

## **Bums, poos and wees: Carnavalesque spaces in the picture books of early childhood. Or, has literature gone to the dogs?**

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*ABSTRACT: Adults often express concern about the increasing production of books with scatological humour despite the evidence of the popularity of such literature with children. This article explores a range of recently published picture books where the anthropomorphic dog is subject to children's laughter. Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque is identified as a useful construct to use in order to understand the nature of this humour and indeed, the theory can provide a rationale for the possible use of scatology in early childhood settings. The dialogic nature of the picture book (image versus narrative) provides a useful structure to exploit carnivalesque humour. However, the paper recognises that providing a carnivalesque space in the classroom is a problematic business that challenges how adults perceive both the nature of children's literature and the adult as the agent of control within the early childhood centre.*

*KEYWORDS: Humour, scatology, carnivalesque, the body, early childhood, picture books.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

It really came as no surprise that Dawn McMillan's book *Why do dogs sniff bottoms?* was the Children's Choice Award in 2003 (part of the NZ Post Book Awards), despite perhaps misgivings by adults. "Not another book on poos and wees!" Teachers, librarians and booksellers note that there has been an increased publishing output of books that are plainly scatological, also at the same time tending to bemoan the fact that they are popular with young children. Studies of children's preferences in book selection have consistently noted that humour is a primary criterion for children's pleasure in the presentation of story, and scatological humour is very much part of this (Shannon, 1993). However, what is considered to be popular is not always seen by the adult to be of quality; there is a gap between children's choices of what they like to read and what adults think is desirable through book awards (Taylor, 1996). As Lambirth (2003) notes, "Pleasure has been seen as the core of children's interest in popular and consumer texts. It is pleasure itself that may form the basis of some adult fear of the interaction between these texts and the supervised child in school" (p. 9). Klor (1991) recognised the connection between children's laughter and scatological humour in relationship to the performance of vaudeville, as for example, when adult authority is challenged:

What makes kids laugh? The broadest, silliest types of humour-silly words and sounds, particularly ones related to the human body, incongruous actions, exaggeration, and spoofs. Ever said the word "underwear" in front of a group of kids? Don't try it with a straight face! Vaudeville would be alive and well if it was being performed in our elementary schools. Children also enjoy situations where they know more than you do. They are afforded so little control in their lives, that any opportunity to correct an adult's mistake or tell you what to do is very welcome (p. 10).

That the bawdy is part of the underground world of children is evident in folklore collections. Pre-schoolers and junior school children are part of this audience and no doubt they would want to be seen to be functioning in the peer group by being seen to be knowledgeable and skilled participants. For example, Fig. 1 indicates some of the scatological rhymes that have been collected as part of a New Zealand national collection.<sup>1</sup>

What then is the nature of the pleasure of these stories that incorporate the body as a source of humour? How are we as adults to read this popularity with children? Is it a type of underground humour that we as adults ought to challenge and resist (and thus maintain its underground nature) or should we embrace such literature (and in doing so, potentially transform the subgenre into a safe, politically-correct subgenre owned by the adult)?

### **IMAGE AND NARRATIVE IN McMILLAN'S *WHY DO DOGS SNIFF BOTTOMS?***

McMillan's tall story of dogs in search of long-lost bums, told through a rollicking rhyming verse, doesn't pretend finally to be a serious take on the inner life of the dog. It draws upon this underground humour that exists and, as the underground is represented as a literary artefact, children are surprised. What was covert has permission to be overt. Shock, horror, laughter!

Despite the echoes of the folktale *pourquoi* type of story suggested by the title and the opening gambit of the initial text that seems to pose a serious question, it is not a transactional text that invites an *effere* reading (Rosenblatt, 1978) of taking information away from the text. The cover cartoon style of Ross Kinnaird instead positions the reader/viewer to assume an *aesthetic* reading, a living through of an emotive experience. Cover images of sparkling, protruding eyes and engorged noses invite a humorous "living through" the text. The opening question of the text seems, for example, to establish a serious tone. "Why do dogs sniff bottoms? Do you really want to know? Why the shameful, blameful sniffing? Why the embarrassing disgrace with no regard to time or place?" However, any sense of propriety in a quest for serious knowledge is totally undermined by the image of the rear end of a mother being assaulted by a sniffing dog, exaggerated rear profiles being a conventional device to induce humour (Nodelman, 1988).

Indeed, it is the visual re-presentation of the story that establishes that this story is pure farce, a tall story. The image of a sniffing dog enclosed within the private space of a young girl's dress on the next double-page spread is both shocking and, in a cathartic response to the shock, hugely funny. Generally it is the text that gives focus to the elaboration of the pictures (Nodelman, 1988). However, in this case it is the uncluttered picture, surrounded by white space, that gives focus to the indeterminacy of the text. The text speaks of children hating dogs when they sniff "from underneath,

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<sup>1</sup> The Centre for Children's Literature, Christchurch College of Education is the repository of a national collection of 6000 rhymes, collected over the last ten years. Thanks to Janice Ackerley for making this selection available.

<b>SCATALOGICAL HUMOUR IN CHILDREN'S FOLKLORE</b>		
Diarrhoea, diarrhoea, It sticks to your bum Like a lump of chewing gum, (Like a bullet from a gun) Diarrhoea, diarrhoea.	The more you toot, the better you feel, So eat your beans with every meal	Along came a cat, and licked it up, And tickled his bum for more.
Diarrhoea, diarrhoea, It runs down your leg, Like a runny boiled egg, Diarrhoea, diarrhoea.	Beans, beans, are good for the heart. The more you eat, the more you fart.	Captain Cook did a poop, behind the kitchen door, A blade of grass, tickled his arse, and made him do some more.
Diarrhoea, diarrhoea, When the sun goes down, And your jocks go brown Diarrhoea, diarrhoea.	<i>Action rhyme, pointing to appropriate body part</i> Bum, tit, tit, Bum, tit, tit, Play the hairy banjo.	Fatty and Skinny were having a bath, Fatty blew off and made Skinny laugh.
Diarrhoea, diarrhoea, When you're sliding into home, And you feel some foam. Diarrhoea, diarrhoea.	<i>Action rhyme, pointing to appropriate body part</i> Milk, milk, lemonade, Round the corner chocolate's made.	Fatty and Skinny were making pastry, Fatty blew off and made it tasty.
Diarrhoea, diarrhoea, When you're walking down the hall, And it splatters on the wall. Diarrhoea, diarrhoea.	Burning down the motor way, at one hundred k's Granny did the biggest fart that I've heard for days.	Fatty and Skinny were in the shower, Fatty blew off and cut the power.
Diarrhoea, diarrhoea, When you're running round the class, With your finger up your arse, Diarrhoea, diarrhoea.	Engine exploded, car fell apart, All because of Granny's supersonic fart.	Fatty and Skinny were in the sea, Fatty blew off and made Skinny wee.
Diarrhoea, diarrhoea, When you're walking through the jungle, With your finger up your rungle, Diarrhoea, diarrhoea	Jingle bells, Batman smells, Robin ran away, Wonder woman did a fart and blew up the USA.	Fatty and Skinny climbed a tree, Fatty fell down the lavatory, Skinny climbed down and pulled the chain So Fatty was never seen again.
Diarrhoea, diarrhoea, Sitting in the gutter, Like a slimy piece of butter, Diarrhoea, diarrhoea.	Boom shukka, lukka, Does your bum smell like khaka, Gives a smell, BLOODY HELL!!	Fatty and Skinny were sitting in the bath, When Fatty turned on the hot tap, And burnt Skinny's arse.
John stood on a burning deck, His jocks were made of cotton, The flames went up his hairy legs, And burnt his big fat bottom.	The Adams family started, when Uncle Festa farted, He farted through the keyhole, which paralysed the cat. The cat fell down the dunny, it cost a lot of money, To get the bloody thing (bugger) (dam thing) back.	Hickory Dickory Dock, my father has a hairy cock.
Beans, beans, the magical fruit, The more you eat, the more you toot	Captain Cook did a poop, behind the bathroom door, Take my hat, and do it in that, and don't be dirty no more!	Hey diddle diddle, the cat did a piddle, Behind the bathroom door, The little dog laughed, to see such fun, And added a few drops more.
	Captain Cook did a poop, behind the kitchen door,	

Figure 1. The bawdy in children's folklore (NZ)

from side to side, from back behind. We hate it when they sniff our friends! (Our friends pretend that they don't mind)".

The pictures give much more focus to these words: it is a boy/girl friendship which is pictured, adding perhaps considerable nuance that could be read into the act of sniffing. As adults we know that sniffing by animals is a sexualised behaviour and we could note here the use of red as an advancing colour and the traditional symbolism of pink/red/sexuality and the female in the folktale. The adult will find this image shockingly sexual; the child will find the incongruity of the image, hilariously funny.



The reason for why dogs sniff bottoms as advanced by the story is pure theatre of the absurd. As Culik (2000) describes theatre of the absurd:

In being illogical, the absurd theatre is anti-rationalist: it negates rationalism because it feels that rationalist thought, like language, only deals with the superficial aspects of things. Nonsense, on the other hand, opens up a glimpse of the infinite. It offers intoxicating freedom, brings one into contact with the essence of life and is a source of marvellous comedy (§6).

In this space provided by laughter, the child experiences the freedom of the imagination to escape rule-boundedness (of nature or nurture) and to think the unthinkable.



This is evident in the next sequence then dogs, near and far, head off to the "K9 Capers", a theatrical performance, and are required to leave their bottoms behind before entering the auditorium. Clearly this defies logic and is irrational. But this irrationality gives space for the freedom of nonsense, and the infinite pleasure of "what if?" What are the imaginative possibilities if bottoms are interchangeable? The illustrator Kinnaird exploits these possibilities by using visual slapstick.

The pictures here reinforce the idea that the theatre of the absurd can be defined in terms of a distrust in words as a form of communication (Culik, 2000) and that pictures instead can ignite the liberating pleasure of a belly-ache laugh.

## **BAKHTIN'S THEORY OF CARNIVALESQUE**

Laughter can be liberating. In the case of *Why Do Dogs Sniff Bottoms?* one might ask what the nature of the liberation is; from what is the young reader being freed?<sup>2</sup> Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque (1965) arguably may give us insight

<sup>2</sup> A bibliography of carnivalesque picture books is provided in the references and marked by an asterix.

into the nature of the pleasure of a belly-ache laugh, especially laughter based on scatological humour. Another theoretical approach could be a Freudian analysis but, as this paper will show, an examination of the text itself shows readers to be positioned more in terms of the carnivalesque.

In the medieval carnival, normal social order (social class hierarchies, gender relations and social values) was disrupted, inverted and parodied in an orgiastic time of liberating freedom. For a period of days, the dominant discourse of authorities such as the Church was, through such social institutions as The Feast of Fools, disrupted and the clown or fool acted as a hero, mocking and challenging authority figures, structures and acceptable modes of behaviour (Mallan, 1999). For Bakhtin, carnival laughter is:

First of all, a festive laughter. Therefore it is not an individual reaction to some isolated “comic” event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people. Second, it is universal in scope; it is directed at all and everyone, including the carnival’s participants. The entire world is seen in its droll aspect, in its gay relativity. Third, this laughter is ambivalent: it is gay, triumphant, and at the same time mocking, deriding. It asserts and denies, it buries and revives (p. 11).

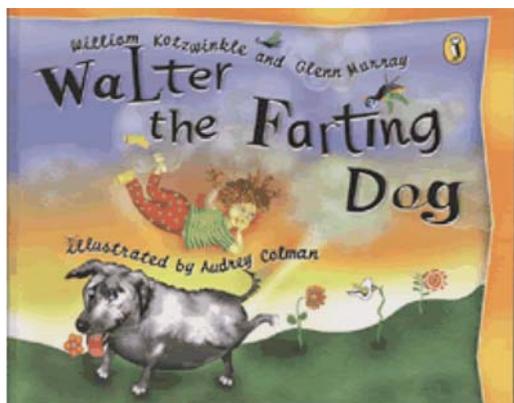
The dominant ecclesiastical discourse of the Church had excluded the “lower body stratum” and consequently much of the carnivalesque focused on the pleasures of the flesh: eating, drinking, copulating and defecating, serving to divide the body from the more elevated soul (Mallan, 1999). The carnival celebrated the corporeal body; from a lust for life to the violence of death, from bodies grotesque to bodies masked and bodies displayed.

However, when the carnival is over, (and the covers of the book slammed shut and the teacher hush-hushing) order is restored and, after a collective sigh of relief, normal social relations and discourses resumed. And so, given its institutionalised nature, the corporate body is given, for the time of the carnival, permission to enact those paradoxes that construct human experience: order/chaos; soul/body; serious/playful; good/evil; clean/unclean; control/freedom; adult/child; male/female; prince/pauper; master/slave. For the time of the carnival, joyful relativity reigned supreme (Toohey *et al*, 2000). In this sense, the laughter of the carnival was an emancipatory laughter where dominant discourses were brought “down to earth.” It could be described very much as the precursor of the post-modern as the Centre is decentred and playfulness erupts at the periphery. Stephens (1992) established the link between the carnival and children’s literature in the following terms:

Carnival in children’s literature is grounded in playfulness which situates itself in positions of non-conformity. It expresses opposition to authoritarianism and seriousness, and is often manifested as parody of prevailing literary forms and genres, or as literature in non-canonical forms... [Hence] playful and to some extent taboo language is used to disclose ways in which adult incompetence masks itself as adult authority, and more generally to construct subject positions in opposition to society’s official structures of authority (p. 121).

The essence of carnivalesque humour, then, is not that the book simply incorporates detail about bums, poos and wees. When scatological humour inverts and subverts the social order, the carnivalesque is at play. Though the following picture book

(Kotzwinkle *et al*, 2001) employs scatological humour, it cannot be described as carnivalesque in that there is a lack of parody.



Despite the best efforts of the family to rehabilitate Walter, his propensity to fart at all times and in all places causes much grief. However, when burglars are literally overcome, the family rejoice and Walter is allowed to stay. Funny enough perhaps in that disorder, through scatology, becomes order; but normal social hierarchies are not interrogated in this book.

### **ANARCHIC PLEASURE IN EARLY CHILDHOOD: THE CORPOREAL BODY**

Can early childhood be described as a time of rebellion against the social order, a search for power in the face of the powerful “other”? Rebellion, for example, seems to be much more associated with the social construction of the teenager. What hegemonic discourses are so powerful that, at an almost conscious level, the community of early childhood feel a common opposition? What needs to be “brought down” in a communal outburst of emancipatory laughter?

Leavitt and Power (1997) argue that much of the early childhood curriculum is focused on “civilising bodies” where the lower body stratum is specifically brought under control and the body generally socialised into those behaviours that are necessary for integration into schooling. The child is thus constructed to see the natural body in opposition to, and subject to, adult pleasure and therefore suppress awareness of, and pleasure in, bodily function. Indeed, researchers argue that, as a consequence of the moral panic brought about the spectre of teacher abuse, and the consequential “no touch” policy in early childhood settings, adults too are conflicted with regard to the corporeality of the child’s body. As Jones (2003) records:

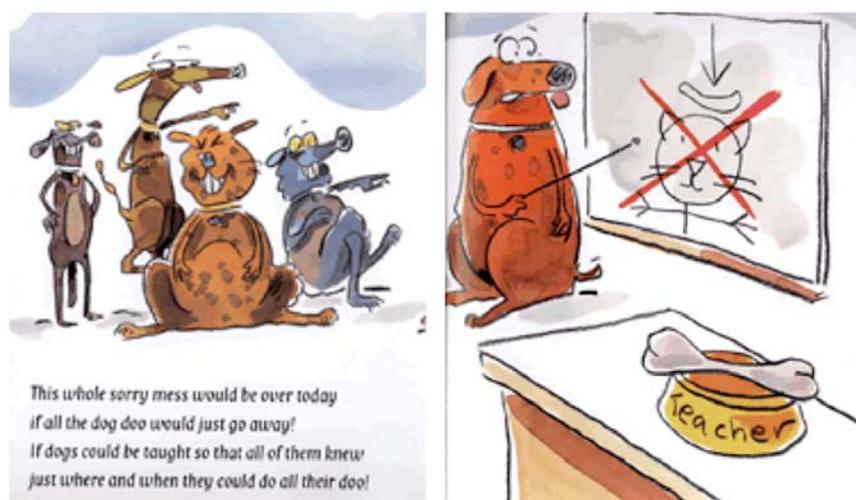
But probably the most intense ambivalence about ‘not touching’ is expressed by those teachers who believe, quite properly in a liberal child-centered education system, that some children *need* positive caring touch from their teachers. These staff say they regularly encounter young children who do not get physical affection at home, especially from males, and seem to crave it at school. Many of these children come up close to teachers, wanting to touch them, sit on them, hold their hands and be near them at playtimes (p. 19).

Thus the child’s pleasure in the corporeal body is suppressed in the early childhood curriculum and practices as educators remonstrate against and seek distance from the lived experience of the child body. Thus it is also that scatological humour assumes a carnivalesque spirit when adult conventions asserting control are subverted by the child and the conventions parodied. Mallan (1999) observed this suppression of the body as a tension between the child and adult in Year 3 settings. When young children

were given free reign to express a response to a storytelling event, Mallan observed how they used storytelling as “a means of disruption and playful anarchy within the authoritative discourse of the classroom. In this sense, the children expose a ‘carnavalesque’ world that can exist temporarily within the parameters of the dominant institutional discourses” (p. 113).

Clearly, the representation of the carnival in the picture book gives a permitted space within the discourses of the early childhood setting for an eruption of pleasure and desire grounded on the cusp of the adult/child dichotomy. And adults may well feel uncomfortable. However, as a necessarily shared experience between adults and children (it is the adult who reads aloud), the carnivalesque book can allow the development of a concept of community. When adults laugh at themselves and participate in the Feast of Fools, hierarchies are disrupted and the child feels, for the carnival moment at least, a sense of common humanity.

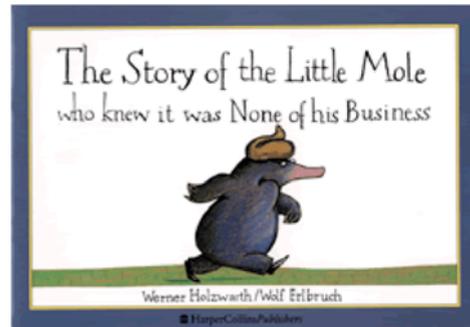
Hence it is that carnivalesque picture books are dialogic or double-voiced. There is an interplay between the serious and the playful, the authoritative voice and the subversive voice. This double-voice is structurally presented in the picture book because of the image and narrative re-presentations of story. For example, something of a sequel to *Why do dogs sniff bottoms?* is Dawn McMillan’s *Doggy doo on my shoe*, again illustrated by Ross Kinnaird. Whilst some of the images in this picture book simply reflect the narrative, other spreads interrogate the text, and subvert the social order based on further scatological motifs. Look carefully at the difference that the illustration brings to the text in the following double-page spread.



As stated previously, whereas the normal convention is that it is the text that positions readers to focus on specific details in the illustration (Nodelman, 1988), Kinnaird as illustrator elaborates on the text and creates quite a different “story.” The text in this page orientates to a transactional text whereby information is being given. If dogs were taught correct manners, the problem would go away. The didactic voice of the narrator is writ large. A representational illustration might have had the dogs being given toilet training in a natural environment. However, in this case, Kinnaird exploits the carnivalesque space in the text by interrogating the idea of the teacher as authority by suggesting that the pupils know better. They are collectively laughing at the teacher’s embarrassment/consternation of a blackboard image that they presumably

constructed. The teacher is surprised. The pupils seem to be laughing both at the teacher and at the hilarity of the joke. The joke is that poos could be an ideal weapon in the archetypal battle between cats and dogs. Dogs could poo on a cat's head! Social order is disrupted when teacher's knowledge about the uses of the body is parodied.

Cleverly, Kinnaird draws thus an intertextual connection to perhaps the most infamous (from an adult perspective) scatological book, Werner Holzwarth's (illus. Wolf Erlbruch) *The story of the little mole who knew it was None of his Business* (James, 2002). When mole emerges from the ground and is struck on the head by somebody's business, he goes off in search of the culprit. The flies (as to be expected perhaps) are able to do a close examination and declare that, "It is clear to us that it was A DOG." Forgetting about any golden rules, mole returns the favour and, satisfied, "disappeared happily into his hole underground". James (2002) draws attention to the anthropomorphic representation of mole, part human and part grotesque and how in the ending "the wickedness of Mole may be perceived as a real threat to the social order; the animal is not that far removed from the human."



That Dawn McMillan and Ross Kinnaird are intent on parodying the social order by subversion is evident in their final episode. The notion that royalty itself is subject to the body inverts the decorum associated with aristocracy and parodies the pretensions involved. This is pure carnivalesque. The lower body stratum makes fools of us all.



## **THE ANARCHIC IN PICTURE BOOKS: IS LITERATURE GOING TO THE DOGS?**

It is not surprising that much of the scatological is focused on the presence of dogs in our lives. Dogs, being man's (sic) best friend, is conventionally subject to the anthropomorphic imperative in the way humans relate to animals. Dogs are like us (and we can be like dogs). Indeed, it is fair to say that in choosing a particular breed of dog as a pet, we project something of our own sense of self within the social order.

The stereotype is that pensioners choose poodles and Mongrel Mob members choose pit-bull terriers. This slippage between dog/human is wonderfully exploited in Babette Cole's *Dr. Dog* where the dichotomy of master/slave is inverted and parodied. As James (2002) notes:

[Dr. Dog is in] the true spirit of the carnival. Cole rarely misses an opportunity to show characters with their pants down, on the toilet, or stuffing themselves with food, and this text is no exception (p. 23).

James draws attention to Kristeva's theory of the abject which is likened to Bakhtin's idea of the grotesque. This focuses not only on the protuberances and margins of the body itself but also the disgust of the adult with bodily fluids outside the body (invoking the dichotomies of proper/clean and improper/dirty). James (2002) argues that this abjection is the main theme of *Dr. Dog*.



When the family dog (who is a doctor) is away on a conference in Brazil, the Gumboyle family became very ill indeed. The family call him home and Dr. Dog proceeds to instruct the family on good healthy habits. Smoking, inappropriate clothing, not washing hands (and letting others stick fingers up your nose) – all come under careful scrutiny. When dangerous gases build up in granddad, he farts so hard he blows the roof off the house!

What is immediately striking in *Dr. Dog* is, of course, this parody of the master/slave dichotomy where, in a Feast of Fools, the dog becomes the fountain of all knowledge, and humans absolutely dependent upon animals. Social order is inverted and, in an anthropomorphic twist, humans behave like animals. The Gumboyles do not take responsibility for their actions because they always have Dr. Dog around. The image of baby Gumboyle scratching the exposed bum (worms) and then licking thumbs is enough to make most of us squirm. It echoes why dogs sniff bottoms. Humour here though has a serious purpose as expository lessons on being healthy are given. However, the carnivalesque spirit is not abandoned. If granddads are perceived to be the guardians of the social order of the family, in *Dr. Dog*, we see that they have clay feet (and rumbling bowels). Dr. Dog suffers from stress and is sent to a remote island for recuperation. Dr. Dog believes that he is safe from the Gumboyles, but a letter in a bottle tells him that, because of granddad's accident, they are on their way! The ending is anarchic in that social order (master/slave) is not restored but disorder is inscribed as natural. Dr. Dog's holiday reading is a book entitled "Dogs at War"!

Dogs at war is very much the focus of Carolyn and Andrea Beck's *The waiting dog*. In this picture book, the master/slave relationship is again inverted as the reader/viewer observes, and through the enriched language, savours the eruption of pleasure when a dog mauls a human being. Though the book is carnivalesque in this parody of master/slave and order/disorder hierarchies, *The waiting dog* emphasises the grotesqueness of the functioning body. Bahktin talks of the grotesque as being:

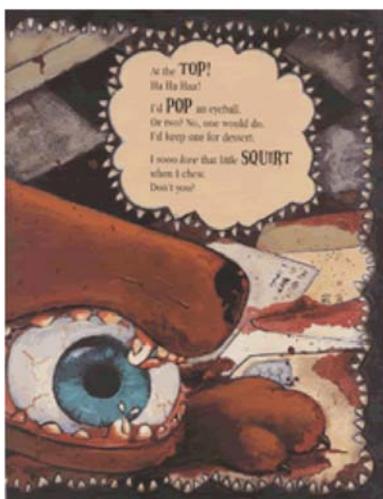
...constantly active, exceeding its margins: a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed: it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body – Eating, drinking, defecation and other elimination (sweating, blowing of the nose, sneezing), as well as copulation, pregnancy, dismemberment, swallowing up by another body – all these acts are performed on the confines of the body and the outer world, or on the confines of the old and new body. In all events, the beginning and end of life are closely linked and interwoven (p. 317).

The materiality of birth, living and death is here writ large. Life and death can be a violent and macabre business, and our shock at this realisation can be a source of black humour.



The opening image of the dog waiting for “us” in a state of eager excitement might position us to read this conventionally. Is this a dog awaiting its owner? The warm colours, the smiling canine and the domestic situation might reiterate the convention of safe inside and danger outside that marks the space of the home. The text is unsettling in that the dog awaits by “my spot by the slot” beginning thus to suggest that it may not be the owner who is the recipient of the salivation. The slot becomes the border between inside/danger and outside/safety, a convention now inverted. The postman arrives and nostrils flare. Then erupts a cannibalistic orgy of self-gratification as the dog imagines itself consuming the postman. The language richly details the goriness of bodily consumption.

“Pusses and sores, crusted or plain, gushes and gores, and lobes of your brain! Dandruff! Belly Button fluff! All that miscellaneous stuff I luff.” The image of the



dog finding the human brain a delectable feast is frightening fare. The irony of the dog collar that has an inscription of a loving heart is not lost as the image is central to the picture, brightly coloured in the midst of dark browns. Dr. Dog becomes Killer Dog. In this picture book, the convention of the loving pet is subverted by anarchic desire.

Thankfully, the slot is impermeable, the boundary remains, and all the dog can do is wait, and salivate. The humour is dark, unpleasant and yet, ironically, very human. It was Max in *Where the Wild Things Are* who powerfully expressed the love/ consumption/ cannibalism nexus when he states of his mother, “I love you so, I’ll eat you up.”

In “Hansel and Gretel”, parent/child (distorted) love is expressed in consumptive imagery. This is the dark side of the carnivalesque space. Death is imprinted in birth, decay is imprinted in sustenance; the pleasure of being human is to become aware of the uncivilised “nonhuman” part of our beings.

## **PEDAGOGICAL IMPLICATIONS OF THE CARNAVALESQUE IN CHILDREN’S PICTURE BOOKS**

What are teachers and caregivers to make of the carnivalesque? Our response to the carnivalesque space tells us about the ideologies we bring to institutional life. If we hold an ideology of childhood innocence, we might be tempted to control, censor and delimit exposure to the carnival (McKenzie, 1997). There is an argument I suspect that the dark side of the carnivalesque (as in Beck’s *The Waiting Dog*) is problematic fare for pre-schoolers. Such texts undermine the notion that the world is an ordered, caring place; this being a dominant theme in early childhood pedagogy. Furthermore, as teachers we might be, like Mallan (1999), unsettled by the possibility of erupting disorder and seek to bring closure to the possibility. Conversely, if we see young children as subject to all the exigencies of life and death, who though less experienced, nevertheless are formulating their own schema, we might want to bring such complexities out into the open, to admit them into the common category of being human. As teachers, if we are secure in our being-in-the-world, we might enjoy the discomfort of being the fool.

Given the spectral monster of the teacher as abuser that now inhabits the early childhood centre (Jones, 2003b) whereby pleasure in the body is silenced, there is arguably “safety” for teacher and child when the belly-ache laugh derived from the shock of the scatological and the carnivalesque is removed from the real world of actual children’s bodies to a secondary world of the book where often the focus is the anthropomorphic dog or “other”. However, the monster will still lurk in the minds of the teacher and wisdom suggests that parental involvement in book selection practices is a sensible precaution (McKenzie, 2004).

To the extent that carnivalesque laughter is to be found in the “terrible twos, the tiresome threes and the fearsome fours”, it could be argued that what is in will “out” and adult response, of whatever kind, is irrelevant. It will continue to exist behind the bike sheds. But children’s literature, in its representations of the carnival, provides, within the boundaries of the cover and the enclosed space and time of the read-aloud session, a permitted space that acknowledges the need for a belly-ache laugh.

Child pleasure in the carnivalesque interrogates a Piagetian idea of developmentalism that constrains adults (especially in early childhood pedagogical theory) to delimit early childhood cognition (namely, pre-operational, transductive, egocentric reasoning) and instead speaks of a growing sophisticated ability to recognise inversions and subversions and all the imaginative possibilities that “what if?” allows. It delights in the irrational, and especially in the case of the picture book, exploits visual language to tell it how it “really” is. The carnivalesque challenges children to think about the social order through the reversal of roles, and in the closure brought about by the ending of the carnival, an increased awareness of the social nature of being-in-the-world. It could be argued that it is dominantly through children’s

literature (as much as *The Simpsons*) that children are positioned to acquire deeper thinking skills.

Whatever, when teachers choose to incorporate the carnivalesque as a form of literature, they are signing a particular ideology about literature itself. That is to say, the popular interrogates the idea of a literary canon and thus, incorporation signifies that the literature belongs to the child. Whilst as adults we might want to “put away childish things” we nevertheless must allow the child to exist in children’s literature. Given that it is the adult who writes, chooses and mediates children’s literature, it is all the more salient that the carnivalesque, for a time, gives power to the child.

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