Crossing the Boundaries: Scatology, Taboo and the Carnivalesque in the Picture Book

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I began this article knowing from past employment in a public library that the books children choose for themselves are often very different from those that their parents or teachers would like them to choose. Those featuring toilet humour and taboo topics, in particular, caused the greatest conflict. So it was with much curiosity that I perused a number of reviews (posted on bookseller Amazon’s UK website) for the texts I had selected for this study (cited 6 Jun 2002). The book which stimulated the most controversy was The Story of the Little Mole Who Knew It Was None of His Business, by Werner Holzwarth and Wolf Erlbruch (1996). To quote one reader:

This book describes a mole with a turd on his head, the mole then proceeds to find the owner. After examining a menagerie of hosts and their turds, with all the different shapes and sizes of turd, he allows some flies to eat it off his head. He then finds out it was the dog, and promptly craps on the dog’s[sic] head!

(Simon, Worcester, England)

This particular reader adds:

Before any of your [sic] parents consider that I am a prude, take note I am far from it … What possible lesson is [sic] being taught to young children here. No surprise this country is going down the toilet.

However, a reviewer from London, England, writes:

As a teacher, this book kept me [sic] class entertained for hours. Both an extremely amusing read (for ALL ages) and the basis for an intelligent discussion on the identification of a wide variety of animals based on their stools. WE LOVED THIS BOOK.

Robert in Manchester, England, had similar comments:

A wonderful book about a subject which interests children greatly.

Let’s face it - taking a dump is a perfectly natural part of life. So why do we hide it away and pretend it doesn’t exist? If nothing else, as an aid to potty training, this should at least discourage your child from doing it on your head <grim>.

Having read the ‘rave reviews’ like Robert’s, a reader in Shanghai, China, bought the book for her daughters, aged three and five. Yet her experience was less than positive:

What an utter disappointment [sic]! I was shocked and appalled at the content. My family and I failed to see any valuable lesson or humour (and yes, we do have a sense of humour) in this book … My daughters found the part where the flies land on the poo disgusting, and my three year old actually cried when the mole decided to take matters into his own hands and plopped on the dog’s head to get his own back. I am not a ‘prude’, but perhaps this book would be suited to older children and adults, although I personally didn’t like it. Judging by the comments from other reviewers, this is a book that you either love or hate.

Interestingly, the Sydney Morning Herald ran a piece a few days after I sourced these reviews on the recent popularity of such books, advising its readers to ‘[f]orget wizards—Harry Plopper’s the new king of the bookshelf’, and crediting The Story of the Little Mole… with the initial breakthrough (Bradley 2002, p.7). According to Michael Bradley, the article’s author, ‘[b]ooksellers and librarians agree anything in the children’s comedy genre that mentions bums is an instant winner … bodily functions are big business’. Once again, not everyone is impressed, however: one children’s bookstore mentioned in the article stocks only one or two copies of the ‘plop plots’ with the manager refusing to promote or recommend them to customers, citing a lack of substance behind some of these titles for her decision (p.7).

While this selection of reviews is fairly limited, it would be reasonable to suggest that, in general, adults expect children’s books to be educational in some way or another; to serve a purpose; or to have meaning. In the case of some, these lessons should be offered in ‘good taste’ too. Children themselves may be inclined to disagree, however. Vulgar, obscene and taboo forms of humour in children’s literature, though often unacknowledged or dismissed by adults—perhaps due to a perceived ‘pointlessness’—have enormous appeal to child readers. This is not a
modern or culturally specific phenomenon either; the enjoyment of gross and vulgar literature is universal, say some collectors of children's folklore and rhymes, and its presence is noted in youth culture for at least the last few hundred years (Mallan 1993, pp.42-43). Scatology, the term applied to literature which has a preoccupation with the obscene, and especially with excretory functions, encompasses such books as *The Story of the Little Mole ...*, David McKee's *Isabel's Noisy Tummy* (1994), and Tim Winton's *The Bugalugs Bum Thief* (1991), and includes authors like Babette Cole, Paul Jennings and Roald Dahl, who owe much of their popularity with children to a repeated use of scatological humour and references to obscene or taboo subjects.

While the popularity of such texts with children is not new, the number of titles that have been added to the genre in the recent past, and their more frequent appearance on library and bookstore shelves today, possibly indicates a more liberal attitude by the general public towards the taboo. Yet this does not mean that acceptance is either total or unproblematic. 'Adult literature is unrestrained but children's literature, when it reflects much of children's culture in its use of vulgarity, is found offensive by adults' (Culley quoted in Mallan 1993, p.43). This of course has much to do with the transgression of social codes—the crossing of boundaries—a practice when applied by children that adults may construe as a threat to authority, because on the whole, adults decide what constitutes acceptable behaviours and appropriate uses of language, ways of being and acting, and adults enforce these social rules and regulations.

The usual aim of children's literature, which is pervaded by the values and beliefs which relate to such codes and practices, is to communicate these ideologies to the child. As John Stephens explains, '... children's fiction belongs firmly within the domain of social practices which exist for the purpose of socializing their target audience' (1992, p.8). However, 'psychologists have long noted that children enjoy jokes and stories that poke fun at the moral authority of adults' (West 1990, p.115). Judging by the appearance in the last few decades of a variety of children's books such as *The Story of the Little Mole ...* which seek to parody or mock dominant social ideologies, break taboos and flaunt the rules of 'official' culture, this is an impulse which can be shared by adults too.

Books of this type which are characterised by such interrogative qualities are typically referred to as 'carnivalesque', a term conceived by Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin based this theory on the relationship between the images and rituals of the medieval carnival and forms of literature possessing the same subversive features. Carnivalized literature, he argued, 'takes from medieval carnival the inversion of power structures, the parodic debunking of all that a particular society takes seriously (including and in particular all that which it fears)' (Roberts 1994, p.250). According to Bakhtin, this fear is mocked, transformed and conquered through the material bodily images so common to writers of the Renaissance; that is, the 'images of the human body with its food, drink, defecation, and sexual life ... [which are] offered, moreover, in an extremely exaggerated form' (1968, p.18). These images of the grotesque body, so characteristic of folk culture (and so at odds with the aesthetic representation of the body in later times) Bakhtin saw as 'open to the world, encompassing it and endlessly reproducing it and itself', and thus overcoming the defeats of time and the terror of death (Morris 1994, pp.226-227). The affirmation of the material life of the body and the earthly world—which was associated with a downwards thrust or movement—he proposed to be in direct opposition to the upward impulse represented by official ideology with its concern for the spiritual, ideal and abstract (1968, p.19). In the literary sphere, this grotesque concept of the body Bakhtin saw as forming the basis for the entire medieval parody, a connection through which he was 'able to account not only for carnival's political position as an oblique challenge to the world of approved ideologies and institutions, but also for its characteristic material bodily focus' (Platter 2001, p.55).

The use of Bakhtin's theory of the carnival in children's literature is relatively recent, with the most comprehensive and useful application belonging to John Stephens (1992). I will draw extensively on Stephens' explanation of its operation in children's literature for this reason:

*Carnival in children's literature is grounded in*
playfulness which situates itself in positions of nonconformity. 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 ... [It possesses] linguistic and narrative resources through which to mock and challenge authoritative figures and structures of the adult world ... [such as]: modes of behaviour expected at home and at school - obedience, approved table manners, language uses and varieties (taboos, etc.); subject-object positions in adult-child conversations ...: orderliness, sleeping hours, tidiness and cleanliness. 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.

(1992, pp.121-122)

Stephens notes in his analysis that the concern with sexuality and excretory functions that is characteristic of Bakhtin's material bodily principle is usually [my emphasis] displaced into questions of undress, and opportunities for getting dirty (1992, p.122). In this paper I would like to examine a number of texts which fall outside this realm of the 'usual', however—books which deal specifically with the body in a physiological sense: with birth, death, excretory functions, sexuality and sexual practices.

It is not customary in children's literature to write about birth, death and sex humorously, nor is it common to examine such subjects in physical detail. While these topics have been explored (particularly since the rise of the 'problem' novel), they have been treated for the most part with seriousness and in a realistic fashion—or in the case of the picture book, rarely at all—with the emphasis on presenting situations whereby the character's mature intellectually and emotionally as a result of these experiences. As such, they can often be sentimental and cerebral, rather than body-focused and ideologically conservative. Picture books such as Paul and Emma Rogers' Ruby's Potty (2001) or The Princess and the Potty (1994) by Wendy Cheyette Lewison and Rick Brown which explore excretory functions in a humorous way do have some carnivalesque tendencies, but their primary function is the communication of acceptable toilet procedures and practices to the young child and they do not possess any interrogative effects. Potty-training books are also often heavily sanitised with minimal references to, or images of, excreta and the grotesque, and sometimes even human bodies are absent, replaced instead with animal figures (which although human in action, dress and some physiology, only seem to transfer attention away from bodily elements).

Reminders of the 'distantable' aspects of human existence are those which dominant culture systematically seeks to repress, yet they are common to everybody (or, every body). A carnivalesque or parodic emphasis on the physical aspects of life thus has great transgressive and subversive potential—a potential which may be maximised in the picture book. Picture books lend themselves to subversion because they deal with both a visual and a verbal story and each can be separately phased so as to reinforce, counterpoint, anticipate or expand one or the other' (Landes in Hunt 1991, p.176). In Bakhtin's terms, picture books are 'dialogic', because the interplay between the illustrative and the written text allows a reader to construct multiple meanings from the text. Babette Cole's Prince Cinders (1987), for example, seems to be a familiar Cinderella story, told using traditional fairy-tale language and styles. Yet, the expectations and assumptions that a reader would bring to the text are disrupted by replacing the usual female figure with a 'small, spotty, scruffy and skinny' male image of a prince who later turns into a big, hairy ape wearing a swimsuit. The use of parody, grotesque imagery and carnivalesque motifs in this instance dismantles conventional notions of masculinity (Stephens 1992).

Cole's work is wholly suitable for a study of the carnival given her choice of topics, unique illustration style, and flair for subversion. Since the mid 1980s she has produced, on average, about one book per year, many of which deal with the aspects of life that official culture wishes to hide. Cole's illustrations therefore have a playful, irreverent and often grotesque element to them. They depict life as a celebration more often than not, treating fun, feasts, gluttony and excess as normal states of being. Wild activities, outrageous behaviour and exaggerated body
movements and forms are also common. The action generally takes place in a domestic setting, but in accordance with the material bodily principle whereby abundance and the community element of the body determine the gay and festive character of all images of bodily life ... [not] the drabness of everyday existence', it is a setting removed from the ordered, tidy and contained world sanctioned by official adult authority (Bakhtin 1968, p.19). The opening scene to Mummy Laid an Egg (1993) is a typical example. In this illustration, a brother and sister lounge all over a large sofa watching television while consuming a variety of lollies and 'naughty' foods. Litter from their feast is strewn around the floor, and a number of domestic animals also share the furniture. The impetus behind Mummy Laid an Egg is the age-old conversation between parents and children about the birds and the bees. "Right," said mum and dad. "We think it's time we told you how babies are made."' (pp.2-3). Cole's ability to upset reader expectations is apparent almost immediately, however, as mum and dad go on to explain that: "Girl babies are made from sugar and spice and all things nice ... Boy babies are made from slugs and snails and puppy dogs' tails ... You can grow them from seeds in pots in the greenhouse ... Or just squidge them out of tubes'", and culminating with: "Mummy laid an egg on the sofa ... [it] exploded. And you shot out." (pp.5-14). This gentle mockery, complete with parodic images, not only discloses that adults aren't always wise and knowledgeable, but also reiterates the point by making the children the experts in the next part of the story. "Hee hee hee ... What a load of rubbish ... But you were nearly right about the SEEDS, the TUBE and the EGG ... We don't think you know how babies are really made. So we're doing some drawings to show you." (pp.15-16).

The children's presentation on reproduction which follows (complete with the correct stance and implements associated with teaching) also mocks the power inherent in adult-child interactions with its parody of the teacher role (pp.17-20, 23-24). This examination of roles also extends to the type of parent Cole has chosen to illustrate. By their dress, mum and dad look quite 'alternative', young at heart and non-conservative: dad sports a ponytail and wears his hat backwards, mum wears sandals and a tie-dyed shirt. The assumption then is that they possess a natural approach to life and an outlook characterised by open-minded attitudes, and therefore are more likely to be open and practical about sex, pregnancy and birth. Cole disrupts this expectation, however, creating a clever inversion of a typical stereotype by having them explain it all in the most sanitised and least body-focused way possible.

In opposition, the children's version is both graphic and fairly explicit. In one of these drawings the carnival element—a feeling of frivolity and excess—is particularly evident. Demonstrating the different ways that 'mummies and daddies fit together', it is replete with balloons, clowns, performances and constant activity (pp.21-22). The grotesque body in the children's illustrations is displayed in all its glory, featuring the 'apertures [and] convexities ... the open mouth, the genital organs, the breasts, the phallus, the pot belly [and] the nose. The body discloses its essence as a principle of growth which exceeds its own limits only in copulation, pregnancy, [and] childbirth ...' (Bakhtin 1968, p.26). The deeply positive rendering of the bodily element in carnival, which is expressed as a brimming-over abundance, exaggerated and immeasurable and which possesses a community rather than individualised character (Bakhtin 1968, p.19), is also represented in the final double-page spread: 'everyone' becomes privy to this information about reproduction and the house is consequently overrun with all types of animals and their offspring. This frequent featuring of animals (particularly in domestic scenes) is prevalent in Cole's work, and is redolent of Bakhtin's concept of the body. 'The unfinished and open body is not separated from the world by clearly defined boundaries; it is blended with the world, with animals, with objects' (Bakhtin 1968, p.26-27). In Hair in Funny Places (1999) she takes this to the extreme: the 'essence of pube' which is soon to become active in the teenaged protagonists is administered by hairy animals called Mr and Mrs Hormone who not only live inside the body, but also have a dog as a companion (p.3). This blending and cohabitation of human and animal bodies emphasises the commonalities of human existence by subtly demonstrating that all humans are in fact animals too.
In The Story of the Little Mole... this effect has been achieved through anthropomorphism by merging the human and the animal together in a way which is both comic and confronting. Mole is at the same time an easily identifiable mole and a grotesque with his potbelly, lack of clothing, protuberant pink nose and faecal headgear; yet he also wears shoes and glasses, walks upright, and has humanoid mannerisms. According to Stephens 'anthropomorphic stories about animals are conventionally used for moral ends in both folk and children's literature.' (1992, p.132). The unsettling and subversive quality of The Story of the Little Mole... relies on the reversal of those narrative conventions, however—on Mole's blatant flouting of moral codes. Furthermore, the overt motif of revenge has been constructed in entirely positive overtones: it is evident in his pleasure at finding out who did the deed; his devilish grin as he strides away to return the favour; and encoded by words such as 'excitedly', 'satisfied' and 'happily'. In this sense, the wickedness of Mole may be perceived as a real threat to social order; the animal is not that far removed from the human.

The confrontational qualities of this text may also be expressed by Julia Kristeva's theory of the 'object' which has been likened to a development or extension of Bakhtin's grotesque. However, rather than merely describing the importance of the convexities and protrusions that make up the margins of the body, she examines their significance in terms of the subject's history (Vice 1997, pp.163,165). For Kristeva, the human subject's disgust and revulsion at the excretion of bodily fluids represents a negative transgression; it is a metaphorical fear of the plunge back into the semiotic realm of bodily rhythms and pulsions, away from the symbolic and its social codes of cleanliness and bodily boundaries—the subject does not wish to be reminded of its bodily origins (pp.163-164). The disgust and the revulsion that accompanies the presence of bodily fluids outside the body—the moment when nausea is experienced—Kristeva terms 'abjection'. The margins of the body thus become potential sites of abjection, places where 'the differentiation of proper-clean and improper-dirty... is impressed and exerted' (quoted in Vice, p.165).

This is the theme of Cole's Dr. Dog, for example. 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, yet like so many of her other books, it is overtly 'educational' at the same time (in this instance via a concern with hygienic practices and their consequences for the body's state of health). Dr. Dog is called away from a bone marrow conference in Brazil to attend to his family, a rather unhealthy group called the Gumboyles. Kurt smokes cigarettes and emits a foul cough; Gerry has germs on her tonsils from not wearing her raincoat; Baby has worms from letting other children stick their fingers up his nose and from sucking his thumb after going to the toilet; and Grandad has terrible wind from eating too many baked beans and drinking too much beer. Dr. Dog explains all the correct procedures and Cole creates graphic illustrations to support his explanations (once again, like Mummy Laid an Egg in a clever parody of the teacher). He fixes everybody up, while admonishing Ma and Pa for their carelessness: "It's disgusting... If you don't take better care of your family there will be a serious accident."

However, the subversive nature of Dr. Dog is evident in Cole's ability to construct a conclusion which ultimately seems to work in opposition to the assumed ideological function as the Gumboyles reply: "So what... we've got you to look after us haven't we!" effectively absolving themselves of any responsibility (p.26). For Kristeva, it is not 'lack of cleanliness or health that causes abjection but what... does not respect borders, positions, rules' (1982, p.4), and thus the Gumboyles' disregard for the rules renders them repellent, unattractive and abject. Kim Wilson explains, that in this act of labelling is 'the embodiment of anarchism... [it] represent[s] a potential subversion of the privileged conception of order' (2001, p.24). The Gumboyles' abjection makes them unacceptable within official culture, yet even though they do cause an accident—Grandad's dangerous gases build up to the extent that 'he fart[s] so hard he [blows] the roof right off the house' (pp.27-28)—they end up 'rewarded' with a family holiday (and given the number of them, and their international destination, this is quite a feat). The contrast between the lessons for correct or 'proper-clean' behaviour...
and the lack of a closure to reflect this, functions to resist fixed meanings. It has a liberating, and more importantly, an interrogative effect. This contradiction has been applied to Dr. Dog also. Once the roof has been repaired, a very stressed Dr. Dog retires to a tropical island for a break. Previously an upright, serious and respected character, here he is shown peeing on palm trees and being entertained by dogs in hula skirts, and as his aberrant actions are illustrative only and not stated in the text, this enhances the instability of meaning.

Carnival’s double-voiced quality is clearly illustrated in Dr. Dog; it is at the same time an instructional account of healthy hygiene procedures and a parody of many of the sacred aspects of official hegemony. Stephens explains that the parody of the ‘hero’ in interrogative texts contributes to their ‘self-conscious textuality … since by drawing attention to roles and role-playing they draw attention to the text itself as a construct’ (1992, p.122).

The comical debasement, and the mocking of dominant orthodoxies and figures of authority in Dr. Dog also reflects the ambivalence of folk humour which ‘brings together, unifies, weds, and combines the sacred with the profane, the lofty with the lowly, the great with the insignificant, the wise with the stupid’ (Bakhtin 1973, p.101). Dr. Dog is well-respected, wise and knowledgeable, and he dresses fully and professionally to present at conferences and practice medicine. However he also lifts his leg to pee, sleeps in a dog basket, and sometimes doesn’t wear pants. In the final scene the sacred and the profane are humorously combined as he lounges about with his medical briefcase close by, reading Dogs of War, wearing floral boardshorts, a lei and sunglasses (p.31).

The opposition between the official and unofficial is often expressed via the sacred or taboo, because culture’s unofficial features are determined by what a particular society sanctions or censors. In Western society, notions of the sacred are typically centred around religion and death, making them subjects which are not usually treated humorously. Cole’s Drop Dead (1996) is thus an exception as it mocks Christian concepts of life after death and represents death in a way which is quite foreign to contemporary Western systems of meaning. In this text—the life story of Gran and Grandad from ages one to eighty—Cole once again demonstrates the ability to interrogate socially received roles and behaviours. Within the orthodox trajectory of Gran and Grandad’s life (they go to school, then to university, meet and fall in love, get married, have a child) there are a number of twists and non-traditional ways of being: they fail to get jobs as scientists after university; Grandad becomes a stunt man and Gran a famous film star; they marry on location hanging from a helicopter; their son ‘grows up’ to become a crocodile wrestler on the Nile; and even in their old age they parachute from a plane. Furthermore, Gran and Grandad’s type of nonconformity (i.e. their immersion in the entertainment industry) which is usually associated with ‘low’ or popular culture, is represented through the aristocracy as their codes of dress and mannerisms illustrate.

They still try the odd stunt in their old age, but then, they explain to their grandchildren, “[e]ven though we’ve lead such dangerous lives, one day we’ll just drop down dead like everyone else. Then we might be recycled as anything at all! … An octopus, a mouse, a new baby, a worm, a sheep, a ghost, a pickled onion, an alien or even two scrawny chickens”’ (pp.23-26). Gran and Grandad do in fact end up as featherless, scrawny chickens, and they are positioned in the illustration amidst a multitude of other chickens. This effectively locates death at a community rather than an individual level, in contrast to contemporary Western representations of death which are increasingly moving from social to individual and private sites. Death is also constructed in Drop Dead as cyclical rather than linear, an idea which is central to carnival: death is never an isolated event but a process which includes both birth and renewal. If the positive and negative poles of becoming (death-birth) become separated from the whole, Bakhtin explained, they lose their vitality and ambivalence and retain merely the negative aspect (1968, pp.149-150). The strength of Drop Dead therefore lies in the juxtaposition of death with birth. This strength is heightened further by mixing in elements of the abject and the grotesque (such as the slimy worm, octopus and pickled onion; the plucked chicken; and the amoebic alien), and by making these images humorous.’ Laughter, carnival’s most powerful...
mode of expression, is then used in a way which mocks and overcomes fears and the terror of death.

Bakhtin also argued that death and renewal should not be isolated from the indecencies and scatological aspects of the organic framework to which they belong. Grotesque and exaggerated images of eating, excrement and the material bodily lower stratum are all 'profoundly inter-related and ambivalent ... signify[ing] a world that dies to be born, devouring and devoured, continually growing and multiplying' (Morris 1994, p.207). Excrement is therefore closely linked with fertility, being intimately related to life, death and birth (1968, p.149) as both Drop Dead and The Story of the Little Mole... demonstrate. Thus when the grandchildren in Drop Dead question their grandparents—in a similar, though mild, form of carnival abuse—"'Gran and Grandad, why are you such bald, old wrinklies?'", they reply: "'We were bald, wrinkly babies once! ... We learnt dribbling and burping...potty training and how to say simple words like poo poo and pee pee'" (pp.1-6). And when Mole discovers the flies eating some dung in The Story of the Little Mole... he invites them to taste the 'business' left on his head so that he may find out who it belongs to and produce his own excrement in retaliation (pp.15-16). The troubling effects caused by such images have an especially subversive potential, according to Kristeva, because literature that explores this topic can 'lay bare, under the cunning, orderly surface of civilizations, the nurturing horror that [social systems] attend to pushing aside by purifying, systematizing, and thinking' (1982, p.210).

Abjection and carnivalesque are two different expressions of the animal and mortal side of humanity. M. Keith Booker explains in a way which encapsulates Drop Dead's theme perfectly:

...in the first case, we are reminded that we are animals and therefore must die; in the second, we are reminded that we are animals and therefore might as well live while we can. In either case the reminders so provided are common to us all and therefore tend to deconstruct all systems of social hierarchy.

(1991, p.14)

Literature which focuses in a carnivalesque manner on the aspects of corporeal existence can be genuinely transgressive in a political sense as the picture books included in this analysis demonstrate. These texts chiefly work towards unconventional ends and feature strategies which disrupt 'usual' expectations, highlighting the relationship of sign to thing, and thus making meanings unfixed. In particular, Cole's use of parody and ambiguity to invert symbolic hierarchies (however temporarily) exposes the contingency of official discourses, revealing them to be arbitrary constructs and not eternal truths. In children's fiction—which is frequently employed as a vehicle for relaying and regulating official culture's ideologies—this is especially important, because print discourse is often associated with truth(s). However, some of the criticisms levelled at carnival question its validity as a form of subversion and thus its ability to truly change entrenched systems of meaning and dominant ideologies. For instance, it has been argued that carnival is officially sanctioned and thus functions in a licensed way that makes possible the perpetuation of authority (Booker, 1991; Morris 1994; Purdie 1993). This is a notion which has particular relevance to children's literature because it is already subject to, regulated by, and distributed within, a wide variety of society's official structures and bodies. Furthermore, subversion has become thoroughly inscribed within mass culture—and, in particular, youth culture—in the last few decades. As Sydney Morning Herald notes, some of the once-taboo areas in children's literature have become 'big business', meaning that transgressive rhetoric may not only become appropriated by the mass-market, but that one mode of domination may simply replace another (p.9). Yet one of the most important effects of carnivalesque literature is simply the indication of alternatives, the suggestion that entrenched or prevailing ideologies can be changed, resisted, or interrogated. In Bakhtin's words: 'carnival celebrates change itself, the very process of replaceability ... rather than that which is replaced' (1973, p.103).
ENDNOTES

1 See Rands (1994) and Mallan (1993)


Cole has also explored images of the abject and grotesque in The Slimy Book (1985) and The Smelly Book (1987).

REFERENCES


**BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE**

Kathryn James has recently begun work on her PhD at Deakin University, where she is examining representations and themes of death in contemporary Australian children’s literature and film. She is also interested in picture books and other visual texts, cultural geography and landscape representation, and the ways in which children are constructed as environmental subjects. A fascination with the obscene and the taboo was the stimulus for this article, however, which was presented in condensed form at the ACLAR (Australasian Children's Literature Association for Research) conference in July 2002.