Swallowed but not Eaten: Images of the Totemic Meal and Children's Culture

Victoria de Rijke

tirallo, sing tirralay, the Wuggley Ump lives far away/
how uninviting are its claws / how even more so are its jaws---
Sing glogalimp, sing glugalump / From deep inside the Wuggly Ump
Edward Gorey "The Wuggley Ump"

Will you please tell me if, on this island, there are places where one may eat without necessarily being eaten?" asks hungry Pinocchio of the dolphin (Collodi, Ch. 24), before being swallowed by the terrible dogfish sea monster. Food is never necessarily just food, especially in literature. Neither is swallowing or being swallowed. They are all metaphors of gastronomic proportion. In this chapter, I will argue that being swallowed is also not necessarily the end of a story; in fact, it might be a whole new beginning. To serve my argument, I explore a number of totemic works of visual and performance art that I believe are important to think with and may well have been influential to picturebook depictions and metaphors of being swallowed but not eaten, ending with contemporary children's literature, including Mac Barnett and Jon Klassen's subversive picturebook *The Wolf, the Duck and the Mouse* (2017).

Swallowing/Reading/Knowing

Beginning with metaphors of reading itself, literary kinds of devouring or digesting of books, consuming literature, reading aloud, words rolled on the tongue, suggests a sensory, embodied experience. Francis Bacon relished reading-as-eating metaphors: "some books are to be tasted, others swallowed, and some few to be chewed and digested" (Essays 185), later parodied by Jonson. In the brilliantly titled *The Fury of Men's Gullets: Ben Jonson*

and the Digestive Canal, (2015) Boehrer's study of Jonson's fascination with 'alimentary matters' reveals how he disliked Montaigne, because in his opinion the French essayist did not digest his reading, and thus did not produce well-considered literature, but "brings it to the stake raw and undigested" (118). Jonson's own recommended method was to read… "not, as a Creature, that swallowes, what it takes in, crude, raw, or indigested; but, that feedes with an Appetite, and hath a Stomacke to concoct, divide, and turne all into nourishment" (118). Such metaphors abound: we can devour or savor all-consuming books, crave or gobble up literature, chew, or binge on a book, as food o' the mind or a poisonous read, digest a book's ideas, read voraciously or be starved of reading. Jacques Derrida pictured writing and reading words as forms of eating (assimilating the text), where for the "meal" to be good for us to "eat well" it must be nourishing not only for ourselves but ethically, for the other.

In Oliver Jeffers' picturebook *The Incredible Book-Eating Boy* (2015), a child has a voracious appetite for books - literally - starting with a word, then a sentence, then whole books, and "the more he ate, the smarter he got." Driven by the desire to be the smartest in the world, Henry eats three or four books at a time, but just as Jonson warned us many centuries before, "Henry was eating too many books and too quickly at that" and swallowing them undigested made things go "very very wrong." Jeffers' humorous illustration shows Henry plagued by nightmares like an "A-Z of Monsters" book chasing after him with the threatening speech bubble "I'm going to EAT YOU!" Due to gobbling so many books unthinkingly fast, Henry suffers digestive problems, and his speech and knowledge become mixed up. The books' moralistic ending – Henry realizing that reading normatively is the way forward (and showing him eating broccoli) – retains a tiny ironic twist, as a little bottom corner of the page has apparently been nibbled out.

For C. S. Lewis and many of us, eating whilst reading are two pleasures that combine admirably, though it is hard to imagine a child choosing broccoli for this purpose. Jeffers' metaphor in his book is a curiously mixed one: both a darkly comic, surreal condemnation of competitive "mastery" through book-bingeing, retreating to a didactic healthy eating/literacy lesson. For me, the book raises a further question, one that feminist scholarship has critiqued as the human need to believe (in religion rather than creative possibility); in other words, "letting go what Kristeva calls the need to know" (Arndt in Diaz-Diaz and Semenec 10). Are complex metaphors of eating, being swallowed but surviving, thus associated with equally complicated notions of literacy and reading: for competition, mastery and domination, for consuming "unlived" knowledge, or for pleasure and well-being? Whatever our answer, there are still darker sides of being swallowed, which I shall now dive into.

Swallowing as Being Damned

Hieronymus Bosch's *De Visie von Tondal* (c.1550s) [*The Vision of Tundale*], picturing an Irish C12th poem of visionary infernal literature, describes the knight Tondal having a seizure at dinner, and being led through Heaven and Hell by an angel, experiencing some of the torments of the damned. As a kind of northern European popularist variant on Dante's *Divine Comedy* (1320) – itself indebted to Islamic philosophical texts – Tondal is guilty of eight deadly sins: pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, sloth, and treachery. Generously invited to stay to dinner by an aggrieved debtor, he is stricken with a violent fit that results in his imminent death. Poetic justice, we might think, but more punishment is to come. Tondal passes through the hell-mouth and is bitten by lions, adders, and snakes within the belly of Acheron; sees lustful clergy who have broken their vows swallowed by a great bird and infested with vermin that creep in and out of their bodies, and so on. Bosch was painting in a time of great barbarity and change at the tail end of the Hundred Years' War, in which over three million people were slaughtered, and Joan of Arc burned alive. It was also what western Europe calls "The Age of Discovery" (when western powers began their global mapping of places that had long been there before any white westerner "discovered" them) and religious cynicism. Bosch turned from the Bible's view of hell to a fantastical vision of human sin separated from God, characterized by chance, with bird-like figures vomiting dice and a monster digesting the souls of sinful clergy. *The Vision of Tundale* makes it horrifically clear that this punishment of being swallowed into the mouth of hell and vomited out into a cesspool was reserved for clerics guilty of sexual vice.

Pieter Bruegel the Elder's painting *Dulle Griet* (1562/3) owes much to Bosch, with Griet leading an army of women to pillage Hell and looking fearlessly into the hellmouth (Fig 1). With several powerful female monarchs on the thrones of Europe adding to a general unease caused by the religious and societal upheavals of the period, the painting is likely to be poking fun at female power, since, in Flemish folklore, Dulle Griet is a shrewish peasant woman. Women were beginning not to 'stay in their place' and Griet personifies this. Both Bruegel's original painting and Carll Cneut's illustrations to the picturebook Dulle Griet (with Geert de Kockere, 2005) depict Griet entering the

Fig. 1

Hellmouth detail, Bruegel's *Dulle Griet* (c1562/3).

mouth of hell without fear. The text reads "it was crawling with evil, so for a moment Griet hesitated. But then she kicked and chopped her way in. Through the mouth of the devil. The mouth was wide open. The mouth that was a gate, the gates of hell." Direct intertextual reference is made to Bruegel's work in Cneut's illustrations, by collaging cut-outs from the original into the design, as if the book itself had swallowed and spat out half-digested gobbets of the painting; self-conscious parodic reference that Beckett (2010) and Van Meerbergen (2012) describe as typically postmodern, but which is also likely to refer to - and continue - a long-established practice of artistic allusion throughout different periods of Flemish art and into works of children's literature (DeLuca, 1984; Beckett, 2010). As Bruegel followed Bosch and Cneut followed Bruegel, DeLuca points out that iconic picturebooks "created some of the schemata that shaped the field" (23), suggestive that the idea of being eaten has been slowly digested over centuries and is now also shaped by children's culture and the self-conscious materiality of the children's book, where the threat of being eaten is depicted as no longer that of damnation, but a challenge to a resourceful, resilient self.

Swallowing as Transforming

To face the mouth of hell and to be swallowed by the monster is clearly an existential crisis, however. In her Reith lecture of 1994, Marina Warner calls cannibal tales "The Hunger for Conquest." From the ogre in the fairytale "*Jack the Giant-Killer"* who dines on the flesh of Englishmen to Dante's *Inferno*, where the damned eat their own and each other's flesh, cannibalism is tied to fears of swallowing and being swallowed: the loss of personal identity, of soul. We instill the fear of cannibalism in our children with traditional tales of *Jack and the Beanstalk* or *Hansel and Gretel,* and that fear in turn serves other functions as well. An old variant of "Little Red Riding Hood" titled "The Story of Grandmother" has the child bring her grandmother bread and milk, yet the wolf (in bed having eaten grandmother) directs her to eat the meat and drink he has left on the shelf. "As she ate, there was a little cat that said: "A slut is she who eats the flesh and drinks the blood of her grandmother!" (Dundes 1991). One reading might be that Red Riding Hood engages in anti-Christian acts including a pastiche of the mass through cannibalism of a family member, plus sexual immorality in lying down with the wolf, but another that the pubertal child symbolically takes on her new place (replacing the grandmother by the ritual eating of her flesh and drinking of her blood) as the female generations of the family are passed on in their time.

Ostensibly to censor female initiative and remove gory or erotic allusion, later versions of the tale (eg. Perrault and Grimm) feature male patriarchs such as hunters to step in, kill the wolf and cut it open to rescue both child and grandma from the belly of the beast.

In this extraordinary engraving (Fig. 2), a man with a large sharp knife between his teeth and a larger chopper resting on the table, is tearing the entrails of a wolf open, revealing a little girl curled inside, apparently alive and well, with a woman looking somewhat faint in the background. As with Cneut following Bruegel and Bosch, Henry Duff Linton's engraved copy of Henri de Montaut's illustration of Little Red Riding Hood for Librarie du Petit Journal, changed purpose when, intriguingly, it ended up in London's medical Wellcome Collection where it was presumably of interest or entertainment to surgeons in the historic development of surgical methods. The image is one of comparisons: the hugely muscled arms of the man, his dark features and possibly afro hair echoed by the hairy pelt of the wolf's snout and leg, contrasted with the paleness of the women behind and the white skin and draped clothing of the child. The inference is the innocence of the eaten and the feminine requiring (male) protection, as rescued by the knowing violence of the hunter/surgeon/wolf.

Fig. 2
Little Red Riding Hood. Wood engraving by H. Linton after H. de Montaut, ca. 1865. Public Domain Mark. Source: Wellcome Collection. (c1562/3).

There are non-western challenges to this formula, such as depicting children themselves with huge appetites, as with the Hindu myth or epic tale Rakshahsa, which Madhubanti Banerjee also links to racial fears of those with dark bodies cast out or defeated "so that others would fear Aryan power" (Banerjee 150). In the tale, Putana tries to kill Krishna when he was a baby, but when she offers to nurse him at her toxic breasts, she is suckled to death by his voracious appetite. For indigenous and tribal peoples, traditional tales can feature being eaten as transformative acts stemming from ancient ritualistic practices where to eat your enemy is to perform an extreme act of physical dominance, symbolically taking on their strength for future battles or territorial expansion (the fat of the land). In his study of children's literature, Jonathan Cott considers cannibalism to be an obsessive theme in fairy tales. He suggests scholars have argued that "it represents simply a vestigial memory of a time when human beings did in fact eat each other both ritually and in combat; or perhaps rather the vestiges of an attempt to exorcise that primordial hunger and the guilt it occasions" (Cott xiv). This view chimes with Rituparna Das's (2020) postcolonial reading of cannibalistic tales from Bengal, emphasizing the narrative trope of races, cultures and marginalized "others" being traumatized and "devoured" by white colonialism in its search for agency and political domination. This brings us to metaphors of eating as related to politics.

Political Swallowing

Food, cooking and eating is of course gendered, as German Dada artist Hannah Höch was well aware. In a kitchen self-portrait she collaged herself blurred, looking away, whilst the pots and pans of the kitchen behind her are super-realist. Her text for the image reads: "I risk eating the maddest of dishes." She reminds us that cooking is hardly domesticated. It is material experiment, like that of collage itself. It is risk. Portuguese artist Paula Rego recalls the uncompromising, blunt work of Höch, though in different media. Her etchings and aquatints of Nursery Rhymes suggest new gendered positionings: a feisty, kicking Miss Muffet rather than a spider frightening her away from her curds and whey. A painting of an older Snow White – still dressed in traditional children's Disney garb – is pictured moments after eating the poison apple, sprawled amidst overturned furniture, clutching at her skirts. Her body lies twisted over a pool of red, Rego perhaps suggesting that swallowing the apple construes aging towards death, culturally for women, a form of physical and psychological violation

Höch's (1919) large-scale photomontage *Cut with the Kitchen Knife Through the Last Weimar Beer-Belly Cultural Epoch* in Germany is a forceful commentary on the gender issues erupting in postwar Weimar Germany – and one of the most prominently displayed and well-received works of the International Dada Fair of 1920. Höch cut, overlapped and juxtaposed photographic fragments of politicians and artists of the time in disorienting ways to reflect the confusion and chaos of the postwar era. Though she probably used a scalpel or scissors to produce her work, her naming of the kitchen knife suggests a more roughly hewn collage, hacked from popular magazines using a domestic cooking tool. Höch cuts up and cuts through individual bodies to serve up the epoch: a Weimar "beer belly" full of social and cultural actions, people and ideas, many difficult to swallow. In this way, Höch's photomontage also announced emphatically that art was under new management, in angry response to the political context that while generals and politicians banqueted, citizens, including the war-injured, were starving. The hope was that art would no longer serve the ritualized dining of the wealthy bourgeois connoisseur. In this photomontage, ingredients are collected, mixed and cooked using non-traditional art practices for what the Dadaist called 'anti-art'.

Like Höch's "Beer-Belly" artwork, intended expressly to oppose the Weimar constitution of 1919 and the chaos of the Weimar Republic that would position Germany for the rise of Hitler and the Nazi Party, Rego's Salazar "Vomiting the Homeland" is a savage criticism of Prime Minister Salazar's authoritarian government that would ruthlessly rule Portugal until 1974. Rego was sent to England at the age of 17 on the advice of her father, but she points out that "To a great extent, I was protected because my father had an engineering company and we weren't poor. The poor starved, particularly in the countryside." In the image, a figure vomits a looped stream of yellow bile beside

abstract shapes of female form and fruit. These works picture cannibalistic images of eating and being eaten, countered by the wishful undoing by its reversal: regurgitation. Can what we eat live on, somehow?

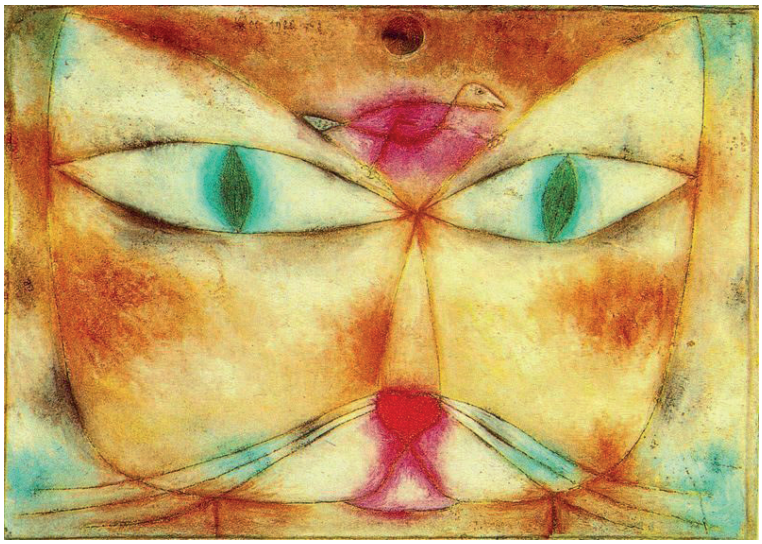

Fig. 3

Cat and Bird. Paul Klee, oil and ink on gauze (1928)

Like his earlier "Cat and Bird" (1928, Fig 3.), Paul Klee's *Hungry Girl* and *Child Eater* (1939) depict beasts with glaring eyes who are dreaming of or who have assimilated their prey. Hunger is thus animal, evoking early childhood experiences as an amalgam of fantasy and reality, characterized by untamed infantile impulses and anxieties. Hunger stirs a wish to swallow up everything, yet also the fear of being swallowed up by everything else. Klee's intense colour pastes and simple pencil lines create a convergence between the child-like and then called "primitive" aesthetic set to challenge the times. Inspired by Klee, Dutch artist Karel Appel was a member of the avant-garde CoBrA group, using child-like methods to approach expressionist artworks. In 1949, Appel was commissioned to paint a mural for the cafeteria of Amsterdam's city hall (Fig. 4). Given the title *Vragende Kinderen* – meaning either "questioning children" or "begging children" – Appel's work caused an uproar. Where the artist saw openness to a new future, Dutch civil servants saw violence, rickets and starvation, things they had known all too well in the war and of which they had no wish to be reminded. This was a place to eat in, not to recall how Holland itself had momentarily been swallowed by national socialism under occupation, when the people of the rural south had starved. The mural was quickly whitewashed over and remained so for 20 years. Appel, furious, moved to France.

War carries its own food-related associations: metaphors of starving, eating and being eaten – the "fruits of war" actually "seeds of destruction" that reap "bitter harvests" for those who have "the stomach to fight." Providing or denying physical sustenance – food or

the lack of it – in these works of visual art, becomes a metaphor to wider social injustice in settings where a life, not just a meal, lies in the hands of others. The beer-belly, the vomited homeland, the starving children gazing at the diners in the canteen, all become totemic: food as sacrifice, marking moments in history that are very hard for us to swallow.

Swallowed by the Wolf

Being swallowed thus operates metaphorically, even totemically, as in the case with Prokofiev's musical tale *Peter and the Wolf*. Prokofiev apparently rejected the initial propogandist "Young Pioneer" tale offered, rewriting "Peter and the Wolf" with Natalya Sats, the first female opera director and director of several children's theatres. It premiered in Russia in 1936 with Sats narrating, then in America in 1938. By that time Sats was already serving a sentence in the gulag. She was convicted as a traitor to the motherland by association (her lover, who was shot). She refused to sign a confession and was sentenced to a labor camp in Siberia. In the musical, the duck is swallowed by the wolf but can be heard still alive and quacking from inside his belly, represented by the oboe. For me, the duck is always Natalya Sats, spending sixteen years of her life inside the belly of an oppressor, swallowed but not eaten. On her release from exile, Sats continued her own "synthesized" method and re-opened the theatrical birthplace of *Peter and the Wolf*, whose performances then toured the world. It is now renamed in her honor, The Natalya Sats Children's Musical Theater and features a statue of her with Little Red Riding Hood, Peter and the Wolf.

Being swallowed by a wolf carries special totemic significance for humans. In Norse mythology, wolf characters chase the sun and moon to devour them and return us to perpetual darkness. Freud tended to over-read the wolf – the parent who pretends to gobble his children up in play – so what is edible is oedipal – representing a threat, linked to repressed sexual desires. Being eaten is thus linked to oral expression and to being castrated. In the book *Animal lessons: How they Teach Us to Be Human* Oliver argues that "For Freud, cannibalism is an essential element of the totemic meal that inaugurates humanity and human civilization against animality and animal nature" (258). Melanie Klein recognized that, for Freud, the fear of being devoured by the "totem father" was "an undisguised expression of the fear of total annihilation of the self" but her observations were that cannibalistic urges begin with children's teething, combined with the "oral impulse to suck dry, bite up, scoop out and rob the mother's body of its good contents" (Klein 7) which in turn is a source of anxiety and guilt. Our fear of being eaten thus shapes the brain and is a powerful force across the natural world. Ecologists have long known that predators play a key role in ecosystems, shaping whole communities with the knock-on effects of who eats whom. But a new approach is revealing that it's not just being eaten, but also the fear of getting eaten, that shapes everything from individual brains and

behavior to whole ecosystems.

Fear Ecologies

This new field, exploring the non-consumptive effects of predators, is known as fear ecology. Historically, as migrants moved across the continent during colonization, dispossessing Indigenous peoples from the land, the dominant settler perception was that the best way to avoid livestock losses was through widespread predator eradication. So, anti-predator sentiment of the times saw the cougar, bear and the wolf almost eliminated, with wolf culling still practiced and remaining a contentious issue today. By the 2000s, it was observed that animals behave and distribute spatially in response to predation risk in a "landscape of fear." The current concept, fear ecology, focuses on how animals make decisions about what, where and when to eat, how they forage, hunt and farm for food and whether it is sustainable. Evidence of intergenerational fear effects is being seen across a number of species, including birds, mice and humans.

It was during this historical era of widespread predator killing that biophysicists began to tackle the ecologic underpinnings of predator-prey interactions. In nature, everyone needs to eat, from the few predators to the many prey and plants. Thinking about the complex ways in which ecosystem puzzle pieces fit together, ecologists conceived of biological communities structured either from "top down" or "bottom up." Bottom-up communities are defined by an abundance of plants, such as grass, available for grazing herbivores. Top-down thinking led to the idea of a keystone predator like the wolf, whose near-disappearance proves the disproportionately large role that keystone species play in maintaining the balance and biodiversity of communities.

Fig. 4

REBVIK's *The A-Z of Dangerous Food* (2012)

My own picturebook collaboration, *The A-Z of Dangerous Food* (Fig. 4), is a playful take on a constructivist collage design featuring food eaten by humans but that also eats or

endangers us, such "B for Bats" which are both endangered, eaten and carry pandemics, or "C is for Crocodiles" as steaks or child-eaters. Resisting the idea of the keystone predator as a pantomime threat, like Roald Dahl's *Enormous Crocodile* sadistic musing "For my lunch today, I would like a nice, juicy little child," Mini Grey's picturebook *The Last Wolf* begins by unexpectedly picturing Little Red dressed up as a hunter, off to catch a wolf. Her mother doesn't worry, as a wolf hasn't been seen in over a hundred years. Happening upon the tree-cave containing the last wolf, last lynx and last bear, Little Red is served tea and told all about the "Good Old Days," when

> "there were endless miles of forest to run through, and a thousand tasty grazing beasts to bite… when you could just lie on a branch and wait for lunch to wander right under your paws. Nowadays, catching a square meal is a difficult business: the pickings are slim and the packing is hard to get into." They looked longingly at Little Red. "My, what huge hungry eyes you all have!" she said. (*The Last Wolf*)

Grey's text points ironically to that famous moment in traditional Little Red Riding Hood tales when the refrain begins: "What big eyes" and finishes with "What big teeth you have," to which the wolf replies "All the better to EAT you with!" followed by eating her, falling asleep and getting his belly cut open by a passing hunter, to free the child and her grandmother. In this modern rewrite, Little Red (a hunter in role-play only) simply shares her packed lunch with the beasts and they kindly walk her home, through "the last woods." Grey's illustrations set a sharp contract of the life before environmental destruction, including a double page spread, fully forested, and idyllic images of nature's bounty set against modernity, where the animals have to break into private property and go through rubbish bins for scraps. Little Red (as Mini Grey's blogspot advises) determines to plant more trees.

Ultimately, these fables and motifs relate powerfully to our flawed relationship with animals and nature in our greedy late capitalist world. "Eating and being eaten preoccupy fairy tales where heroes are turned into animals, children are roasted in ovens," suggesting both "the fear of dependence on the other (and) also tapping into the real *fear of being eaten* as just another kind of meat" (Hudson). In Amy Dykman and Zachariah O'Hora's *Wolfie the Bunny* Dot is convinced the wolf her rabbit parents adopt is bad news. All the parents can do is admire Wolfie. "He's a good eater" says Papa. "Speaking of eating," says Dot. "He's going to eat us all up!" "But they were too smitten to listen." The joke here is that the youngest child appears to be the only realist with knowledge of a wolf's natural eating habits, so her concern about being both his sister and his dinner seems reasonable. However, the twist in the tale is that by being adopted into the bunny family Wolfie (who

wears a pink bunny suit over his wolf pelt) is not a risk to his own family members. It is only when both he and bunny Dot meet a hungry bear that the risk is suddenly real, but for Wolfie! "'DINNER!' roared the bear." But Wolfie is rescued by Dot, shouting: "Let him go!... or I'LL EAT YOU ALL UP!" The last scene shows the two hand-in-hand shopping at the Carrot Patch Co-op, with Dot saying: "Come on, little brother. Let's go home and eat."

There is a kind of magic in the refrain "I'll eat you all up" from many traditional tales, as illustrated (Fig. 6) by Kay Nielsen's Troll waiting under the bridge, mouth open, whilst the goat promises "Eat me when I'm fatter," from what translates to "The Three Billy Goats Gruff." Similarly, works of more contemporary children's literature still employ the tropes found in "The Gingerbread Man," being chased then eaten bite by bite by the fox carrying him over the river, crying "I'm quarter gone...I'm half gone...I'm three-quarters gone...I'm all gone!" Max, in his wolf suit, threatens, "I'll eat you up!" to his mother, and then is sent to bed "without eating anything" in Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are*. When in turn Max threatens to return home, the Wild Things say – just like the Jewish relatives Sendak said he recalled leaning over his pram, who had been in his mind when making the book – "We'll eat you up, we love you so." But Max said "No!" In the final act of reconciliation, he finds his supper waiting for him "still hot" at the end of all his adventures. Traumatic threats can be reversed by facing one's "wild things" – fears, frustrations, rages, expectations, others) – the inner stress is calmed (safely chewed over or digested), and no one is "eaten all up," after all.

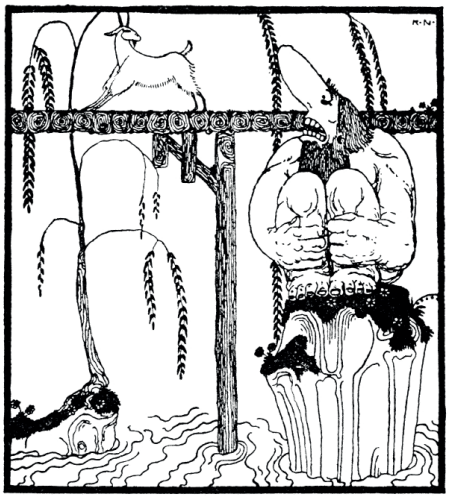

Fig. 5
Illustration by Kay Nielsen from *East of the Sun and West of the Moon* [The Three Billy Goats Gruff] (1914)

It is not surprising that 21st-century children's literature is also playfully subverting long-held notions of predation risk, as reminders that we humans are now more conscious than ever of our morally reprehensive role as a top predator, knowing it carries very real risks to our own happy survival. Ryan T. Higgins' jolly, didactic picturebook *We Don't Eat Our Classmates* features dinosaur Penelope Rex who initially eats her classmates (because children are delicious) but then must learn from the aptly named teacher Mrs Noodleman that she is going to have to spit the tasty children out if she wants to stop feeling lonely so she can play with them. Such texts are, in essentials, pragmatic analogies for what unbridled human greed's cause and effect will do to planet Earth. Perhaps more adults should read *We Don't Eat Our Classmates*.

Being Swallowed but Not Eaten

As in Jean de la Fontaine's fables, humans and animals often play equal roles in children's literature. A prominent element of the American Indian hybrid of myth and fable is the Pourquoi story or etiological tale, which answers a "why"? question of nature, often to illustrate the pitfalls of (human) silliness, naughtiness and weakness. Why spiders eat flies, why plover birds clean crocodiles' teeth, why the cat purrs. These are often metaphoric plays on factual knowledge. Mac Barnett and Jon Klassen's picturebook *The Wolf, the Duck and the Mouse* (2017) can be categorized as a pourquoi tale of sorts. The tale begins early one morning when a mouse meets a wolf and is quickly wolfed down. So it goes with alpha predators, nature's way, you might say. Here the book's design features a clever page split of the front and back end of the wolf, signifying mouse's moment of primal separation from the world outside to the inner.

> "Oh, woe!" wails the mouse. "Here I am caught in the belly of the beast. I fear it is the end." "Be quiet!" someone shouted. "I'm trying to sleep." A light was lit. A duck lay in bed. "Well?" Said the duck. "Oh," said the mouse. Duck makes breakfast. The meal was delicious. "Where did you get jam?" asked the mouse. "And a tablecloth?" The duck munched a crust. "You'd be surprised what you find inside of a wolf." "It's nice", said the mouse. "It's home", said the duck. "You live here?" "I live well. I may have been swallowed, but I have no intention of being eaten." (*The Wolf, the Duck and the Mouse*)

This witty picturebook is like a playful illustration of Derrida's philosophical idea "we must eat well," or learn "to-give-the-other-to-eat." He sees a distinction between animals simply swallowing whilst the human animal incorporates abstractly, thereby creating a symbolic or inner space that is the subject. He also makes a distinction between assimilating, whether food, ideas or friends, in ways that respect and nourish, or ways that conquer them as trophies (Birnbaum and Olsson).

The duck and the mouse may therefore have been swallowed but have not been annihilated. For lunch they make soup. They wear chef's hats, aprons, and have a well-equipped kitchen including 5 large knives. (The wolf has clearly had to swallow quite dangerous items for their convenience). "The mouse cleared his throat. "Do you miss the outside?" "I do not!" said the duck. "When I was outside, I was afraid every day wolves would swallow me up. In here, that's no worry."

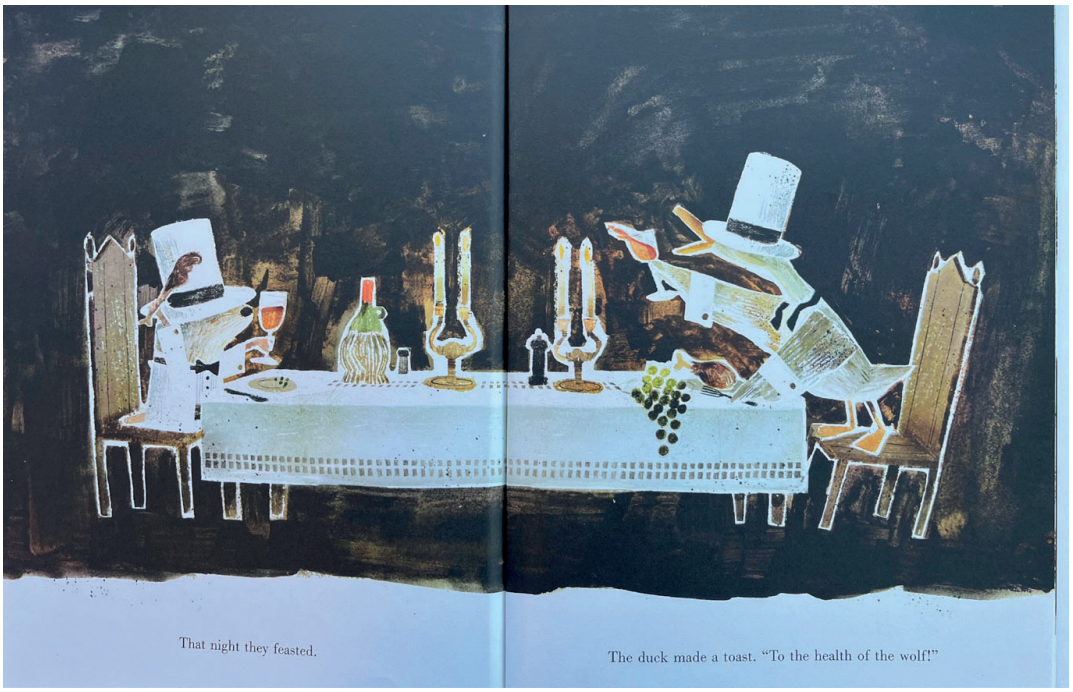

Fig. 6

The Wolf, the Duck and the Mouse (2017) Feasting inside the wolf's belly

Introducing the mouse to the high standard of living inside the wolf (top hats, bow ties, dinner jackets and all, as in Fig. 6) compared to the anxiety of being prey outside, the duck has chosen to interpret being swallowed not as separation, isolation or marginalization, but as integration. In a humorous twist, the creatures that have been swallowed actually increase in agency by negatively controlling the wolf as when they party and dance, causing the wolf's insides (indicated in Klassen's comic illustrations as the smeary darkness surrounding the candlelit dinner party) to suffer, as he wails "Oh, woe! Surely it must have been something I ate!" As the blurb says, "The book is more than funny, it's a howl". As a witty phonic twist, even "Oh, woe!" stands for the sound of a wolf howling.

The duck then suggests to the wolf that he eats "a hunk of good cheese, a flagon of wine and some beeswax candles." That night duck and mouse feast and toast, with some irony: "To the health of the wolf!" But of course, the wolf feels worse, exclaiming: "I feel like I'll burst." This precipitates a potential crisis that will affect them all as a human hunter hears the wolf moan and fires a shot. The duck and mouse then "CHARGE!" out of the wolf's wide-open mouth "to defend our home" in kitchen-implement-inspired battledress: tablecloth cape, with saucepan and colander helmets (Fig. 7).

The duck and the mouse defeat the hunter, and the wolf grants them any favor in return, admitting "you saved my life when I thought not to spare yours." "Well, you can guess what they asked for," reads the text laconically. To return to the belly and party. And that is why the wolf howls at the moon.

Animals are not "by nature" secondary entities in children's literature. As Levi-

Strauss maintained, "Animals are good to think with." In fables, they stand for us, as us. In his essay "What has literature got to do with it?" Nigerian novelist Achebe refers to animal fables about class division, privilege and the seeds of revolution they contain, arguing that they often carry the suggestion of the dissolution of an incompetent oligarchy. In this subversive tale, the wolf is immature, over-eating and punished with stomach-ache. Which of us has not done the same in our childhood with too many sweets or green apples? Thus, the wolf and the hunter – stereotypically alpha male keystone predators – are reduced to (child-like) incompetent oligarchs, tortured by greed or their fears.

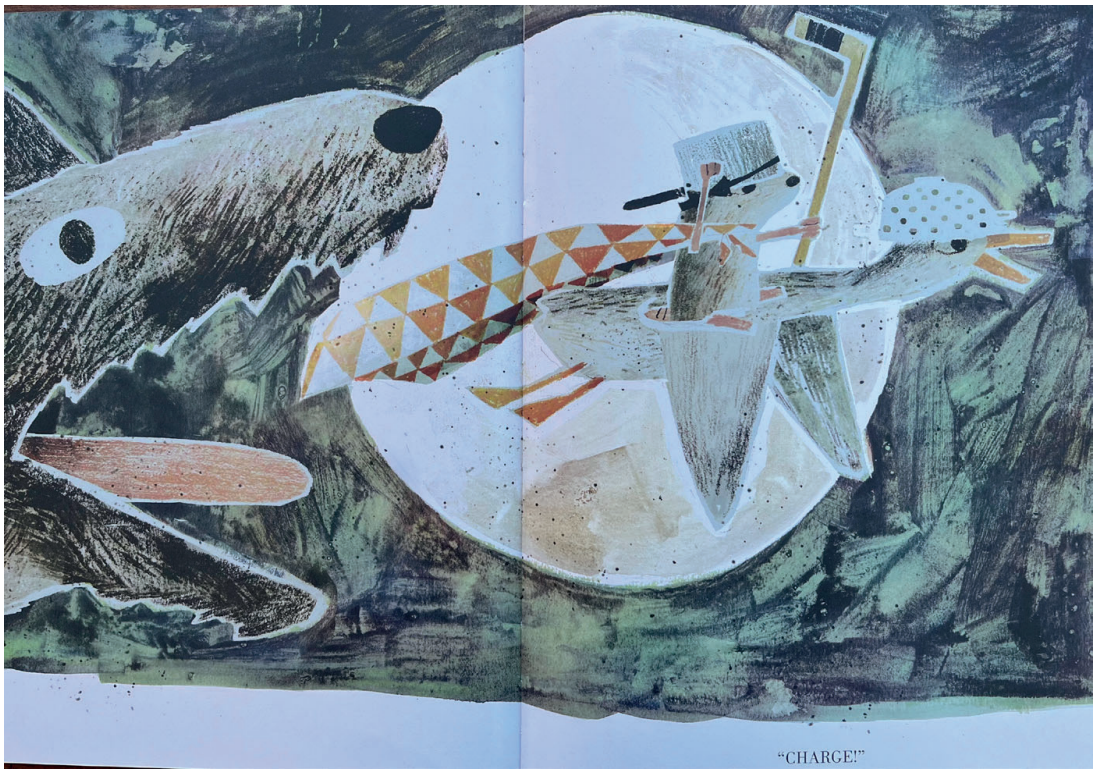

Fig. 7

The Wolf, the Duck and the Mouse (2017) charging out of the wolfs mouth

But the wolf is also depicted as the mouse and duck's home: his belly houses his and their fictional tropes, indeed, all fictional tropes, from reading as eating, damnation, salivation or salvation, the cannibalism of folk and fairy tale, art and anti-art regurgitation. For the mouse and the duck, being swallowed followed by regurgitation is disintegration then reassembly; thus, they choose to return to the belly as home. They live well and eat well, there. The wolf and what he eats belongs to them, under their control, reminding us animals are the relational metaphor, placed in a receding past, some once threatening, now threatened in their turn. The picturebook offers a comic reversal of fear ecology, in that being swallowed keeps you safe from something worse (something human). I have

argued in the past that the fable genre has a special relationship to biopolitical intensity, an often unconscious relationship of children's literature to the symbolic order cracking under political pressure. *The Wolf, The Duck and The Mouse* seems to suggest the 21st-century is truly one of a landscape of fear, where ironically, only being swallowed keeps us safe from being eaten.

Fictional swallowing suggests metaphoric assimilation – like the alarm clock inside Peter Pan's crocodile – though living beings in the belly are in the liminal stage between separation and incorporation, such as pictured by the death-rebirth cycle of Pinocchio in the belly of the whale. For Freud, cannibalism was an essential element of the "totemic meal" that inaugurates human civilization against animality and animal nature. Yet, European avant-garde art movements such as CoBrA, embodied by the expression of children, drawing inspiration in particular from children's culture, suggest we re-question these positions – especially now, in light of Donna Haraway's posthuman "companion" vision drawn from Derrida's insistent "we must eat well" cultural concept of shared food: "eating well- together" for exceptional humaneness. "I fell in well with you, so I remain," writes Derrida (Lavenz), which is pretty much the same conclusion the duck and the mouse come to, inside the wolf. Barnett and Klassen's 21st-century picturebook, exploring a bodily experience represented visually and viscerally through cannibalistic ideas of eating and being eaten, is countered by its reversal – swallowing as regurgitation, and disintegration as cheerful reassembly of animal, posthuman self. It opens up the possibility that being swallowed is not to be eaten whole (assimilated, annihilated) but rather deconstructed, dispersed, ex-appropriated, resulting in relating to and protecting one another, including (via the metaphor of gastronomic proportions) the wider home that is this planet. It is a fable of our times and our only hope.

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