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Postmodernism and children's picture books

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POSTMODERNISM AND CHILDREN'S PICTURE BOOKS.

BY

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Introduction.

When speaking of postmodernism and picture books Ann Grieve states:

> There is a growing body of picture books which ultilise their complex pluralistic nature and their unique physical qualities to present self-conscious, parodic, intertextual, interrogative texts that can be described as postmodernist. Such picture books allow young readers to question conventional aspects of narrative and challenge an unthinking empathy with what they read in various discourses. A theory of the postmodernist picture book offers a new critical discourse for exploring how literature can continually shape and reshape itself (1993:24).

The focus of this thesis consists of an analysis of four children's picture books which display postmodern characteristics, and as such, offer a challenge to and an alternative from traditional picture books. It can be argued that such picture books are exemplars of the major elements that constitute postmodernism. To some degree this has been recognised by critics in the field, but the intention of this thesis is to extend and elaborate the terms of this debate through detailed discussion of four contemporary works.

Philip Rice and Patricia Waugh suggest postmodernism "wages war on totality":

> We live in a pluralized culture surrounded by a mulplicity of styles, knowledges, stories that we tell ourselves about the world. To attempt to impose an overarching narrative on such experience is to perpetuate the violences of modernity with its exclusions and terrors. The relativisation of styles which is postmodernism, throws into doubt the claims of any one discourse or story to be offering the 'truth' about the world or an authoritative version of the real (1994:308).

These comments are relevant to the postmodern picture book as many of these texts interrogate the notions of truth and authenticity. They

also tend to highlight aspects such as ambiguity and incertitude. This is often achieved through a self-conscious reworking of a familiar text or texts. The pre-text is often reworked in such a way that the cultural codes and conventions presented in them are subverted through parody and irony.

All picture books are, by their very nature, bifurcated. That is, there are two different codes of signification happening - one to do with the words, the other to do with the pictures. In traditional picture books the two forms of narrative tend to complement one another, resulting in a homogeneous text. Postmodern picture books prise open the gaps between the two codes of signification. The reader is placed in a position of 'author'ity as she/he is required to fill the gaps. Postmodern picture books vary greatly in their level of complexity and their usage of postmodern devices. Like the term "postmodernism", which resists fixed definition, postmodern picture book cannot be neatly classified.

The postmodern devices most often employed in postmodern picture books are the use of metafiction, parody, intertextuality, indeterminacy, a playful manipulation of perspective, a resistance to closure, an interrogation of the "grand narrative", and a questioning of fixed meaning. The reader is required to do some work; and become an active participant in (at least some part) of the construction of the text. Traditional texts, however, tend towards a more passive consumption on the part of the reader.

"Underpinning many traditional picture books is the assumption that there is a unitary truth rather than pluralistic 'truths'" (Lonsdale 1993:26). In traditional picture books there are often

implicit moral codes or values in which good will triumph over 'naughty' or evil. Sex role stereotyping is also prominent and most often presented within the context of the nuclear family. Stereotypical depictions of a nuclear family with defined roles not only misrepresent the range and types of families there are, but also undermine the diversity found in nuclear families. Class and race are often homogenised in traditional texts; almost everyone is depicted as middle class and Caucasian, whether they are human or animal characters. It seems that authors and illustrators of traditional picture books adhere to more clichéd representations of culture, rather than challenging the status quo.

The term "postmodernism" is fraught with conjecture and opinion as to what it actually stands for. There is no fixed or precise definition; no solid ground on which to position oneself. Much of the debate surrounding the term has been about its distinction from modernism. What arose from these debates was a proliferation of work which attempted to locate particular properties of our culture. At the core of this differentiation is the foregrounding of knowledge. Brian M^{C}Hale argues that, broadly speaking, modernism is concerned with epistemological questions - the study of human knowledge, and investigations into the origins, sources, and limits of knowledge. Postmodernism is concerned with ontological questions - the theory of existence, and investigations into the nature of being and existence (1989:10). Geoff Moss suggests, "The result of this shift from the ways of modernism to postmodernism is an increased self-consciousness in art and writing, an exploration of the limits and possibilities in art and of the past which informs it" (1992:55). The postmodern

picture books which are being analysed in this thesis display a tendency to question, or problematise, ideological, social and cultural conventions as portrayed in traditional picture books.

Postmodernism is also about critiquing language and power, and raising questions concerning truth and authenticity. Brenda Marshall suggests:

> Postmodernism is about language. And how it controls, how it determines meaning, and how we try to exert control through language. About how language restricts, closes down, insists that it stands for some thing. Postmodernism is about how we are defined within that language, and within specific historical, social, cultural matrices. It's about race, class, gender, erotic identity and practice, nationality, age, ethnicity. It's about difference. It's about power and powerlessness, about empowerment, and about all the stages in between and beyond and unthought of. Postmodernism is about everything that's come before that shows up the detritus and the brilliance of the everyday of now...Postmodernism is about histories not told, retold, untold...It's about the refusal to see history as linear (1992:81).

What is pertinent about Marshall's description of postmodernism is her insistence on linking postmodernism to language, culture and history. By doing so she foregrounds notions of ideology, which "is formulated in and by language" (Stephens 1992:8), and is fundamental to all cultural practices. Children's texts which display postmodern characteristics very often interrogate socially received standards of behaviour, and dominant cultural ideologies.

Roberta Trites has labelled such pictorial texts, "visual manifold narratives". Trites suggests:

> The structure of the story unfolds by means of multiple planes of signification that recur on the majority of the book's pages. But visual manifold narratives stimulate a variety of questions. How do they work? How do they vary from - and even comment on - traditional picture books? How do they affect the reader? And most important: What do manifold narratives say about our cultural reading practices? (1994:225).

The questions Trites poses are significant to this thesis, as she implies there is a striking variation between manifold narratives and traditional texts. It is in this realm of variation that questions in relation to form, content, style, structure, and meaning arise. It is important to consider the implications of such variations, and also to comment on how these texts reflect, or deflect, aspects of contemporary Western culture. Trites suggests that visual manifold narratives make a comment on cultural reading practices. This is a pertinent observation as postmodern picture books, usually, require the reader to actively participate in the construction of the story(s). Postmodern texts could be considered 'writerly' whereas traditional texts are more 'readerly'. These terms are attributed to Roland Barthes, and Ann Jefferson and David Robey offer this definition, "A readerly text is the one that as readers we passively consume, whereas the writerly text demands the reader's active cooperation, and requires him [sic] to contribute in the production and writing of the text" (1986:108). 'Writerly' texts demand participation and demonstrate a break with accepted reading conventions. In postmodern picture books the 'writerly' aspects of the text may be apparent in the words and/or the pictures.

Pictorial images are, self-evidently, vital components of the picture book and can serve specific authorial functions. Jane Doonan claims:

> Pictures have two basic modes of referring to things outside themselves: denotation and exemplification. Denotation is simple. A picture that represents an object refers to and denotes it. The meaning of the symbol is attached to the object....
> The other mode of referring is called exemplification, which means that pictures show, by example, abstract notions, conditions, ideas, that cannot be pointed to directly but may

> be recognized through qualities or properties which the pictures literally or metaphorically display. Meanings do not become attached, as they do to symbols that denote. You have to select your meanings from a variety of possibilities and apply those which best suit the image(s) and the context (1993:15).

Postmodern picture books tend to display characteristics of exemplification. The exemplifying symbol, with its open nature, allows for multiple interpretation. There is no single precise reading which allows fixed definition of what is being pictorially represented. The reader is able to construct a variety of meanings based on how the individual decodes the visual cues. Understanding the cues is of vital importance to the child reader; they, like adults, want to make sense of their world. Linda Hutcheon suggests that postmodernism draws attention to our need to make order:

> It acknowledges the human urge to make order, while pointing out that the orders we create are just that: human constructs, not natural or given entities... part of its questioning involves an energizing rethinking of margins and edges, of what does not fit in the humanly constructed notion of center. Such interrogations of the impulse to sameness (or single otherness) and homogeneity, unity and certainty, make room for a consideration of the different and the heterogeneous, the hybrid and the provisional. This is not a a rejection of the former values in favor of the latter; it is a rethinking of each in the light of the others (1991:41-2).

These observations can readily be applied to the reader decoding the signs present in a postmodern picture book. It is important for the reader to make sense of the information presented to her/him. However, because it is often not presented in a straightforward linear manner, the reader is required to consider different interpretations of the signs presented in the text. This makes the process of explanation more complex; and allows the reader the opportunity to focus on multiple differences. This is empowering to the reader as she/he is an

active participant in the creation of the narrative(s).

The process becomes a little more mysterious and intriguing when the visuals offer up numerous possibilities that do not necessarily correspond to the written narrative. Further questions of truth and authenticity arise. The text is offering a polyphony of voices, with tensions often times arising between them. Texts that display a plurality of voices very often require the reader to consider the possibility of heterogeneous reading positions in order to construct meaning(s).

The discussion of postmodernism in this thesis is textually based because it is my aim to highlight the diversity of form and content found within postmodern picture books. David Lewis believes critics of picture books must "patiently and carefully describe" individual texts. He suggests taking a phenomenological approach:

> Picture books are, of course, already frequently described - in reviews, critical appraisals, bibliographies and elsewhere but what I have in mind is a phenomenology of the picture book. Not a phenomenology that seeks for an essence, but a reflective looking that results in an account of what it is like to read this or that particular book. Just as a true phenomenological investigation 'brackets off' questions about the real nature of things and concentrates upon the object as perceived or imagined - that is, as it appears in consciousness - I have in mind a kind of reading-and-writing that sets aside judgements of quality and preconceptions about 'what picture books are really like'(1996:113-114).

Lewis's statement outlines a descriptive way in which to consider children's texts. Each text must be studied on its own merits, and critiqued for the individual elements it contains. The relevance of his statement to this thesis is that particular elements of postmodernism, which are apparent in specific texts, can be foregrounded and discussed.

In part one I will focus on the position of the reader,

highlighting the non-linear elements of the illustrations, and the intertextual aspects of Charlotte's Piggy Bank, by David McKee. I will also examine the elements of indeterminacy and metafiction in Black and White, by David Macaulay. In part two I will discuss the notion of 'play' and the representation of the feminine in Babette Cole's Princess Smartypants. In addition I will highlight ideological issues, in particular, gender roles. In part three I will focus on the notions of truth and knowledge, in particular the hegemonic, male dominated potrayal of history that has permeated many children's history texts. I will investigate the "cultural politics of difference" as presented in My Place, by Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins (illustrator).

Part One: The Reader; Intertextuality; Indeterminacy; Metafiction.

David M^{C}Kee's 1996 publication, Charlotte's Piggy Bank is a text which constantly shifts the positioning of the reader. The reader must negotiate appropriate positions based on the visual and verbal cues offered by the text.

The cover shows the profile of a large, smiling, pink piggy bank with red spots. Its gaze is directed at the reader, luring the reader into a position of conspiracy with the pig. This suggests the pig has agency and that it would like to take the reader into the text. M^{C}Kee, however, immediately undermines this supposition on the page preceding the main text. Here he has a female child about to place money in the slot of the piggy bank. The child and the pig are looking at each other; they are smiling and making eye contact. This implies that there is a pleasant interpersonal relationship between the child and the piggy bank. The reader is now situated outside the text, rather like a voyeur observing an intimate moment. The effect is destabilising for the reader as contradictory messages are being presented before the written narrative has even commenced.

M^{C}Kee ensures this destablisation will continue when the reader turns the page. The double spread contains a number of people involved in a variety of activities such as eating, shopping and taking photographs. The mood is one of a market place or a holiday resort. He has also included some social deviants in the form of male pick-pockets, which could be read as a comment on contemporary society where theft is commonplace. Or perhaps he is suggesting that the

ancient practice of pick-pocketing is as prevalent today as it was in the past. All is not what it seems, the happy smiling holiday makers are victims of petty theft. McKee has been careful to make the pick-pockets blend in with the other characters. There is no suggestion that these people are stealing because they are impoverished. Because of this it is difficult to explain their actions, and their conduct is open to interpretation.

This raises the issue of a dual audience; the text will offer something to both children and adults. The blurring of audience boundaries is often found in postmodern picture books. John Cech suggests this blurring of boundaries is a favourable move. He states:

> The blurring of audience boundaries in the contemporary picture book may indeed fill a cultural need for reduction and simplification.
>
> But something else is happening in the contemporary picture book that challenges conventional assumptions about its legitimate subject matter and thus forces us to re-examine our expectations concerning the nature of the genre. For contemporary creators of the picture book have already begun to reshape its traditional dimensions into a form that speaks to adults and children, separately or together, in words and images that not only delight but shock, provoke and perhaps enlighten (1987:198).

Cech's comments are pertinent to McKee's use of generalized social references. McKee is creating situations whereby the adult reader must re-examine accepted assumptions of what should or should not be considered suitable in children's texts.

Another social reference McKee has included is a female prostitute standing on a street corner. She has very red lips and is wearing a short, sleeveless dress. She is not soliciting in an obvious manner, but to the adult eye the implication is clear. This sort of inclusion is beyond the understanding of the (young) child reader.

However, unspoken social modes of behaviour such as this need not be excluded from a child's text. This can be a contentious issue as some critics read these sorts of 'adult' references as a form of complicity between the author and the adult reader. As such the child is excluded and this is sometimes viewed as unacceptable. I, however, agree with Clare Bradford when she suggests that children and adults bring different knowledge to the texts:

> First, the act of reading, the sharing of a picture book between the adult and child, is a social event, inviting and even demanding talk of many kinds.
>
> Secondly, text and illustrations can work at different levels, assuming that child and adult will bring vastly different kinds of knowledge and experience to the text. Many of the best picture books for very young children simultaneously delight the child and challenge the adult (1993:13-14).

Children do not need to get all the clues to comprehend the narrative. M^{c}Kee is self-consciously creating a circumstance in which the adult reader is required to respond. If the adult response is one of trepidation, it is up to the adult to examine her/his reaction.

M^{c}Kee offers further provocations in the realm of aesthetic contemplation. The pictures take up the whole physical space of the page. This suggests the text is not easily contained and that there is even more going on that the reader is unable to access. This is in addition to the wealth of pictorial narratives which resist closure and are open to diverse interpretations. This technique also questions the notion of a centre; because if there is no centre then there can be no defined margins. John Stephens argues, "There are also special problems posed by texts which set out to deny any stable centre of potential meaning, and hence imply a reader capable of multiple perspectives" (1992:55). This denial of a centre of potential meaning

allows the reader to establish multiple discourses with the text. This is particularly relevant to the young child who is unable to read, and must engage with the text through the visuals. Charlotte's Piggy Bank breaks with conventional codes of representation in that there is no coherence in the illustrations. The reader is required to rove the pages in order to find her/his focalising point. This raises questions of perspective, and once more signifies the dual audience of the text. A very young reader would neither know about, or be particularly interested in, theories of perspective.

M^{C}Kee questions the western perception of perspective. Visual artist, David Hockney, has spoken at length about perspective; he suggests:

> Perspective is a theoretical abstraction that was worked out in the fifteenth century. It suddenly altered pictures: it gave a strong illusion of depth; it lost something and it gained something. At first the gain was thrilling, but slowly, very slowly, we became aware of what had been lost. That loss was the depiction of passing time. We thought this way of looking was so true that when the photograph came along it seemed to confirm perspective. Of course, it was going to confirm perspective because it was exactly the same way of looking, from a central point with one eye fixed in time (Hockney, 1988:34).

M^{C}Kee's pictures in Charlotte's Piggy Bank suggest he considers that perspective is a construction that denies motion and time. There is no single focalising point in any of the pictures, consequently there is an appearance of movement. This is achieved by M^{C}Kee's use of fragmented scenes and because the pictures lack depth. Hockney argues that when artists create depth, motion and time are abolished. "Narrative must be a flow in time and one-point perspective freezes time and space" (Hockney, 1988:123). Lack of depth is considered to be a characteristic of postmodernism. It is this very characteristic that

displays the paradoxical nature of postmodernism. If perspective is a construction that has been with us since the fifteenth century, then visual art prior to this would lack depth but contain narrative. It would seem, then, McKee's style borrows from a pre-Renaissance era. This implies his technique is a case of intertextual 'quoting' in regard to visual representation. The effect being one of opening up the possibilities of narrative. The pictures may visually lack depth, however, this lack in one area creates space for dialogue in another area: the realm of meaning, which need not be fixed but based on individual interpretation. This puts the onus back on the reader as she/he is required to produce meaning(s) from the range of visual cues and clues.

McKee has interior and exterior scenes flow into one another. On some pages the pictures must be viewed at different angles to ascertain what is happening. There is much play with visual continuity; the referents are the characters who can be tracked from one page to another. Pictures such as these further rupture the conventional, linear narrative. Trites explores this idea and she suggests that the subversion of linear narratives empowers the reader:

> In allowing the reader to synthesize information from disparate planes of signification, manifold narratives emphasize the process of reading to subvert traditional linear readings....When no single interpretation asserts itself on the readers, they are more likely to escape the type of ideological manipulation that totalizing texts produce. Manifold narratives allow the reading subject to suture in a nonlinear way that may escape the prescribed limitations of the dominant ideology (1994:239-240).

McKee wants to bring into play, and also question, prescribed ways of seeing. Whilst the book as a whole has a 'right way up', there is a parody of this within some pictures. Some characters appear to be

walking off the pages and some scenes look as though they have been pressed flat.

He may be parodying the conventions of western art practices (particularly since the Renaissance) and questioning the concept of 'High' art. High art is now associated with the modernist period. Madan Sarup states:

> Art's absorption in itself is the essential principle of modernism. It should be added that in modernism there is often a desire for absolute originality. The artistic products of modernism are supposed to be pure signs of nothing but themselves.
>
> One of the main characteristics of postmodernism in art is the multiplication of stylistic norms and methods. This emphasis on stylistic diversity is part of a larger mistrust of the modernist aesthetic of exclusion (1993:172).

Ellen Berry further claims, "the modernist idea of culture was generated out of a specific sense of cultural hierarchy that divided cultural spaces and products into highbrow (true culture) and lowbrow (popular culture)" (1992:134). The mood of postmodernism is usually associated with mass or popular culture. Postmodern art is frequently disjunctive, open to interpretation, and it very often borrows from a variety of cultural codes. The pictures in Charlotte's Piggy Bank display postmodern characteristics with a pre-Renaissance lack of fixed perspective.

Moss states:

> Broadly speaking, postmodernism pictures a subjective, relativisitc world which is so full of contradiction and so dependent on individual observers for its definition that there is little certainty about anything. Building on poststructuralist thinking, it also posits a view of this observing self as decentred, as a product not of individual consciousness but as the meeting point of a plurality of discourses so that the human being is not a unity, not autonomous, but a process, perpetually in construction, perpetually contradictory, perpetually open to change (1992:54-55).

The protagonist Charlotte is extremely difficult to locate in the opening picture. The flow of reading is interrupted in the reader's search for her. She is not presented as a distinct individual; rather she is a part of a bigger picture. This reinforces the post-structuralist notion of the decentered subject. Rice and Waugh state:

> Post-structuralism has sought to disrupt this man-centred view of the world, arguing that the subject, and that sense of unique subjectivity itself, is constructed in language and discourse, and rather than being fixed and unified, the subject is split, unstable or fragmented (1994:119).

McKee is applying and exploiting this theory, not only through his lack of fixed perspective and split pictures, but also with the plurality of narratives presented within the pictures. They pose questions which in turn lead to more questions. The reader is empowered as she/he is able to construct her/his own narratives based on visual clues and cues embedded within pictures. The reader can follow Charlotte and the pig from page to page but can also disregard them in favour of another set of characters or events. The reading will be based on fragments of visual information that shift and change from one page to another. There can be no complete, unified, stable or precise reading.

The written narrative is linear and straight forward. It begins, "One day, when they were out together, Aunt Jane bought Charlotte a present." The use of "one day" suggests a play with the folk and fairy tale tradition of "once upon a time", with no fixed time or place being specified. The fact that the pictures display movement supports this premise.

There is nothing idiosyncratic about the written narrative,

although the pig has the capacity to speak. This, in a children's text, is not unusual or outstanding. What is unconventional in a text for children is what the pig actually does. It is a "magic pig" which tells Charlotte if she saves enough money it will grant her a wish. She will know she has saved enough when she hears a "ding" after she has placed a certain number of coins in the piggy bank. Charlotte is very industrious and earns money by helping her family and her neighbours. Finally the pig goes DING! and Charlotte thinks she has now earned her wish. The pig, however, tricks her into saying "I wish you were a flying pig." With that the pig sprouts wings and flies out the window, saying, "Life can be very hard." The look on Charlotte's face suggests that she agrees.

McKee is playing provocative games with his flying pig. It brings to mind the old adage "pigs might fly", which we have come to understand as, it will never happen. Yet the pig is given ultimate agency; its wish is fulfilled and it has risen from the status of the proverbial to the actual. The pig and the aphorism surrounding it have broken through their literal limitations; the impossible has been made possible. Yet this does not seem to apply to the human characters in the text. None have surpassed their limitations, although individual readings of the visuals may allow for some human characters to break away from imposed limits. This, however, is not immediately obvious as in the case of the pig. Ultimately, though, the industrious child protagonist is left unfulfilled, angry and frustrated:

> "Come back," shouted Charlotte.
> "Perhaps," said the pig.

An ending such as this situates the child reader outside the text. The child protagonist is not one the child reader would finally choose to

align her/him self with. The abrupt and unexpected conclusion to the written narrative is rather disconcerting to a young child. When my five year old daughter, Djuna, was read the text for the first time she was confused by the ending. She exclaimed, "Well go on finish the story." She was outraged to discover there was no more text: "That pig is mean, it should not trick!" She made a very interesting connection between the pig and a clown in Charlotte's bedroom. Djuna claims the clown is mean and scary and it turned the pig mean. She then noticed (in the top right corner of the last page) a drawing of a boy receiving a piggy bank exactly the same as Charlotte's. Djuna declared, "Oh no, it's probably another trick one, it's not fair." When questioned as to whether it would be mean without the influence of a clown, she seemed to think it would still be a trick pig. The physical appearance of the pig is what she based her decision on.

What is pertinent about Djuna's understanding of the written text is that, not only did she perceive it as unfinished (resisting closure) but, she attempted to include her own reasons for the pig's actions. She extended the narrative and filled what she perceived to be the gaps. She was empowered as reader/listener as she was able to make her own decisions. The text did not limit her interpretations.

* * * * * *

The next area I will concentrate on is that of intertextuality. John Stephens provides a useful working definition of the term:

> The production of meaning from the interrelationships between audience, text, other texts, and the socio-cultural determinations of significance, is a process which may be conveniently summed up in the term <u>intertextuality</u>. Further,

> no text exists in isolation from other texts, and from their conventions and genres (1992:84).

Charlotte's Piggy Bank is richly intertextual; McKee borrows freely from E.B. White's 1952 publication, Charlotte's Web. This text has entered the canon of children's literature and as such is an appropriate choice for a postmodern reworking. "Postmodernism signals its dependence by its use of the canon, but reveals its rebellion through its ironic abuse of it" (Hutcheon, 1991:130). McKee's "ironic abuse" of Charlotte's Web highlights the interdependence of texts upon one another. Ann Grieve states:

> There are a number of devices for foregrounding intertextual networking within a text and they are commonly found in picture books. The intertextual strategy most commonly found in picture books is the "transmigration of characters from one fictional universe to another" (McHale,p57) or what Umberto Eco calls "transworld migration". Because picture books are still recognisably literature for children, the characters which are transmigrated from one fictional universe are usually well known (1993:20).

McKee has borrowed from a text which is aimed at older children. However many young children will be familiar with the text through the animated film version of it. So here we have a double "transworld migration" which McKee is actively exploiting. He is very careful, though, to make his 'main' characters visually distinct from those in the film. As such McKee's characters have an ironic relationship with their predecessors. The film and print versions of Charlotte's Web flow neatly from one scene to the next with no break in the narrative logic. Whereas (visually) Charlotte's Piggy Bank is a complex journey involving numerous, seemingly unconnected, characters, as well Charlotte and the piggy bank.

In Charlotte's Web (both print and film texts) the Charlotte character is a talking spider who saves the life of a talking pig,

named Wilbur, by weaving words ('some pig', 'radiant', 'terrific', 'humble') about him into her web. This situation arises as Wilbur is a commodity who is being fattened up in order to slaughter. The relationship between Charlotte and Wilbur is one based on mutual respect. However, Charlotte is, both literally and metaphorically, above him. She is physically positioned in the rafters of the barn; and she is attributed with an astute intellect and a knowledge of Latin. She is also the archetypal trickster, who manages to fool humans in order to save Wilbur. The pig is presented as lovable but very naive - one who is unable to take control of his situation. He is reliant on Charlotte to reverse his fate. Once this has been achieved, and once Charlotte has woven her egg sac, she dies. Her eggs eventually hatch and Wilbur lives to a ripe old age.

What is so interesting about Charlotte's Web in regard to Charlotte's Piggy Bank is the relationships between both the Charlotte characters and both the pigs. In Charlotte's Web the human characters are tricked by the cleverness of the spider; whereas in Charlotte's Piggy Bank the child, Charlotte, is tricked by the pig. M^{c}Kee subtly establishes the motive for the pig to trick Charlotte early in the written narrative:

> "Silly present," said Charlotte as she went indoors and she shook the pig to try to get the money out.
> "Don't do that," said the pig. "It hurts."

At first the reader may not realise that the piggy bank has no hole from which to remove the money. As such the piggy bank will have to be smashed when it is full. The 'life' of the pig will end; Charlotte will be a 'death-dealer' rather than a life-saver like her spider counterpart. Yet, paradoxically the piggy bank is reliant on Charlotte

to fill it, so it can manipulate her to grant it its freedom. The pig can no longer be perceived as naive, like Wilbur; nor can it be regarded as an unselfish trickster, like Charlotte the spider. The pig is the one who maintains agency throughout the text and, like the pig in Charlotte's Web, it achieves its freedom through the assistance of others. Inadvertently the child Charlotte saves the object that she hoped would give her something. This raises questions of desire.

Wilbur's appetite-dominated existence would have brought him certain death had Charlotte not saved him. The child Charlotte's money-dominated existence would have meant certain death for the piggy bank had it not tricked her. The selfless spider has been reincarnated in M^{C}Kee's text as a self-centered (although industrious) child. The piggy bank pig has the last laugh; the child is left firmly on the ground as it flies out the window, unlike White's text where the position of the spider is **always** above that of the pig. There are obvious similarities between the two texts as well as significant differences.

Charlotte's Piggy Bank could be considered a parodic version of the well known pre-text. Hutcheon claims, "Parody is a perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (1991:11). Certainly positions of power (no matter how subtle) are questioned in M^{C}Kee's text. Whilst both the Charlotte characters are bestowed with particular powers in relation to the pigs, it is the inanimate pig who manages to overcome its lowly position using its own skills. The Charlotte characters are used as a means to the same ends except M^{C}Kee reverses the trickster figure. By doing so he makes the pig 'author'

of its own text and he re-situates the locus of meaning. It no longer resides in what a particular Charlotte can do for a particular pig; it is now what the pig can do for itself. Wilbur will always remain a barnyard animal saved by a clever spider; the piggy bank, however, has tricked its way to ultimate freedom. M^{C}Kee's use of a trickster figure indicates another use of intertextuality. There is a long literary history of the trickster figure. Jane Yolen notes:

> The figure of the trickster can be found in every folklore tradition....they represent chaos in the ordered life....the stories always make us smile at the ingenuity of the hero...that sly gutsiness of the trickster who has outwitted us all in the end (1986:127-128).

The piggy bank certainly represents the archetypal trickster who manages to outwit the child protagonist and also the reader. As mentioned previously an ending such as the one in Charlotte's Piggy Bank is unconventional in a text for young children.

Charlotte's Piggy Bank also displays self-reflexive intertextuality which refers the reader back to other texts by M^{C}Kee. John and Brenda from I Hate My Teddy Bear are on the last double spread page. They look almost identical to the picture of them on the cover of 'their' text. The only slight variation is the gaze of the teddies. In I Hate My Teddy Bear the bears are looking at the reader; in Charlotte's Piggy Bank they are staring across the street. Perhaps this is because they are not the subjects of this particular text. It is not important that they engage with the reader. This specific intertextual inclusion is interesting as the technique of illustration juxtaposed with a linear written narrative is similar in both texts. Critical comments made about I Hate My Teddy Bear can be readily applied to Charlotte's Piggy Bank. Moss, when speaking about I Hate My

Teddy Bear and Snow Woman (also by M^{C}Kee) suggests these texts offer children "the opportunity to experience multi-layered narrative, to read and write a text at the same time in that they can be entertained by a text on the simplest level as well as becoming engaged in the active pursuit of complex meaning" (1992:62). Meaning enters the realm of indeterminacy, which refers to the gaps and absences in the text which the reader must fill.

* * * * * *

In this section I wish to focus on the notions of indeterminacy and metafiction.

Jerome Klinkowitz states, "Indeterminacy shows itself in cultural pluralism, fragmentation, and a multitude of choice; process and change rule the day; the once inviolate self glories in new diffraction, with desire happily displaced; media is everywhere, and religion and science intermix" (1988:129). Ihab Hassan, who views indeterminacy as a constitutive tendency of postmodernism, provides this definition, "I mean a complex referent that these diverse concepts help to delineate: ambiguity, discontinuity, heterodoxy, pluralism, randomness, revolt, perversion, deformation" (1987:153). These definitions and terms, collectively or singly, help to outline what is at play in the reading of a picture book that displays postmodern characteristics. David Macaulay's 1990 publication Black and White exhibits many of the aforementioned traits.

The cover has the words 'black' and 'white' printed in blue and green. These words are repeated on the title page but this time in

red. This brings to mind the riddle about newspapers; black and white and red/read all over. Macaulay fulfills this intertextual expectation with an abundant use of newspaper throughout the text. Newspapers refer directly to the print media which is a means of communication, supposedly presenting the facts or the truth. However, Macaulay manipulates this expectation, not only by having black and white printed in colour but also, with his irreverent use of this print medium in the text. He has characters dressed in newspapers, a dog 'reading' a paper, and newspaper used as fish and chip wrapping. This latter use foregrounds the multi-layered nature of the text. There is something beneath every surface. The fragmentary character of the text is also indicated by Macaulay's collage effect of torn newspaper. This, at one point, takes over the narrative of Seeing Things and spills into the other narratives. The effect, however, is not one of narrative cohesion or continuity. The text(s) remain open to reader interpretation.

The title page also contains a warning:

> This book appears to contain a number of stories that do not necessarily occur at the same time. Then again, it may contain only one story. In any event, careful inspection of both words and pictures is recommended.

The reader is made aware the text(s) are going to be ambiguous and plurality of meaning will be available. The reader will also notice that the accepted, conventional, way of reading the picture book is being disturbed. The warning also serves to alert the reader to the fact that she/he is required to do some work. Trites states:

> The text couches its voice very carefully in the passive so as not to intrude on the reader's agency: Neither the author nor the text but the reader must construct the narrative (1994:233).

This insistence on reader participation is common in texts which are labelled 'metafiction'.

Hutcheon suggests metafiction can teach us about reading practices:

> Its central paradox for readers is that, while being made aware of the linguistic and fictive nature of what is being read, and thereby distanced from any unself-conscious identification on the level of character or plot, readers of metafiction are at the same time made mindful of their active role in reading, in participating in making the text mean (1984:xii).

In the case of Black and White making the text mean is no easy feat for the child reader. In fact for the young pre-reader the task is almost too difficult. It could be argued that Macaulay's implied audience is those children who would be considered experienced readers. Moss states that children's metafictive texts are a worthy inclusion to the genre of children's literature:

> Metafictional texts do seem to me to have a place in the field of children's literature. Firstly, because children do have an interest in these kinds of texts - certain kinds of readers find them fascinating. Secondly, because such texts may well have the function of providing an active criticism of more mainstream texts, of defining the limits of poetics; and finally because children's literature, like any form of literature, will inevitably build on, toy with and perhaps even destroy conventional forms as it develops. Perhaps provocation is as important as satisfaction for children. That's why it is worth throwing away the scabbard (1992:51).

Moss's observations suggest that metafictive texts offer a counterpoint to mainstream texts. By doing so they offer the child reader an opportunity to explore the gaps and absences in the text. I would argue this procedure links metafiction and indeterminancy. Iser states:

> Gaps are bound to open up, and offer a free play of interpretation for the specific way in which the various views can be connected with one another. These gaps give the reader a chance to build his [sic] own bridges, relating the

> different aspects of the object which have thus far been revealed to him. It is quite impossible for the text itself to fill in the gaps (1992:229).

Iser's insistence that the reader must fill the gaps in the texts is in keeping with Hutcheon's view that the reader of metafictive texts must participate in the making of meaning.

The first page opening in Black and White reveals four very different artistic styles accompanied by four different titles. Seeing Things is presented in watercolour and the style is impressionistic. Problem Parents is in black and white pen and ink with a sepia tone through it. A Waiting Game is presented in vivid colour and the style emphasises pattern and design. Udder Chaos is presented in black, white and green with touches of pink. The style is reminiscent of the paintings of the abstract expressionist, Robert Motherwell (This description of artistic styles comes, in part, from Stephens and Watson, 1994:44).

The narratives on the left side of the page, Seeing Things and Problem Parents seem, initially, to have a connection. When my eleven year old son, Jed, read the text for the first time he read all the left hand pages and then all the right hand pages. He formulated an argument for his reading position based on the fact that the left side narratives both contained trains, children, and parents. Following is a transcript of Jed's initial interpretation of the text. David Lewis believes the child's view is important even if, at times, it is difficult to obtain or interpret. Lewis states:

> Nevertheless the attempt must be made for we are all prone to forget that in the end there is no such thing as 'the text itself', an objective artefact that can be discovered outside of any read..j of it. If all we ever do is reflect upon our own reading we will never find out anything about the text as realized by the child (1996:113).

Following is Jed's realization of Black and White.

> The story Seeing Things is connected to the story Problem Parents when the boy on the train sees snow and works out it is newspaper. This happens at the same time as the dad in Problem Parents rips the paper into shreds. I also think that the boy's train set looks like the train that the boy in Seeing Things is on. Also the boy on the train says that there are strange creatures standing around the train, this connects the trains to the story Udder Chaos as the strange creatures are cows. Problem Parents is also connected to A Waiting Game because when the boy had to clean up so did the station master. The reason why the train in A Waiting Game is delayed is because the kid in Problem Parents is out at dinner. Then when he comes home the train arrives at the station in A Waiting Game. When the book is finished the last picture shows the boy picking up the station. I think the dog in Problem Parents is imagining he is the cows in Udder Chaos because when he is asleep the cows wander off. When the dog watches t.v. and sees the robber from Udder Chaos he thinks the robber is his parents, I don't know why. Later, when the dog sees the train you can see the train in Udder Chaos and the cows are blocking it. Then you see a cow's eye and the dog's eye, it seems the cow and the dog are linked. Then when the dog goes to bed the cows come home.

All these observations of Jed's are based on the pictures; he did not write at all about the written narratives. When questioned about this he explained that the pictures were far more interesting. He wanted to make up his own stories and not use the ones given. Jed said he thought the author wanted children to make up as many stories as they could. This comment of Jed's is interesting when considering language. Jed has not allowed the written language of the text to exert any control in regard to his understanding of the text. He made connections between the visual information and became the active author rather than the passive consumer. This suggests that Black and White is a complex 'writerly' text in which the reader can construct and reconstruct meaning depending on which narrative cues and clues she/he chooses to pursue.

What is pertinent about Jed's account is his need to make

connections between the pictorial narratives. He did not perceive them as separate and disconnected, he insisted that there were correlations between them. Yet he did not see the necessity to complete the text by establishing a resolute and fixed single, chronological narrative, with a definitive conclusion. His reading ability and his understanding of the author's intentions are sophisticated enough to allow him to accept that this text offers infinite layers which lead to multiple interpretations.

Each of the four narrative strands not only have their own aesthetic style but the written narratives techniques differ also. "There is no controlling "master narrative" offering a unitary view of characters and events, and the text makes large demands on the reader's capacity to construct meaning from cues which are often ambiguous and even contradictory" (Bradford, 1993:10). Seeing Things is told from a third person point of view; and the subject matter is a boy travelling on train to meet his parents. Problem Parents is narrated by the older sister of the boy with the train set; her narration revolves around their parents and the unusual behaviour they display. A Waiting Game is written like a voice-over technique which provides information about a train service to passengers on a station platform. Udder Chaos contains a disjointed narrative predominantly about cows.

The texts do relate to each other but what confuses the reader (adult and child) is the constant shift in narrative consciousness. This strategy serves to alienate the reader, even though she/he must construct the narratives. Stephens call this an "estranged subject position", as simple identification with the text is impossible and

the

reader is unable to adopt a single subject position (1992:70). In the case of Black and White Macaulay offers "multi-stranded narration" and "overtly inscribed indeterminacies" (Stephens, 1992:70). Because of this the reader is disallowed a comfortable and secure position in which to enter the text. Options immediately offer themselves to the willing reader in the form of questions such as, "Where do I start from?" "How do I proceed?" "What is most significant?" and in the words of Djuna, "Why did the author make such a hard book?" The raising of such questions places the reader in an interrogative position. Stephens, when discussing interrogative texts (which require the reader to adopt an interrogative reading position) suggests such texts,

> include a tendency to employ a range of discourses which may function oppositionally or dialectically, effecting a multiplicity of unresolved points of view on both micro-discoursal and macro-discoursal levels. Such an element of indeterminacy may operate in conjunction with a tendency to employ textual strategies which undermine the illusion of fictionality by drawing attention to the nature of the text as text (1992:123-124).

For the reader unused to such texts Black and White may initially seem too difficult, too strange, and beyond comprehension. However, if the reader is prepared to ask questions of the text and engage actively with it the experience should illuminate the polysystemic nature of reading the text. Lewis describes polysystemy as, "the piecing together of text out of different kinds of signifying systems" (1996:108). Black and White is a text that can, indeed, only ever be pieced together. It refuses to offer any definitive meanings or ultimate conclusions - what is significant is the process the reader goes through to create meaning(s).

Hutcheon views metafiction which foregrounds its "fiction making processes" as openly contesting realism, "for it embodies its own theories, demands to be taken on its own terms" (1984:39). This view is applicable to Black and White as there is no prescribed formula by which one can interpret the text. As such the process of interpretation is foregrounded. Nelly Richard suggests multiple interpretation is a factor which distinguishes postmodernity from modernity:

> Modernity has always been intimately linked to the idea and practice of writing. The storage of knowledge in books generated meaning and fixed reference points: the book as history is also history as the book. Postmodernity, on the other hand, declares itself concerned not with the question of established meanings, but with the challenging of the very concept of any monological or univalent structure of signification (1993:467).

In Black and White the notion of established, definitive meaning is undermined. The text has no predetermined direction or privileged point of view. Attention is drawn to the structure and construction of the text. Metafictive texts such as Black and White serve to demonstrate analogies between how texts mean and, how meanings are attributed to everyday existence and reality. It is a text that invites ludic play, which allows the reader the opportunity to take up a variety of subject and reading positions.

Part Two: Play and the representation of the feminine.

The term "play" in theoretical discourse is oftentimes referred to as ludism. Vicki Mistacco describes it this way:

> 'Ludism' may simply be described as the open play of signification, as the free and productive interaction of forms, of signifiers and signifieds, without regard for an original or ultimate meaning. In literature, ludism signifies textual play; the text is viewed as a game affording both author and reader the possibility of producing endless meanings and relationships (1994:109).

Some postmodern theorists tend to view ludism or play as an opportunity to explore the potential of signification, rather than persisting in a search for unitary truths and fixed meanings. Play allows for the unexpected and the spontaneous. There is no prescribed way to read a text that involves ludism.

W. Nikola-Lisa suggests we live in an age which looks reflexively upon previous cultural and political attitudes; he states:

> In that backward glance, that gaze, we play:
> play with the materials of culture,
> play with the (in)determinate codes of literature,
> play with all that we have previously esteemed, valued-held to immutable (1994:35).

Producers of postmodern picture books play innovatively with traditional codes and conventions that have preceded them. The consequence of such play is texts which not only defy the rules but also draw attention to their existence. Usually postmodern texts display an impulse to create situations and/or characters which interrogate and challenge dominant social ideologies. Stephens refers to such texts as "carnivalesque"; he states:

> Carnival in children's literature is grounded in a playfulness which situates itself in positions of

> nonconformity. It expresses opposition to authoritarianism and seriousness, and it is often manifested as parody of prevailing literary forms and genres, or as literature in non-canonical forms. Its discourse is often idiomatic, and rich in a play of signifiers which foregrounds the relativity of the sign-thing relationships, and hence the relativity of prevailing 'truths' and ideologies (1992:121-122).

Princess Smartypants by Babette Cole is a parodic revision of Cinderella, with a smattering of The Frog Prince and Rumplestiltskin also included. Cole examines the ideologies presented in the traditional tale(s). The versions Cole parodies are those which have become popular since the 1950's, predominantly through Walt Disney's mass marketing approach. These versions are generally bowdlerized and present particularly sexist points of view. It is these versions with which most children, today, are familiar. Cole's primary focus in her critique of these versions is the portrayal of patriarchal rule and marriage as a means of upholding this.

The title, Princess Smartypants, is interesting in that it suggests attributes of the character, rather than her actual name. This sets up the notion of playfulness that permeates the text. It also implies a clash between what we have come to expect from the traditional portrayal of princesses, who are usually defined by their physical attributes, and from what we can expect from the protagonist of this text. It seems she will be presented as quick-witted; consequently the focus will be on her intellect, and perhaps her autonomy.

The cover of Princess Smartypants displays a leather-clad, young woman riding a motorbike. A petite gold crown sits atop her flowing blonde hair. Her pillion passenger is a small, green, dragon-like creature. Both characters are smiling and at ease. Contradictions have

been immediately set up. Firstly through what Smartypants is wearing; black leather is not usually how we imagine a storybook princess to be attired. Secondly, through the dragon; in traditional tales dragons and princesses are antipathetic to one another. These visual clues support the assertion that there will be significant differences between the protagonist of this text and those of traditional texts.

Cole reinforces this on the front end paper. Displayed is a coat of arms, two small winged dragons flank its sides and a crowned frog sits on top. The shield is blue and is adorned with pink ribbons. The motto on the banner reads, "Smartypants Rulus O.K.us". This evokes the schoolchild's 'pig' Latin, as mottoes are usually in Latin; and further highlights the aspect of play within the text. There is a lack of seriousness in the use of this emblem which signals the playful disposition of the protagonist. It also parodies the perception of a coat of arms as containing positive or desirable attributes. Qualities such as wisdom, strength, virtue, or knowledge are frequently adopted as favourable maxims. These maxims are usually intended to be a representative mode of conduct which is beneficial to the wider community. The one in Princess Smartypants implies Smartypants is in a position of authority and that she will have agency throughout the text. Implicit in the term "smartypants" are the notions of authority and agency but there is also the likelihood of a fall associated with a "smartypants" type. This, however, is not the case in Princess Smartypants. Cole does not allow her protagonist to succumb to the fate of other "smartypants". Here we are entering a realm where the young woman's personal identity and individual goals are of prime significance.

Cole confirms this on the pages preceding the main body of the text. Smartypants, dressed in dungarees and flat red shoes, leads a parade of winged, dragon-creatures. It seems she is directing the reader into the text. Cole insists on the reader's awareness of Smartypants' agency. The first illustration (in the main text) takes up the whole physical space of the page. Smartypants is lying on the floor, watching show jumping on television, whilst surrounded by animals. Nothing suggests she is an extremely wealthy princess, although the decadence of her lifestyle is evident. The written narrative accompanying this picture reads:

> Princess Smartypants did not want to get married.
> She enjoyed being a Ms.

This is juxtaposed with the recto page which is framed by ruled lines and conveys a sense of order. Smartypants sits upon a throne carefully painting her fingernails. She avoids making eye contact with three suitors who are gazing lovingly at her. The illustration of her and the throne take up half the picture; the three suitors take up the other half.

Cole's pictorial style and technique is influenced by the popular British comic, Beano, where humour is paramount. The reader is expected to view the scenes as amusing. She maintains the humour throughout the text by exaggerating and emphasising particular features. The pets are unusually large and the suitors seem small and insignificant in comparison. Cole suggests shifts in mood through her use of frames. When Smartypants needs to take control of a situation Cole uses a rigid frame. When events are going according to plan for Smartypants there is no frame or a free-hand one. Doonan believes the use of frames is significant:

> The quality of the frame affects the psychological meaning of what it surrounds. A rigid structure contains events while a free-hand drawn line appears less formal and allows for a livelier effect - as if the frame itself is breathing to the life of the pictured events (1993:84).

These comments are relevant to Princess Smartypants as the lack of frames implies a lack of boundaries where Smartypants is involved. This also suggests a freedom of play which is intrinsic to the relationships Smartypants has with her suitors and to her maintaining a position of autonomy. She does this despite the fact her mother, the Queen, insists that she find a suitable husband. To placate the Queen she sets her suitors tasks. The one who accomplishes his task will win her hand. Cole achieves further playfulness through giving the princes names similar to their prescribed tasks. Prince Compost is expected to control the garden slugs; Prince Vertigo is expected to rescue Smartypants from a tower; and so on.

What is significant about the set tasks is that Smartypants is able to perform each and every one of them. The princes, however, find them too challenging and difficult. The princes are willing (because they want the prize) but not very able. Not that Smartypants wants them able; the key to her freedom lies in their inadequacies. This further enhances the presumption that Smartypants is the one in control; and the one who contests stereotypical gender roles. She is not going to be dominated by the hegemonic, patriarchal culture. The patriarchy is rendered powerless due to the ineffectiveness of its male representatives. The notion of the prince as the perfect prize for the passive princess is made to look preposterous in Princess Smartypants. The protagonist is, at no point in the text, prepared to relinquish her position of independence. She wants to remain in

control of her life and not be subjected to the marriage paradigm.

Smartypants being in control is an essential element of the text as it reinforces its subversive nature. In the traditional Cinderella tale the protagonist has little control over her life. She accepts that marriage is her only alternative and that this alternative is, in fact, desirable. Cinderella is presented as beautiful, passive, submissive, and virtuous. She is the perfect symbol of a respectable wife. The traditional text of Cinderella reinforces clearly delineated roles for females and males. Cole interrogates these arbitrary delineations through Smartypants. She has allowed her to adopt some of the more positive values, which were perceived to belong to the male. She is granted attributes such as independence, assertiveness, intelligence, and courage, yet she is not presented as aggressive. Rather she is portrayed as an autonomous protagonist. Her position of autonomy not only questions the ideals presented in Cinderella but those of other fairy tales as well. Bronwyn Davies suggests there is a particular type of female presented in many traditional tales:

> The idealised female sexual form in fairy tales is passive, inert, without power. She lies asleep for a hundred years, or in her coffin as if she were dead. She becomes so, in the fairy tales, often from the actions of powerful/evil women/witches such as the Queen in Snow White, or the wicked fairy in Sleeping Beauty. Virtue is passive, evil is active. The virtuous/passive/asexual women are given life in these stories only through the power of the prince's (or the woodchopper's) heroism/sexuality (1993:136-137).

Cole parodies the beliefs posited in the traditional tales by gently revealing the suitors' inadequacies. She is careful not to make them seem too ridiculous. To do so would detract attention away from Smartypants. She is constantly active and displays no desire to be won over by a handsome prince.

Just when Smartypants considers she is free from the male gaze Cole introduces Prince Swashbuckle. He is able to complete any task Smartypants sets him. He believes she will now be his. So Smartypants gives him "a magic kiss." This turns him into a "gigantic warty toad." He leaves, dejected and admitting defeat. Here we have a complete inversion of The Frog Prince, where the princess is rewarded for kissing the toad by receiving a handsome prince. The final page of the text shows Smartypants smiling broadly, clad in a red bikini, surrounded by pets.

Her attire is significant as it implies she has now established a position of sexual freedom. She has successfully avoided the social contract of marriage, and challenged the authority of the adult world. She maintains her position of power on her own terms by refusing to adopt a role prescribed by socially constructed conventions.

Princess Smartypants challenges some of the traditional versions of fairy tales by constantly undermining the ideological messages presented in them. What is most closely interrogated is the notion of defined roles for girls. By having her protagonist remain single by choice, Cole is providing an alternative to marriage as the desired option of all young women. Smartypants is able to disaffirm both parental and societal authority. The text succeeds because Cole presents her subject matter in a playful and parodic manner. She has broken down the stereotypical depiction of the fairy tale princess and provided the reader with a pro-active heroine.

Princess Smartypants resists sex role stereotyping and it presents the reader with an alternative to the binaries of female/male. It also allows for the possibility of exploring gendered

identities. It is an alternative which is not reliant on dominant ideologies. Whitney Chadwick suggests that the emergence of postmodernism has allowed women artists to "address concerns central to women's experiences":

> The fact that Postmodernism draws heavily on existing representations, rather than inventing new styles, and that it often derives its imagery from mass media or popular culture, has drawn attention to the ways that sexual and cultural difference are produced and reinforced in these images. The emergence of a set of critical practices within Postmodernism has led to critiques of how media images position women, and of the social apparatus by which images reinforce cultural myths of power and possession (1990:350).

The relevance of this statement in relation to Princess Smartypants lies in regard to Cole's parodic use of fairy tales to redress the cultural myths of patriarchal rule and marriage as desirable to all women. Myths such as these usually place girls and women in a subordinate position to that of boys and men. This text disallows its princess protagonist to be possessed by any male, or figurehead of the patriarchy - in the form of her parents.

The naturalisation of gender identity is problematised in Princess Smartypants. Broadly speaking, gender refers to characteristics culturally attributed to males and females. The dominant ideological position most commonly presented in traditional picture books relies on the assumption of fixed feminine or masculine gender. Postmodern theory contests this viewpoint and tends to focus on difference, via a critque of representation and subjectivity. The historical and social construction of gender is emphasised. Hutcheon suggests:

> The modernist concept of single and alienated otherness is challenged by the postmodern questioning of binaries that conceal hierarchies (self/other)...Difference suggests multiplicity, heterogeneity, plurality, rather than binary

opposition and exclusion (1991:61).

Cole has questioned the social constructions of gender which permeates so many children's texts. By using the familiar fairy tale form in an overtly playful manner she not only challenges the patriarchal marriage paradigm, but she also opens up possibilities. W. Nikola-Lisa suggests:

> When we are playful, we relate to each other as free persons. When we are playful, we engage others at the level of choice. When we are playful everything is of consequence.
> It is, in fact, seriousness that closes itself to consequence, for seriousness is a dread of the unpredictable outcome of possibility:
> TO BE SERIOUS IS TO PRESS FOR A SPECIFIC CONCLUSION (1994:38).

Princess Smartypants leaves the reader with questions as to the gendered identity of the protagonist. There can be no specific, correct, conclusion to be drawn in relation to her sexual preference(s). What is significant here is that Cole provides the reader with a viable alternative to the traditional, sexist, male-female dualism.

Part Three: Notions of truth and knowledge.

Nadia Wheatley and Donna Rawlins (illustrator) produced My Place to coincide with the bicentennial celebrations held in Sydney, Australia, in 1988. Their text can be read as a reaction to the commemorating and glorifying of, what they consider to be, the invasion of Aboriginal land:

> We also shared a deep regret for the results of the British invasion of Aboriginal land. Many of our friends are Aboriginal and while owning that we could never properly comprehend the spiritual devastation this society has caused our friends, we both felt we have an enormous obligation to see the devastation doesn't continue (Rawlins, 1989:7).

Coupled with this was their desire to concentrate on the immigrants who were predominantly working people rather than land owners, and also to give a voice to children who are usually a subjugated group, and not deemed knowledgeable or perspicacious. Using a picture book format makes history accessible and engaging for children. Wheatley's and Rawlins' approach is one of making legitimate the histories of ordinary people. As such the grand narrative known as History becomes disseminated into histories. Jean-Francois Lyotard suggests the "postmodern condition" is one in which the grand narrative is questioned:

> In contemporary society and culture - postindustrial society, postmodern culture - the question of the legitimation of knowledge is formulated in different terms. The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation (1995:28).

Lyotard's suspicion of grand narratives is certainly applicable to My Place. The notion of the white, male voice as the official point of

departure, from which many history books are written, is problematised. Here history enters the realm of the social and the local. History is reclaimed from the single point, homogeneous perspective and turned into heterogeneous histories.

On first reading My Place seems to begin in 1988 and move backwards, in ten year time spans, to the Dreamtime. The child narrators that 'open' and 'close' the text are Aboriginal. In between the narrators come from a variety of ethnic backgrounds ranging from convicts from England (and their 'masters') to Irish, Greek, German, Chinese, and American immigrants. The 'progression' in time throughout the ten year intervals is disrupted via the reader being able to enter the text at any point. Because of this the text has a circular nature to it and moves through the text can be made in any direction. The written and pictorial narratives can be regarded as the beginnings of the child narrator's stories. As such readers are able to extend the narratives and construct their own stories. These elements empower the reader and, importantly, give voices to at least three types of minority groups. These being children, indigenous people and migrants. This suggests the text could be viewed in terms of what Cornel West calls "a new cultural politics":

> Distinctive features of the new cultural politics of difference are to trash the monolithic and homogenous in the name of diversity, multiplicity and heterogeneity; to reject the abstract, general and universal in light of the concrete, specific and particular; and to historicize, contextualize and pluralize by highlighting the contingent, provisional, variable, tentative, shifting and changing (1995:65).

It is the "concrete, specific and particular" which are highlighted in My Place. Most significant is the focus on the land, and a big tree which remains constant through the two hundred year time span of the

text. Bev Croker argues "The central character of My Place is the land itself and the book shows how man [sic] interacts with it and upon it" (1988:11). By focusing on the land throughout the text the reader can trace the environmental impact of colonization, and concepts of land ownership. The child narrator of the Dreamtime and 1788, Bangaroo, states:

> My grandmother says, 'We've always belonged to this place.'
> 'But how long?' I ask. 'And how far?'
> My grandmother says, 'For ever and ever.'....
> This is a map of this place. We camp here because the creek water's so fresh and good, and we're close to the river and the bay.

Every other narrator states, 'This is a map of my place.' The emphasis is shifted from communal belonging to personal ownership. The children did not actually own the land, however the connotation of land ownership as a European aspiration is firmly set in place. This notion of land ownership superseded the sovereignty of Aboriginal people as custodians of the land. The child narrator of 1798 is a convict boy who works for a land owner, Mr Owen. What is interesting is how this Mr Owen assumes the land is there for the taking, and for cultivation:

> We're clearing the bush back to make a farm. It gives me blisters. Mr Owen has 90 acres, but he wants to buy more.

By 1808 Mr Owen owns 650 acres of land. The play on words with his name whilst being humorous, serves to indicate his social status. He is in a position to purchase land, to belong to the land owning class. No mention is made as to whom he buys the land from. This sort of exclusion raises questions in relation to land and land rights. It signals the open ended nature of the text, whereby complex and timely social and political questions (such as land rights) are raised but not necessarily answered.

Wheatley and Rawlins attempt to redress the injustice of the take-over of Aboriginal land by having an Aboriginal child open the text, and an Aboriginal flag hanging in the window of her home:

> Our house is the one with the flag on the window. Tony says it shows we're on Aboriginal land, but I think it means the colour of the earth, back home.

This can be read as signalling that the inner city environment where the child now lives and the country town from which she came are both to be recognised as Aboriginal land. Rhonda Bunbury suggests My Place contains a number of different voices. When speaking about the opening and closing pages of the text she states one of these voices is that of the "politically conscious illustrator":

> Here in the images and in the symbolic colours of red, black and gold is the 'voice' of the politically conscious illustrator united with that of the writer. It is also a politically conscious combination which silences the usual Anglo-Australian celebration of the British landing on Australian soil in 1788 to establish the convict colony and declare the land to be part of the Britsh Empire (1993:6).

Considering My Place was first published in 1988 it can be perceived as the work of a politically conscious author and illustrator team who refuse to participate in exclusively Anglo-Australian perspectives of Australian history. They reinforce this stance by their inclusion of children from many and varied ethnic origins, and by drawing the reader's attention to the environmental impact of colonization.

The creek is mentioned is each ten year time span, but by 1828 it is already being polluted. Wheatley and Rawlins highlight the impact of British agricultural methods and industrialization, which lead to the ensuing environmental pollution, through both written and pictorial narratives. Each child narrator 'draws' a map (heavily annotated) which show the creek and the developments surrounding it.

By doing so the reader can trace industrialisation from 1988 back to the pre-industrial Dreamtime, or start at the back of the book and trace the changes in that direction. The environmental impact on Aboriginal culture is a significant feature of the text, Rawlins explains:

> With the coming of the whites the land was devastated with alarming speed. Within twenty years 'our' creek was unsafe to drink or even swim in. Within a few decades pestilence had spread and was killing off not only the first generation of white Australians but also the Koories who had remained in the area or who had survived the war. In every direction we turned we were led back to the essence of the land and the traditional caretakers. Every time we tested the old white premises we found falsehoods (1989:9).

Rawlins' comments raise questions of truth and knowledge. Once again this can be viewed in relation to the shift from metanarratives to local narratives:

> The shift from metanarratives to local narratives and from general theories to pragmatic strategies suggests that in place of assuming a universal mind or a rational knowing subject, we imagine multiple minds, subjects, and knowledges reflecting different social locations and histories (Seidman, 1995:5).

My Place can be read as postmodern reconfiguring of knowledge where multiple voices and perspectives can be heard. The voices in the text are like personal, anecdotal, family histories. The notion of the family is interesting as the text presents a broad definition of the term, incorporating step-parents, grandparents, cousins, aunts, uncles, pets, servants and convicts. This sort of inclusion is one with which the reader can engage, and can extend the narrative(s) via discussion of their own family.

Throughout the text privileging of historical events differs from narrator to narrator. This technique serves to highlight the multicultural nature of the text, and the legitimizing of individual

local narratives. No one child's recollection of events is deemed more worthy of inclusion than any others. The history of migration to Australia can be broadly traced through the ten year time spans. The periods from 1798 to 1848 portray the coming of the first convicts and their 'masters', and the subsequent offspring that came from these early arrivals. The following periods from 1858 to 1978 show the wide range of cultures that have migrated to Australia.

Wheatley and Rawlins have their child narrators 'live' through two or three time spans. This allows the reader to conceive of the notion that time is fluid. The layers of time rub up against one another. In this sense the text can be considered in terms of heteroglossia. The term comes from Mikhail Bakhtin, and Pam Morris suggests it is a muliplicity of social voices, linked and interrelated in dialogue. "Heteroglossia is certainly perceived as the constituting condition for the possibility of independent consciousness in that any attempt to impose one unitary monologic discourse as the 'Truth' is relativized by its dialogic contact with another social discourse, another view of the world" (1981:73). This idea of another view of the world is firmly embraced in My Place. Wheatley and Rawlins have produced a text which allows for the voices of minority groups to be heard and acknowledged in a manner that is accessible to children. The text offers many different voices and allows for many different readings; with no one particular reading to be privileged over another. No one view of the truth is to be viewed as more reputable than any other.

It is interesting to note that Sally Morgan's highly successful text entitled My Place was published in 1987. There may be no

connection between these two texts with the same title. However it is possible that Wheatley and Rawlins My Place could be a 'writing back' against Morgan's My Place, with its exclusive focus on Aboriginal claims to place. The latter text is more broadly inclusive and, consequently, reflects a multicultural Australia.

Conclusion.

Picture books are the first texts with which very young children interact. Because of this some unenlightened yet commonly held attitudes and beliefs about the picture book lie in relation to its simplicity. To some degree traditional picture books help to uphold this belief. The texts rely on a congruous relationship between the written and visual narratives. Plot development follows a logical course, and conflicts of interest (if included) are resolved by the end of the text.

The aim of this thesis has been to demonstrate how some contemporary picture books foreground elements of intertexuality, indeterminacy, metafiction, play, and question the notions of history and truth. The complex nature of the texts under discussion serves to highlight just how the picture book can be sophisticated and intellectually engaging. This thesis argues that these texts undermine the accepted conventions of the picture book genre. It is suggested that the consequence of this subversion of genre is texts which require the reader to become actively involved in the construction of meaning(s). I argue that readers are invited to consider multiple interpretations of texts, rather than accepting singular views on issues.

This thesis contends that boundaries are being blurred in relation to the picture book audience. The texts which display postmodern characteristics can be shared and enjoyed by a broad spectrum of readers. As Clare Bradford states, "Even in those picture

books which seem to be appropriate to very young children there are often the sorts of intertextuality and multiple constructions of meaning associated with postmodernist fiction" (1993:13). The notion of dual audience is important to consider. Many picture books are read to children by an adult or an older child. Multiple levels of meaning ensure that postmodern picture books will appeal to both experienced readers and young pre-readers. Meanings will be made from the background knowledge each individual brings to the texts.

In conclusion, it is claimed that the postmodern picture book adopts an anti-didactic stance and draws attention away from what has been circumscribed in children's literature. Children must be given access to empowerment through story. Postmodern picture books call for empowerment via interaction, participation in the creation of meaning, and a questioning of fixed meaning. These texts actively encourage various ways of seeing, with no one way being privileged over an other.

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