

TAKEN FROM: *Postmodern Picturebooks: Play, Parody, and Self-Referentiality*
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12 Would I Lie to You? Metalepsis and Modal Disruption in Some "True" Fairy Tales

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Fairy and folk tales, while not originally composed or written specifically for children, have for quite some time been told and retold to young audiences, and retellings and reversions of such traditional tales now constitute a significant proportion of picturebooks published for children. As such, they have some important functions in the cognitive, linguistic, imaginative, and social development and enculturation of children. As John Stephens and I argued in *Retelling Stories, Framing Culture*, "folk literature poses a particular challenge to anyone who desires to conserve or retell stories drawn from traditional sources" because the conventional forms of folktale "tend to reinforce existing metanarratives" (201)—that is, the implicit ideologies and assumptions operating globally to order knowledge and experience. Retelling and rewriting traditional stories represents a challenge for contemporary writers because "the metanarratives of the traditional societies within which folk narratives evolve often incorporate world views antithetical to those preferred by many members of modern societies" (201). On the one hand, the process of retelling involves choices about language, register, narrative point of view, structure, and so on, that is, choices which carry with them ideological and cultural assumptions and which will always modify the meaning of the stories in some way. Thus, the particular cultural and ideological context will have an impact on the discourse and the significance of any particular retelling. At the same time, however, traditional stories carry with them residual meanings and ideologies which are an aspect of their engagement with the larger cultural metanarratives which structure them. Thus, any retelling brings with it a predetermined horizon of expectation, which in turn means that its values and ideas about the world are always already legitimate. Hence it is "difficult to re-shape the stories without recourse to more drastic processes of revision" using strategies such as parody, metafiction, or framebreaking (201). Such strategies can enable picturebook writers and readers to engage with and reflect upon the meaning-making process, but they can also raise questions about the very nature of story making and the possibilities for retelling traditional stories.

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Four characteristically postmodern strategies which draw attention to the fictional nature of a picturebook are: overt intertextuality; inversion of the narrative voice (so that the story is told from another character's point of view); metaleptic disruptions to the diegetic level of narration, which breach conventional relationships and hierarchies between characters, texts, authors, illustrators, and readers; and modal contrasts and disruptions within the pictorial discourse. This chapter will examine the interrelationships between these four strategies in the following metafictional fairy tale picturebooks: *What Really Happened to Little Red Riding Hood: The Wolf's Story* (Forward and Cohen), *Oops!* (McNaughton), *Beware of the Storybook Wolves* (Child), *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* (Child), *Wait! No Paint!* (Whatley) and *The Three Pigs* (Wiesner). In combination, the broadly metafictional strategies used in these books raise questions about the nature of narrative and the possibilities for reshaping and changing traditional stories. Not all of the books use all four strategies, but they are all overtly intertextual, as each retells a version of Little Red Riding Hood, The Three Little Pigs, Goldilocks, or Cinderella—and other fairy tales and nursery rhymes to a lesser extent. Further, many of them use innovative pictorial techniques to position readers in interrogative positions, and they all at least to some extent problematise the relationships between fiction and reality, and the world of stories and that of readers, potentially offering readers more empowered reading positions and strategies.

An obvious, and within contemporary fairy tale retellings almost conventionalized, strategy for engaging with and potentially problematising the metanarrative structuring of fairy tale is the use of overtly parodic forms of intertextuality, resulting in what has become known as "the fractured fairy tale." In such stories, the narrative is typically organized so as to foreground the formulaic structure of fairy tale characterization and outcomes in particular—common strategies for example include retelling the story from another character's point of view, retelling the story as an epilogue for the traditional version, or switching the gender of a central protagonist. In general, such overt forms of parodic intertextuality can have three main effects: they can foreground the ways in which narrative fictions are constructed out of other texts and discourses; they can indicate possible interpretative positions for readers; and they can enable the representation of a plurality of voices, discourses, and meanings. However, while strategies such as these may draw attention to the conventionality of the forms of traditional story, they are not always successful in circumventing the inevitable outcomes to which such forms typically lead. The effect may be comic but often the metanarrative structure of the story remains intact. Furthermore, while parodic intertextuality can highlight fictionality, the boundaries between the fictional and the real are apt to be kept firmly intact through pictorial and narratorial strategies which affirm the fictionality of the represented world. However, strategies such as unusual visual perspectives and mixed modality within the pictorial discourse and

innovative narrative techniques can disrupt and blur distinctions between the represented worlds of reality and fantasy, encouraging readers to adopt more active interpretative positions.

The Wolf's Story (Forward and Cohen) uses the quite conventionalised strategy of retelling the story of Little Red Riding Hood from the Wolf's point of view and hence recasting him as the "hard-done-by" hero of the story rather than the villain. Forward's use of an ironic narrator and Cohen's manipulation of visual point of view together position readers to actively engage with the narrative. The story opens with a direct address from the Wolf:

NO, PLEASE. Look at me. Would I LIE to you? It was the old woman who started it. I did *nothing* wrong. Would I? We hit it off from the beginning. Not everyone likes a wolf, do they? Look at *you*. You're not certain. Would you like to come and sit a bit closer while I tell you about the kid? I don't bite. No? Sure? Okay. Up to you.

The smiling Wolf in the accompanying illustration gazes directly at the viewer, making eye contact, and his paw is depicted in a beckoning gesture which creates a diagonal vector to the picture he is holding of an amiable-looking old woman—these features all realize visually the "demand" imperative explicit in the verbal address ("Look at me"). However, the modal shift from an imperative to a more polite, interrogative syntax with "Would you like to . . . ?" implies a narratee who is clearly skeptical of the Wolf's story and who in refusing to move closer to the Wolf, also refuses to be interpellated into the subject position constructed by his address. As Kress and Van Leeuwen have argued, "demand" pictures, that is, "pictures from which represented participants look directly at the viewer's eyes," have two related functions. They "create a visual form of direct address . . . [which] acknowledges the viewers explicitly, addressing them with a visual 'you'; and they 'constitute an 'image act,'" that is "the participants gaze . . . demands something from the viewer, demands that the viewer enter into some kind of imaginary relation with him or her" (122). Insofar as the narratee implicitly refuses that demand, there is an ironic tension created by the different subject positions constructed by the verbal text and the visual text, which in turn situates readers in an active questioning relation to the Wolf and the story he tells.

Visual point of view is also manipulated throughout *The Wolf's Story* in ways that maintain this tension. The use of high aerial viewpoints to depict the Wolf and Red Riding Hood in the forest as they part ways (opening 5) and for her entry into the cottage (opening 6) imply she is in a position of threat. Likewise, the use of extreme close-ups, shifting points of view, size contrasts, and visual framing devices imply her vulnerability once she enters the cottage. An extreme close-up of the Wolf's eyes on opening 7 depicts a very small Red Riding Hood reflected in and visually "framed" by

the Wolf's red-tinged eyes—the accompanying text ironically reiterates the conventional "What big eyes you have." On the next opening the viewer is positioned behind the Wolf who is in the extreme foreground and Red Riding Hood is framed by the bed, the bedpost and the Wolf's ear—the narration is again explicitly ironic: "she wasn't that bad, really. Looked good enough to eat, if you know what I mean," and is followed by Red Riding Hood's next statement, "what big ears you have." On the ninth opening, as she asks about the Wolf's teeth, viewers are positioned inside the Wolf's mouth looking out at Red Riding Hood who is framed, but slightly off-centre, by the Wolf's four canines.

Visual strategies such as these effectively undercut the Wolf's narrative and his assertions of innocence. One implication of this undercutting is that another story, an alternative to the Wolf's story, is inadvertently being told through ironic dissonances between and within the visual and verbal texts. Furthermore, that this "alternative" story implies that Red Riding Hood and Granny are the victims and the Wolf, despite his assertions to the contrary, is the villain, suggests that it is actually a version of the traditional story, as told by the Grimm brothers or Perrault for example, and raises questions about the possibilities for changing stories and characters. (The strategy also introduces a very young audience to the concept of ironic and unreliable narration, encouraging that audience to question the Wolf's story.) As Maria Tatar has suggested, the simplicity of fairy tale plots allows for a multiplicity of interpretations: traditional versions of the Little Red Riding Hood tale might be read as a symbolic struggle between strength and weakness, so that "any predatory power can be substituted for the wolf, with any innocent standing in for the heroine" (51). Thus, one interpretation of the tale might be that it is a story of stranger-danger and rape—as the moral to Perrault's version more or less implies (see Zipes). Forward and Cohen's Wolf is initially represented as an "odd job man" who puts up shelves, does the shopping, tidies the garden, and does the mending, and the language used plays on late-twentieth-century discourses of "new" masculinity: "I'm versatile. Sort of a new wolf. Vegetarian cuisine a speciality. . . . Are you *sure* you wouldn't like to sit just a little closer?" (opening 2). In other words, he is the sensitive "new" man of the 1990s, if readers are prepared to believe his story. The narrative closes with an ironic reiteration of this characterization and his opening address:

Anyway, thanks for listening. And, if you ever want any odd jobs doing around the house, just get in touch. Here's my card. I don't charge much, I'm a neat worker, completely trustworthy, and I won't make a meal of it! No, please. Look at me. Would I lie to you?

Again the Wolf's ironic punning ("make a meal of it") undercuts his self-characterization, and the narratee's implicit response prompts the reader to answer "yes" to his final question. He is not so much a "new" wolf, as the

old wolf, made over in the guise of the "new man" of the 1990s. Pictures which use the demand gaze (for example, openings 1, 2, and 12) depict the Wolf as quite friendly, inviting reader trust and belief. However, he appears much more sinister in those pictures in which he is a represented participant, most notably, for example, in the illustration of his encounter with Red Riding Hood in the forest (opening 4) in which his smile is close to a leer. The contrasting sizes and general appearance of the two characters in this picture also echo Gustave Dore's illustrations of the same scene. However, Red Riding Hood's expression here is one of disdain, in contrast with the look of knowing sexuality on the face of Dore's Red Riding Hood (see Zipes 240–42). Furthermore, "demand" pictures are also of a much lower modality than this picture, and like Dore, Cohen here does not attempt to humanize the Wolf—he is quite clearly a very large wolf and, hence, it is quite understandable why Red Riding Hood might choose to ignore him.

Another wolf who is intensely aware of his traditional character role and function is McNaughton's Mister Wolf in *Oops!*, a comic reworking of the Little Red Riding Hood story in which the female child is replaced with a male piglet. This change in protagonist, in combination with the characterization of the wolf as comically ineffectual, overturns traditional interpretations of the story, transforming it into a comic fantasy. Like the wolf in *The Wolf's Story*, Mister Wolf also uses direct address and the demand gaze. The metafictional framebreaking effect is, however, much more radical here as the story is framed by third-person narration. Thus, Mister Wolf's metaleptic intrusion on the third opening—"Don't look at me like that, I'm the Big Bad Wolf" accompanied by a picture of an open-armed wolf who makes direct eye contact with the viewer—disrupts the hierarchical relations within diegetic levels of narration. Furthermore, he goes on to discuss with his audience his own character function and the necessity of particular story conventions: "It's my job to be nasty. These stories would be pretty boring if I was good, wouldn't they?"²³ And from the following page onwards, the book unfolds two parallel narratives: Preston Pig's journey to his grandmother's house and Mister Wolf's attempts to catch him; and the story about how that story is being told, especially Mister Wolf's struggle to work out which story he is actually in and what its outcome is likely to be.

Explicit metaleptic disruptions can also be signaled by overtly self-reflexive references to storytelling within a narrative. That *Oops!* is likely to be a story about telling stories is playfully intimated at the outset: "It was the same old story. Mister Wolf was hungry. Mister Wolf was very hungry and Mister Wolf had his eye on Preston Pig." The last sentence suggests a Wolf and Pig story (for example the Three Little Pigs), and the picture seems to affirm the latter, although it quickly becomes apparent that if this narrative is "the same old story" it is perhaps not a version that Mister Wolf remembers. Surprisingly few story elements are needed to allude to the story of Little Red Riding Hood. For example, Mister Wolf's list on the

fifth opening—a "red hood, basket of food, granny's house"—is probably enough for most readers to infer which story it is. Furthermore, the question which follows—"That reminds me of a story, but which one?"—invites the audience to actively participate in the storytelling process. However, the list of story components is not enough for Mister Wolf, who inadvertently leaves out a crucial clue given in the text on the preceding page—Preston's dad's comment that he will be over later to chop some wood for Granny. (The woodchopper is, of course, a relatively modern addition to the story, and perhaps he does not know those versions.) Mister Wolf's problem is twofold: he does not know which story he is in and he keeps being positioned on the margins of that story. Visual framing and framebreaking devices emphasise this situation. For example, the three pictures on the second opening each depict him being thrown or driven out of the visual frame. The use of windows and doorways in the latter part of the book also position him on the margins of the story. The point at which he remembers which story it is, after recognizing that Granny is saying his lines, is also the point at which he literally jumps into the story by jumping through the frame of the window.

Similar to *Oops!*, the opening sentences of Child's *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* signal that this book will be about books and reading:

Herb loved storybooks. Although he wasn't a very good reader, it didn't matter because he could tell a lot from the pictures. Herb liked the scary ones best with pictures of dinosaurs gobbling up other dinosaurs, or swooping vampires chasing people who had foolishly decided to go for a midnight stroll without any garlic. (opening 1)

The first sentences suggest that perhaps readers too should also pay attention to the pictures, while the last sentence draws attention to the picture on the page, which depicts a boy reading a book whilst eating his dinner. A simple metafictional move here is to depict Herb reading a version of the book we are reading: the text page is the same, and the illustrations include the same monsters, but not Herb. One implication of Herb's absence is that his imaginative engagement with the book brings the characters to life, out into his level of reality, even as he drops his peas into the book. The book he is reading has a pea sitting at the bottom of the left-hand page, just as the book we are reading has a picture of a pea in the same place. However, while it might be inferred that Herb has dropped the pea, it is not, of course, a real pea but a picture of a pea in a book painted within another book—in other words, it is a picture of a picture of a pea. From the outset, then, this book raises complex philosophical questions by problematising relationships between fiction, the imagination, and the real. This process of blurring fiction and experiential reality is taken a step further when two pages later Herb wakes up inside the story of Goldilocks and the Three Bears having fallen asleep while reading one of his favourite storybooks.

Herb's reaction to discovering that his bed has become large and lumpy is to quote one of the recurrent formulas of the Goldilocks story: "Herb had always found his bed to be just right" (opening 3). And just in case readers don't get the joke the first time, the phrase is repeated by the medium-sized bear on the next opening when she offers Herb porridge which he may find is "too hot or too cold," apologizing for being out of "just right." British and Australian audiences will recognize the doubled intertextual reference to the formulaic phrase of the fairy tale and to contemporary culture in the form of the breakfast cereal, Just Right.

The incorporation of characters or narrators, such as Mister Wolf, the narrator of *The Wolf's Story*, Herb and the various fairy tale characters who appear in Child's books, who reflect on the nature of storytelling and narrative processes, can be a playful and amusing part of a story. This strategy can also perform key thematic functions in that it often highlights relationships between narrative structure and characterization, agency and self-definition. A character who recognizes his/her position and role in a story may also recognize how that position limits and denies him/her agency—in other words, the way in which the formulaic structure of fairy tales may deny characters the capacity for deliberate thoughts or actions which might result in an alternative outcome. However, a character, such as Mister Wolf, who recognizes that there is a story happening around him and thinks he might have a role to play in it, but cannot remember which story it is or what the ending is likely to be, lacks agency. Freedom and agency, it would seem, lie in the capacity to take an active part in the story and thereby change it and create one's own story. However, Mister Wolf's attempts in the forest to insert himself in the story and create an alternative ending by setting up various "cunning wolf tricks" are thwarted, though not because of any greater cunning on Preston's part (opening 8). Unlike Red Riding Hood, Preston does not talk to the wolf; instead, he remains completely unaware of the wolf's presence until the third to last opening. Thus, it would seem that Preston's childlike innocence and self-absorbed "sticking to the path" saves him. Devices characteristic of slapstick comedy and pantomime also frustrate Mister Wolf's attempts to construct an alternative ending. Pantomime conventions are evoked explicitly by the birds on the front pages and the motif of a comic villain following an unaware and clumsy hero is also a convention of pantomime and slapstick comedy in general, as are the wolf's cunning tricks—as is foregrounded by the language and layout of the verbal text in opening 8. The tricks also fail because the formulaic components of the Red Riding Hood story are utilized in ways which limit alternative narrative possibilities—for example, Mister Wolf's decision to take a shortcut through woods is borrowed from Perrault, while Preston's stopping to pick flowers comes from the Grimm Brothers. Finally, the outcome is inevitable because Mister Wolf is simply playing out the role he has been cast in: he is the "Big Bad Wolf"; it is his "job to be nasty"; and within the comic genre his plans are bound to fail.

In the books discussed so far, metafictional devices are used in ways that might prompt readers to think about the ways in which fairy tale conventions may restrict the possibilities for changing traditional stories. The extent to which formulaic components of fairy tales constitute parameters which shape and restrict narrative forms is explicit in Child's two books, *Beware of Storybook Wolves*, another reversion of Little Red Riding Hood, and *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?* Both incorporate metafictional disruptions, which evoke questions about the extent to which a fairy tale can be changed and still be the "same story." In *Beware of Storybook Wolves*, two wolves from Herb's bedtime storybook of Little Red Riding Hood escape from the book and appear in his bedroom. Herb shakes Cinderella's Fairy Godmother out of another fairy tale book to help him, and her actions set off a chain of events, which could have potentially drastic consequences for various other fairy tale characters. She accidentally waves her wand at the little wolf, dressing him in Cinderella's ball gown; he is "so pleased with his new look" that he jumps into the book and goes to the ball himself, leaving Cinderella "having a night in, cleaning the kitchen after all" (opening 11). After turning the large wolf into a caterpillar, the fairy godmother decides to take a holiday, and the next time Herb's mother reads the wolf storybook to him there is "no wolf to be seen—just a tiny caterpillar trying with all his might to terrify a little girl in a red coat" (opening 16). The close of the book thus prompts the question as to whether there can be a story of Little Red Riding Hood in which there is no wolf.

This kind of questioning is even more explicit in Child's later book, *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?*, in which Herb finds himself being pursued by Goldilocks through his fairy tale book and into the story of Cinderella. The story has become a little complicated, because Herb doesn't take good care of his books, and has drawn in the book, cut out characters and objects, and pasted the book back together with key pages upside down. These changes result in plot complications, which foreground the extent to which fairy tale conventions shape and limit narrative progression and story events and outcomes, as well as character behaviour and actions. For example, Prince Charming has failed to arrive at the ball because Herb has cut him out of the book to make a birthday card for his mother. Hence, despite folding out to be four pages wide, the scene inside the palace consists of unconnected components because the catalyst figure, the prince, is missing and Cinderella has had to return to the kitchen (again). Changes also encourage readers to engage actively with the narrative. By simply compelling readers to turn the book around and back as they read each line of dialogue, the upside-down pages make readers very aware of the books artifice and artificiality. The graphic presentation on these pages emphasizes this, especially the use of varying font styles to visually represent the character speech (with a very thin font for Cinderella's thin stepsister for example) as well as genre (with a gothic font being used for the stepmother).

At the end of the story, after Herb has escaped (or woken up from his dream), Herb and Ezzie repair and put the book back together more or less as it used to be before Herb defaced it. However, there is a tension between that book (the book inside the book) and the book we are reading, which playfully flouts conventions of closure. The book inside the book thus shows Cinderella and Prince Charming dancing together, while the verbal text articulates a common formula for concluding a fairy tale: "And they lived happily ever after. The End." The framing book, however, substitutes another ending, which blocks narrative progression in the story of Goldilocks in a manner similar to the close of *Beware of Storybook Wolves*. The last page is the only page in which formal framing is used—that is, it has a white border around the edge of the picture separating the world of the picture from that of the reader implying a sense of distance, detachment, and objectivity. This invocation of formality coincides with a final joke which is also a comment on fairy tale conventions: can the story survive if its key components are changed? If Goldilocks cannot get into the Three Bears' house because Herb has drawn a padlock on the door, can there still be a story? Furthermore, can she still be "Goldilocks" if Ezzie has stuck a "mousy brown" coloured wig on her?

The problematising of the relations between the fictional and the real can also be played out through pictorial strategies that mix the visual modality, or truth value, of images. Insofar as the level of modality corresponds to a level of "realism," modal shifts and contrasts can be used in overtly metafictional texts to reflect metaleptic disruptions between levels of narration and between fictional and fantastic realities. Thus, Mister Wolf's final entry into the story of Preston Pig and his visit to his grandmother is marked by a shift in the modality of the visual discourse. Low to mid modality is used in most of the pictures, with the exception of opening 12, which depicts Mister Wolf in the foreground with Preston Pig in a sack on his back and Granny tied up behind him. The picture takes up the whole page, and a greater degree of contextualization and perspective, compared to other pages, give it a heightened sense of "realism," just as Mister Wolf has finally remembered what the story is and how it (usually) ends. Thus, the picture ironically becomes more "real" at the point that he enters into that (fictional) story. Furthermore, a vector from the wolf's mouth across to the door where Preston's dad is standing cuts through the object with the highest modality, and hence the most salience, in the picture, that is, the axe held by Preston's dad. This is, of course, also metonymic of the key clue which, as I mentioned earlier, Mister Wolf missed in his list of story components (opening 5)—the allusion to the woodchopper. The likelihood that the outcome of the story will conform with traditional versions of the Red Riding Hood story is actually signaled on the first opening through the various objects scattered around—a wooden sword, a soccer ball, a slingshot, a basket, and an axe. The first three are all in the foreground, but the basket and the axe are given more salience through the vector between

the wolf and the pig, which cuts across the basket and the axe, and again by the higher modality of the axe, which is placed almost in the centre of the page.

Modal-mixing and contrasts are more overt in the visual discourse of Child's *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?*, where she uses collage technique and a combination of photographs and drawings to play with relations between the represented "fictional reality" and the fairy tale book. The story-within-a-story structure mixes and blurs different fictional realities and the pictures reflect the latter through the combination of images high and low in modality and the manipulation of picture space. The opening page, for example, combines a very rudimentary cartoon-like (low modality) approach for the figures with (high modality) photographic images for details such as the plate of food, the strawberry milk, and the squashed pea on the left-hand page. The use of collage implies the surface texture (and hence tangible reality) of objects, but the obvious cut-and-paste technique emphasizes the two-dimensionality of the image and mitigates against the illusion of realism. Thus, distinctions between "real" and "represented" are blurred. Other pages, for example opening 5, play with perspective and spatial depth, flouting the (dominant Western) conventions of single-point perspective; thus many of the pictures do not depict a single coherent space, but instead a series of unrelated incidents and unconnected story components. And at the point at which the story is perhaps at its most chaotic (opening 12), the text is scattered across the page as Herb climbs up it, a technique which flouts formal picturebook layout conventions while also drawing attention to the artifice of the text itself. While Herb, the central protagonist of the story, is positioned centrally, at eye level, on the first page, once he is inside the fairy tale book, he is consistently viewed from high angles and placed very low and/or on the very outer limits of the page—strategies which suggest his relative disempowerment within the confines of a fairy tale narrative, perhaps, or simply that he does not have a place within the world of fairy tale.

Metalepsis and modal shifting are also combined in Bruce Whatley's *Wait! No Paint!* and David Wiesner's *The Three Pigs*, two versions of the story of The Three Little Pigs, where these two strategies are used to disrupt the boundaries between the represented world of fairy tale and the "real" worlds of authors, illustrators, and readers. Whatley's text has a conventional fairy tale opening and the illustrations are very low modality cartoon-style. Meta-leptic disruption occurs, however, when the illustrator spills his juice on the page and converses with the pigs. These disruptions are paralleled by modal contrasts in the pictures—the illustrator's glass, paint tubes, and brushes are all represented with a higher modality than the pigs, implying the higher "reality" of the (represented) world of the illustrator. Despite the disruptions within the visual and verbal discourses, the narrative follows the formulaic path of The Three Pigs story with a relentless logic. Thus, when the illustrator runs out of red paint, the pigs are unable to light the fire to keep the wolf out, at which point the pigs declare they "don't want to be in this story

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anymore" (opening 14). Hence, the text on the last page reads: "Once upon a time there were three bears"; and the picture depicts three bears (with very pig-like noses and standing in the same configuration as they appeared on the first page) and a rather wolfish-looking Goldilocks. An implication of the narrative progression and the outcome is that the story cannot be changed; all the illustrator can do is move the characters out of the story into another story—he is, after all, the illustrator, not the author.

Wiesner's version of the same story is more radical in its envisioning of alternative narrative outcomes. Like Whatley's book, *The Three Pigs* has a very conventional textual opening, reinforced by the use of conventional picturebook layout, framing, and modality in the pictures. When the wolf blows the first pig's house down, however, he also blows the pig out of the framed picture space and "right out of the story" (opening 2), where he is eventually joined by the other two pigs, the cat from the "Hey Diddle Diddle" nursery rhyme, and a dragon (who is not dissimilar to the dragons in Wiesner's *The Loathsome Dragon and Freefall*). Once outside of their stories all the characters have higher modality, but are depicted against a low modality white space through which the pages of the book-within-the-book float—one implication might be that the white space is the liminal space between fiction and reality where new stories might be created. Certainly, Wiesner reverses the modal shift occurring in *Oops!*. Whereas the higher modality of the axe and the final page suggests fairy tale has a higher "realism" than the represented "reality" of Preston and Mister Wolf, characters in Wiesner's book have a higher modality (and hence "reality") once they leave the world of books and create their own story. The wolf, however, remains trapped inside the story, where similar to Whatley's book, the narrative progresses with a relentless logic: while the pigs have disappeared, the verbal text still asserts that the wolf "blew the house in . . . and ate the pig up," though the ellipsis suggests some uncertainty and the accompanying picture shows a somewhat puzzled wolf. The pigs, cat, and dragon do return to the original story on the same page they left from, but they do so by standing the pages up the right way and smoothing out the one they have used as a paper plane. The narrative reverts, partly, back to its traditional form on the next page, as the wolf begins to "huff and puff" and the characters are once again low modality. However, the story is disrupted again because they have opened the door and the text is scattered across the page by the dragon's head. The facing page shows the pigs outside the story again putting the text back, and the final page depicts them all inside the house eating soup, with one pig still replacing the last letters of the text. As in *Who's Afraid of the Big Bad Book?*, the characters' manipulation of the text breaches boundaries between the fictional world and the "real" world, while drawing attention to the artifice of the text itself. At the same time, the replacement of the text suggests that the story cannot be changed. There is a crucial ellipsis, however, in the last two openings; the scattered text seems to indicate that the wolf climbs up to the chimney and the pig's

speech "Come inside everyone. Soup's on!" implies the traditional ending to the story. However, in the next frame the wolf is seated across from the house. He also appears in the final picture in a framed image behind the dragon—but the image could be a picture on the wall or the actual wolf seen through a window frame. The gaps in the narrative leave the wolf's fate, and the ending of the story unresolved, opening the way for reader speculation. Certainly the new configuration of characters at the close of the book suggests possibilities for creating new stories.

As I asserted at the outset, retelling traditional narratives poses a particular challenge for contemporary writers and the books examined all illustrate the difficulties of such a task. The broadly metafictional devices in each of the books I have discussed add an extra level of amusement to the stories they tell, but they do so in ways which also encourage audiences to engage imaginatively with the books and participate in the meaning-making process. An important component of early critical literacy is a metacognitive and metalinguistic awareness of language and texts. The books examined in this chapter all have the potential to foster such an early critical literacy insofar as they all position their readers in actively interrogative and participatory positions. Metaleptic and modal disruptions in particular construct spaces within texts for readers to actively engage with stories. Such engagement may potentially expand an audience's knowledge of what stories are like, how they work, and how they might be played with, changed, and retold, and potentially how new stories might be written.

NOTES

1. In brief, metalepsis refers to the disruption of logical and hierarchical relations between different levels of narration (McCallum, 1992, 403) and between the world of "story" and that of "reality."
2. Derived from linguistics, modality refers to the "truth value" or credibility of statements about the world (Kress and Van Leeuwen, 1996, 160) and hence to the extent to which a linguistic or pictorial representation approximates what we think of as "real" within a particular sociocultural context.
3. The narrative reverts to third person after this intrusion. My eldest son, for whom this book was a particular favourite at about the age of three, interjected one day at the fifth opening, turned the pages back to Mister Wolf's intrusion and asked, "Who is telling this story?" Needless to say, it is difficult to surmise exactly what he recognized or understood about narratorial functions but the question is interesting in that it does at least indicate that he perceived the metaleptic disruption and that it had implications for story-telling functions and processes.

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13 "It Doesn't Say How?" Third Graders' Collaborative Sense-Making from Postmodern Picturebooks

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A plague has struck a small town in the Old West. A team of horses staggered back to the town of Riverbend, covered in a mysterious greasy slime. The sheriff rode out in search of their driver, only to find him similarly afflicted. Viewing an image of this man, covered in erratic streaks of color, third grader Oumar wondered, "Um, why did it only get greasy things on him and not the other people? It doesn't say how?" Oumar's first question points to the central indeterminacy of *Bad Day at Riverbend* (Van Allsburg): the source of the Technicolor slime. His second question, in which he seeks confirmation that the story does not explain how the slime appeared, underscores the significant interpretive challenge posed by texts that do not supply ready answers and instead inspire and sustain children's wonderment.

Oumar, one of five students in a third-grade (eight year-olds) literature discussion group, raised a number of questions about the meaning of the verbal text and illustrations as the group tried to collaboratively make sense of the ambiguities of the picturebook. *Bad Day at Riverbend* and other texts like it were chosen for use with this group because of their more writerly (Barthes, *S/Z*) nature, which requires active readership to interpret possible meanings and fill in textual gaps (Iser). The challenge for students is to figure out how to navigate texts that require significant coauthoring—what to do when it "doesn't say how" to read and make sense of the text.

The unconventional narratives presented in postmodern picturebooks have led many teachers and researchers to recommend providing young students with explicit direction in navigating the substantial gaps in these texts (Goldstone, "Traveling"). This may take the form of sharing the books with children in the context of a genre study, which may involve more or less explicit naming and instruction about postmodern textual features (Pantaleo, "The Long, Long Way," "Young Children and Radical Change," "Young Children Interpret;" Serafini). Teachers may actively direct students' attention to these features as well as scaffold their sense-making by weaving together the multiple sign systems to build toward coherence. While Pantaleo's research has revealed that young children can respond to postmodern picturebooks with great sophistication when