

Monsters in children's picture books and childhood fears

Do stories featuring monsters in children's picture books play a part in
managing childhood fears?

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Introduction

Fears are typically heightened when people are faced with the unknown entities of the future. Nowadays, media coverage of terrorism and environmental change has increased children's fear of death and the future, and Australian researchers have found that 25% of children fear the world will be destroyed in their lifetime (Rousell & Cutter-Mackenzie-Knowles, 2020, p. 192). Fear is an innate part of the human condition, and, it is a survival mechanism from a standpoint of evolution, as children's fear may help them to prevent physical harm (Muris & Field, 2010, as cited in Maynes, 2020). Fear can also cause negative emotions such as anxiety in children. As people mature, the focus of fear is constantly changing. For example, six-month-old babies fear loud noises, sudden movements, and the inability to get timely demand fulfillment, and three- to four-year-old children are afraid of monsters, dark surroundings, and separation from their parents (Mercurio & McNamee, 2008, p. 30). Children usually display their emotions in different ways to adults and may not be able to express their feelings clearly in words, so adults may not notice children's fears or may underestimate the level of their feeling (Mercurio & McNamee, 2008, p. 30). If children's fears are ignored, they may produce more fear and anxiety (Nicholson & Pearson, 2003, p. 16). Therefore, in addition to the attention from parents, it is important for children to learn how to deal with anxiety and fear themselves.

Picture books can assist children in overcoming or alleviating their fears, and the characters and stories may help children to express feelings that they are hard to say in words (Mercurio & McNamee, 2008, p. 29). Monsters are important characters that impact children's anxieties and fears, which are largely utilized in children's picture books. Cohen (1996, p. 6) states that monsters are ‘...disturbing hybrids whose externally incoherent bodies resist attempts to include them in any systematic structuration, and so, the monster is dangerous, a form suspended between forms that threaten to smash distinctions’. Gilmore (2003) also describes monsters as hybrids, which can take the form of a combination of human and animal parts, or a mixture of

both live and dead things (p. 189). Otherwise, they can also be defined simply as imaginary supernatural creatures (Taylor, 2010, p. 3). Monsters inspire fear of the unknown through their grotesque appearance and behavior, and they can be metaphors for all the fears and dangers in the human imagination (Gilmore, 2003, p. 1). According to Weinstock (2014, as cited in Maynes, 2020, p. 2), monsters can be seen as a unique psychological tool to help children overcome fears such as loneliness, and confronting new experiences and challenges. On the other hand, there are also questions about whether children's horror literature will have adverse effects on children.

The research question that emerges from these perspectives and that this dissertation will attempt to answer is “Do stories featuring monsters in children’s picture books play a part in managing childhood fears?” In a broad sense, monsters can also describe some transgressive features, such as cruel murderers, psychopaths, and war criminals (Lester, 2016, p. 26). For the purpose of this essay, the monsters I have researched are imaginary creatures within children’s books. These mainly include the classic children's picture books: *The Gruffalo* (Donaldson, 1999) and *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), picture books with monsters as protagonists: *The Color Monster* (Llenas, 2015), monster picture books that embody empowerment: *The Boy Who Ate Around* (Drescher, 1994), monster children's picture books with warning purposes: *Jumblebum* (Strathie, 2012) and picture books to cope with bedtime fears: *The Wardrobe Monster* (Thomson, 2018) and *Molly And The Night Monster* (Wormell, 2018). The monsters depicted in these books convey different educational purposes for the reader while displaying different styles, forms and personalities. In this essay, firstly I will discuss the reasons for using horror and monster elements in children's picture books and their impacts on children. Secondly, I analyze the evolution of monstrous forms for readers of different ages. Thirdly, I will dissect the common characteristics of monsters and the influence of illustration and text design in picture books on children's fears and emotions. Finally, I conclude with a summary and synthesis of monstrous forms in children's literature and their impact regarding evoking fears and anxieties in children and whether they help in controlling their fears.

Critical Analysis

1. Monsters in children's picture books

1.1 Monsters and Children's Fears

During childhood, monsters play an important role. When children are two and a half to three years old, they begin to interact with monsters (Bettelheim, 1976, as cited in Taylor, 2010). Studies have shown that 74 percent of preschool children experience fantasy and fear related to monsters, and children's fear of monsters increases in the early stages of school as children develop their experience and imagination (Taylor, 2010, p. 4). This feeling continues to diminish in later development but nearly 50 percent of children between the ages of eleven and twelve still have similar fantasies and fears of the supernatural (Taylor, 2010, p. 4). In addition, children can recognize the difference between reality and imagination from an early age, but sometimes children are confused as to whether what is imagined can appear (Samuels & Taylor, 1994, p. 418). This skill of distinguishing between fantasy and reality may not even be developed sufficiently during adolescence (Taylor, 2010, p. 4). Thus, the use of fictional creatures can have an impact on children's imagination and the real world.

Animatic representations of monsters can be understood as the projection of children's fears and other emotions. Monsters provide a method for children to visualize their confusion, fears, and things that can cause them harm, such as death, isolation, illness, destruction, and the unknown and evil (Taylor, 2010, p. 5). Thence, when children project their fears, they feel safe and content (Taylor, 2010, p. 9). Moreover, children crave safety, happiness, and power but as language skills are not fully developed, their fantasies are an effective way to tell adults what they want (Jones, 2002, p. 21). If power or desire is not fulfilled, children may also use fantasy to satisfy a variety of discontent and disquiet (Keeling & Pollard, 1999, p. 130). According to people's definition of monsters, monsters exist and break boundaries, so they can also be metaphors for the desire of people to control their destiny and the urge to break

taboos, as well as power (Taylor, 2010, p. 5). For example, *The Boy Who Ate Around* by Henrik Drescher (1994). Mo, a young boy, doesn't like his dinner of string beans and cheese soufflé. After eating a little of the food, Mo transforms himself into an ever-expanding series of monsters who start eating everything except his dinner. The first is his parents, then the table, his math teacher, his best friend, and various countries. In the end, only the monster, the moon, and the plate of beans and cheese soufflé remain, but he still refuses these foods. Mo feels lonely and turns back into a boy, and pours out the contents of the monster's stomach. The reappearing parents abandon the string beans and cheese soufflé dinner, and take Mo and his best friend out for banana soufflé. This story shows the conflict and struggles between the world of children and adults. At the end of the story, the main character, Mo, transforms from an obedient boy to a boy who is not bound by his parents. He understands that he can use some power and expresses the emotion of his aversion to beans and cheese soufflé (Keeling & Pollard, 1999, p. 131). The empowerment and education of children are expressed in many of these stories (Taylor, 2010, p. 9). In Maurice Sendak's children's picture book *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), the protagonist Max is reprimanded by his mother for being naughty and called "Wild Thing!". He is asked to go back to his room without food. Max goes back to the room feeling very sad. Then Max begins to fantasize about an adventure in search of real wild things. The room turns into a jungle, and he sets sail to find them. Max sees the monsters and becomes their king. They have a carnival in the forest. At the end of the story, Max requests that the monsters all go to rest without dinner. The protagonist feels lonely and begins to miss his warm home. The monsters threaten to eat Max in order to keep him, but he rejected the monsters and sets sail home. As can be seen in the drawings, the monsters bow to the protagonist to show their submission to the main character, and Max becomes the king of monsters, so he is empowered to control them while gaining a sense of dominance over world. The mother does not allow Max to eat his meal, and likewise Max uses the same method to limit the monsters, which shows that his power and status are the same as his mother's (Keeling & Pollard, 1999, p. 135). When Max returns home, he take off the hat of the monster-like clothes,

which seems to symbolize that Max tames the beast inside (Keeling & Pollard, 1999, p. 128). Another example is Julia Donaldson's *The Gruffalo* (1999), which is also about empowerment. This story centres on a mouse. At the beginning of the tale, the mouse meets in turn a fox, an owl, and a snake. They all invite the mouse to have lunch with them but in fact, they want to eat the mouse. The mouse politely declines their invitations and uses the Gruffalo to scare them. After scaring the animals away each time the little mouse would say: "Silly old Fox! Doesn't he know, there's no such thing as a Gruffalo?" but a Gruffalo appears in front of the little mouse and says, "My favorite food!". The clever mouse in turn uses the fox, owl, and snake's fear to subdue the Gruffalo. In the process, the weak mouse is empowered with the wisdom to manipulate the fears of the animals that feed on it, thus avoiding danger. This story conveys to young audiences that facing monsters is not scary and that they can be controlled by intelligence or other abilities.

1.2 How children get rid of fears

Instead of telling children that everything is fine, it is better to teach them how to deal with all kinds of fears and insecurities. Monsters mostly appear in children's imagination and are not real objects or situations that can be easily controlled. As Taylor (2010) states, that fear is in children's brains, not in the room, thereby people should use methods that allow access to children's minds to solve problems (2010, p. 8). A research has shown that bibliotherapy is an effective tool for teaching children to address their fears (Nicholson & Pearson, 2003, 16). The term "Bibliotherapy" was coined by Samuel McChord Crothers in the 20th century and the concept has evolved (Beatty, 1962, p. 106). Jachna (2019, as cited in Rahmat, H. K., Muzaki, A., & Pernanda, S., 2021) argues that bibliotherapy uses books as a medium to maintain people's mental health and it is suitable for people who are anxious, stressed and traumatized. When people read, they can vent their emotions and gain new insights into their own problems and emotions, so it can be said that bibliotherapy provides readers with an outlet for their emotions and empathy. In addition, the use of horror elements is common in

bibliotherapy, which includes monsters, and it has been proved that stories using monster elements are effective in helping children to reduce their fears (Taylor, 2010, p. 8). Pardeck (1994) defines that when using bibliotherapy, readers will go through four stages: identification, selection, presentation, and follow-up. In the process, readers should be able to identify the demands, desires, emotions and difficulties of the main character and themselves. After that people can connect their own similar emotions with the protagonist and release their emotions by reading the stories. Finally, people analyze and understand the solution of problems by learning the main character's coping strategies (Nicholson & Pearson, 2003, p. 16). Therefore, a good picture book allows young readers to discover themselves through the characters in the story and consequently connect themselves emotionally to the story and experience and learn from the characters' responses. For instance, in Bryony Thomson's *The Wardrobe Monster* (2018), the protagonist Dora has anxiety about the wardrobe. When Dora was going to sleep with her companion, she heard a strange sound coming from the wardrobe. Afterward, Dora was accompanied by her little friend, and she bravely opened the closet and found a huge green fluffy monster in the closet. The monster is equally frightened of the world beyond the wardrobe. At the end of the story, they accompanied each other and fell asleep together. Children generally have a fear of the dark, closets and under the bed, so young readers with such fears can easily relate and empathize with the protagonist. Furthermore, the contrast between the monster, which is huge but has a timid personality, gives readers a cute and humorous image prompting children to associate their fear of the wardrobe with the monster or positive emotion.

According to Taylor's research (2010, p. 14), there are six ways in which monster stories can be used as a vehicle to alleviate children's fears and enhance their sense of empowerment. The first is "Cathartic". Characters in monster books can replace children doing antisocial behaviors and emotions such as fighting and rule-breaking and help young readers to express emotions that they could not previously express. The second is "Naming", which is the first step in empowering children. When children express their fears and name them after reading and discussing the stories, these issues

will have the opportunity to be addressed (Taylor, 2010, p. 12). The third is “Taming”, as monster stories help children to control their fears by creating a world that not only allows children to experience frightening emotions but also provides them with a safe and controlled environment. At the same time, these stories help children to understand the difference between imagination and existence (Taylor, 2010, p. 12). The fourth is “Integration”. When children read monster stories, they can integrate their different personalities and feelings and children can project them onto the story characters. Besides, these feelings also evolve as the characters experience them. When two polarized characters appear in a monster story, it provides young readers with the opportunity to embrace feelings of complexity, contradiction, and conflict (Taylor, 2010, p. 13). The fifth is “Transformation”. Readers deal with their feelings through the characters in the story, so the transformations are connected to the relationship between young readers, the child main character of the story and the monster character. If the monster story has a good or hopeful ending, it can give children a hint that their fears and difficulties will be resolved and transformed. Finally, there is “Moral Empowerment”. In monster stories, there are messages of hope, bravery, resilience, empathy, and responsibility that can be offered, which help young readers to build their conception of the world (Taylor, 2010, p. 15). Although monster stories are not real, they can provide children with a sense of hopefulness and reassurance (p. 15) .

1.3 Concerns about horror literature

Admittedly, not everyone believes that children should read horror literature or picture books. Some literature with a horror theme have been taken off the shelves because of various concerns. The first is the view that these types of books could make children violent (Taylor, 2010, p. 16). Some adults believe that horror-themed children's literature may distort children's minds or have a negative impact, so they regulate and ban the various media to which children are exposed to avoid harmful content (Lester, 2016, p. 23). However, the idea that horror literature causes violence in children is not supported by science, and actually these books may help some children to reduce their

violence (Taylor, 2010, p. 16). Even if children are banned from reading books with a monster theme, monsters they imagine will not disappear and there is nothing to stop them from creating new monsters of their own, (Taylor, 2010, p. 16)

Secondly, some horror children's literature tends to liberate children and subvert adults' power (Taylor, 2010, p. 16). Many monster storybooks have empowering representations to give children the ability to defeat monsters, including challenges to parental authority. For example, *The Boy Who Ate Around* (Drescher, 1996) shows the child protagonist transforming into a monster to fight against the demands, authority and status of his parents. Additionally, some monster stories provide children with a world where they can solve problems without adults, or where they can refuse adult help (Stallcup, 2002, p. 127). This not only encourages the development of independence but also enhances children's empowerment.

Thirdly, monster children's literature may break the safe environment that adults have created for children (Taylor, 2010, p. 16). Some parents want to keep their children innocent and do not want them to realize that there is death, harm, violence and evil in the world (Stallcup, 2002, p.128). They believe that some monster story books have messages that may convey fearful and strange values to young readers (Taylor, 2010, p. 16). In addition, some parents do not want their children to be disturbed, especially their young children who have not yet developed the ability to perfectly distinguish between reality and imagination (Taylor, 2010, p. 16). Taylor suggests that this problem can be addressed by avoiding reading scary stories with monsters at bedtime, especially to children who are already haunted by monsters, darkness, and nightmares (p. 16). However, Maynes (2020) argues that the presence of monsters in bedtime storybooks is appropriate (p. 2). Monsters as characters in bedtime stories seem to help children to act out their possible fears and contain problems that cannot be voiced (p. 2). At bedtime, children's fears of the night are close at hand and parents and children can share and discuss their fears and anxieties by reading monster bedtime stories in a safe and controlled environment (Maynes, 2020, p. 2). When choosing bedtime stories that include monsters, it is important to note that the main purpose of these stories is to put

children more at ease at bedtime, and to listen to children's choices about whether to read such books at bedtime. Further, Taylor (2010) reminds people that young readers are generally not bothered by scary monsters but rather on the problem-solving strategies in the story, so the monster story increases readers' confidence to face their fears (p. 14).

2. The monstrous form

2.1 Reasons for the evolution of monstrous form

Most of the children's horror literature of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries depicts the punishment of children who defy adult wishes and social boundaries. The aim was to threaten children who challenged adult authority, using terror to make them obey (Stallcup, 2002, p. 125). For example, Hans Christian Andersen's *The Red Shoes* (1845) is about a disobedient and conceited young girl who wears a pair of red dancing shoes that control her incessant dancing. Then the girl has her legs cut off to stop dancing and the amputated legs are still dancing. Through this story, young readers are warned not to be vain and listen to the admonitions of the people. Nowadays, children's picture books that are designed to alleviate or help alleviate children's fears are more popular (Stallcup, 2002, p. 125). Apart from changes in the popular direction of children's horror literature, monsters need to evolve as readers become more mature. As children's knowledge, abilities, experiences and fears change, the focus of what they fear changes, such as becoming more sensitive to the dangers around them, and readers develop the ability to distinguish between fantasy and reality. If the balance of fear and imagination that readers develop from the monster characters is not maintained, then the stories will not have an impact and appeal to readers (Christie, 2020, p. 7). Conversely, if the balance is achieved, the image of the monster will facilitate readers to explore the boundaries and tolerances of anxiety and fear (p. 7).

2.2 The evolution of the monstrous form

In children's literature, a monster can be a warning monster with some danger, a friendly monster that can go on an adventure with children, or a monster that appears in a bedtime story with little threat. Contemporary children's picture books show children more benevolent, friendly monsters and these are generally a combination of fear, joy, and humor (Reschenhofer, 2022, p. 37; Christie, 2020, p. 4). Introducing children to these humorous and lovable monsters early in their development allows them to associate horror with happiness and positive endings (Christie, 2020, p. 2). For instance, Joy Cowley's *Number One* (1982) tells the amusing fictional story of a ghost who comes out to scare humans. At night, the ghost comes out of his room and says, "Who can I boo?" He scares a man on the road and says, "Number one", after which the ghost counts each time, a person is successfully frightened by the ghost. Just as the ghost was getting complacent, a witch scares him and the ghost flees town and hides in a cupboard in his house. In this picture book, both the language and the shapes of the people and the ghost are exaggerated and funny, while the book makes extensive use of repetitive words, which is beneficial for children's language development and self-confidence. Similarly, in *The Wardrobe Monster* (Thomson, 2018), the contrast between the green monster's huge and fluffy body, its simple face and timid personality creates a sense of humor and satire and diminishes the monster's threat and terror. Moreover, picture books for young children often use bright illustrations, and because they are picture books, the appearance of the monster is clearly presented with the text describing the frightening behavior in more detail (Christie, 2020, p. 2). For example, in *The Gruffalo* (Donaldson, 1999), whenever the mouse describes the Gruffalo, it introduces a certain part of the monster's body in detail, such as, "And a poisonous wart at the end of his nose". Although some parents now prefer books that address children's fears, monster picture books that act as a warning or reprimand to children still exist. For instance, in *Jumblebum* by Chae Strathie (2012), due to the main character not cleaning his room, the house is messy and smells bad. At night, various things in the

room combine with a monster and threaten to eat the boy. At the end of the story, the boy manages to lure the monster into the washing machine to defeat it and learns to clean his room. On the last page of the book, it says “And you would be wise to listen to mum, just in case that wasn’t the last Jumblebum!”. Although there is a certain amount of intimidation in the story, the main character often has a smile on his face, and he is confident. The monster's appearance and behaviour are also depicted in exaggerated and detailed detail, such as, “...its hot stinky breath reeked of smelly old shoes...”. To make monsters more suitable for children, it is essential to stimulate their imaginations. In the imaginary world, despite the presence of monsters and other terrifying creatures, children can simultaneously imagine themselves as warriors who have various abilities and resources that can overcome all obstacles (Christie, 2020, p. 3).

The shift from picture books to plain text implies a maturing of readers. As children grow up, they will have more time to face dangers and fears alone and will begin to encounter some of the darker aspects of reality (Christie, 2020, p. 6). To adapt to their changes and new fears, literature begins to become darker, and the monsters become portrayed with human characteristics and similar behavior to humans. Such monsters in human form can metaphorically represent threats from adults, as well as some real problems such as aging, death, separation, and fear of the unknown (Christie, 2020, p. 5). In Patrick Ness's *A Monster Calls* (2012), a human-like tree monster is depicted, telling three stories for the protagonist, Conor, which involve meanings such as death, separation from family members, fear of the unknown and school bullying. In addition, the atmosphere of terror presented by the story is more important to older child readers, so the details of the monster's appearance in horror literature begins to diminish, thus stimulating the reader's imagination as well as their personal beliefs of fear, and makes the content of the story more horrific (Christie, 2020, p. 6). By battling these evil monsters, older children can be motivated to grow in perseverance (Christie, 2020, p. 7)

Monsters created for adults are often designed to break through expectations and thus

disrupt readers' early perceptions (Christie, 2020, p. 4). To evoke fear in adults, information about the appearance of the monster is minimal, thus relying more on the reader's experiences and personalized fright (p. 7). In addition, monsters for adults can be human beings who are cruel and evil. This type of monster arguably exposes the twisted and evil qualities of humans (Christie, 2020, p. 7). Likewise, these human-like monsters make it impossible for people to distinguish them from the crowd and hence to know when and where the danger will occur. Therefore, there is nothing more frightening than not being able to identify them (Christie, 2020, p. 6).

3. Analysis of children's picture books of monsters

3.1 General characteristics of monsters

According to Cohen (1996), monsters are hybrids, which are not bound by the structure of classification (p. 6). They live on the border as well as being able to present themselves in innovative and unexpected ways (Varrik, 2018, p. 17). It may not be possible for monsters to be fully defined or fully classified but monsters are still classified for various reasons. For example, in the animated film *Monsters University* by Dan Scanlon (2013), the designers divided the monsters into seven main types, thus creating over 300 monster characters. Like, Fungus (tall, thin monsters with long limbs), Charlie (cephalopod-like monsters), Pill (monsters with pill-shaped bodies), Slug (slug-like monsters), Block (giant rectangular monsters), Spif (humanoid, nose-horned monsters), One-offs (no defined body type) (Paik, 2015, p. 147). According to Pual Goetsch (2002, as cited in Padley, 2006), there are two types of monsters. The first is a realistic model of literary content in which the monsters can be identified by metaphor or human traits. The second type is where the content leans towards the fantasy model, then the monster is more likely to have non-human characteristics. This classification may provide an explanation for the differences in the shape of monsters in different kinds of literature but Padley (2006, p. 13) believes that it is too simplistic. When Goetsch classifies monsters, the basic premise of the monster's existence is as an opponent to the hero. A monster can be evil but this does not specifically fix its characteristics, so this classification is somewhat one-sided (Padley, 2006, p. 13).

Although there are different forms of classification of monsters, there are some similarities in the design of monsters. Firstly, the size of monsters, which may have an unnatural, grotesque, huge body, and this shape can create a sense of menace (Gilmore, 2003, p. 174). The giant monster shape is also represented in some children's literature. For example, in *A Monster Calls* by Patrick Ness (2011), the shape of the giant tree monster grows ever larger as it constantly engages with the main character, as a

metaphor for the conflicting emotions of the main character Conor, and to give the reader a constant sense of urgency in the storyline. There is also the giant in Roald Dahl's *The BFG* (1982) and the giant furry green monster in *The Wardrobe Monster* (Thomson, 2018). The reasons why children fantasize about giant monsters may be related to how they feel. Children have been living in a world of giants, huge tables, household items, and life scenes (Ruth, 2014, para. 4). Hence the giant monster can be a metaphor for the threat from life and adults (Gilmore, 2003, p. 175).

The second similarity is the huge and voracious mouth and sharp teeth. Stories of mastication and devouring are found in folklore around the world, and in many cultures, the primary weapon of monsters against people is the mouth (Gilmore, 2003, p. 178). Gilmore states that most monsters are defined as cannibals, who dismember and eat humans (p. 180). In many artworks and literature, the behaviour of monsters eating people and their mouths are highlighted, perhaps because being eaten is one of people's deepest fears (Maynes, 2020, p. 2). In many children's picture books of monsters, the shape of the monster's mouth is emphasized through illustrations or language. In *The Gruffalo* (Donaldson, 1999), when describing the Gruffalo, the mouse said that "He has terrible tusks" and "... terrible teeth in his terrible jaws", and the illustrator has given close-ups of the monster's mouth and teeth. In *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), monsters first meet Max with their mouth wide open roaring and eventually threaten to eat him. Another example is in *The Color Monster: A Pop-Up Book of Feelings* (Llenas, 2015), which uses a black curve and triangle to imply that the monster has a huge mouth and a mouthful of fangs.

Many of the images of the monsters combine the characteristics of other things or creatures. Gilmore (2003) defines a monster is a mixture of shapes, which can be a combination of features or attributes of different living and natural objects (p. 8). For instance, a monster can be a blend of animate and inanimate things or a mixture of humans and animals; and zombies are a cross between life and death. Hybrid monsters are very suitable for children because these monsters have become supernatural phenomena, which reduces the fear of reality and excludes realistic monsters (Lester,

2016, p 26). Furthermore, most of the monsters in children's literature have animal features such as horns, fur, claws and tusks (Maynes, 2020, p. 3). *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) shows some monsters with images that resemble sheep, cows, and eagles. The monster images in *Monsters Inc.* by Pete Docter (2001) are inspired by real animals and children's impressions of monsters, and when the designers created the main character, Sullivan, they combined elements and details of real animals with the colorful sense of children's drawings (Hans, 2001, p. 60)

For readers, monsters bring fear not only from themselves but also from the setting in which the creatures live. Varrik (2018) notes that the surroundings in which monsters live can influence people's fear of them (p. 20). Based on the stories of monsters in traditional cultures, they can live on the borders, in places where people are afraid, or in hidden corners, such as underground lairs, wilderness, oceans, swamps, forests, glaciers, and spaces where people cannot see (Gilmore, 2003, p. 12). In *The Gruffalo's Child* (Donaldson, 2004) Gruffalo lives with his child in the caves of the forest, and in *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) Max has to reach the world of monsters by voyaging. Moreover, for some children, wardrobes and under beds are scary places at night, so the environment in which monsters live includes their wardrobes and under their beds. This fear may occur because children are afraid of losing control of reality after falling asleep and they worry that something will happen after they fall asleep (Adcock, 2020, p. 91). In *Monsters Inc.* (Docter, 2001), every door in the company is connected to a wardrobe in a child's room, and the monster terrorises them by opening the door into their bedroom. For this reason, friendly and cuddly monster figures appear in children's picture books or bedtime stories to help them close their eyes at ease.

When designing monsters, the colour of characters not only conveys some message to readers but also creates different emotional responses (Varrik, 2018, p. 23). It is common to use dark tones when creating monsters and their environments to create an atmosphere of mystery and terror, which may be because, in some cultures, black is often associated with evil and death (Varrik, 2018, p. 23). Otherwise, different colours stimulate different emotions in readers. For example, Anna Llenas's *The Color Monster*:

A Pop-Up Book of Feelings (2015) is a pop-up picture book that helps young readers understand and recognize emotions. In the book, a colorful little monster is troubled by its uncontrollable emotions, and it feels that its various emotions are everywhere. A little girl helps it to recognize and differentiate between these varieties of emotions, which include happiness, sadness, anger, fear, and calmness. Meanwhile, the author uses various graphics and various colored little monsters to motivate the reader's emotions and allow young readers to explore the emotions that are aroused (Hathaway, 2019, p. 35). Children can understand their various uncontrollable emotions as being like the little monster or they can place themselves into the role of the little monster to understand their emotions. The author changes different colours on the same monster and uses these colours to guide children to recognize and feel various emotions, such as the little red monster symbolizing anger, and fear is represented by the little black monster. Also, Lester (2016) argues that when children are viewing horror media, they should not be in a continuous atmosphere of fear for a long time and should use some techniques to interrupt this prolonged negative atmosphere, thus making horror media more suitable for children to view (p. 26). Using black and white may interrupt children's prolonged feelings of horror while allowing the reader to expel the reality of the story (Lester, 2016, p. 27). Edward Gorey's *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* (1963), is an alphabet book with black and white illustrations. Whether in respect of book design or the target audience of the alphabet book, this book is a children's book (Stallcup, 2002, p. 125). However, *The Gashlycrumb Tinies* contains terrifying words and pictures. Twenty-six horrific ways for children to die are described alongside the twenty-six letters of the alphabet. For instance, "K is for Kate who was struck with an axe". Although, each page of the book has a scary picture that corresponds to the text but the illustrations are black and white, which reduces the realism of the story and children's recognition of the blood.

3.2 The development of monsters in children's picture books

Monsters as imaginary creatures are almost infinite and diverse in their design

(Reschenhofer, 2022, p. 36). Obsession with monsters has been around since ancient times. In the Middle Ages, some churches and decorative borders of painted manuscripts were adorned with a variety of strange creatures (Cheng, 2012, p. 201). In the art of this period, images of monsters have moral implications; the monstrous physical features of these creatures were considered to be symbols of spiritual corruption (Cheng, 2012, p. 200). In addition, it is widely believed that these monstrous images hint at a sign of God's wrath and warning (Cheng, 2012, p. 201). From the Middle Ages to the Renaissance, monsters were prodigies, while having more political and social influence. During the Renaissance, the image of the monster was also common, and its main function was a pleasure; gardens were one of their favorite places (Cheng, 2012, p. 202). As time progressed, most monsters gradually moved away from religion and became secularized through the decorative use of art and politicized functions (Cheng, 2012, p. 203). Since the nineteenth century, because of the development of fantasy themes in children's literature, new images of monsters created specifically for children have emerged (Maynes, 2020, p. 3). For example, Jabberwock from *Through the Looking-Glass and What Alice Found There* (Carroll, 1871) is depicted by Sir John Tenniel as a hybrid of various animals, with a Western dragon-like body, a fish-shaped head, insect-like tentacles, and a pair of huge claws. More recent illustrators have drawn Jabberwock in a less frightening way. The Grinch is from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* by Theodor Seuss Geisel (Seuss, 1957) and is designed as a green, furry, pear-shaped body creature. Then there are the monsters portrayed in the animated films *Shrek* (Adamson & Jenson, 2001) and *Monsters Inc.* (Docter, 2001) and *Monsters University* (Scanlon, 2013).

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, most children's picture books aimed to require children to obey adults (Stallcup, 2002, p. 125). Therefore, most picture books will be threatening and intimidating. Although monster picture books that enhance children's sense of security are currently more popular, this does not mean that monsters have changed from enemies to friends but rather that the range of roles and functions of monsters has expanded (Reschenhofer, 2022, p. 42). Monsters that are similar to

enemies are portrayed in picture books with a more aggressive and frightening feel. For example, in *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963), the visual image of the monster is described as having the characteristics of a predator. These monsters not only have the general characteristics of the monsters analyzed previously, but they are also threatening and feral in their behavior and body language design. such as speaking words to eat Max, wandering through the trees in the forest with Max, and dancing to the moon. On the other hand, friendly monsters may add elements of the unexpected, funny and cute to balance the negative emotions that the picture or content brings to children (Lester, 2016, p. 26). For example, Dennis is a polite little monster in *The Monster Bed* by Jeanne Willis (2007), but he is afraid to sleep alone and so does not want to go to bed. The reason is that he is concerned that there may be human children under the bed. Dennis, despite being a monster, is afraid of human children. Through this unexpected setting, a humorous atmosphere can be created for young readers.

There is a growing concern about the impact on children of the gender of characters in children's picture books. Currently, the gender of characters in many picture books is mostly dominated by male characters (Brugeilles, Cromer, Cromer & Obadia, 2002, p. 249). This may leave children with stereotypes about gender, such as that men have more power of speech or women are more vulnerable and men are stronger (Ferguson, para. 8). Julia Donaldson, the author of *The Gruffalo* (Donaldson, 1999), has worried that she has created too many male characters unconsciously (Miller, 2020, para. 4). In *The Gruffalo*, the monster Gruffalo and most of the animals are referred to by "he". Julia Donaldson may be trying to change the situation, and in *The Gruffalo's Child* (Donaldson, 2004) she created a character with a female Gruffalo as the protagonist. Monsters do not belong to any particular culture, and thus these creatures that live in the imagination do not have any prejudices or preconceptions (Reschenhofer, 2022, p. 42). Therefore, monster characters in children's picture books can be undefined in terms of gender, age, and race, which allows for more opportunities for children to identify with different identities. Besides the influence of the gender of the characters on readers, there may also be an effect on children's gender identity as a result of the setting of the

scene in the picture. In some bedtime children's picture books, the illustrator depicts bedroom scenes without drawing details and individual features but instead uses universal bedroom images such as a bed and quilt or blanket, window and scooping curtains, bedside lamps, and toys (Maynes, 2020, p. 6). In Chris Wormell's *Molly and the Night Monster* (2018), the layout of the protagonist's bedroom does not reflect the fact that the protagonist is a girl. Such a bedroom can be used for any child, and gives young readers more scope for imagination as well as enabling them to empathize with the protagonist (Maynes, 2020, p. 6).

3.3 The impact of illustration and typography

The design and layout of illustrations and text in picture books have an impact on children's fears (Maynes, 2020, p. 5). Illustrators can use some of the artistic expressions of illustrations to control the sense of realism that picture books bring to children and their sense of distance from the content and characters. Firstly, whether the images are bounded by a border or not makes a difference to the visual effect (Painter, Martin & Unsworth, 2012, p. 103). One kind of picture is unbound. For example, in *Where the Wild Things Are* (Sendak, 1963) when Max conflicts with his mother, the illustrations shown are bounded by white frames, which imply that the protagonist is restrained. However, as Max's imagination turns the bedroom into a forest, the white borders of the book become narrower. After that, when Max becomes the king of the monsters and plays with them in the forest, the illustrator has used two interleaved pages and no text and borders. This border-removal visual guides children into the forest to become king of the monsters with Max and join them in the revelry. Also, this visual structure suggests that they are free and unrestrained (Painter, Martin & Unsworth, 2012, pp. 104, 105). The other is an image that is constrained within a border. Pictures with borders create a clearer sense of boundaries between the world of the story and the children's world, while the format serves to limit or contain characters (Painter, Martin & Unsworth, 2012, p. 105). In the bedtime story *Molly and the Night Monster* (Wormell, 2018), each page is illustrated with a white border and Molly's room door is

set at the division of the two pages. Through this constraint on the images, the child readers can feel a sense of distance and unreality to the story (Maynes, 2020, p. 5). When designing a monster picture book, these visual structures can be used to achieve the goal of keeping young readers away from the monster or bringing them into the monster's world, depending on what the picture book is trying to communicate.

Controlling children's sense of distance from the characters in the illustration through the size of the characters and readers' perspective (Painter, Martin & Unsworth, 2012, p 16). The use of 'close-ups', 'medium shots', and 'long shots' of characters is presented in images to control the distance between characters and readers (Painter, Martin & Unsworth, 2012, p. 16). For example, when only parts of the character above the shoulders are shown, it creates a sense of closeness with readers. If it is a long shot, then it produces a sense of distance from the character, which means that readers are not encouraged to establish an intimate relationship with them (Painter, Martin & Unsworth, 2012, p. 16). In addition, it allows young readers to read the picture book from the perspective of a spectator. This is a way of reducing involvement by not being forced into the story, thus easing children's anxiety about the monster (Maynes, 2020, p. 5). Through this perspective, children are given more information than the protagonist, which not only reduces fear but also a sense of intellectual superiority (Maynes, 2020, p. 5). In *Molly and the Night Monster* (Wormell, 2018), the author uses the border between the two pages to distinguish between the bedroom and the outside of the bedroom, so that children can see what is happening in both spaces at the same time but Molly can only guess what kind of creature is behind the door (Maynes, 2020, p. 5).

The design and layout of the text in monster picture books can also affect the mood of the children. Some picture books will emphasize specific words (Maynes, 2020, p. 5). For example, words that are enlarged, bolded, or capitalized to describe monster roars or noises (Maynes, 2020, p. 5). This typography will attract the attention of young readers and help them to reduce or escape terror (Maynes, 2020, p. 5).

Conclusion

The belief and fear of monsters begins in childhood. In many children's picture books, monsters often take on different images and personalities and affect children's anxieties and fears. Because children are not fully developed in their various abilities to distinguish between fact and fiction, they may become confused and scared. They are sometimes not able to express themselves well, which may cause parents to underestimate their children's fears. Monsters inspire fear in readers while also providing a way for children to visualize their demands, so it not only helps young readers vent their emotions but also satisfies their desire for power and pleasure. In addition, the use of books as a creative arts therapy – Bibliotherapy, is an effective tool to help children overcome their fears and anxieties. In the process, the monster characters create more opportunities for young readers to identify themselves so children can easily develop empathy and sympathy with the main character in these books and thus gain awareness and understanding of their own fears and anxieties. Through the imagination inspired by fairy tale books, children can adventure with or defeat monsters in their imaginary worlds and learn coping strategies from the books.

The image of the monster has evolved because of the changing age and experience of readers and trends in children's horror literature. If the image of the monster is balanced with the sense of fear and imagination that it creates for children, children have the opportunity to explore the boundaries and tolerances of their own anxieties and fears. In much children's literature, monsters are inspired by animals, so many of the monsters depicted in picture books will have animal features. In addition, the monsters are portrayed following people's fears, so that their images can map their fears. Most of the monsters have large and hybrid bodies and huge mouths, probably because of people's fear of being eaten and children's fear of adults. To make the monsters more suitable for younger readers, the monsters take the forms of humour and exaggeration, and at the same time maintain a certain sense of horror that allows them to associate terror with a positive ending. In addition, illustrators can use a variety of artistic

methods such as scene setting, colour, composition, and typography to alter the visuals in order to achieve a sense of control of the distance and realism between children and the monster characters.

Although there are questions about whether children should read scary children's literature, when parents read monster picture books to children, children can share and discuss their fears with their parents, and in the process, picture books help children express their concerns and learn strategies to cope with their fears. Therefore, Monster-themed picture books can create a safe and enjoyable environment for children to read and discuss with their families to help children explore, recognize and overcome their fears.

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