

Carnivals, the Carnavalesque, *The Magic Puddin'*, and David Almond's *Wild Girl, Wild Boy*: Towards a theorizing of children's plays.

Four years ago, the Centre for Research and Education in the Arts at the University of Technology Sydney began a program of original drama for children, and here I want to pay particular tribute to my colleagues Barbara Poston-Anderson, who has written and directed many of the plays, and Paul March, who was part of the original program. The plays performed as CREA Productions have all been produced within the university context; they are written, directed and performed by UTS staff and students, and presented to school and community audiences. The program has been very successful, and over 14,000 children have attended performances 1998-2002. One program is called Creative HSC (HSC refers to the Higher School Certificate, which is the final year examination sat by students in New South Wales schools), and this is the Young Adult arm of what we do. It has included innovative adaptations of 'classics' for secondary schools, particularly those that are set as HSC texts. Performances have included Fool for thy Love: Hamlet; Masquerade: Shakespeare's Hidden Women; and History and Hysteria: The Crucible. The Creative HSC program includes a lecture and/or scholarly introduction that tries to link into contemporary concerns and ideas: thus The Crucible was related to some of the ideas raised in Elaine Showalter's analysis of modern day hysterias; it also had an expressive dance depicting the girls' increasing seduction by ideas of witchcraft. Twelfth Night and Much Ado About Nothing were related to soapies about young people, such as Friends and Home and Away. Antigone: The Fall of the House of Oedipus was given an opening Chorus that linked the troubled relationships of Sophocles' drama to messy contemporary relationships. The aim of these plays was to provoke and to give student-friendly access to difficult texts.

CREA Productions also produces a number of plays for primary age children: original plays, and original adaptations of folk and fairy tales, usually with dancing and music. We were successful in obtaining a research grant and used part of this to develop a play called Sense and Sustainability, a play with a strong environmental message, which in various forms has been performed in our thousand seat theatre, toured schools as part of a Theatre in Schools Practicum program, and been featured at a number of external venues including Sydney's Powerhouse Museum.

It is these experiences which have led to this theoretical consideration of plays in terms of children's literature.

Children's literature theory and criticism continues to grow, but there is one area in which very little theoretical work has been carried out – that of children's plays and children's theatre. I am not here referring to educational drama or theatre in education, nor necessarily plays written to be acted by children; rather, this discussion concerns plays written for and performed to audiences who are children. My emphasis here is on plays presented to children commercially, as books are presented to children commercially (that is, through market processes).

In fact, my point of departure is a book. *The Magic Pudding*, written by the Australian artist Norman Lindsay in 1918, is a well-known illustrated text that has been adapted and performed as a play many times, notably on several occasions as a puppet production. Even a brief overview

suggests that a productive interpretive hermeneutic through which to view *The Magic Pudding* is the Bakhtinian optic of the carnivalesque, with its emphasis on parody, food, marketplace language, fools and rogues, and the 'laughing truth'. *The Magic Pudding* is in fact a profoundly theatrical text. The visuality of events, visual eccentricity of the characters, and the chronology of story pattern – a rollicking journey – lend themselves to dramatic adaptation, as does the extensive use of the rhythms and rhymes of verse: the characters break out into verse in the same way as the characters of stage musicals break out into song (in fact, many of the verses are called songs). The book is composed mainly of dialogue; those parts that are not dialogue tend to read as stage directions, describing accompanying actions and how words are said:

‘Always anxious to be eaten,’ said Bill, ‘that’s this Puddin’s mania. Well, to oblige him, I ask you to join us at lunch.’

‘Delighted, I’m sure,’ said Bunyip Bluegum, seating himself. ‘There’s nothing I enjoy more than a good go-in at steak-and-kidney pudding in the open air.’

‘Well said,’ remarked Sam Sawnoff, patting him on the back. ‘Hearty eaters are always welcome.’

‘You’ll enjoy this Puddin’,’ said Bill, handing him a large slice. ‘This is a very rare Puddin’.’

‘It’s a cut-an’-come-again Puddin’,’ said Sam.

‘It’s a Christmas steak and apple-dumpling Puddin’,’ said Bill.

‘It’s a - .Shall I tell him?’ Sam asked, looking at Bill. Bill nodded and the Penguin leaned across to Bunyip Bluegum and said in a low voice, ‘It’s a Magic Puddin’.’ (p.21)

Norman Lindsay’s illustrations all face an audience - an implicit auditorium - and are drawn on the one level; the characters are almost caricatures, easily identifiable by costumes and gait; there is considerable language play and parody; the action is slapstick, farce, vaudeville, with the dress-ups and disguises of pantomime, and lots of shouting and fighting and hitting and trouncing; there is also a great deal of eating, and talk about stomachs and ‘raging tums’. In the words of the penguin Sam Sawnoff, ‘songs, roars of laughter and boisterous jests are the order of the day’ (p.48).

Lindsay’s story is a performance – a performance not of childhood (as children’s books are sometimes described) – but rather an artistically self conscious performance *for* childhood. Conceived at a time of personal and national heaviness (the last year of the First World War) it is a

deliberate indulgence in jollity and play, a ‘conversation, song and story’ (p.44) set as a journey through an overtly Australian bush context, and spiced with irony and political and social satire:

... Bunyip decided to leave home without further ado. The trouble was that he couldn’t make up his mind whether to be a Traveller or a Swagman. You can’t go about the world being nothing, but if you are a traveller you have to carry a bag, while if you are a swagman you have to carry a swag, and the question is: Which is the heavier? (p.11).

The book parodies many social institutions, including the pretensions of the legal system, and even becomes metafictional at the end, when Bill warns:

‘For the point is, here we are pretty close to the end of the book, and something will have to be done in a Tremendous Hurry, or we’ll be cut off short by the cover.’

‘The solution is perfectly simple,’ said Bunyip. ‘We have merely to stop wandering along the road, and the story will stop wandering through the book.’ (p.168)

Although the language of the whole text has been inflected ironically, it is only at the end that the narrator’s presence becomes visible; note however, that the narrator who emerges from the wings in the final scenes is a participant rather than an observer:

On winter nights there is always Puddin’ and hot coffee for supper, and many’s the good go-in I’ve had up there, a-sitting round the fire. (p.171)

The last song, extolling the significance of home, constitutes a brilliant finale to a ‘rolling, roaring life,’ with ‘all hands joining in the chorus’:

Home, home, home,
That’s the song of them that roam,
The song of the roaring, rolling sea
Is all about rolling home. (p. 171)

The journey that is the pattern of so many children’s stories has reached journey’s end – home, or a new construction of home; the carnival is over.

The notion of performance is significant. It is integral to the study of children's plays, which are written with actual performance in mind and which constitute what can be seen as a real, practical performativity. The topical debate (see for example, Bell 1999) around this notion of performativity, a term emerging out of linguistic theory (Austin 1962) to refer to the relationship of *speech* to *act*, but initiated into feminist theory by Judith Butler (1990) to refer to the relationship of *act* to *identity*, provides a provocative backdrop to considerations of children's plays. For Butler, performativity describes the production, through constant repetition, reference and citation, of subjects or selves as effects. In Gayatri Spivak's words, this identity – 'subject-effect' – is 'the effect of an effect' (1988, p.204); identity is embodied in dramatic acts. Rather than performance being the effect of identity, identity is the effect of performance. Performance, in Butler's theoretical terms, is a 'bounded act' (1993, p.24), a form of theatricality; Lloyd points out the Derridean idea that 'everything is in some sense always theatrical' (1999, p.202). As a way of viewing children's plays, I want to apply (reapply?) the idea of *performance* – the act bounded by the sense of miming [that is, mimicking] and exaggerating existing codes and signifiers (Lloyd, p.202), and iterating and reiterating cultural practices (sometimes transgressing them) – to the play itself, using it to refer to the deliberate creation of subject, space, story and identity in the context of overt artistic act, theatre. The idea of *performativity* is adopted here to refer to that which is enacted and revealed about the production and performance of identity, but particularly to the idea of performative belonging:

The performativity of belonging 'cites' the norms that constitute or make present the 'community' or group as such. The repetition, sometimes ritualistic repetition, of these normalised codes makes material the belongings [belongingness] they purport to simply describe. (1999, p.3)

'Acts' derive their binding power (Fortier 1999, p.43) through routine and reiteration, but most of all through citationality, that is, 'through the invocation of convention' (Butler 1993, p.234). In this way, children's plays, like children's books but more obviously so, constitute, cross-reference, and make present a community of belonging that is in a sense 'doubled' through the consciousness of performance. The invocation of convention is part of the performative utterance (speech to act) which 'confers a binding power on the action performed' (Butler 1993, p.234). To put it simply, the 'act' of the performance/play, which is culturally coded, constructs identities and communities of belonging; children's plays represent a conscious, theatrical citationality (quotation) of speech, act, identity and belonging.

That brings me to my next point. Children's books can be critiqued by academics as a text, because children will also read the books (that is, we are looking at the same thing, even though our points of view may be very different); our reading of these books assumes a child audience/implied reader, even if we are not concerned with the response of that audience. Children's plays as texts, on the other hand, cannot with integrity be separated from the play as dramatic presentation, because it is this that children will actually experience. Therefore I am proposing an idea of *children's plays-as-the-performance-of-texts* rather than play as text; in other words, any theoretical consideration must assume performance and performativity. This of course introduces a huge number of variables, but adjunctively it implies certain defining characteristics. These include:

- 1) Plays, unlike books, will usually not be read by children or adults. Rather, plays will be viewed, and experienced live. (I am not concerned here with plays produced for television.)
- 2) The experience of the play will involve a performance, and in any performance there will be many variables, including such things as the contributions/interventions of actors and directors, staging, size of theatre, costumes. The ideologies and commitment (to excellence, to promulgating a particular worldview, to children, to education, to artistic development) of all those involved in the production process will also shape the experience of the audience.
- 3) A live play is usually a one-off experience; most children will see most plays only once. The play normally has to stand on that one performance, whereas books can be re-visited.
- 4) The play must hold children's interest.

There are of course ways in which children's books, especially as read to children, can be compared to theatre; as I have written elsewhere:

... [C]hildren's literature in the classroom is a type of theatre... Every time we read a book with children it is a viewing, as theatre is: a viewing of the text, of the imaginary experience that is the invitation of the text, and of each other's participation in that experience. Like theatre it is a corporate experience of being involved in shared story. The word *theatre* derives from the Greek word *theatron*, meaning a place for viewing or a place for seeing. ... A reading event is a metafictional mise-en-scene, a sliding between a present 'real' setting and an imagined 'un-real' setting. ... Every turn of the picture book page is a shift in scene; the teacher's hand turning the page is a *stagehand*. Readers are part of the stage crew

in this reading event, getting things ready and making links between what is seen and what is unseen and filling in the gaps by running around in the backstage places of the imagination. (2001, pp. 433-434)

This is not to take away from the real experience of theatre – or the unreal experience of theatre – which can present powerfully to the senses: visual, aural, kinaesthetic. And thus we come to four significant characteristics of children's plays:

- 1) First, although of course children may and do respond individually to the play with very private, important and non-evident reactions, *theatre is a corporate experience*. Plays not only connect and construct community, they are also seen *in community* – with families, friends and peers.
- 2) Second, this corporate communal nature of children's theatre means that the *experience of the play criss-crosses the footlights*. Feedback is not reflected by how many books are sold, but at the very moment of performance; indeed, feedback as audience response is immediate. There are qualifications to this however; Fox makes the important point that theatre behaviour is learned behaviour, and sometimes children don't know what is expected of them ('Is it okay to laugh?' 'When do we clap, or don't we?') (2002, see Acknowledgement).
- 3) Third, and following on from this, children's plays are essentially an interactive experience (even when they are not designed to be overtly interactive in the modern sense) in that the *audience and its response can change the dynamic of the play as it happens*. Sad parts can become funny not only by how the writer conceives them and the actor acts them, but by how the audience as a collective respond to them. In short, plays depend on an audience, and the audience is a fundamental part of performance.
- 4) And fourth, the distribution of power in children's theatre – like all distributions of power – is complex, involving the varying roles of writers, producers, directors, costume designers, and actors, as well as lighting and sound technicians and so on - but in the end I believe that *power – as choice and freedom to respond – resides principally with the child audience*. There is great political power in body language (especially in the communal body language of five hundred children).

Is this different to adult theatre, and if so, in what ways are children's plays distinctive?

Children's plays, like children's books, are part of an artistic continuum. It is obviously difficult to analyse plays-as-performance-of-texts (as I am proposing here), as play text can change with each performance of it. However, some characteristics (if not differences) are:

- 1) The fundamental rule is that children's plays absolutely must capture children's interest.
- 2) Again, the essence of the children's play is that it is a shared communal physical experience. Children *perform* audience together, no matter what their interior thoughts may be. This is also true of course of adult plays, but adult audiences are more independent, likely to be less influenced by peer pressure to perform in a certain way, likely to be attending the play with a variety of motives and expectations.
- 3) There is generally, but not exclusively, a great emphasis on action.
- 4) There may be greater emphasis on the journey of the play rather than on what character development takes place.
- 5) Children's plays are on the whole fast paced. Even when action is not fast paced, dialogue is (as in the Chorus of Voices in David Almond's *Wild Girl, Wild Boy*). There are variations on this, but the principle holds.
- 6) Children's plays – although not always those for young adults, which tend to be issue-based - contain many different forms of humour, both verbal and visual.
- 7) Dramatic irony is a very common and pervasive element in children's plays – the audience love to be 'in the know' and especially enjoy trying to help stage characters who are not (at its most basic level, 'He's over there!' Look, behind you!'). At a more subtle level, and in other genres of plays, dramatic irony works as it does in Shakespeare – to complicate the sense of drama and highlight the inevitability of outcome. Thus, our adaptation of *The Crucible*, which sought to make an 'adult' play accessible to students who were struggling with the original but who were studying – and 'knew' - the tragic Salem history, presented the seduction of gossip and peer pressure in a dance around a witch's cauldron, out of which words were taken, passed around and inflamed (an example of Austin's speech to act).
- 8) The role of fools, rogues and other rascals is on the whole not that of the Bakhtinian fool or rogue who speaks wise words or 'laughing truths'; rather, fools and rogues are often either downright bad, humorous, or both. The person who tends to speak wisdom in a children's play may be the child or animal figure who is most mocked and marginalised (the Cinderella figure) – suggesting not only the contemporary significance of peers but also a change in social attitudes. In some plays the wise person is the Storyteller/Chorus (a little like the Narrator/Chorus who becomes visible at the end of *The Magic Pudding*). In others – such as

the Almond play - the Chorus of Voices represents conventional mob 'wisdom' (including the comments of well-meaning school teachers).

And that brings me back to the idea of carnival and children's plays. There has been much discussion of the carnivalesque in children's literature (for example, Stephens 1992, Nikolajeva 1996, 2000) but one point is often missing. The *carnivalesque* may be a time-out experience, as Stephens suggests, but the intrinsic power of the spirit of *carnival* is community, connection to others. Clark and Holquist note that Bakhtin identified two Rabelaisian sub-texts, 'carnival, which is a social institution, and grotesque realism, which is a literary mode' (1984, p.299). Carnival is a physical coming together, a significant 'suspension of all hierarchical precedence,' a 'feast of becoming, change and renewal' (Bakhtin 1968, p.10). Carnival laughter and mockeries are corporate play. Carnival depends on common senses of the ridiculous, in-jokes, and knowledges. Centrifugal language – that is, the everyday slangy language at the margins of the marketplace (and playground) - becomes part of a shared 'laughing word' which may in turn initiate a moral reorganisation. Carnival slides into grotesque realism through the body – its apertures and gross flesh, its bellies and appetites. The many pitfalls that happen to bodies – tripping over, silly disguises - become a grotesquerie of slapstick possibilities for all to enjoy together. As Bakhtin notes, 'it is the medieval comic theatre which is most intimately related to carnival' (1984, p.15). There are many children's plays that seek to teach – about the environment and so on – and there are serious plays with morals, but many at some stage – and sometimes as a small episode of relief - involve comic (or drastic) things happening to bodies. *Peter Pan* (1904), which started life as a play rather than a book, is an obvious example, with its Nanny as the body of a dog, the hook of Captain Hook replacing the hand bitten off by a crocodile, and so on. One of the *CREA Production* plays, which was very successful and seen by about 7000 primary school children, was *Stop, Look, Listen: Santa in the City*, was a performance about Road Safety produced in collaboration with the Road Traffic Authority of New South Wales and three local councils. Written and directed by a postgraduate student in the Master of Arts in Children's Literature and Literacy course, in collaboration with a colleague and myself, it was performed by UTS students from the Faculty of Education. The play - which revolved around Santa getting lost in the city with a sleighful of presents, because the baddies had kidnapped Red Man and Green Man (of traffic light fame) – contained many carnival elements: a journey, lots of action and humour, irony and dramatic irony, and breaking into song, much body grotesquerie and falling over and pouncing on people, and some questionable marketplace (school playground) language. Another *CREA* play, *Sense and Sustainability*, written by Barbara Poston-Anderson, had a strong environmental message, but

Sludge, Slick and Smog had to undergo some pushing around and pummelling before they were recycled and transformed. And another, a retelling of Andersen's *Ten Dancing Princesses* which I adapted into a more mystical story of imagination and desire ('Shadow world/calling me/from across the silver sea'), had some light relief in a carnivalesque interlude, as the invisible Gardener following the princesses stumbled and lost his way.

There are other ways of viewing children's theatre – once called a 'ghetto' by a *Times* critic. Bakhtin claims that the freedom of grotesque realism helped develop the Romantic discovery of what he calls 'the *interior infinite* of the individual' (1984, p.44). The representation of subjectivity (the interior infinite) in children's plays is at once physical and direct, with little obvious access to inner worlds; however, child audiences are remarkably perceptive in discerning what characters are thinking and feeling through what they say and do. Further, just as Shakespeare uses soliloquies as the revelation of inner worlds, children's plays often use song; thus the oldest Dancing Princess sings out her sorrow about the death of their mother, the subsequent overprotectiveness of their father, and the passing of time:

*I dreamt last night of times gone by
Of overflowing days, and summer sky
Of rainbow colours bright, like tinted cellophane
I dreamt last night I was a child again.
Why can't the world be like my memories
When roads were long and mountains high?
When just the branches of a blossom tree
Became a fortress reaching to the sky
And I could keep my tryst [sung as 'date'] with destiny
With laughing eyes, as dreams fulfil? ¹*

As we shall see, David Almond uses a contemporary Chorus to allow the audience to hear what his protagonist is hearing all too clearly. Again, developing a concept of children's plays in terms of a proposed *dramatic chronotope* is also theoretically exciting. Briefly, this would explore the dramatic relationship of people and events on the one hand, to time and space on the other. Such a conception highlights in particular the often dense construction of theatrical temporality beyond the obvious temporal-spatial shifts of scene changes, which may imply a simultaneous present anyway. In other words, sometimes scenes/events that happen *after* each other on stage, are presented in

such a way as to be understood as happening at the same time. Further, an actor/narrator/chorus who wraps up at the end invokes another time-space again – a sort of omniscient continuous present, a sense of *dramatic eternal* - that automatically refigures the action of the play in a frame of past. In some cases this happens almost as the quotation, incasement, autothematism and mirror games of Gide's *mise-en-abyme* (Kowzan 1976, p.68), which is described by Rimmon-Kenan as 'a transposition of the theme of a work to the level of the characters.' This figure may describe the play that has just been seen as a *quotation*, more or less placing it in quotation marks. They may provide a frame as an interpretive hermeneutic (*incasement*). They can *mirror* the action and ideas of the play. *Autothematism* is related to the concept of metafiction: in other plays, this figure – like Puck - may give an overlay of metafiction.

Implicit in the idea of carnival is the serious period – the period of abstinence, festival and feast, and often sacred time it traditionally precedes – for example, Lent and Easter in Christian tradition. Ironically, the etymology of the word carnival – *carn* = flesh, and *levare* = to raise, remove, meaning 'the putting away of flesh' – describes what comes after the carnival; what happens during the carnival is the exact opposite (a telling parody). Perhaps in this context children's plays as carnival celebrate a construction/reconstruction of childhood as the free and uninhibited before-time preceding the economic and social concerns of adulthood. This carnival of childhood is fun, festive, scatological, perhaps part of adapting to bodies that are, in the view of some of their owners, changing quite grotesquely. In this way, the inevitability of growth is expressed – and mediated - in what Bakhtin calls 'the laughing truth' – making fun of what is, and can't be changed. Thus, carnival becomes one way of performing childhood.

Carnival is never an end-state; rather, it is a seductive freedom, a 'kind of existential heteroglossia', that is, a many-voiced ('heteroglossic'), noisy commentary on issues of life and death and existence. It is something between 'normal' life and sacred, spiritual life. In reality, writes Bakhtin, 'carnival is life itself ... shaped according to a certain sense of play' (Bakhtin 1984, p. 7). Children's theatre is also play; like carnival, it 'builds its own world in opposition to the official world ...' (p.88), it is parodic, unifying, generative; indeed, while carnival lasts, 'there is no other life outside it' (p.7).

David Almond's *Wild Girl, Wild Boy* is a play for older children/young adults, but it creates exactly such a world of existential heteroglossia, of an inner sacred; it is an imaginative construction of

interior worlds that are out of joint with other, larger, more politically powerful worlds. Whereas *The Magic Pudding* ends metafictionally; *Wild Girl*, *Wild Boy* begins metafictionally:

ELAINE Wild ... Girl... Wild ... Boy ...
 That's the title. That's the title.
 Once ... there ...was ... a ... girl ... called ... Elaine ...
 Ah. Yes. Phew. That's the start ...
 She ... lived ...with ...

She holds up the paper and looks at her words.

ELAINE Look at it! Look at it! I'm so stupid. No, I'm not! I have problems ... writing.
 Something to do with the way I ... see or something.

The play explores the troubled 'interior infinite' of Elaine, the way she sees herself and others in conflicting worlds, times, and spaces, that collide in misunderstanding and pain. This misunderstanding is manifest theatrically in the grim chorus of voices - 'of neighbours, classmates and teachers' (p.26) – that reflect attitudes towards difference and the wildness of creative imagination. Elaine is a figure of ridicule, a seeming 'fool', who huddles within herself, holding her hands around her head as the voices start:

THE CHORUS OF VOICES

- Have you seen the way she just stares out the window with her gob hanging open?
- Like she's catching flies.
- Like a little kid.
- Like a baby.
- And the state of her books?
- Like a spider's crawled over them.
- Like somebody's chucked spaghetti on them.
- Hey, Elaine, has somebody chucked spaghetti on your books?
- No, that's her writing, man!
- Now leave Elaine alone. Oh dear, Elaine. We're going to have to do better than that, aren't we?
- Concentrate, girl!
- Keep your mind on your work.

- Elaine has severe difficulty in maintaining concentration on the task in hand.

This choric ‘carnival’ of voices represents a dialogised phenomenology of mindscapes: a refracted one of Elaine’s own inner world, with its confusion and despair, and desire for understanding; and those of the community around her. Briefly, the play tells the story of a young girl, Elaine, whose imaginative father has died, and who now has a difficult relationship with her more down-to-earth mother. Grieving her father’s death, she also grieves the concomitant loss of the imaginative spaces and freedoms of the allotment to which he introduced her, where they listened together to what Almond refers to in his Afterword as the ‘endless lovely singing of the larks’ (p.86):

ELAINE Then he dies, and there was nothing more to dance for and nothing more to sing for.
 Let me out!
 No answer.

Truanting from school one day and playing in the allotment, Elaine sits drawing, and is joined by (draws?) Wild Boy, who has fur on his hands and who can’t speak but only make ‘weird’ noises. She takes him back home with her:

ELAINE holds WILD BOY in front of her mum.
 WILD BOY smiles tenderly into Mum’s eyes.
 ELAINE realises that MUM sees nothing.

ELAINE Look, Mum. Look. Oh, Wild Boy, she can’t see you. She can’t see!

MUM moves close to ELAINE, peers into her eyes.

MUM Elaine, what’s going in in there? What’s happened to my little girl?

One of the many ways in which this play can be seen as performance-of-text is to contemplate the different options of designing the allotment space on stage, and of representing and blocking the actors’ physical and mental interactions between restraints and freedom. Wild Boy is a carnival figure; Bakhtin notes that the Roman Saturnalia presented images of men ‘wearing the skin of wild beasts’ (1984, p.392). In Almond’s play, ‘spit and horse muck,’ bodily excretion and excrement, are

used on the fairy seeds to magic the fairy into existence. The allotment – regenerative space, secret garden, other world heterocosm, fertile and imaginative wilderness and wildness – is the place of both death and life; not a Rabelaisian underworld but an overworld:

... [I]t contains the past, the rejected and condemned, as unworthy to dwell in the present ... But it also gives us a glimpse of the new life, of the future that is born, for it is this future that finally kills the past. (Bakhtin 1984, p.409).

Wild Girl, Wild Boy slips in and out of ('quotes') times and spaces in a refracted *mise-en-abyme*, with insertions and framing Wild Boy mirroring the wild side of Elaine, and the As Elaine coaxes her mother and McNamara into tasting the sweetness of the raspberries, all of them undergo a moral psychic reorganisation that is part of the essence of carnival:

MUM	Delicious
ELAINE	Raspberries. Delicious and sweet and wild.

The Magic Pudding is a humorous trip to a safe harbour (or more correctly treehouse). *Wild Girl* *Wild Boy* is a difficult traversing through the complexities of grief, loss, mother and daughter intersubjective relationships, and the untamed parts of the human psyche. Journey's end for Elaine comes as she and her mother, 'absorbed in each other and in their memories,' – that is, in both past and present - dance together into the 'delicious and sweet' wilderness. This represents another version of the arrival home, and another version of carnival – a human rejuvenation and 'tendency to duality' (Bakhtin 1984, p.323) that is expressed bodily in their parent/child relationship, and invokes images of both birth and death: 'You were once a yolky little salty thing,' Elaine's mother tells her (p.78). Carnival, writes Bakhtin, 'celebrates the destruction of the old and the birth of the new world – the new year, the new spring, the new kingdom' (p.410). There is a logic, he goes on to say, about seeing things 'wrong side out' (p.411), as Elaine does. The grotesque hairy body of Wild Boy provokes ambivalence and ambiguity: is he a figment of Elaine's imagination? delusion? imaginary friend? alter ego? symbol of imaginative freedom? shadow? metaphor of the fertility of the untamed, and the barrenness of the safe and ordinary?

ELAINE	No wings. Fur on your hands. You're ... ugly. No, not ugly.
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The play relates very clearly to some of Almond's prose work, particularly *Secret Heart* (2001). But as he writes in the Afterword to *Wild Girl, Wild Boy*, the writer's input is only one part of a play:

... [U]nlike stories in prose that march line by line from top left to bottom right, all the space filled in by the writer, a story in play form moves down the page in short bursts surrounded by lots of space. Dialogue, names, skimpy stage directions, and that's all. The space around the words is for the director, the actors and the designer to fill. (pp. 88-89)

Later, Almond describes his feeling on arriving for the first performance of the text:

A last minute rehearsal was under way. The music played. Beneath the stage lights were the bedroom, the allotment. The moon shone through the window above the bed. Who was that figure that shuffled through the lights, with his wild hair, his ragged clothes, with fur on his hands and feet? Who was that girl, her face transfigured by a weird mixture of despair and delight? (pp.92-92)

The playwright concludes his remarks with these words:

In the end of course, none of it exists. There is no Elaine, there is no Wild Boy, there is no allotment, there is no bedroom. The play is a subterfuge, a set of disguises and tricks. It's a pack of lies

Of course it depends on the creative skills of writer, directors, actors, composers, designers. But it also depends on the creative skills of the audience, those skills of the imagination that allow us all to leap into other minds and other worlds, skills that are at once quite natural, straightforward, commonplace and quite amazing. (p. 92-93).

Almond's last point is also, I believe, true to a great extent of reading a book. Nonetheless children's plays are texts that are mediated by performance, and it is this performance that gives their stories and characters shape, voice, movement and life. Further, this performance Theatre – corporate yet intimate – is a powerful medium of sensual communication. The fleeting ephemerality of the theatrical experience is a carefully constructed human moment that is at once real and unreal. Plays, more so than books, in their immediacy and sensual present, exert a corporate captivity, if only for an hour or two. Writers such as David Almond seek to lay the groundwork for imaginative freedom and a sort of carnivalesque wildness that is subtly encoded as transient. If there is a

pervading impulse in children's plays, further to those already noted, it may well be in their writing by adult authors this sense of wistfulness and urgent need to recapture, for a moment, in the midst of the ephemerality of life itself, a sense of the vision, hope and clarity of childhood perceptions.

Acknowledgement

I would like to thank Geoff Fox, whose own experience with children's theatre I respect, for his extremely helpful comments on this paper.

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