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Playing with Father: Anthony Browne's Picture Books and the Masculine

Anthony Browne's picture books are justly celebrated for their playfulness, which manifests itself in several ways: through the play of language and visual images, through the intertextual play by which he draws on a rich repertoire of texts, discourses, narratives, and symbols, and through the narrative and discursive strategies by which he engages readers in playful reading by way of the multiple possibilities of meaning and the shifting reading positions that his texts offer. Nowhere is the playfulness of Browne's work more striking than in his representation of gender, and particularly in his treatment of masculinity: *Willy the Wimp* and *Willy the Champ* play with and subvert social constructions of gender by way of ironic inversions of masculinity; *The Tunnel* overturns gender stereotypes through the fantasy and symbolism of Rose's quest for her lost brother¹ and Browne's reversion of *King Kong* contests the patriarchal significances of the 1933 film. For the purposes of this discussion, I propose to concentrate on the father figures in Browne's books and on the ways in which gender ideologies are encoded in works dealing with family relationships, concentrating on *Zoo* and *The Big Baby* but referring first to two books of the eighties, *Gorilla* and *Piggybook*.

In a number of interviews Browne has referred to his relationship with his own father, and especially to the impact of his father's sudden death when Browne was seventeen.² Such references invite a partly autobiographical link between the gorilla figures in *Gorilla* and Browne's version of *King Kong* with his own father, who, he says, "in some ways was like a gorilla, big and potentially aggressive" but

Anne Commire,
*Something About the
 Author*, pp. 26 and 19

whose "ways remained gentle." Indeed, Browne's *King Kong* is dedicated to "my dad; for me, the original Kong," and the representation of Kong can be seen to comment on the rigidity of gender stereotypes, which view physical strength and tenderness as mutually exclusive. While these references are interesting for what they say about Browne's reflection on his own work, I do not argue in this discussion for an autobiographical reading of his representation of fathers, because texts are produced and received not simply by authors and readers but by and through the cultural contexts within which, knowingly or unknowingly, they form their views about the world.

As I have said, Browne's work demonstrates an intelligent observation and representation of gender politics, and his treatment of father figures inevitably involves the consideration as well of his representations of women and the feminine, since many of his books are concerned with relationships and power structures within families. To frame this discussion, I will draw on three forms of feminist thought and discourse: egalitarian feminism (exemplified by the work of second-wave feminists such as Germaine Greer, Kate Millet, and Betty Friedan), which calls for equality of opportunity for women; feminisms of difference (exemplified by the work of theorists such as Luce Irigaray, Jane Gallop, and Hélène Cixous), which valorize a specifically feminine voice defined for what it is and not by way of comparison with the masculine; and poststructuralist feminisms (exemplified by the work of Rosalind Coward and Chris Weedon), which emphasize the ways in which the meanings, values, and social practices of gender are constructed through language, much of which serves patriarchal interests and power relations.³ These are, of course, overlapping (and contestable) categories, and represent only a few approaches to feminist discourse, but they serve to contextualize the gender ideologies of Browne's books.

Gorilla focusses on the relationship between Hannah and her father, although the combination of the realistic and the symbolic in this work serves to warn the reader against attempting to read the narrative as a literal account of Hannah's family life. Hannah's father is "always too busy" to take her to the zoo, and pages 6-7 exemplify the book's movement between realistic and symbolic modes. The small illustration on p. 6 shows Hannah's father seated at his desk, Hannah behind him, one foot on the rung of his chair. The face of Hannah's father is indistinct, and the viewer is placed directly in front of the scene of father and daughter, offered the choice of reading the father as neglectful or simply as absorbed in his work, Hannah as neglected or as unreasonably demanding. The verbal text offers Hannah's perspective:

But the next day he was always too busy. "Not now. Maybe at the weekend," he would say. But at the weekend he was always too tired. They never did anything together.

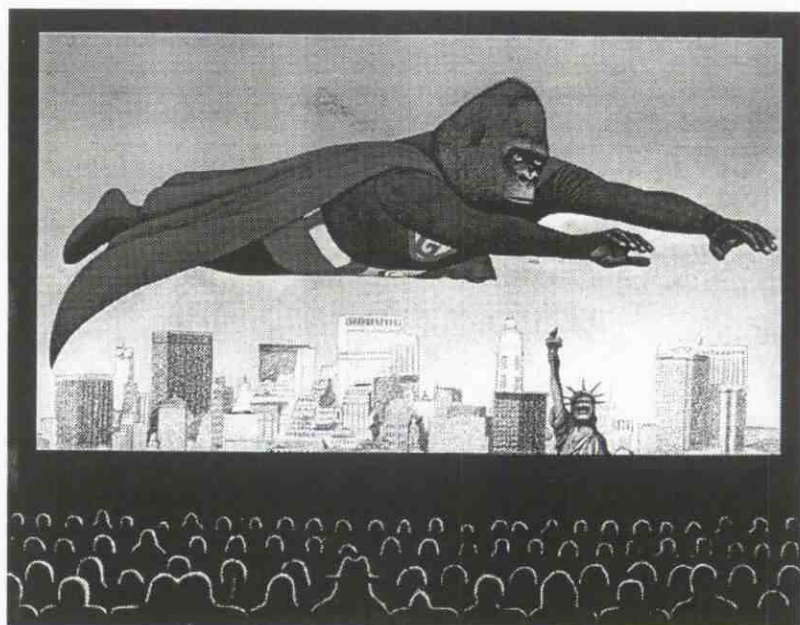
The repetition of "always too busy" and "always too tired" in the first and third sentences focuses on Hannah's perception of her father's neglect, with the final sentence, "They never did anything together," effecting a transition to the emotionally charged images of the opposite page, in which Hannah sits on the floor, watching television and eating a solitary meal. The eyes of the viewer, positioned above Hannah and at a diagonal from her, track the bare floorboards to focus on her figure, small and isolated in the corner of a room that lacks any of the comforting forms of armchairs, cushions, or rugs, and through this strategy Browne simultaneously draws on realistic representations and inscribes them with symbolic significances. In addition, domestic details are overlaid by the imagery of the map of Africa on the left of the picture, a reference that sustains and develops the book's references to gorillas, and is located against a background pattern in which the benign images of butterflies and flowers appearing in the light reflecting from the television merge into the more dangerous and threatening impressions (a witch's head, wolves, bats, birds of prey) on the left of the page. Through the blending of realistic and symbolic



The nine illustrations from Anthony Browne's work are included with the kind permission of the author.

strategies evident in these pages, Browne elides such "realistic" questions as "Where is Hannah's mother?" in order to focus upon the father-daughter relationship at the heart of *Gorilla*.

The meaning of Hannah's dream of her nighttime encounter with the gorilla is explicated retrospectively in the father's greeting and question, "Happy birthday, love . . . Do you want to go to the zoo?" and in the final visual image of the book, where the figures of Hannah and her father mimic those of the gorilla and Hannah in an earlier picture (p. 22). That is, Hannah's dream is seen, by way of the book's consolatory ending, to demonstrate her father's love for her. Browne's approach in articulating the strength of the father's affection through the figure of the gorilla is a daring one, for the intertextual references to Superman narratives (pp. 15 and 21) and to ballroom dancing (p. 25) carry the erotic charges of these associations. The picture of the dance on the lawn serves to demonstrate the skill with which Browne negotiates the boundaries between erotic and paternal love. Here Hannah's feet, in their red boots, are placed on those of the gorilla, her head against his chest, encoding the game through which parents and their small children play at dancing together. The figures of the other gorillas enact the contrast of adult eroticism, tempered by the stylized posture of the dance. Similarly, Hannah's small hand, engulfed by that of the gorilla-father, distinguishes the father-daughter relationship from that of the dancing gorilla couple to the right of the page,



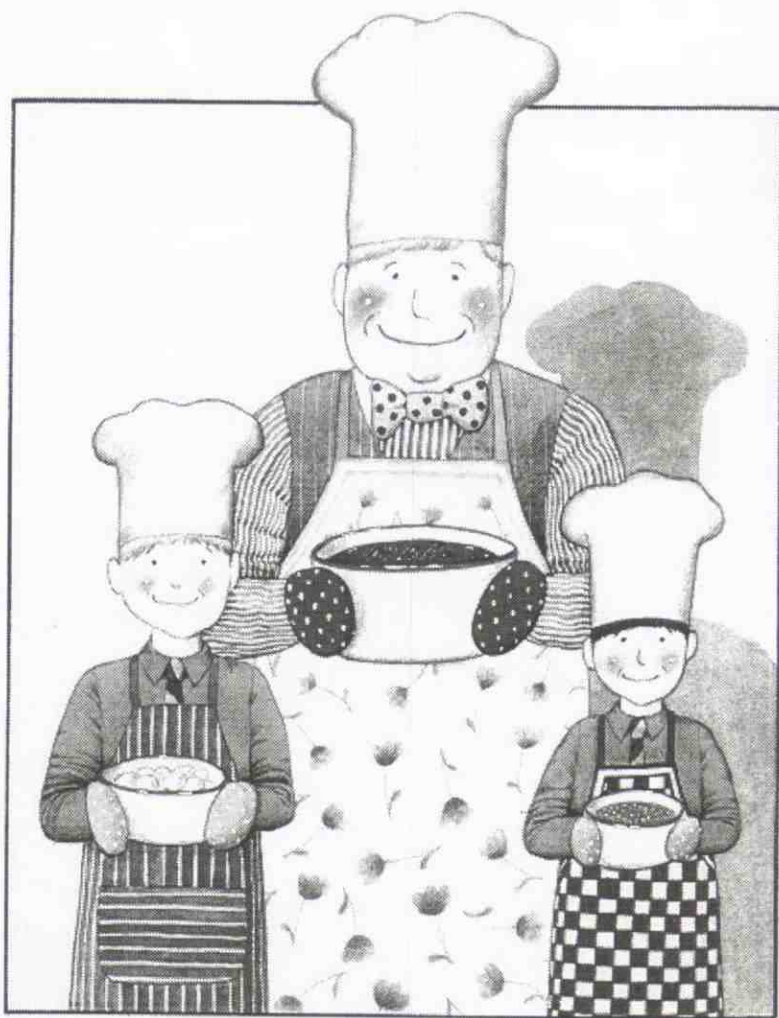


whose hands, joined in a classical ballroom-dancing pose, instantiate an erotic partnership.

While *Gorilla* has generally been read in realistic terms, as the story of a neglectful father finally remembering his paternal obligations, I think that such a reading oversimplifies the complexity of the book's treatment of fatherhood. Browne's strategy of identifying the masculine with the figure of the gorilla enables him to allude to the ways in which masculinity is constructed within popular culture, especially through his use (pp. 20 and 24) of background images, which suggest the stereotypes of Chaplinesque clown, Western hero and criminal, but he subverts these stereotypes by comparing them with the figure of the father/gorilla, whose blend of strength and tenderness affords a view of the masculine that resists polarized associations of strength with men and tenderness with women. Such contestation of stereotypes of masculinity has much in common with Chris Weedon's position, in *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, that "we need not take established meanings, values and power relations [concerning gender] for granted."

Chris Weedon, *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory*, p. 174

Piggybook constitutes a bravura performance, extravagant with detail, loaded with visual and verbal jokes and allusions. The very excess of the illustrations can, however, blind readers to the book's pervasive irony, signaled through the flying pigs ("pigs might fly") that figure in its opening pages. For the resolution of the narrative, in which Mr



Elizabeth Grosz, "Sexual
Difference and the
Problem of
Essentialism," p. 87

Piggott, Simon, and Patrick wash the dishes, make the beds, do the ironing, and help with the cooking while their mother mends the car, can be read unironically as an argument for egalitarian feminism, that "women are as able as men to do what men do." Read ironically, however, the visual and verbal texts of *Piggybook* can be seen to contest the very possibility of equality in regard to social and domestic roles. When, in their descent into piggishness, Mr Piggott, Simon, and Patrick "root around" for scraps to eat, Browne draws on a cinematic reference that undercuts notions of gender equality. On the left-hand side of the double-page spread can be seen the detritus of fast food, dirty clothes, and squalid eating practices; on the right-hand side the reader's eye is drawn to the opening door, whose shaft of light frames the silhouette of the returning Mrs Piggott. John Ford's



avenging and/or redeeming heroes enter buildings and rooms in just this way in westerns such as *The Searchers*, but whereas Ford's heroes are intent on revenge or on the restoration of social order, Mrs Piggott returns to save her family from squalor and horrible food, "framed" by the gendered associations of the feminine with the domestic.

At first reading, the discourse of the last five pages of *Piggybook* may be seen to enact the transformation of the Piggott family into a model of gender equality:

So Mrs Piggott stayed. Mr Piggott washed the dishes. Patrick and Simon made the beds. Mr Piggott did the ironing. And they all helped with the cooking. They actually *enjoyed* it! Mum was happy too. . . . She mended the car.

But the syntactic and lexical simplicity of these one-clause sentences dramatizes the fictionality of such a transformation, especially when read in conjunction with the visual images of these pages. By this point in the book, the reader has experienced the visual overload of Browne's extravagant use of background detail (wallpaper, upholstery, tiles) and of the myriad manifestations of domestic chaos (spilled food, burned toast, unwashed dishes) that have served to plot the degradation of the Piggott males. Following this excess of detail, the very neatness of the images of Patrick, Simon, and Mr Piggott diligently washing dishes, making beds, ironing, and cooking, allied with the smug reductiveness of the verbal text, is enough to underline the impossibility of their sudden conversion and, by extension, the impossibility of gender equality. Read in this way, *Piggybook* may be seen

not as advocating equality so much as contesting the notion that if men and women simply exchange roles, gender equality will inevitably result.

The families in *Piggybook* and *Zoo* are constituted similarly (mother, father, two sons) and the mothers in the two books are represented in similar visual terms; though the class backgrounds encoded are quite different, the fathers in these families have much in common in their assumptions concerning gender and power. The exploration of family relationships and gender in *Zoo* is aligned with Browne's advocacy of animal rights; in particular, the representation of the mother works in conjunction with the images of entrapment and pain evident in the images of the zoo animals⁴ and introduced through the picture of the caged mouse on the book's title page.⁵

Zoo is built on an opposition between two scales of value, encoded in quite different visual styles. In the scene (p. 6) where the family begins to walk around the zoo, a signpost points to elephants on the right, humans on the left, as if using signifiers along the same plane of meaning, directing visitors to two kinds of display. This picture draws on Browne's characteristic visual playfulness; humans are attributed animal features (the head of a pig, antlers, a tail) that serve to evoke questions concerning who is the observer, who are the observed at the zoo, and to introduce the book's contestation of the notion that animals exist to provide spectacle and entertainment for humans. Against the surreal humor of Browne's representation of the human visitors to the zoo, he has placed painterly illustrations showing animals pacing or crouched and situated in relentlessly man-made settings, all concrete, steel, and glass. Thus, the elephant is dwarfed by the dimensions of its cage, framed against the antiseptic blue-gray of the wall, partly hidden by the red railing that separates it from its viewers, objectified through its incorporation into a setting that avoids all reference to the natural and emphasizes the animal's powerlessness, its dependence on humans.

The point of view in the verbal text is that of the older boy in the family:

We hadn't got a map of the zoo so we just wandered round. Me and my brother wanted to see the gorillas and monkeys, but we had to see all these boring animals first. We went into the elephant house which was really smelly. The elephant just stood in a corner stuffing its face.

In children's books, the usual narrative strategy for first-person narrative through the perspective of a child character is to create and sustain the *illusion* of a child's voice; this means, in general, that the discourse of such narrative is far from the actual discourse of children,

just as dialogue in fiction is generally very far from the hesitations, incomplete sentences, and repetitions of actual conversation. In *Zoo*, however, the narrator's discourse is relatively unembellished, having the vocabulary ("boring," "really smelly," "stuffing its face") and syntactic range ("we just wandered round," "just stood in a corner") of a voice limited as to expressiveness and betraying the boy's lack of an empathetic understanding of the plight of the animals.

The explanation for this is to be seen, I believe, in the picture on p. 6, in which the child narrator is seen to manifest the posture and walk of his father, a cue that suggests the insensitivity and crassness of the father is replicated in the figure of the boy. The father in *Zoo* is the most unambiguously objectionable of all Browne's fathers: He is physically grotesque, he attempts to avoid payment by claiming that Harry is younger than he is, he tells bad jokes (and laughs at them), and he embarrasses his children by his King Kong impersonations. The first-person child narrator is a true son of his father: All he can think of is food and fighting, he finds the animals boring and silly (walking up and down as they do), and his choice of a souvenir is the "funny monkey hat" by means of which he objectifies animals through ridicule.

Both verbal and visual text have narrator and narratee; the narratee of verbal text in *Zoo* is a child like the narrator, to whom he is recounting his visit to the zoo and who is assumed to share his preoccupation with junk food and his view of animals as entertainment. But who is



the narratee of the frames representing the animals? The answer is to be found in the sequence in which the family visits the cage of the orangutan. To the father and the two boys, this animal is a failure because it fails to react to the shouting and banging by which they become their own versions of orangutans. But the mother's expression of sympathy and concern link her with the animal crouching in its corner and with the mood of the picture, with its focus on the sterility and coldness of the food-chute, seen across the same diagonal as that of the cowering animal. The splash of blood or paint above the animal's head, associated through color with the animal and with the mother's hair, effects a symbolic link between the woman and the captive animal, and this association offers a reading that aligns the mother with images of entrapment by and alienation from the family. In fact, she appears in only six of the eleven frames depicting the family, and in most of those frames she is presented in spatial terms as apart from the boys and their father, and, in one frame, as caged; worse still, as caged with her children.

In *Zoo*, verbal and visual texts are directed at different narratees, but the implied reader, child or adult, is a reader capable of seeing through the voice of the unreliable narrator and of weighing this voice against the power and intensity of the animal pictures. It is not unusual to have an unreliable child narrator in picture books, but it is unorthodox to have an unlikable one, even if he is partly redeemed through his dream, at the end of *Zoo*, of himself being caged. The father, on the other hand, remains absolutely unreconstructed; when the mother asks what has been the best part of the day, "Dad said the best bit was going home, and asked her what was for dinner." The mother's response to this is, "I don't think the zoo really is for animals. . . . I think it's for people," a nicely ambiguous remark that might relate to the notion of the purpose of the zoo as entertainment rather than conservation, or (a reading more consistent with the imagery of *Zoo*) to the idea that people are metaphorically caged by speciesism.

The fathers in *Piggybook* and *Zoo* are alike in their acceptance of patriarchal values and in the ways in which they are represented as relegating the feminine to the periphery of events and social structures. The mother in *Piggybook* is, for example, "inside the house," her face featureless and hidden for much of the book, her activities of no importance in comparison with the "very important job" and "very important schools" of the males in the family. Similarly, the mother in *Zoo* is marginal to the family's activities, contradicted when she expresses pity for the tigers, her role that of provider of food. Whereas *Piggybook* is built on an ironically framed model of gender equality, *Zoo* offers a version of the feminine that valorizes difference,



constructing such difference through semiotic links between the mother and the zoo animals, especially in the representation of the orangutan. That is, the mother is seen not merely in terms of a set of oppositions to the father but as embodying “feminine” values, which are admirable in themselves.

If the father in *Zoo* is represented as exercising power through his adherence to patriarchal values, John Young’s dad in *The Big Baby* conducts a more subtle form of exploitation, as the beginning of the narrative suggests:

Everyone said that John Young’s dad was young for his age. He did have young clothes, and young hairstyles. He liked very loud pop music, and he had a whole den full of toys. . . . When people said to him, “You do look *young* for your age,” Mr Young grinned boyishly. John’s mum just smiled. “You should look after *yourself* a bit more, Mum,” he said.

In visual terms, Mr Young is surrounded by references to babyhood and to the passage of time. The clock, in the Jimmy Hendrix frame, counts backward, as Mr Young wishes he could, and the guitar is topped by a baby’s bottle. Among the toys in his den are more bottles, pacifiers, and rubber nipples, the latter placed on the end of a

pipe and the top of a bottle of Scotch, alluding in a Freudian reference to his regression to or fixation in an oral state.

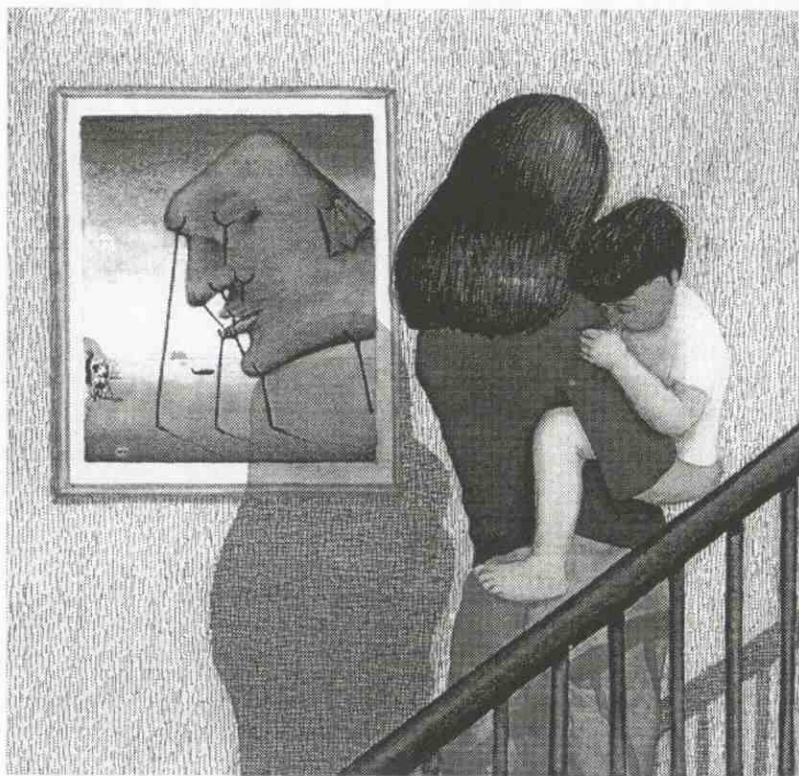
The curtains from Magritte's *The Human Condition 1* appear (though green instead of red) as a framing device in page 8, where Edward Hopper's painting *Early Sunday Morning* appears both as a print and through the window as a street scene. These intertextual references serve to contest Mr Young's grasp of reality as he is shown sitting on his exercise bike, dressed to contend with the traffic, pretending "every morning, . . . well, nearly every morning . . . well . . . sometimes" to maintain his physical fitness by cycling. As well as playing with his toys, Mr Young plays with signifiers, naming things selectively to change meaning and to arrest time; thus, he calls his wife "Mum" as part of his flight to infantilism, and he calls his slight cold "flu" in order to regress to a dependent state, coddled and suffering, under Edvard Munch's *The Sick Child*. But the game is not one-sided; "Mrs Young call[s] him a Big Baby" and endorses his infantilism by taking his temperature and providing him with the paraphernalia of sickness.

Until Mr Young drinks the "Elixia de Yoof," the narrative voice has been that of a narrator largely external to the action; the tone is amused and indulgent, detached from events. But for the rest of the book the narrative is focalized mainly through the perspective of John Young, the genuinely young John:

Well, John's very fond of his dad really, but when his mum called him into their bedroom the next morning, John just burst out laughing. There in bed with his mother was a baby—with his dad's face!

Visually, too, we see the scene of the bed and of the nappy-changing from the point of view of young John, who stands at the foot of the bed and observes while the safety pins are fixed, watches as Mr Young makes a mess with his muesli, and looks at Mr Young in his stroller, dressed in his stretch n' grow blue suit and his runners, achieving his goal of being admired for nothing more than being young.

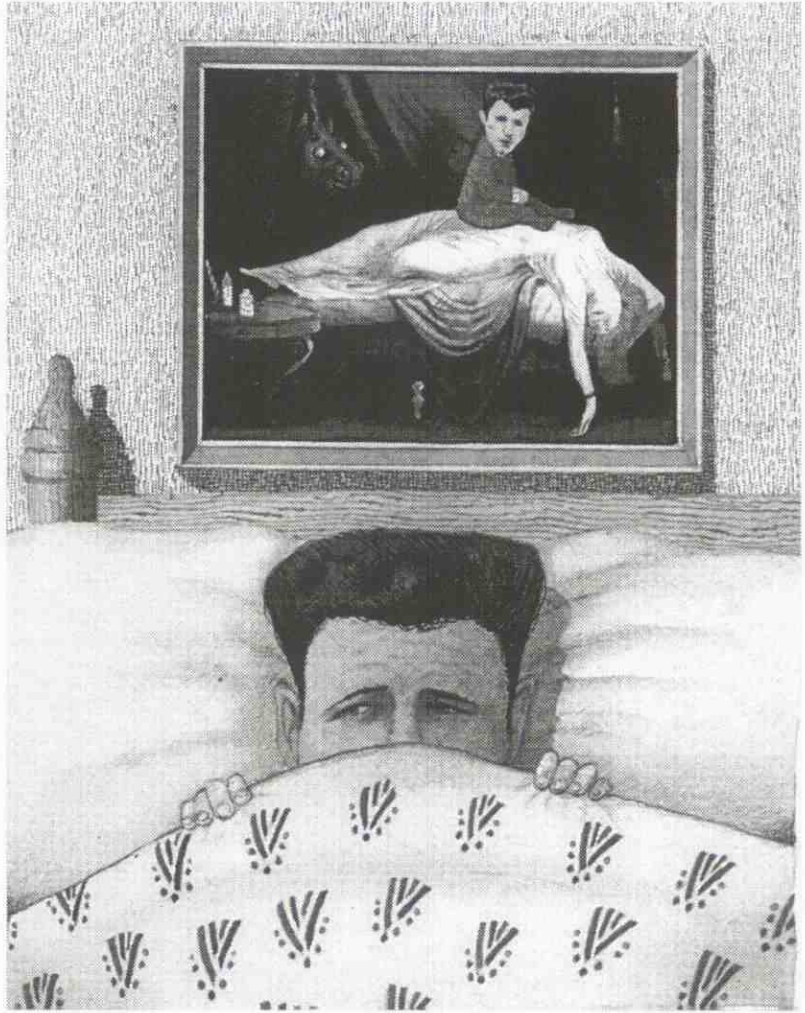
The language of the text in effect positions young John in the adult role, especially in the scene (p. 20) where John tries to play with his father, painstakingly building him a tower of blocks. As a boyish adult, Mr Young has been seen as engrossed in his toys, the gadgets and electronic "toys for boys" that fill his shelves. Here, offered toys for babies, his peevishness might be constructed as childish except that he *is* a child—well, almost. At the same time, the carefully cultivated smoothness of skin and the engaging well-practiced lopsided smile that characterize his adult face are here replaced by the wrinkles and



lines that signify aging if not maturity. The subtext of this sequence compares young John and John Young in relation to parenting behaviors. The figure of young John, demonstrating patience and tolerance for the troublesome baby Mr Young has always been, is contrasted with that of John Young, obsessed with his toys and his looks and unaware of the importance of play for children.

As Mr Young is carried up to bed to sleep "for hours" (p. 22), he passes a simplified version of a Dalí painting, *Sleep*, which represents a sphinx-like sleeper immobilized at the center of a nightmare, his eyes and lips pierced by poles fixing him to a rigid surface. This combination of horror and of sleep comments neatly on Mr Young's predicament, but another set of meanings is hinted at in the shadow cast by John's mother as she carries Mr Young up the stairs. The shadow is that of a pregnant woman, an image that plays with the grotesque possibility that the "Elixir de Yoof" that Mr Young has so unwisely taken may, in a parody of folktale transformation, return him to the womb and even to a time before time.

The final and most startling intertextual reference in *The Big Baby* occurs in the picture on page 23, where Mr Young, restored to what



passes for maturity, peers over the top of the bedclothes. Over the bed hangs Henry Fuseli's 1781 painting, *The Nightmare*. Fuseli's work, like many eighteenth-century artworks, deals with "a moment of terror," a dramatic episode shown in a setting that makes lavish use of neoclassical draperies and play with shadow. But Fuseli's is a heavily gendered version of terror, and the woman's sleeping or fainting body, displayed prone and helpless, her arms languidly outstretched, is eroticized by the way in which it is positioned as the object not only of assault by the incubus that sits astride her but of voyeuristic enjoyment on the part of the male viewer or possessor outside the painting. The devil in early religious paintings is frequently depicted riding on a horse, and Fuseli's sinister horse peering through the curtains bears associations also with masculine sexuality.

A table at the foot of the bed carries a tray, a couple of jars, and a dressing mirror.

When *The Nightmare* was exhibited at the British Royal Academy in 1782, Horace Walpole described it as "shocking." Its power to shock derived from the fact that the figure of the woman was, in visual terms, set in Fuseli's own time, so that the episode was provided with no mythological distancing to render it acceptable to the viewers of its time of production and reception. The following verses from *The Loves of the Plants*, a long didactic poem by Erasmus Darwin, who was a friend of Fuseli's and who wrote a section of his work on *The Nightmare*, demonstrate the painting's capacity to invite a voyeuristic gaze:

Back o'er her pillow sinks her blushing head,
Her snow-white limbs hang helpless from the bed;
While with quick sighs, and suffocative breath,
Her interrupted heart-pulse swims in death.

On her fair bosom sits the Demon-Ape,
Erect, and balances his bloated shape;
Rolls in their marble orbs his Gorgon-eyes
And drinks with leathern ears her tender cries.

Nicholas Powell, *Fuseli: The Nightmare*, pp. 59-60

Browne is following a long line of artists in his treatment of *The Nightmare*, which from the time it was first exhibited attracted parodic interpretations. In place of the incubus he has placed Mr Young in his blue stretch n' grow, but whereas the Fuseli painting has the goblin squatting and alert, Mr Young merely sits, looking thoughtfully at the viewer, as though wondering how he has arrived in this predicament. The horse's head is still there, though now, in this new context, taking on the ludic quality of a fairground horse and looking puzzled rather than sinister. And the objects on the table have been replaced, in keeping with the visual images throughout the book, by talcum powder and a baby's bottle. The mirror remains as a reminder of John Young's narcissistic obsession with his looks.

The Nightmare reproduces a patriarchal ideology in which the female is subject to and governed by the male. What happens when the incubus is replaced by little Mr Young in *The Big Baby*? He is, clearly, an infantilized version of the incubus, but an incubus nonetheless, exploiting the female through the tyranny of dependence. The position of the woman's body is just as languid and inviting of voyeuristic gazing as that of *The Nightmare*, but through his interpolation of Mr Young and the signifiers of babyhood, Browne plays with and mocks patriarchy. There is no room in Browne's treatment of Fuseli for a voyeuristic identification with the incubus.

In *The Big Baby*, mother and son collude in their perception of Mr Young as baby:

There was John's dad, back to normal. "I've had a TERRIBLE dream," he wailed. "Oh, poor baby," said Mrs Young. "But how did *you* know?" asked Mr Young. She looked at John and smiled.

This knowing, shared smile might be compared with the laugh withheld in *Zoo*, when the father tells one of his excruciating jokes:

"What kind of jam do you get stuck in?" asked Dad. "Don't know," said Harry. "A traffic jam!" roared Dad. Everyone laughed except Mum and Harry and me.

Here, too, mother and children distance themselves from the father through their reaction to him, but the mother in *Zoo* is, so to speak, absent; her failure to laugh has more to do with a kind of psychic removal from the family than with the ironic collusion of *The Big Baby*. Mr Young's final trauma occurs when he sees his first gray hair, and the ending of the book, with the mirrored view of his appalled face, offers no resolution to the problem of his infantilism; if anything, it sharpens it through reference to his physical aging. Anthony Browne has provided *The Big Baby* with the subtitle *A Little Joke*. Where the father in *Zoo* is too crass to be funny, this father himself constitutes "a little joke," offering readers opportunities to play with ideas about gender and especially about the masculine.

In his 1988 article "Children's Literature as Women's Writing," Perry Nodelman argues against a view of children's texts and critical discourse in which masculinity and femininity might coexist in an androgynous fashion and points to the dangers, in such a model, of ignoring women's and men's (and girls' and boys') different subjectivities. Instead, Nodelman calls for "a paradoxical insistence of two contrary values at the same time," a turn of phrase that implicitly reinforces the idea that masculinity and femininity are oppositional realities. Browne goes further than this in his construction of gender, for his treatment of the masculine and of fathers in *Gorilla*, *Piggybook*, *Zoo*, and *The Big Baby* can be seen as critical readings both of what John Stephens describes as "long-standing schemata for masculinity and femininity" and also of socializing practices that perpetuate patriarchal dichotomies. In particular, his treatment of power relations within families contests associations of the category "father" with notions of power, status, and control, and that of "mother" with ideas of subservience, inferiority, and passivity. In *Piggybook*, *Zoo*, and *The Big Baby*, Browne has reserved his most trenchant criticism for the patriarchal ideologies that underlie the behavior of Mr Piggott, the father in *Zoo*, and John Young. In *Gorilla*, he has argued for a

Perry Nodelman,
"Children's Literature as
Women's Writing," p.
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John Stephens,
"Gender, Genre and
Children's Literature,"
pp. 18-19

Terry Threadgold,
*Feminine Masculine
 and Representation*, p.
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more subtle and diverse view of the masculine, while the relationships between Hannah and her father and the young John Young and his mother model modes of interaction characterized by playfulness and mutual affection. It is Browne's insistence on the significance of those "relations between men and women which precede relations between fathers and mothers" that affords a context for his representations of relationships within families and between children and their parents, locating fatherhood (and motherhood) within sociocultural practices.

Thus, Browne's treatment of gender exposes the limitations of egalitarian feminism and, in the fashion of poststructuralist feminisms, contests the "naturalness" of gendered oppositions. But *Zoo* and *The Big Baby* also offer views of the feminine that transcend masculine-feminine polarities and valorize female experience, so at least some of Browne's work can be read in the light of feminisms of difference. Such diversity of approach offers child readers subject positions that invite them to play with ideas about gender and about fatherhood, and with the contradictions and complexities inseparable from such ideas.

Notes

1. See John Stephens's discussions of *Willy the Wimp* and *The Tunnel* (1992).
2. See *Something About the Author*, Vol. 61, pp. 19–26; *Children's Literature Review*, Vol. 19, pp. 59–60; see also Douglas Martin, *The Telling Line*, pp. 279–290.
3. For a lucid comparison of egalitarian feminism and feminisms of difference, see Elizabeth Grosz, "Sexual Difference and the Problem of Essentialism"; Chris Weedon's *Feminist Practice and Poststructuralist Theory* outlines principles of poststructuralism and relates them to feminist critical practice.
4. Browne's opposition to vivisection and to the hunting and exploitation of animals has been obvious from his early *Bear* books and is echoed in *Gorilla* and *King Kong*.
5. See Jane Doonan's study (1983) of Browne's *Hansel and Gretel*, in which she examines the significance in this work of images of cages, bars, and vertical patternings, introduced in the title page, where a caged bird links the domestic with the symbolic. In *Zoo*, the image of the caged mouse on the title page performs a similar function.

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