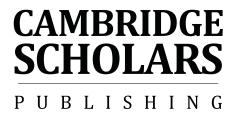# Embodying an Image

# Embodying an Image:
## Gender and Genre in a Selection of Children's Responses to Picturebooks and Illustrated Texts

By

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**CAMBRIDGE
SCHOLARS**

P U B L I S H I N G

For my daughters Indira and Maya

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

# ILLUSTRATIONS

## Plate section

## Figures

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

There are many people whom I wish to thank for their help, support and encouragement in what has been for me, a significant learning experience. I am particularly grateful to my tutor, Susan Hancock, for providing excellent tuition and guidance whilst studying for an MA in Children's Literature at Roehampton University. I am also indebted to Peter Hunt who, as an external examiner, contacted me to suggest that I publish the research, and to Pat Pinsent who offered invaluable intellectual help and practical suggestions to transform the thesis into a readable book. Thanks also go to Rosemary Betterton and Elaine Millard for their encouraging words, and to Roberta Seelinger Trites for taking the time to write to me and say such nice things; to Beverly Lyon Clark, Valerie Walkerdine and to Morag Styles, a group of women whose work I immensely admire, for offering recommendations. Thanks are also due to Sue Mansfield and Julie Mills, the Librarians associated with the Children's Literature Collection at Roehampton, to Amanda Millar from Cambridge Scholars Publishing for answering all my queries, to Soucin Yip-Sou for designing a terrific front cover, and lastly to Korky Paul for granting permission to use a fabulous picture of "Winnie the Witch" for the front cover art work.

On a more personal note: I would like to express my gratitude to the staff in both schools for providing such a welcoming and friendly atmosphere in which to work, and I would especially like to thank the children whose humour and intelligence kept me on my toes! Warm thanks are also due to my mother, Clare, for offering support and giving generously of her time, to my sister Imelda for helping with childcare, and to my close friend, Linda, for providing inspiration and encouragement. Special thanks also go to my partner, Gregory, for his kindness and newfound ability to multitask, and lastly to my daughters, Indira and Maya who, through their unbounded enthusiasm kept me amused by breaking up long periods of work with little snippets of poems, songs, drawings and dramas!

I am also grateful to the following artists, writers and publishers for permission to reproduce their work. Figures 1.1, 1.2, 1.3, 1.5 and 1.6 (including Plate 1) from *Well I Never!* written by Heather Eyles and illustrated by Tony Ross. Reprinted by permission of Andersen Press. Figure 1.4 from *Knock Knock Who's There?* by Sally Grindley and

# INTRODUCTION

## Considering gender: redressing imbalances

There has been an explosion of knowledge and theory about children's responses to pictorial text in recent years, and although critics have advanced many different conceptualisations of the text-picture relationship, there has been very little written about the way that gender is constituted through the complex interaction between the words and pictures, and the way that children's own experience of themselves as embodied females and males is intricately woven into the lived storylines of visual narratives. This piece of research is an attempt to redress the balance by examining, through the lens of gender, a range of Key Stage One children's responses to a selection of picturebooks and illustrated texts.

Visual texts demand consideration by means of a number of different analytical approaches, so, rather than limit myself to one theoretical model, I have instead drawn on several traditions and disciplines. I have tried to maintain a balance between the literary and visual, but rather than focus exclusively on the two different forms of signification, or consider the picturebook as an educational vehicle, or indeed, simply to rely on an examination of the visual text as a purely aesthetic object, I have made efforts to combine an analysis of the way in which artists and writers convey ideas and emotions through character, theme, setting and story, with a detailed investigation into the child's perspective of meaning.

Children are sophisticated interpreters of visual texts; they see and feel certain qualities in the words and pictures, but cannot always articulate their opinions. My role has been to listen attentively, even intuitively, to the children's responses and to pay attention to the comprehensive, creative and sometimes delicate balance of their inner reasoning and logic. It has not been my intention to direct or guide children's thoughts along specific lines of enquiry, but rather to listen thoughtfully to a range of divergent perspectives, a series of fascinating exchanges, in an attempt to uncover valuable insights about the pivotal role gender plays in the constructed and contradictory world of children's literature.

# Contexts, methodologies and subjectivities

It is fair to say that the following qualitative, interpretive piece of research did not fit neatly into any of the methodological frameworks that I have previously encountered. After initially planning a fairly structured, measurement-orientated research project in which the principal aim was to investigate how visual texts are read by children, and to determine whether gender is an influencing factor in this process, I finally decided that I would opt for a more informal approach which involved talking to a variety of girls and boys about their reading habits and interests both inside and outside school. The information provided by the children during these conversations prompted me to abandon thoughts of imposing a set of what I considered to be both "quality" and "suitable" picturebooks worthy of investigation and, instead, to offer the children the opportunity to choose their own reading material. The books, therefore, have not been selected because of literary or artistic merit, nor because of their suitability in terms of equality issues; they have been chosen from the eclectic range of picturebooks, illustrated texts and information-type books that were available in school classrooms, corridors and libraries.

Two primary schools from the North East of England participated in the study: the first, a partially multi-ethnic school in a mixed catchment area, and the second, a school in a predominantly white, working class area. In-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted with 24 randomly chosen children across Key Stage 1 in both schools. Eight children were selected from each year group: Reception (4-5), Year One (5-6) and Year Two (6-7), with a 3:1 ratio in favour of girls.[1] Overall, the sample included children from 4 to 7 years old with a wide range of reading abilities, responding to different questions relating to a school book of their choice.[2] Wherever possible, I conducted the research in the mornings when the children were generally more bright and alert, and usually within a quiet and comfortable place to help them feel as relaxed as possible. All of the children called me by my first name, and as far as I am aware, none of them knew I was a teacher. In addition to recording our discussions on a portable cassette recorder, I also took additional notes which included references to children's body language (pointing, scanning, tone of voice, use of facial expression etc); these were written up in full as soon after the interviews as possible.[3]

The study is divided into three parts (with three chapters in each part), which relate to the year groups of the children in Key Stage One. Part 1: Reception; Part 2: Year One; Part 3: Year Two. In this sense the book follows a natural chronological pattern, but it is also thematically

organised around the children's eclectic mix of genre-led books. The interviews therefore required a considerable degree of open-ended discussion and a genuine desire on my part to engage with the children's thoughts and feelings about their chosen books. It would be naïve to assume that children give consistent, non-contradictory accounts of the books they read. Children have incredibly idiosyncratic approaches to reading books, which means that every visual reading experience has its own particularity. There are those children who like to read in a conventional way from front to back, but there are others who read back to front, sideways, even upside down. Whereas one child may choose to linger over a particular illustration or spend long moments puzzling over unfamiliar words and small details, another prefers the rising action of a plot. Children, as Aidan Chambers insists, "possess an innate critical faculty. They instinctively question, report, compare and judge" (2004: 29). Left to comment on their own, without the stimulus of a question, children often choose to talk about quite other aspects of a tale than those that might preoccupy the researcher. With this in mind, I have tried to enable, rather than dominate the discussions, ensuring that wherever possible the children's voices are heard.

Brought together, these case studies become a collage of sorts: a series of impressions providing descriptive examples, comparisons and contrasts, rather than results of statistical value. They are not intended as definitive statements about children's reading practices. Instead, they offer insightful observations about children's likes and dislikes, opinions and prejudices. All of the children chatted to me about their out of school activities as a way of leading in to their book choices and, although initially popular cultural interests seemed to hold the most sway, on closer inspection, these were not chosen to the exclusion of more traditional activities such as reading, writing and drawing.[4] The majority of children offered enlightening responses, sometimes amusing, sometimes poignant; however, rather than attempt to examine all of them, I have instead tried to capture some of the flavour of the conversations by focusing on a selection of interviews.

I have also tried to limit the possibility of bias creeping into my conversations with the children by maintaining on the one hand, a level of objectivity, but on the other, being mindful of my own subjectivity. Bronwyn Davies makes the point that, "The processes through which subjectivities are constituted are imbricated, not only in ways of speaking and ways of making meaning, but also in the contexts and relations in which particular acts of speaking take place" (2003: 10). Although one could argue that any pedagogical intervention on behalf of an interviewee necessarily involves influencing some of the outcomes, I have tried to

limit the possibility of this during the course of the research by attempting to find out how children interpret visual texts based on *their* existing knowledge, not *mine*. My intention was not necessarily to try to awaken children's critical and discerning eye for detail or quality (although this is a valuable activity and happened naturally with a number of the children), nor was it to teach the children how to read a visual text, or to deconstruct an image; it was to listen attentively to how children see, read and make sense of the books they choose to read.[5]

## Intersections of gender and genre

Issues of gender affect the conception, production and interpretation of children's picturebooks and illustrated texts in ways that may not be immediately apparent. "Gender" is really the cultural construction of femininity and masculinity (the terms are generally used to describe broader cultural associations) as opposed to our biological sex (male or female), which we are born with. When it comes to sex and gender, much of what we label as "natural" in Western culture is socially constructed, and, unfortunately, by the time children reach school age, they have already taken on a range of socially gendered expectations about what it is to be male or female. In Allan Luke's introduction to *Texts of Desire* he makes the point that in the last 500 years of Western history, schooling has probably been the most important institution that has affected the selection and shaping of a reading public. He suggests that the ritual introduction of "differing reading practices, genres and canons" has formed part of a system of regulation which has helped to steer people towards "differing kinds of knowledge, pleasure and desire as appropriate for male and female, public and private use" (1993: viii). Despite the fact that we can now see different literacies begin to emerge in the classroom through the combined aid of digital technologies and the phenomenal increase in a global multi-media communications network, it is still possible to see publishers and schools systematically construct gendered literacies which help to shape our children's reading habits.

The convergence of different methods of production, and the constant flux surrounding the way in which contemporary illustrators and writers think about content, medium and style has contributed towards a shift away from the conventionally illustrated text towards experimental and avant-garde forms of visual and literary storytelling. Although such books possess highly distinctive features, and form a vital part of the artistic and literary culture of the classroom, it is important to recognise that, although uniquely different, both are equally valid art forms. In its purist sense,

illustration, such as a painting or drawing, a photograph or even lettering, is a form of visualisation. In children's literature it is generally used to elucidate or decorate textual information, such as a story or poem, by providing a visual representation of the artist's impression of a story, often using a series of pictures. Illustrations, however, are not only used decoratively; they can also be employed to bring an added sense of depth and dimension to long pieces of prose, giving the reader a chance to contemplate and reflect on the artist's interpretation or re-interpretation of a particular narrative. Picturebooks, in contrast, are rarely republished with different sets of illustrations; instead, they are usually complete designs incorporating covers and endpapers. Anthony Browne, an acclaimed picturebook artist and current Children's Laureate, offers one of the most enlightening accounts of the creative process:

> Making a picture book, for me, is not like writing a story then painting some pictures to illustrate what's going on. Nor is it a question of making some images and adding words to make the story clearer. No, it is more like planning a film, where each page is a scene that includes both words and images inextricably linked (Interview in Evans, 1998: 194).

Although there are many of what I would refer to as picture-books which tend to fall between the illustrated text and the classic picturebook, the best ones are usually unlike any other form of verbal or visual art; they are a synthetic medium, like theatre or film, where the overall meaning is, in Perry Nodelman's words, "more than the sum of its parts" (1999: 200).

## Visual literacies

There is a feeling of uncertainty that surrounds the vocabularies used to talk about the visual, and, while some critics refuse to use a term like "visual literacy", others want to ally the visual with the verbal by reclaiming concepts which have come to be associated with language. The trend to read images using a strict semiological model has produced some interesting analysis in the last 30 years, with critics such as Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (2000) leading the challenge against the dominance of verbal language over visual texts by exploring the "grammar" of visual design. This struggle, as Griselda Pollock explains, "between a sense of the visual as the ineffable 'other' of language and the argument that visual representation is equally, if differently, semiotic (i.e. structured to produce meaning and affect)" is a very complex one (Interview with Pollock, cited in Raney 2003: 134-5). Is a picture, then, really nothing more than a text whose codes need to be cracked and its

languages deciphered? It seems to me that seeing is clearly not the same thing as reading, and vision cannot really be understood as language. Karen Raney touches on the disciplinary turbulence, the melting pot that is visual literacy, but, like a number of other critics, tries to avoid the tightness of semiotics by placing the concept of visual literacy within historical debate:

> In a deeper sense, the history of 'visual literacy' is not the history of what should be 'taught to the people'. Rather it is the history of thinking about what images and objects mean, how they are put together, how we respond to or interpret them, how they might function as modes of thought, and how they are seated within the societies which gave rise to them (1998: 38).

It is important to recognise that the term "visual literacy", or the ability to be visually literate, involves many different kinds of processes and skills. When we are young, we need formal instruction to teach us how to read letters and words and then we must learn how to write them down; it is not a natural process. But learning to read the visual world, in contrast, seems to be a natural, almost automatic process in which we must work out how or what to see, and then develop the skills to make sense of it. Even during my conversations with individual children, their responses to visual imagery would range from highly focused, analytical and abstract ways of thinking, to more basic levels of inactivity where the perceptual channels seemed to have shut down. Clearly there are no absolute judgments and no universal criteria to fall back on; visual literacy cannot be moulded to fit neatly into every discipline, nor can it be moulded to fit every child, but the intellectual ferment produced by the process is important in opening up critical questions about gender, cultural history, class and identity which undoubtedly evolve and challenge us to look at things in new ways.

# Notes

1. When formulating this piece of research, I soon realised through my conversations with the children that I was particularly interested in the way that girls appeared to use their femininity as a form of resistance to some of the dominant cultural storylines made available to them. This is not to suggest that boys' reading is less worthy of critical debate, it is more a reflection of my own personal engagement with feminism.

2. An exception to this was Anya's (6) (I: 9) decision to read *Barbie as The Princess and the Pauper* (2004) which she brought in to read with me (Part 2: Chapter Four).

3. For referencing purposes, if a book does not have numbered pages, I have counted one to be the first page of the story itself, be it text, picture or a combination of both. When discussing individual case studies I have included the child's age in brackets, followed by a reference to the relevant interview extract within the body of the text as (I: 1) (I: 2) etc., which can be located in the appendix. I have also changed the names of all the children in the study. The children's references to other books, comics, television programmes and so on, are included either in the "Notes" that can be found at the end of each chapter, or in the "Interviews" located in the appendix. Details of specific books which either I or the children looked at can also be found in the "Primary Texts" section of the bibliography.

4. It is possible to categorise (albeit loosely) the children's out-of-school interests into nine areas: 1) Film, DVDs and videos; 2) television programmes; 3) computer games, Nintendo portable consoles and handheld digitally animated toys; 4) toys (which frequently tied in with films); 5) books and comics; 6) arts and crafts; 7) writing; 8) music (mainly girls cited this as an interest); 9) dancing and singing (mainly girls cited this as an interest); 10) playing outside.

5. Although I have tried to avoid pedagogical interventions during my conversations with the children, I have provided some suggestions in the conclusion based on my findings.

# PART I

# VAMPIRES, WITCHES AND MONSTERS (RECEPTION)

Fantasy literature for children clearly takes on a variety of forms, and although there are some obvious and substantial differences of theme, tone and style in the books chosen by the following children, there are also a surprising number of connections and continuities. Joseph Appleyard's developmental model of the reading process provides a useful backdrop to early childhood exposure to, and experience of, visual texts. Appleyard's first stage, "The Reader as Player" (1994: 14), in which the young child "becomes a confident player in a fantasy world that images realities, fears and desires", was evident in the many shrieks and roars as the children turned the pages with a mixture of delight, suspense and wonderment. Supernatural and semi-human boundary figures such as vampires, witches and monsters were a popular choice among this age group, but, while these peering, prowling and alluring creatures provided the reader with a heady mixture of pleasure and anxiety, it seems that "suspense", a key narrative element in most horror fiction, kept them turning the pages.

Children slide easily from the world of reality into fantasy, in which imaginative and fanciful creatures frequently create intrusions into otherwise realist narratives, making it possible to see the real and the fantastic, not as two opposing forces, but rather as inextricably intertwined in a symbiotic, sometimes parasitical relationship with one another. There is no abstract entity called fantasy; it is an ambiguous term that is not only difficult to define, but is frequently used, as Rosemary Jackson suggests, to describe anything that defies realistic representation: "myths, legends, folk and fairy tales, utopian allegories, dream visions, surrealist texts, science fiction, horror stories, all presenting realms 'other' than the human" (1995: 13-14). The unique nature of the picturebook, in particular, lends itself to artistic creations which straddle the real and imaginary, enabling the young child to experiment with different ways of seeing. These books frequently show in graphic form a tension between the visible and the invisible, the conscious and the unconscious, and between cultural

order and chaos, by enticing the viewer to explore what lies behind the disjunction of image and word.

Picturebooks and illustrated texts provide the perfect vehicle for a subtle metamorphosing of the different genres, essentially producing a hybrid genre which masquerades under the label "fantasy", but in actual fact combines characteristics traditionally associated with teenage/adult horror: the grotesque, the occult and the Gothic. These books are tied in closely to popular culture and are seen by many educationalists and critics as relatively harmless, with any real contempt being reserved for regressive, often sexist teenage series horror such as *Goosebumps* and *Point Horror*. The Campaign for Real Education has vilified horror, but as Kevin McCarron (2001) suggests, many of those who decry children's propensity for horror have very little real understanding of its appeal, or can appreciate the subtle differences that exist in the genre as a whole. Although many consider "horror" to be unsuitable for children, it is clear that publishers are simultaneously creating, but at the same time satisfying, a desire among young children for visual texts which conjure up, but then generally dispel, any potentially harmful or frightening incidents that may cause the reader distress. Nevertheless, this is not always the case, and interestingly many authors and illustrators of spooky picturebooks are far less constrained and conservative than their teenage counterparts, offering their readers a visual roller-coaster ride of anarchic, wild and fantastical adventures, sometimes, with the added attraction of an uncertain or ambiguous ending.

Part One considers the case studies of three children, Alex, Sadie and Amy, whose illuminative responses to "frightening" imagery reveal the rich diversity of the horror/fantasy genre and the entrenched, extravagant myths and legends that have grown around the shadowy manifestations of such seductive symbolism.

# CHAPTER ONE

# EMBRACING THE MACABRE

Most new readers confidently address pictures with an inventive and free-wheeling readiness to speculate (Victor Watson and Morag Styles, 1996: 145).

Alex had only just moved up from nursery when I first met him. He was the youngest of all the children I interviewed, just four and half years old. He introduced himself as "Alex the Great", not "Alex the Small!" as his friends called him. Right from the start of our first meeting Alex decided to crack a series of jokes that consisted of a few "Knock Knock Who's There?" jokes combined with a breakdown of his favourite party games, number one being "Murder in the Dark". Alex explained to me that his best thing in the whole world was "being scared". It came as no surprise then, to see Alex quickly rummage through a box of books and tell me with great glee: "This is the one I want. Look at his pointy tooths!" *Well I Never!* (1990) written by Heather Eyles and illustrated by Tony Ross, is a book Alex is already familiar with. He begins to chant the words "Well I Never! Well I Never!" as he settles himself down to read the story (I:1).

Alex stares at a very large, close-up image of a face. He then picks up the book and decides to wrap it around his face.

A: We're touching! It's a vampire [he screams]. Arghhh Arghhhhhh! [Alex copies the face of the demon child by forcing his teeth into a pair of fangs. This is the first of many amusing impressions I am treated to.] Can't read that. [He points at the large black capital letters emblazoned across the front cover image.] What's it?
ST: It's the title; it tells you what the book is called. [I read the words to Alex tracing my fingers slowly across the letters.]
A: Well I never what? [Alex laughs at his own joke, clearly showing some understanding of the title's play on words.]
ST: What do you think the book's going to be about?

Figure 1.1 From *Well I Never!* written by Heather Eyles and illustrated by Tony Ross. Reprinted by permission of Andersen Press Ltd.

A: Vampires, Arghhhh! It's gonna be scary [he warns me, using quite a serious tone], but it's gonna be funny, ha ha ha!
S.T: How do you know?
A: Because of that. [He points at the exclamation mark at the end of the title.] They're in my joke book at home. Not here.

Although Alex has not yet learnt how to read words, he has already acquired some of the conventions of language and understands that an exclamation mark is often used at the end of a joke. He is also learning how to interpret the pictures. "It's like a cartoon about Dracula," he informs me, using his hand to create a dramatic, sweeping gesture across the front cover. "What a lovely neck you have ma dear!" He grins wickedly and opens the book. Alex urges me to read the words, while he carefully examines the picture before him:

ST: "It was Monday morning. Time to go to school, and Polly wasn't dressed. As usual" (1).
A: He can't do his toast like me. [Alex points to Polly's hands awkwardly trying to butter a piece of toast.]
ST: How do you know it's a boy?

A: That's easy. He's Polly. If it was a lady, it would have "L", but it it's not, it's a "M". [Alex points to the capital "M" for Monday and then the small "m" for morning.] That means it's a *man*.

Although Alex is unaware that Polly is a female name, he has cleverly applied his knowledge of language to work out that the character seated before us is male. Gunther Kress and Theo van Leeuwen suggest that visual language is not a "universal grammar" that is transparent and universally understood, but rather, it is "an inventory of the elements and rules underlying a culture-specific form of visual communication" (2000: 3). In other words, the way we perceive and interpret visual information raises important social and cultural questions; it is not simply a matter of the individual's eye and mind. This can be seen in the way that Alex freely appropriates elements in the lettering and then uses this information to attribute Polly's image with masculine overtones.

In trying to understand and make sense of this interpretation it is useful to explore the work of Jacques Lacan, who provides one of the most comprehensive analyses of the way a child's entry into the language system confers on us our social and gender identity.[1] Drawing on the ideas of Ferdinand de Saussure, Lacan suggests that there is no natural relationship between the signs (words) and the objects in the real world that they represent (the referents). All signs are comprised of two aspects: a signifier and a signified. Each sign also has a visual or sound element (the signifier) and, attached to it, an idea, image or concept (the signified). This algorithm can be written as S/s (1977: 149). For example, the visual signifiers "M" and "m" evoke, for Alex, the signified concept or mental image of a man, or in this case, a boy, and likewise, "L" signifies the opposite, a "lady", a female. A radical perception follows from this in that there is a separation (or gap) for Alex, between the world of reality, which does not necessarily endow language with meaning, and our system of language, which is the means by which he is beginning to make sense of the world. Louise Rosenblatt maintains that even a child of five years of age may still believe that the "name" is an inherent part of the referent. She cites L. S. Vygotsky, who makes an important point when he states that "The sense of a word is the sum of all the psychological events aroused in our consciousness by the word. It is a dynamic, fluid, complex whole" (1993: 11).

Alex's unconscious desire to subvert the process of meaning is also evident in his interpretation of the pictures.

ST: Is there anything else in the picture that makes you think it's a
boy?
A: He's bare. Boys don't wear tops, just girls, 'cos they're clever
like witches. [He points at Polly's bare chest.]

Alex decides to turn over the next few pages to find evidence to prove his
point. He finally settles upon a picture of Polly, no longer seated at the
kitchen table, but now standing on a chair looking aggressively out to the
viewer, baring a set of vampire teeth. Alex passes the book to me: "I told
you it's a boy, a vampire boy!"



Figure 1.2 From *Well I Never!* written by Heather Eyles and illustrated by Tony
Ross. Reprinted by permission of Andersen Press Ltd.

In her book *Looking on: Images of Femininity in the Visual Arts and
Media*, Rosemary Betterton suggests that there is a long history of imagery
in art and literature which links feminine qualities and characteristics with
submissive behaviour:

Femininity, as defined by western culture, is bound up very closely with
the way in which the female body is perceived and represented. […] The
visual is particularly important in the definition of femininity, both because
of the significance attached to images in modern culture and because a
woman's character and status are frequently judged by her appearance
(1987: 7).

Polly's appearance, her nakedness from the waist up, helps Alex to form an opinion about her sex, which is further reinforced by her aggressive, rebellious behaviour. Barbara Chatton maintains that the reason three- and four-year-old children "typically assign gender by appearance and behavioral traits" when reading picturebooks is not only because they "generally pay more attention to the way that characters are portrayed in the illustrations than in text references", but it is also because, at this age, they "are in the process of consolidating and making sense of their own gender identity" (2001: 57).

On the one hand, Ross cleverly challenges our notion of gender identity by portraying Polly in a very masculine pose, doing distinctly "wild things", but, on the other, he reinforces gender stereotypes by painting Polly's pyjama bottoms with pink spots. Alex attributes this to "… blood dripping from his tooths!" This kind of imaginative deduction, trying to thread together the pieces of the story through the words and pictures, was an ongoing process, and coincides with Howard Gardner's description of the child's early development, which describes a strong desire to name and label all kinds of symbolic objects as the child increasingly searches for meaning or reference in the visual world (1973: 156). Alex uses his repertoire of conventional visual codes to support a value system that is dependent upon female- and male-differentiated behaviour. He takes for granted that traditional female attire (pink pyjama bottoms), requires traditionally constraining feminine behaviour, behaviour which Polly clearly does not exhibit.

Alex becomes increasingly excited at the protagonist's refusal to get dressed for school. He points to the pictures and asks me to re-read favourite parts of the text in which he takes great pleasure in interjecting and emphasising particular words. "Oh, I can't go in there," said Polly. "There's a witch in there" (3). The phrase is repeated, as Polly's attempts to reason with her mother become increasingly surreal. She mimics the behaviour of a vampire, a werewolf, a ghost, until her mother finally decides she's had enough of such childish antics and decides to fetch the clothes herself. Polly's mother makes her way up to the bedroom and is horrified to see a witch:

A: A witch, a witch! [Alex bounces up and down on his chair.]
Ugh, she's really ugly. Her horrible spots is blood! Not looking!
[He hides his face in his hands.]
ST: What makes her so ugly?

A: Scary, she's scary. Not going in. Them [pointing at the witch's long yellow talon-like nails], and that [pointing at her green face]. I don't like witches.

S.T: Can you tell me why you don't like witches?

A: They're nasty. [Alex thinks for quite a while.] And ugly.

A sense of female power as dangerous and perverse is central to Alex's interpretation of this witch. Her unattractiveness and perceived predatory nature proved to be a source of anxiety for Alex, and although Eyles has tried to counteract this with an amusing piece of dialogue: ' "Toads and slugs' bottoms!" shrieked the witch, who looked very fetching in Polly's tee-shirt', it has not had the desired effect on Alex's reading of the picture (10). Alex jumps off his chair and calls back to me:

A: I know a nice witch.

ST: Oh, where?

A: In a book, in there.

ST: Would you like to show me?

Alex goes off to the classroom to find his "nice witch" and emerges with a copy of Sally Grindley and Anthony Browne's *Knock Knock Who's There?* (1994). He quickly finds the picture he wants to show me:

A: It's her. [Alex looks visibly relieved as he caresses the picture.]

Browne's imposing figure of a witch looms into the foreground creating a strange, ambiguous and formidable presence in the illustration. The witch (who is actually the character of the father in disguise) suddenly appears at his daughter's bedroom door at bedtime, casting a shadow reminiscent of the Grim Reaper on the far wall. Alex, seemingly unaware of the menacing shadow, takes a sensual delight in touching the witch's masculine looking face, and stroking her outstretched arms as she welcomes the viewer into the picture:

A: She's nice. [Alex speaks very quietly.]

ST: What makes her different to this witch? [We compare the two illustrations.]

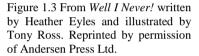A: 'Cos she's happy and has a nice face. [Alex points to her rosy cheeks.]

Figure 1.3 From *Well I Never!* written by Heather Eyles and illustrated by Tony Ross. Reprinted by permission of Andersen Press Ltd.

Figure 1.4 From *Knock Knock* W*ho's There?* written by Sally Grindley and illustrated by Anthony Browne (Hamish Hamilton 1985) Text copyright © Sally Grindley, 1985. Illustrations copyright © Anthony Browne, 1985.

Typically, Browne creates a surreal image for the viewer to contemplate, while Grindley's text provides the reader with an ambivalent tale about the fears a young girl has to face before bedtime. Alex's conflicting interpretation of these two witches seems to suggest that children may be more thrilled than disgusted by fiendish vampires, whereas they are more likely to be repelled by the stereotypically "ugly" witch. (The symbolic significance of the witch in children's literature will be explored more fully in Chapter 2).

Dracula is Alex's real passion. He turns the pages in an attempt to discover his whereabouts. "I know he's here somewhere. It's Dracula, it's Dracula, my best!" he exclaims, pointing to an amusing illustration of Dracula trying on Polly's pink shorts (12-13). Ross's depiction of the dark side of Dracula's character dominates the central axis of the illustration and draws on the archetypal image of Count Dracula with his black clothes, cold white skin and hypnotic, mesmeric eyes, recreated not only from Bram Stoker's novel, *Dracula* (1897), but also from the many horror films, comics and cartoon narratives that Alex appears to have already encountered. The contrasting shades of pink that surround him, especially in the lower part of the illustration, may be an attempt by Ross to repress the darker, shadowy side of his character, and instead, portray a vampire who is embracing what Carl Jung would define as his "otherness" his

"anima", his feminine side.[2] Unlike the conventionalised version of Dracula which is usually depicted in children's books, Ross's image creates an erotic ambivalence on the part of the viewer which tends to draw on the vitality and freedom of the female vampire in nineteenth-century iconography.[3]



Figure 1.5 From *Well I Never!* written by Heather Eyles and illustrated by Tony Ross. Reprinted by permission of Andersen Press Ltd. For colour image please see Centrefold, Plate 1.

Alex imitates Dracula's two fang-like teeth and attempts to recreate his imposing presence in the illustration by pulling up his collar! He carefully examines the picture and shows me Polly's mother's distorted, fearful face reflected back to the viewer in the mirror, clearly an allusion to Edvard Munch's painting *The Scream* (1893), while the depiction of Dracula in the foreground may be a reference to another infamous work of art by Munch, *Vampire* (1893-4).[4] Ross's possible allusion to *Vampire* may act as a visual metaphor, as we are never quite sure about the ambiguous status of Polly's mother in the story. For example, a series of pictures show her mouth gradually changing shape as she begins to grow a set of vampire teeth herself (2, 4, 6).