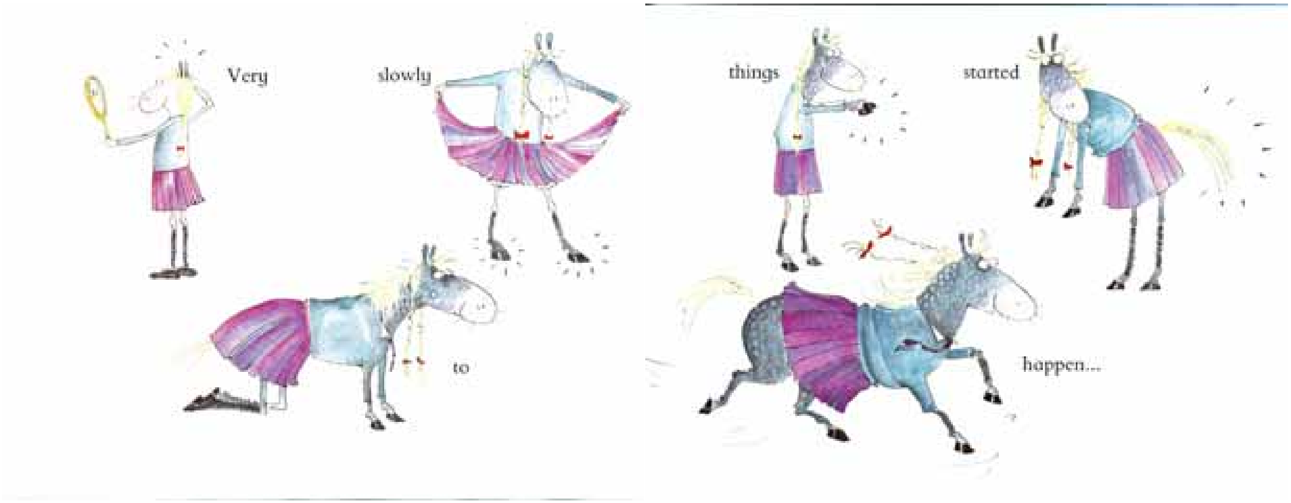
Picture 19: Drescher, Henrik (1982) *The Strange Appearance of Howard Cranebill Jr.* New York: Lothrop, Lee & Shepard Books, [21].



Picture 20: Crew, Gary and Steven Woolman (1996) *Caleb.* Flinders Park: Era Publications, [14].


The Birdman
Ruth Brown
Melvin Burgess

Picture 21: Burgess, Melvin and Ruth Brown (2000) *The Birdman.* London: Andersen Press.


Very
slowly
to
things
started
happen...

Picture 22: Cole, Babette [1993] (1995) *Winni Allfours.* London: Puffin Books, [9-10].

Children's literature abounds with young characters who transform into animal, vegetable, inanimate or monstrous "Others". Adventures Into Otherness – Child metamorphs in late twentieth-century children's literature presents multifaceted readings of these alluring and repelling supernatural events in order to gain a deeper understanding of authors', readers' and critics' fascination with the metamorphic body. Among the increasing number of works written on literary metamorphosis, this is the first book-length study on the motif within children's literature.

Maria Lassén-Seger explores three categories of child metamorphs: wild and uncivilised children; innocent, playful and rebellious children and children who are victimised and lost. Applying theoretical perspectives drawn from narratology, play theory and carnival theory, she presents metamorphosis as a flexible trope, comic or tragic, through which authors explore crises and concerns that are central to the lives of young people.