Nicholas Grundy and the Magic Undies

Karen Jarvis

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Attestation of Authorship

 I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning.

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ABSTRACT

Nicholas Grundy and the Magic Undies is a fast paced, plot driven, Bildungsroman fantasy aimed at eight to twelve year olds. The novel is narrated by its eleven-year-old protagonist, Nicholas Grundy, who discovers a world of storybook characters come to life in his great, great Aunt Zelda's bookshop. Nicholas begins his journey in a state of despondency: he covets his millionaire relations' lifestyle while spurning everything his parents stand for. He is weary of his great, great Aunt whom he suspects is a witch. As the stakes rise, Nicholas becomes a more active character, in charge of not only his destiny but those around him. His attitudes are challenged and he develops an understanding of what is truly important to him. It was my intention that this sense of independence and self-awareness mirror that of the preadolescent audience. *Nicholas Grundy* is also a celebration of story in all its myriad forms: life stories; tales from classical children's literature; ordinary everyday stories that both form and inform our memories and experiences.

Nicholas Grundy and the Magic Undies

EXEGESIS

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EXEGESIS

General considerations

Nicholas Grundy and the Magic Undies is a pre-adolescent contemporary Bildungsroman aimed at readers aged eight to twelve. The novel is narrated in the third person from the point of view of the main protagonist, Nicholas Grundy, an eleven-year-old boy who uncovers a magical world of time travel and storybook characters come to life. Nicholas's personal journey begins from a place of ignorance at his own situation and exasperation with his parents' wholesome yet impecunious lifestyle. His disillusionment with the power of reading and contempt for magic lead him, during the course of the narrative, to a broadening of his ideals about money, love and the joy of books.

Nicholas' self-discovery and journey towards independence is mirrored by the storybook characters exiting their books and exploring the outside world. By leaving the safety of their books, they become like children on the cusp of adolescence, experiencing for the first time a sense of their own mortality. They, like Nicholas, become aware their lives could end in any number of ways - outside of their books, their fates are governed by the forces of nature. Storybooks as 'homes' is a conceit for the security of childhood; the warmth of the womb; the safety of a life dependent on the kindness of others. In short: a state of pubescent purity that could teeter into loss of innocence at any moment.

In terms of plot, Nicholas unravels three interwoven mysteries that centre on three of the main characters: Victor Grimes, Zelda's shifty assistant; the Man with One Eye, a storybook character who terrorises the other characters; and Doris Grundy, his flamboyant millionaire Aunt. Nicholas' relationship with his great, great Aunt Zelda is integral to his personal development and the plot in general. As the stakes rise, Nicholas' motivations and objectives intensify: ultimately the onus is on him to save his great, great Aunt Zelda, her bookshop, the storybook characters and all stories from destruction.

Whilst this novel is set in the world of books, I want to make the point that stories are everywhere and come in many forms. Stories can be made up or based on real historical events (accounting for the grey area when speaking of 'truth' in terms of fiction vs. non-fiction), and packaged in multifarious ways. Whilst this novel embodies and celebrates the classical paper book form, I am aware from my own experience around technologically savvy children of this age group that many of them have a negative attitude towards reading. I have noticed that the growing omnipresence of technology has given rise to a disconnect (especially with boys) between the magic of literature and the act of reading books. The latter is seen as hard work compared to the multisensory computer based experience. The multisensory experience of a paper form novel might not be as easily accessed or immediately obvious to a younger reader who is more accustomed to computer generated worlds. It might be compared to the way television robbed radio of an audience when it first appeared. Children respond to the music, graphics, hand-eye coordination and interactivity. My aim is not to negate the richness of this multimedia experience but to celebrate the love and magic of a literature that found its inception in the classic book form; to open up the possibility of these worlds feeding into each other, rather than being mutually exclusive. I wanted to concentrate on the essence of story as opposed to the medium within which the story is told. Therefore technological devices rarely feature in *Nicholas Grundy*. I would

ultimately like to make *Nicholas Grundy* into an e-book with the footnotes as hyperlinks and the illustrations portrayed with flash animation. This might make it more immediately accessible and relevant to its intended audience.

My intention was to give children a map of what I believe is the classical canon that has relevance to their modern day techno-centric world views. While I believe in the inherent value of the classics such as friendship in *Winnie the Pooh*, the power of imagination in *Alice in Wonderland*, working together in *The Wizard of Oz*, my main aim is to introduce these beliefs in a meaningful, twenty first century way. Just as the characters in *Nicholas Grundy* get lost in other books, my son gets lost in a cyber-world every day. When he plays Minecraft multiplayer (two players interacting within the same interface but on separate computers) he is exploring other worlds devoid of authority figures. Like Nicholas and the storybook characters, computers are a portal into another world where he can roam free of adult constraints. He enters cyberspace safe in the knowledge that he will return to reality and the security of family life (although sometimes I wonder within which sphere he would prefer to remain). The characters in *Nicholas Grundy* experience a dislocated reality when they leave the world of their books and explore other books, just like my son and the millions of children playing video games every day.

Motivation for writing *Nicholas Grundy and the Magic Undies*

Research for my intended independent preadolescent audience led me to explore the following concepts in relation to children's books: individuation, self-discovery, intertextuality, magic, humour and the carnivalesque, fantasy, the connection between word and image, and footnotes and their implications. My reading on intertextuality was specifically in relation to the use of classic children's literature from the Golden Age and biographical references from history. I wanted to explore magic both in the broad sense of the magic of reading and specifically with regards to the art of illusion. I found humour and the carnivalesque for this age group in myriad forms: scatological, body-centred, juxtaposition, scale. The relationship between word and image played an important part in my motivation to write *Nicholas Grundy*. I have found from personal experience and

extensive reading that children of this generation are accustomed to a visually rich diet. I wanted to explore the connection between word and image and its impact on the reading of a work. Through reading many chapter books over the last five years I have noticed footnotes have become increasingly popular. As with computer technology, children are used to moving their eye up and down and on and off the page. They enjoy sound bites and quirky facts from history. The extra information adds texture and depth to the text. It also allows me to indulge my love of history and biography and, in doing so, hopefully piques the interest of my intended audience.

Theoretical Section

Genre of writing

In her book, *Starting Over: The Task of the Protagonist in the Contemporary Bildungsroman,* Susan Gohlman (1990) suggests the term Bildungsroman refers to any novel whose young central protagonist experiences life changing events. The social and psychological journey results in a greater awareness and connection between the inner and outer worlds of the protagonist and their surroundings (Gohlman, 1990). With this definition in mind, I would argue that *Nicholas Grundy* is a contemporary preadolescent Bildungsroman that is written as a mystery unravelled by its main protagonist, Nicholas Grundy, whose character development is integral to the narrative structure.

Individuation

Eight to twelve year olds are on the cusp of emerging adolescence, finding their own sense of independence within arms-reach of the adults in their life. They want both independence and the security of adult guardianship. This separates them from actual adolescents who desire to break away from authority figures and become individuals. Psychologist Peter Blos talks about the journey into adolescence as a process of 'individuation', during which self-awareness and a sense of mortality become integral (Blos, 1962). Jung defines individuation as 'the process by which individuals are formed and differentiated from others' (Adler, 1976).

I was searching for a way to encapsulate the concept of individuation with a conceit that would capture the imaginations of eight to twelve year olds. I realized if a book was treated like a 'home', when a storybook character leaves their book they embark on a journey of self-discovery and individuation. They leave the safety of the womb/home/family to test out their independence. By journeying out into the unknown, the storybook characters gain both independence and a sense of their own mortality, as does Nicholas Grundy, the main protagonist. Gretel (one of Nicholas's main storybook character friends), warns him of the real danger of diving in and out of storybooks:

'If they lock you up, you have to find a way of escaping, just like you would in real life.'
'You mean we could get trapped inside a book forever?' said Nicholas.
'Yes, or worse – we could drown or get run over. We could die.'

(*Nicholas Grundy and the Magic Undies,* pp. 69)

Roberta Seelinger Trites (2001) offers a convincing argument for the difference between Young Adult (YA) and children's literature in her essay, "The Harry Potter Novels as a Test Case for Adolescent Literature". Trites states that, as the characters grow older, the Harry Potter books 'shift solidly onto the terrain of adolescent literature.' She notes that many scholars seek to define adolescent literature through a comparison with adult rather than children's literature. The essential difference between children's and adolescent literature, she believes, can be found in the 'issue of power' (Trites, 2001). In children's literature, character development is measured in terms of what the character has learnt about self;

adolescent fiction is invariably shown as a way of expressing what the adolescent has learned about 'how society curtails the individual's power' (Trites, 2001).

The distinction between high and low fantasy needs to be made when speaking about fantasy novels. J. R. Tolkien's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy is an oft cited example of high fantasy: a self-contained fantastical world with its own unique set of rules and regulations. *Nicholas Grundy* falls into the low fantasy category: the novel is set in the everyday world of a modern day bookshop within which resides a fantasy realm reached through the medium of books. Many classic high and low fantasy books for children use a device through which children travel to enable individuation to take place. A rabbit hole provides Lewis Carroll's Alice a portal through which she can transition from reality into a fantasy world where she is devoid of parental authority. While there are adult figures advising her (albeit nonsensically), she must take responsibility for her actions as she is alone in a foreign world. Similarly, something as ordinary as a wardrobe acts as a conduit to independence and danger for the children in C. S. Lewis's *The Lion, The Witch and the Wardrobe* (1950).

As Nicholas' role in the safety and livelihood of the characters grows, so does his realisation that his parents offer him the same sense of protection. This growth in self-awareness results in a rekindled love and respect for his parents. Whilst his journey gives him independence from them, it leads to an acceptance rather than rejection of their authority. Likewise, the storybook characters' security is contingent on their capacity to return to their books. Whilst Alice (in *Nicholas Grundy*) ventures out into the world of Zelda's bookshop, her main aim throughout the novel is to return to the safety of her own book. Her life and the lives of her peers are overturned when this convention is threatened.

I would maintain that the novel is a pre-adolescent form of Bildungsroman in the sense that Nicholas and the storybook characters experience a sense of autonomy and self-discovery within the confines of Aunt Zelda's bookshop.

Intertextuality

Merriam-Webster's dictionary defines intertextuality as:

The complex interrelationship between a text and other texts taken as
basic to the creation or interpretation of the text (Merriam-Webster, 2015).

This definition belies the complexities and intricacies of a term that has been fiercely debated amongst scholars for decades. Michel Foucault delves deeper when he states that:

> The frontiers of a book are never clear-cut: beyond the title, the first lines and the last full stop, beyond its internal configuration and its autonomous form, it is caught up in a system of references to other books, other texts, other sentences: it is a node within a network...The book is not simply the object that one holds in one's hands... Its unity is variable and relative (Foucault, 1974).

If there is, as Thomas C. Foster states, 'no such thing as a wholly original work of literature' and stories cannot be created in a vacuum then intertextuality becomes a 'dialogue between old texts and new', which enriches the experience of reading by creating a multiplicity of meaning to the work, both conscious and unconscious (Foster, 2003). Roland Barthes suggests that any text is 'a multidimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and crash' (Chandler: 2001). Intertextuality is omnipresent: it exists in every narrative (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2005).

It is this intertextuality - the reading and prior knowledge of texts past and present - that informs much of modern day children's literature. The conscious and unconscious knowledge of what has gone before enriches and elucidates the reading of a text. Whether it is a child or adult reading the text, any prior knowledge that person has will influence the reading.

Nicholas Grundy refers to books from the period coined the 'First Golden Age' of children's literature which Knowles (1996) suggests was ushered in by Lewis Carroll's *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* (1885) and continued up to the early 1990s. Rather than simply refer to books from this epoch*, Nicholas Grundy* aims to bring the characters from these books into the present day and incorporate them into the hero's journey. I wanted the books to function as homes for their characters, from which they could explore the outside world, secure in the knowledge that they could return home at any time. This sense of security is disrupted by a power crazed antagonist (who is in fact a fictional character himself) and the world of story is threatened.

My aim was to introduce children to a variety of classic texts they may be reluctant to read. The texts are not directly quoted (apart from Frances *Hodgson Burnett and Mark Twain*) but by becoming part of Nicholas's story, the characters are given another life and the reader is made aware of the adaptability of a primary text and how it can be interpreted in many forms. By appropriating classic texts and characters, there is a hope the reader will feel inspired to visit (or revisit) the original and bring to it, a host of interpretations informed by other readings.

Johnathon Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* is a parody of a classic traveller's tale and was originally written as a satire for adults. In *Nicholas Grundy* I have parodied the image of Gulliver being held captive in Lilliput and taken over by little people. Victor Grimes, the main villain, is tied up by the characters and stripped of his clothes (and dignity). In this scene, Victor is captured and humiliated by characters, many of whom are villains themselves, from classic children's literature, including Gulliver himself.

> There were so many little people crawling, scampering, tugging and yanking at his clothes he could barely stand up. He crashed to the floor, his arms and legs flailing like a dung beetle fallen onto its back. Nicholas and the villains jerked and wrenched at his clothes slowly removing three shirts, two dresses, four waistcoats and half a dozen ties. As soon as his torso was free they tied his wrists firmly with rope and secured each arm to a leg of Victor's solid oak desk.
> 'It's just like Gulliver's Travels!' said Gretel, clearly enjoying the chance to be
> villainous.   (*Nicholas Grundy*, pp.115)

While the Lilliputians in *Gulliver's Travels* entrap Gulliver because he is the 'other', Victor Grimes' unruly behaviour towards his so-called tribe (the other villains) results in fatal revenge.

Jack Zipes (2001) states that the term 'contamination' has been used with regards to the reinterpretation of original stories. Injecting unique elements into a once 'pure homogenous narrative tradition' was seen as threatening its purity. He argues, 'like a vaccine infecting a physical body to make it stronger', contaminating a story enriches it. Original motifs, ideas, words and images serve to transform it into something unique and fresh (Zipes, 2001).

Roald Dahl 'contaminates' traditional tales in his collection *Revolting Rhymes* (1984) by subverting classic stereotypes to create fresh and edgy characters and plotlines. The unsavoury characters may appear extreme but do in fact encapsulate the spirit of fairy tales that are often needlessly cruel. I have tried to parody the quaint and non-descript one dimensional stereotype of a fairy tale character such as Gretel by giving her an encyclopaedic knowledge and bolshie 'tom-boy' attitude. Gretel is traditionally a victim of a cannibalistic witch and heartless stepmother – in *Nicholas Grundy* I have attempted to re-contextualise her into a modern day setting with responsibilities and a conscience.

Roland Barthes' theory positing what he termed the 'death of the author' is central to the concept of intertextuality. Barthes argues the reader will invariably interpret a text based on prior knowledge. Every reader will render the characters, concepts and narrative differently depending on their personal journey thus far. I did not want comprehension of *Nicholas Grundy* to be contingent on prior knowledge of the referenced books. A child does not have to be familiar with Lewis Carroll's *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* to make sense of Alice's journey within *Nicholas Grundy*. However, if the reader/child is aware of the story, Alice's actions will make more sense based on her character traits of innocent curiosity and precociousness. The intertextuality should augment the story and enrich the experience.

In her essay on Lemony Snicket (aka Daniel Chandler, author of *A Series of Unfortunate Events*), Elvira Atvara states:

> Intertextuality serves to amuse the knowledgeable and educate
> the less erudite readers. The boundaries between children's and
> adult's literature have been blurred, hence the defining factor is
> not the age, but cultural and social background (Atvara, 2015).

Within children's literature there has been an explosion of adaptations of classical texts from Shakespeare to Charles Dickens into films, graphic novels, short stories and plays. The original *Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* (1865) has been made into numerous movies, TV series, video games, comic books and other media. Films include *Betty in Blunderland* (1934) and Jan Švankmajer's *Alice* (1988) a '…very weird and relentlessly dark…trippy take'(Peitzman, 2013). *Gulliver's Travels*, despite originating as a political satire aimed at adults, has been adapted numerous times and become a classic children's text pitched at infants as young as five years old. In this techno-centric multimedia age of short attention

spans and fierce competition between mediums, I believe it is important to seize the chance to refer to and include children's literature from the Golden Age. My aim is to insert stories within stories to pique children's interests in tales they may or may not be familiar with, from which grows a desire to explore those texts; to learn from and add to the plethora of adaptation and appropriation that continues to enrich present day children's literature. While I am aware of the twenty first century multimedia explosion, I have deliberately confined the focus of *Nicholas Grundy* to the book form. However, it is the essence of story that I am championing, not the book form as such.

> Intertextuality in literature, particularly children's literature,
> serves to amuse and provide richer reading experience to a more
> knowledgeable audience, on one hand and, on the other hand,
it is charged with the awesome responsibility of initiating young
> readers into the dominant literary, linguistic and cultural codes
> of the home culture (Wilkie-Stibbs, 2005).

The potency of story and its power to influence is part of the reason children's books were written in the first place. Written and oral stories were told to pass cultural and social messages through the generations but also to keep a sense of moral order and status quo. This was subverted during slavery days when stories of Anansi and other rogue characters were used as a way of rebelling against repression.

Nicholas is disillusioned by 'magic' both in terms of his parents' shows and in the wider sense of the magic of reading fiction – made up stories. Just as the little people known as the 'Borrowers' in Mary Norton's (1953) *The Borrowers* are under threat from the family/modern world on which they depend for their survival, the characters in the books in Aunt Zelda's bookshop are dependent on readers to keep them alive. A book must be read at least once to activate the magic and enable the characters to come to life.

A more subtle use of intertextuality takes a convention from another source and uses it in an understated tacit way. I wanted to use the concept of a Greek chorus towards the end of the novel in order to reiterate events leading to this point.

As they walked down the aisle they heard voices chanting softly:

Doris and Duncan a cowardly pair
They stole from Aunt Zelda
Then poisoned her dead
They wanted her shop
They wanted her money
They wanted to swap
Her books for their undies
They wanted her shop
They wanted her money
They wanted to swap
Her books for their undies...

It was the characters singing from inside their books.

The voices grew to fever pitch as Doris and Duncan rushed up and down the aisles.

(*Nicholas Grundy*, pp.120)

As I researched the origins of the Greek chorus I realised it had also provided another function in my novel. Albert Weiner (1980) suggests that Aristotle regarded the Greek chorus as a 'collective character' and that its aim was to alienate the audience in a theatrical rather than dramatic way. In *Nicholas Grundy*, the Greek chorus serves to further alienate Doris and Duncan from the audience (readers) while conversely consolidating the bond between the other characters.

It became apparent to me as I wrote *Nicholas Grundy*, that I was both consciously and unconsciously influenced by Lewis Carroll's style in terms of conundrums, puzzles and the bizarre. Concepts found in *Nicholas Grundy* such as doppelgangers and fictitious characters creating their own fiction could be confusing for some readers. At one stage, there are two Aunt Zelda's, one of whom was supposedly a fictitious character all along and who is turned into a plastic button by the very character she invented: Victor Grimes. Further, Victor sets out to destroy the very world that created him: the world of story. There is also the inbuilt paradox of time travel that if over analysed has the potential to create brain spasms in the most logical of thinkers. I am aware that these types of puzzles may appeal to some children

while potentially alienating others.   Hopefully for most children, the high energy narrative will carry the story along and override possible confusion.

Humour

In this foolish world there is nothing more numerous,
Than different people's senses of humorous… (Odgen Nash, 1945)

Common elements that arise in the research on what children find funny include: 'exaggeration, surprise, slapstick, the absurd, verbal humour, human predicaments, ridicule, defiance, violence, incongruity' (Kappas 1967; Klause 1987).

Kerry Mallan states that 'humorous literature' incites children 'to view people and their actions in ways which tend to reveal discrepancies between expectations and reality'. The status quo is up ended, resulting in readers who may inadvertently challenge what they are reading – a subversive and threatening bi-product of the joy of reading (Mallan,1993).

Examples of this can be found in Dav Pilkey's (1997) bestselling series *Captain Underpants*, where the pinnacle of authority - a middle school principal who falls under the spell of two unruly pupils - transmogrifies regularly into the eponymous underpants clad superhero. Children, such as my ten-year-old son and his friends, identify with the rebellious spirit and enjoy the spectacle of authority turning in on itself.

Aunt Zelda's magic underpants collection milks this scatological obsession and provides the chance to incorporate historical content. The incongruity of a British Prime Minister wearing pink underwear beneath his pinstriped suit was something I thought might appeal to children of this age group. It provides a hook with which to draw them into a world that is often seen as boring and irrelevant. Teary Deary's *Horrible Histories* (2002-2007) has revolutionised history teaching by focusing on the fascinating, often gruesome aspects that appeal to most children.

Susan Stewart (1993) suggests that humour is 'fantasy writ large, a reminder of the monstrous and the freakish'. She claims the 'freakish' works to 'normalise' the reader 'as much as it marks the freak as an aberration'. The freak symbolises the 'other' which is often portrayed in terms of scale. Stewart argues that a giant's titillation hinges on the territory

from which it beckons, a place Jacques Lacan labelled 'the Real'. The Real is the thing that seduces and scares us; it both gives us identity and subverts it. The Real is 'sublime in that it both attracts and repels' (Stewart 1993). Gulliver in *Gulliver's Travels* is seen as the other when he wakes up surrounded by Lilliputians. By dint of size, he holds authority and command. While Alice's shrinking and swelling in size feeds into children's fascination with the gigantic and the infinitesimal, it is also about the fickle nature of power in a child's world. One minute you are the boss: you have full rein over your toys, your little sister, the boy next door; the next minute you are forced to obey an inexplicable sets of rules imposed on you by adults, bullies or the whims of the weather.

I tried to exploit this sense of scale in the book. Nicholas's size means he holds sway with the tiny storybook characters despite being the same age as many of them. Gretel's father even grants her permission to 'hang out' with Nicholas based on the assumption that Nicholas is an 'adult' (*Nicholas Grundy*, pp. 64). The main antagonist, Victor Grimes, literally deflates in stature when he loses the one thing lying between his real and fictitious self: underpants. Victor's change of scale mirrors his altered status from bully to victim as the villains seek revenge (ibid. pp.115). Nicholas overcomes the hierarchy of size when he whirls a hulking bully around his head like a 'noodle from a swimming pool' (ibid. pp.126). His new found confidence, coupled with the magic from his great, great grandfather's underpants, gives Nicholas preternatural powers over his erstwhile bully, redressing the imbalance and providing a sense of justice for Nicholas and hopefully, the reader.

John McKenzie (2005) agrees that humour in children's books is largely centred on the body. The various forms of comedy, including slapstick, caricature and nonsense frequently focus on the body. The work of Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll is filled with 'long noses, wild hair, elongated and collapsed bodies…' (McKenzie, 2005)

McKenzie cites Hugh Rhodes' *Book of Nurture and School of Manners* (c. 1550) as one of children's literature's earliest examples of cashing in on attitudes towards the body. The book is intended as an instruction manual for children's behaviour but in fact 'teases the reader with descriptions of defiant behaviour.' It inadvertently ushers in the 'spirit of parody' so pervasive in modern children's books. McKenzie notes that eating is another prevalent source of humour as 'adults often discourage discussion about what goes in and what comes out of our bodies' (McKenzie, 2005). He compares the connecting binaries of food and waste with life and death. Examples of cannibalism are common in children's literature. The

witch intends to devour the fattened up Hansel in Grimms' 'Hansel and Gretel' and the 'wild things' in Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) threaten to eat up Max (whom they believe is one of them).

Bakhtin's theory of Carnivalesque

It is worth examining Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the carnivalesque (1965) in relation to scatological humour. Mallan (1990) states that the medieval carnival gave society a chance to subvert social hierarchies and values by allowing unruly chaos to reign. Clowns became heroes, clergy became fools, the social fabric of the day was unpicked and overturned (Mallan, 1999). For Bakhtin, the laughter of carnival is fundamentally a festive one; it is not a personal reaction to an isolated "comic" event. Laughter at carnival is the mirth of the people. It does not isolate one person or group; it is aimed at and enjoyed by everyone. But most importantly, carnival laughter is ambivalent. It is at once joyous and jubilant and derisive and sardonic; it 'asserts and denies, it buries and revives' (ibid. pp. 11). Due to the Church excluding the 'lower body stratum', most carnival festivities involved the body: eating, drinking, fornicating and defecating. All these pleasures were essentially aimed at dividing the mortal body from the eternal soul. Carnival incorporated the full spectrum of corporeal pleasure from 'a lust for life to the violence of death' (Mallan, 1999). When the carnival ends, however, lawfulness is restored. Thus, during carnival, the myriad human paradoxes are set in motion: 'order/chaos; soul/body; serious/playful; good/evil; clean/unclean; control/freedom; adult/child; male/female; prince/pauper; master/slave' (Toohey et al, 2000).

John Stephens (1992) makes a connection between children's literature and the carnival:

> …carnival in children's literature is grounded in playfulness which situates itself in positions of non-conformity. It expresses opposition to authoritarianism and seriousness, and is often manifested as parody of prevailing literary forms and genres, or as literature in non-canonical forms... [Hence] playful and to some extent taboo language is used to disclose ways in which adult incompetence masks itself as adult authority…The essence of carnivalesque humour, then, is not that the book simply incorporates detail about bums, poos and wees. When scatological humour inverts and subverts the social order, the carnivalesque is at play (Stephens, 1992).

Edward Lear, Shel Silverstein and Spike Milligan are examples of the carnivalesque so omnipresent in children's books (Reynolds, 2004). My take on the carnivalesque is to paint conventionally high status characters, such as Doris and Duncan, in a comically ignorant light. Doris and Duncan begin the novel as aspirational figures for Nicholas: successful millionaires who represent everything his parents lack. But as the truth unravels, Nicholas realises his Aunt Doris is a power hungry criminal with a limited cultural compass.

'Ha! Homer's toenail clippings. 750 BC.'
'How can you get toenail clippings from a cartoon character?' said Duncan.
Doris shrugged. 'Anything's possible in this house…'

(Nicholas Grundy, pp.83)

Doris' affected flamboyance (strawberry cheesecake lip gloss, suffocating hugs) contrasts with the natural élan of Aunt Zelda whom she describes as 'at least a hundred years old', 'losing her marbles' and 'as thin as an empty clothes rack' (ibid. pp.42). These images say more about Aunt Doris than Zelda and attempt to plant a seed in Nicholas's mind (and hopefully that of the reader's) of his Aunt Zelda as dependent and slightly unhinged.

Victor Grimes' comic spoonerisms and clumsiness are tinged with a sinister element from the start. He began as a purely slapstick figure (in the first draft) but soon developed into the central antagonist, integral to both the plot and Nicholas' development. This led to a decision to accentuate the juxtaposition between his caricatured behaviour and his evil nature. I tried to break away from the stereotype of a conventional butler by making him at once larger than life and one dimensional. His room is devoid of the usual trappings of a butler: his drawers are empty and he owns only two pairs of underpants. As his power swells, so does his wardrobe. The larger his wardrobe grows, the more power he attains. The fact that the vanquishing of Victor lies in the simple act of removing his underpants, underpins the novel's attitude towards conformity. If the quintessence of evil can be overcome by such a facile act, life at the top is flimsy and authority has little sway. Money and power are ephemeral in the face of enduring love and integrity.

I have attempted to weave threads of humour through *Nicholas Grundy* rather than be overtly slapstick. The scatological humour begins halfway through the novel at the mention of Aunt Zelda's underpants collection.

'So these underpants, do people um, take them off right then and there?'

His Aunt laughed. 'No. They give them to me freshly washed and folded.

Except Michelangelo. I'm not sure how often he changed them. They honked.'

'Honked?' said Nicholas.

'Stinky poo! All those years painting the Sistine Chapel…'

<div align="right">(Nicholas Grundy, pp.76)</div>

Victor's attempts to 'pillage the pants of history' (ibid. pp.96) and his sartorial extravagance exploit the 'funniness' children find inherent in underpants…

> He [Victor] looked ludicrous. He was laden with every article of clothing he could find. He must have had ten pairs of underpants on (including pink lacy ones), four hats, three jackets, a couple of dresses, even a mouldy Egyptian bra. He had so many layers on he was lumbering from side to side like an overcrowded ship.
>
> <div align="right">(ibid. pp.102)</div>

…and bare bottoms:

> He lunged for the doorway but fifty villains shot up his each leg and tugged at his boxers. Within seconds he was standing there completely starkers. Nicholas threw him a tiny pink towel and he wrapped it around himself and staggered out the door. The hand towel barely covered his bottom. (ibid. pp.115)

Other examples include Long John Silver's pants falling down (pp. 80), Aunt Zelda flinging Queen Victoria's bloomers at Nicholas's head (pp.104) and the One Eyed Man's lost eyeball that, when reinserted, transports him directly into the world of the second witch from Macbeth.

'Gross! She's sitting on the chamber pot!'

'What's a chamber pot?' asked Nicholas.

> 'A poo pot…stinkeroo!' shouted the One Eyed Man, holding his nose with his other hand. 'What a pong!!' (ibid. pp.130)

Fantasy

Madeleine L'Engle (1982) states:

> A child denied imaginative literature is likely to have more
> difficulty understanding cellular biology or post-Newtonian
> physics than the child whose imagination has been stretched
> by fantasy...' (L'Engle, 1982)

Fantasy literature owes its genesis to mythology, fairy tales, folklore and all stories that deal with making sense of our world. Sheila A. Egoff (1988) believes children's fantasy literature began with John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, when children were viewed as 'little people' and continued through to Lewis Carroll, Dickens, Thackery, Anderson, Kingsley and MacDonald who together 'created nonsense, revived the faeries, entered dreams, and established respect for children's literature' (Center, 2001).

Francis Molson suggests that *The Adventures of Alice in Wonderland* and *Through the Looking Glass* signalled the first time children's literature was 'written for the express purpose of "wasting" its young readers' time instead of "improving" it' (Molson, 1981). Up until then, texts were expressly didactic. Tamora Pierce (1993) sees fantasy as 'a literature of possibilities' due to the way it can distance itself from reality. Pierce also describes fantasy as 'a literature of empowerment'. In contrast to children's lack of power over the circumstances and events in their lives, characters in fantasy are empowered whilst retaining their human foibles and limitations. The obstacles and power struggles overcome by fantasy characters provide children with empowering metaphors for their own daily struggles.

David Gooderham (1995) agrees that fantasy is a 'metaphorical mode of literature'. While the real is swapped for the imaginary, reality is still rendered metaphorically. He believes metaphor has more power and resonance than realist modes of children's writing.

Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* uses metaphor to explore the concept of power. Andrea Immel, U C Knoepflmacher and Julia Briggs (Immel, et al, 2007) suggest that young readers can relate to Gulliver's sense of ignorance and isolation in a foreign land. They parallel this with the journey of discovery and uncertainty the young reader/listener commits to when entering a fantasy world. Furthermore, children can empathise with Gulliver's reversal of status when

he is propelled from Lilliput into the Land of Brobdingnag and finds himself pint-sized with a status to match (Swift, 1726).

Status reversal is a motif that recurs throughout *Nicholas Grundy*. Victor experiences this reversal of power when he is attacked by the villains he once terrorised. In an attempt to escape the restraints of his parents, Nicholas finds himself at the mercy of yet another set of adults: Aunt Doris, Uncle Duncan, great Aunt Zelda, the One Eyed Man and Victor Grimes. As the story develops and power relations shift, Nicholas finds his own power and independence. He begins to make active decisions and comes up with strategies instead of letting things happen to him (as he did in the first third of the novel). Nicholas is able to offer to Alice and the other characters, the type of parental protection he has (until now) taken for granted.

Mary Norton's *The Borrowers* explores the issue of disempowerment and power imbalance. The borrowers are tiny people whose survival in the walls and floors of an English house depends on 'borrowing' from the big people. Their thwarted attempts to make life better by stealing dolls' furniture and food from the pantry provide a metaphor for instability and the 'unstable postmodern world view' (Olsen, 1987). Norton's conceit represents the impossible feat of achieving the kind of security the house (and its owners) take for granted.

Jane Yolen (1988) labels Phillipa Pearce's *Tom's Midnight Garden* (1958) a 'time-slip' fantasy as it uses a magical device to juxtapose people from disparate epochs of history. She states that when there is an anachronistic clash in terms of comprehension, a storyteller can 'make a galaxy out of the chaos' by using time travel (Yolen, 1988). In *Tom's Midnight Garden*, Tom's initial preoccupation with historical truth is eclipsed by his need to understand and regulate his time travel encounters. These experiences become an antidote for Tom's present day loneliness.

Time travel in *Nicholas Grundy* is used as a device to introduce Nicholas and the reader to a cast of historical figures many of whom were labelled in their day as 'eccentric' and 'outcast'. Nicholas is confronted with a number of characters dressed in old fashioned clothes when he unwittingly time travels inside a book for the first time (*Nicholas Grundy*, pp. 46). His sense of 'otherness' mirrors the attitudes people often had towards the historical characters he meets: Florence Foster Jenkins, Francis Eggerton, Lord Byron et al. The gulf he feels between himself and the other guests is further reinforced by the fact he appears literally invisible to them. This could provide a chance for existential questions: who am I,

why am I here and what is the point if the only certainty in life is death itself? If Nicholas were an adult this situation may have given rise to such philosophical angst. However, being a curious but naive 11-year-old boy, he decides to exploit the situation: he gorges himself on cakes and explores the house.

Word and Image

Nobelman (1988) refers to illustrations as 'visual matter used to clarify or to decorate a text'. However, by treating them as images to reinforce the writing he ignores their integral part in the reading experience. If the 'visual image is supreme in its capacity for arousal' (Gombrich, quoted ibid. pp.4), illustrations are more than 'intensifiers' aiding the storytelling process. Winfred Nöth suggests that 'words and images are cross-medially related…and there are many overlaps' (Nöth, 2001). He posits that 'syntactic' and 'semantic' perspectives are needed in the analysis of the relationship between words and pictures. Syntactically, their relationship is described in terms of time and space. Simultaneity is where both text and image are on the same page; succession is when the image follows or precedes the words on a different page.

Semantically, the combinations of pictorial and verbal components convey a complex message. Noth lists five distinctive types of relationships: complementary (image and words are of equal importance to comprehension of the message), redundancy (the words reiterate the image unnecessarily), dominance (either image or text is more important), contradiction (text and image are deliberately juxtaposed to surprise the reader), discrepancy (unrelated image and text are mistakenly placed together). Within such a framework, I would align *Nicholas Grundy* both syntactically and semantically with Noth's 'complementary' relationship. Whilst the illustrations are not critical to the comprehension of the text, they serve to complement the writing by reinforcing the old worldly setting and interconnectedness of story.

I have attempted to create a sense of intertextuality by using the medium of books themselves to create images. I painted, drew, ripped and collaged using old copies of the texts referenced in the book: *Alice in Wonderland, Pinocchio, Dr Dolittle, Peter Pan and The Complete Works of Shakespeare.* I made an active decision to create and reproduce the illustrations in sepia tones as opposed to full colour. I wanted to reference the black and

white drawings found in many books from the Golden Age of children's literature such as John Tenniel's drawings in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865). Adding colour would modernise the aesthetic and possibly detract from the vintage feel.

I deliberately positioned the text upside down in Figure 9 (below) to encourage the child to interact with the book in order to read the words. Hopefully this reinforces the underlying topsy-turvy carnivalesque tone of the book and the fact that books are physical objects that can be read in different ways.
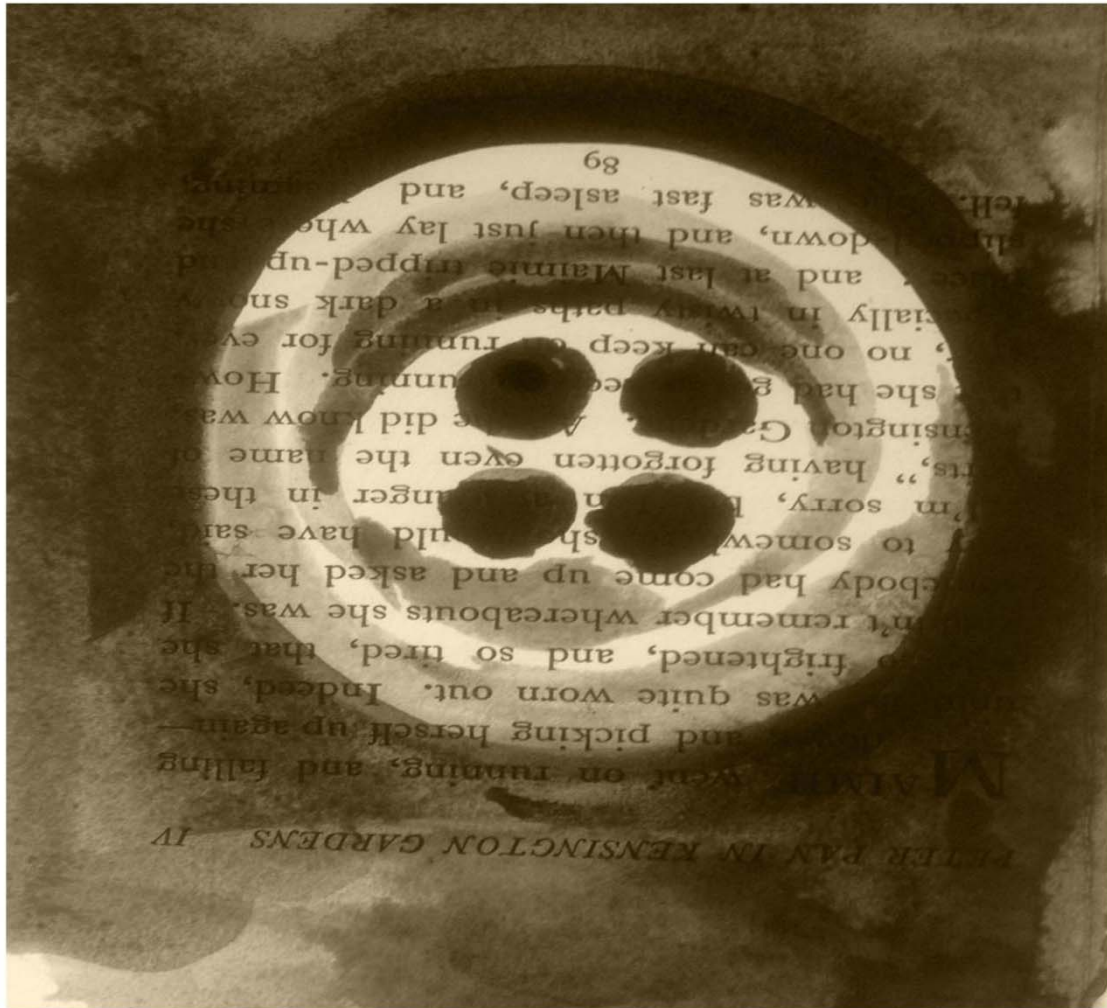
Figure 9.

I chose to illustrate less action-packed aspects of the narrative as I believe high action is often more vivid if developed solely in the child's mind. In Figure 3 (*Nicholas Grundy*, pp. 44) Nicholas' silhouetted frame invokes a deliberately vague and ambiguous portrait. His features will both reflect and be defined by the unique aesthetic sensibility of individual readers. Whilst the image of the main antagonist, Victor Grimes in Figure 1. (ibid. pp.37) is more explicit, I avoided rendering Aunt Zelda or Aunt Doris, both of whom are larger than life characters who might run the risk of inadvertent caricature.

By concentrating on ordinary objects like buttons, underpants and cake, my aim was to extract elements of the story without over cooking it.

Footnotes and reading aloud

The relationship between picture and text has been important in informing the tone and aesthetic of the illustrations. Knowledge or lack of knowledge of the cited figure from history affects the story. Rather than clutter up the body of the text, footnotes give the reader the option of either embracing or ignoring the extra information. The use of footnotes to expand and create room for biographical points of interest will enrich a child's journey and hopefully lead to further enquiry. Pseudonymous Bosch's uses footnotes throughout *The Secret Series* (2007-2011), enabling him to expand on a vast spectrum of facts from numerous fields.

Amuse Bouche are small and unusual dishes that chefs
at fancy restaurants sometimes whip up for their customers.

(*This Book is Not Good for You*, 2009)

I have used footnotes to enrich the text and provide a launching pad from which the reader might further explore the historical figures mentioned, thereby enriching the intertextual experience. I tried to include lesser known, quirky facts about historical figures. As with all things scatological, the odd aspects of people's lives are what, in my experience as a teacher and children's entertainer, children find the most intriguing.

> **Salvador Dali** (1904-1989) was a famous Spanish surrealist artist. He once wore aftershave made from cow dung to impress his wife-to-be and arrived at a party in a Rolls-Royce crammed with cauliflowers. He nearly died from suffocation on stage, dressed in a diving suit and air tight helmet after forgetting to switch on the oxygen supply. He was saved by two stage hands – the audience had thought his mad arm flapping was part of the act.   (*Nicholas Grundy*, pp.82)

I welcome footnotes in children's books when I am reading to my ten-year-old son. I have used them as a discussion point on a relevant fact or if he is impatient for narrative, I have skipped them and returned at a later date. Returning to the footnotes after reaching the end of Pseudonymous Bosch's *The Name of This Book is Secret* (2007) was a chance to revisit the story and prolong the reading experience.

Lemony Snicket (aka Daniel Handler) cites historical and literary names and allusions throughout his series, *An Unfortunate Series of Events* (Handler, 1999). He quotes from T. S. Elliot, Shakespeare as well as parodying Charles Dickens's *Oliver Twist*, the Bible and many other heavyweights. Elvira Atvara writes

> …the novels are so rich in allusions and references
>
> to other works, writers, historical events and people
>
> that even Sunny's baby talk contains disguised references (Atvara, 2015).

Handler embraces the ubiquity of intertextuality when he asserts, 'he is […] just giving a shout-out to the books he loves' (ibid.).

I acknowledge the complexity of the story in *Nicholas Grundy* where the text becomes dense with references, footnotes and high-octane action. The novel adopts a fast paced, elaborative style of storytelling that may be too intense for some readers. I realised once I had written it, that slowing down the narrative would adversely affect the tone of the writing. Rather than simplify it, I decided it would be better to assume that *Nicholas Grundy* would ideally be read aloud by an adult or independently by an advanced reader. It became clear, while reading *Nicholas Grundy* aloud to my ten-year-old son, that it is indeed paced for the human voice. He had no problem keeping up with the storyline, but would struggle to read the book himself. Moreover, text is 'read' differently when delivered orally: it becomes a shared experience between the reader and the receiver of the text; a mutual exploration that benefits from the unique perspective of both parties. This brings us back to the omnipresence of intertextuality and its enriching capacity.

Conclusion

In typically chicken and egg fashion, the process of simultaneously researching and writing *Nicholas Grundy* has influenced and informed its outcome just as its outcome has generated further research and rewriting. Whilst I began with the fantasy premise of storybook characters exploring each other's books, I had not fully explored the concepts of intertextuality and individuation or understood how they might be relevant to this age group. Similarly, I treated the issues of humour and fantasy in children's books and the relationship between word and image as a natural part of the terrain. It is only after researching these areas that I can fully appreciate their importance in creating and shaping the work.

In researching and writing *Nicholas Grundy* I savoured the chance to explore ways of linking 'fact' with 'fiction' in a way that was potentially accessible and enjoyable for my target audience. Whilst the line between 'fact' and 'fiction' is often blurred, I would argue that there is one irrefutable common denominator: story. Every form - from biography to graphic novel to interactive computer game to design app - is essentially a story.

Susan Sontag (2007) spoke of fiction's role in 'stretching' the world of our imaginations.

To be a traveller – and novelists are often travellers – is to be constantly reminded of the simultaneity of what is going on in the world, your world and the very different world you have visited and from which you have returned 'home'(Sontag, 2007).

The biggest revelation for me was the fact that *Nicholas Grundy's* cultural agenda is, in essence, the celebration of story. In the uber-cyber world of twenty first century tweens, everything comes back to story. Irrespective of form, stories will remain the basic building blocks of the future.

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