From Sendak to Sesame Street:
The Art of Creating Monstrous Emotion in Children's Picturebooks

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Abstract

This article examines the concepts of monsters and monstrous emotions in multimodal children's literature. Drawing on research from the fields of literary study and child psychology, children's picturebooks will be examined as an art form, deploying multimodal means of conveying abstract emotions to young readers. A focus will also be put on the phenomena of using monsters to, on the one hand, embody emotion and, on the other, discuss a child protagonist's identity. The analysis will thus entail a discussion of non-adult identity, attachment, emotion regulation, and the non-human embodiment of human emotion.

Keywords: picturebooks, anthropomorphism, attachment trauma, monstrous emotion, child psychology

1. Introduction

Monsters, children, psychology – in various formations and contexts, these three subjects have been captivating humanity for centuries. An analysis of the construction of monstrous characters in children's picturebooks ties these three areas together in an attempt to grasp the unique mediating role fictional monsters can play for young audiences in terms of understanding their own and others' psychologies. Birthed from the broad canvas of human imagination, the construction of a monster can be infinitely diverse. What thereby makes monsters ideally suited for child audiences is the fact that they can be re-imagined to best appeal to any given target demographic. Depending on the medium, genre, or audience's age, the monster in focus can be created to be as harmless or as scary, as mean or as friendly, as big or as small as necessary to convey a story or lesson in any desired way. What becomes apparent from comparing historic children's tales to contemporary stories for young ones is that the role of the monster has become more multi-faceted. Gruesome and antagonistic monsters still do exist, but nowadays they share the monstrous realm with much more amicable and harmless kin.

Aside from the fact that monsters can be constructed in bespoke ways to cater to specific audiences on certain topics, these fictional beings can also become relatable characters for children in terms of their alienation from the tame and adult, human world. Friederike Frenzel (2021), for instance, elaborates on this link between child and monster. Albeit disagreeing with Perry Nodelman's "all too clear-cut [parallelization] of the adult-child relation" (p. 313), Frenzel (2021) acknowledges children as Others who rely on adults to narrate and represent their environment for them. Perry Nodelman, a prominent scholar of children's literature, himself asserts that:

> As ideal representations of this list of qualities, children are purer and better than adult humans, and therefore, ironically, less than human – not in fact human at all. Other (1992, p. 34; cited in Frenzel, 2021, p. 313).

This idea of the child as non-human suggests a link to the realm of the monstrous. Monsters themselves are not human and, in literature or film, are often portrayed as frightened, confused, or angered by the human world. It is almost as though monsters become foil characters for children who also must navigate the strange and regulated world of adults.

Over the past centuries, monsters have shifted from outright antagonists to relatable narrators in many a multimodal tale. Contemporary picturebooks exemplify how monsters can be introduced as benevolent companions for child readers, whilst traditional classics tend to feature wild yet not necessarily threatening monsters. The spectrum of monstrous characters, thus, is vast, but no matter whether they behave in human-like ways or not like humans at all, monsters can become ideal vehicles for mapping out complex concepts to young audiences. The emergence of new types of monstrous characters poses the question of what might have brought about this literary trend. Philosophy scholar Stephen Asma (2016) believes that the monster story's increase in popularity stems from the fact that monsters can be used to symbolize vulnerability in a unique way – in part by mirroring human crisis responses (see also Kungl, 2017). This article will expound on such existing theories to further discuss the art of multimodally constructing monstrous characters for the purposes of comprehensibly addressing and discussing human emotion in children's picturebooks.

2. Understanding Human Emotion Through Non-Human Bodies

When attempting to grasp the construction of human emotion in a non-human vessel, it is most useful to examine the topic at hand through a particular lens. For example, human social behavior and narratives about monsters have been explored by scholars such as

Hannah Jackson (2018), who examines Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818; 1996) through the lens of attachment theory. Jackson concisely explains that "[a]ccording to attachment theory, the kind of attachment children have with their parents determines the nature of the child's later relationships" (2018, p.49). When looking at literature through an understanding of human attachment and the psychological impact of insecure bonds, character behaviors can be interpreted on a more profound level. Rather than dismissing Frankenstein's monster as horrifically evil by nature, Jackson's (2018) analysis of the monster's experience of neglect by its creator suggests that its wrath stems from what can be compared to an unhealthy relationship between a child and its primary caregiver. Though Shelley's tale may not be as suitable for young audiences as picture books like David McKee's *Not Now Bernard* (1980)*, or stories from the more recent *Sesame Street* franchise,[1] it very clearly exemplifies how non-human bodies can be instrumentalized to convey human emotions of pain or disappointment from an external perspective. But what might be the advantages of having the non-human, rather than an actual human character, embody human emotion? The following analysis aims to answer precisely this question.

Insights from research on child psychology indicate that young minds are capable of making abstract connections between behavior and consequence, especially when challenged to elaborate on their thoughts more concretely. Stefano Morena (2014) provides a glimpse into the psyches of children and "their monsters" (p. 118) from the perspective of a practicing psychotherapist. With his young clients, Morena (2014) at times uses the concept of specification, which allows the child to construct solid links between thoughts and ideas:

> To hold the thread in the narrative of a monster story is like laying the foundation for a house for the child's fears so they have a structure and will not leave him or her drifting in a terrible sea of anxiety (p. 119).

Morena (2014) recounts a child client once telling him that "no one is born evil but a person can become evil" (p. 120). The same child had drawn monstrous beings by hand and explained that each one had previously been a human or an animal before being punitively transformed (p. 120). Although one child's perspective on monsters and transformation is not representative of all children, it is certainly fascinating to see how young ones are very able to discern between nature and nurture, when it comes to judging desirable versus unpleasant behavior. The fact that a child is able to fabricate an abstract narrative for the sake of explaining how a monster had come to be suggests that children tend to search for answers to the unanswerable by accessing the fictitious realm. The non-human, in a way, serves to fill

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[1] Such as the Elmo picturebook by Newman and Kwiat (2021) discussed below.

the gaps of what appears inexplicable to a young mind.

How, though, might the non-human convincingly bridge these gaps in a child's perception of reality? When a fictional being is seen as a credible instrument for explaining how the world works, the surrounding circumstances must, arguably, be all the more relatable and tangible for the child. If more elements of a story were to become as absurd as the existence of the monster itself, the hypothetical universe would collapse and no longer fulfil its purpose of holding up a mirror to reality. Barbara Foley (2005) explains that fiction entails "a contract, wherein writer and reader share an agreement about the conditions under which texts can be [composed] and comprehended" (p. 250). Precisely such a contract must be implicitly formed between a picturebook and a young reader for the latter to accept a monster as a reliable mediator.

Research by Mary-Louise Maynes (2020) might explain why picturebooks which mirror the human experience through the non-human successfully avoid being dismissed as unrelatable fabrications by child audiences. In her analysis of bedtime stories featuring monsters, Maynes (2020) argues that picturebooks tend to reflect certain coping mechanisms for fear, deployed by the developing psyches of children. To map out the most commonly observed coping mechanisms, Maynes (2020) points to Sayfan and Lagattuta (2009), who, in a study, found that children aged four to seven engaged in firstly, behavioral strategies, secondly, reality affirmation, and thirdly, positive pretence when trying to manage their fears. Some popular behavioral strategies include avoidance or distraction, whereby the child aims to no longer focus on their fear, whilst others entail self-soothing activities, such as cuddling a soft object or oral pacification (Maynes, 2020, pp. 3-4). Reality affirmation, on the other hand, entails mentally "distancing oneself from an imaginary situation to recognise that something is not real" (p. 4). Positive pretence, unlike reality affirmation, does not dismiss a fear outright. Instead, a threat is minimized after being acknowledged and accepted for what it is:

> Positive pretence is the strategy for coping with monsters most frequently mirrored in monster bedtime books for young children. Typically, either the monster changes in physical form or the reader's understanding of the monster changes. Sometimes the change comes about through revealing that the child protagonist has misunderstood or misinterpreted events or phenomena (Maynes, 2020, p. 4).

Revisiting the idea of implicit contracts between a text and its reader, the mirroring of

positive pretence in children's picturebooks may very well support such a contract.[2] If, by the end of a story, an absurd plot is revealed to have been a misunderstanding, daydream, or nightmare, the picturebook itself is preserved as a reliable tale, rather than a far-fetched fantasy. Positive pretence thereby provides closure and serves as a tool to close any logical loopholes before the reader has the chance to question them, and prevents any emotional insights won by the reader throughout the course of the reading experience from being nullified. The child reader is given both a narrative experience and a logical explanation for the illogical. Maurice Sendak's *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963) is a prime example for this, as protagonist Max's adventure to an island inhabited by monsters is, by the end of the picturebook, revealed to have been a mere dream. The book closes precisely where it first began – in the safety and comfort of Max's domestic family home. The contract between book and reader thus remains intact.

Aside from implicit contracts regarding the relatability and validity of fictional narratives, another unspoken appreciation concerns the presupposition that monsters will differ from humans in behavior and thus not be burdened with the expectations of good manners or learned politeness. This way, a fictional monster sets a sort of juxtaposition to human behavior, especially in a picturebook where it interacts with a human. If a monster behaves in an unpredictable, uncontrollable, irrational, destructive way, its actions are more likely to be forgiven than a human misbehaving similarly. *Where the Wild Things Are*, for instance, highlights the boy protagonist's humanity when he consciously chooses to leave the monster island and return back home, to reality. Although he initially strived to be a wild thing himself, Max eventually accepts and appreciates his human identity. The monsters beg Max to stay on their island, but he stands firm and leaves. Even more than the monsters' untamed nature, it is their immaturity that is brought to the forefront through the human boy's comparatively mature decision to exit the fantasy. *Where the Wild Things Are* thus implicitly teaches young readers that it is not always desirable to have access to unlimited freedom and pleasure. The monsters' lack of discipline and structure is to be rejected and Max's mature realization is to be admired.

Although *Where the Wild Things Are* ends on a positive note for the protagonist, the same cannot be said for Bernard in *Not Now Bernard.* What both picturebooks share, nevertheless, is their construction of monsters to conceptualize repressed emotion regarding primary caregivers. Monsters in picturebooks about adult-child relationships can become particularly insightful when examined through a Jungian understanding of identity. Hamilton

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[2] Foley (2005), "The Documentary Novel," p. 250.

(2020) discusses the Jungian archetypes of the human psyche, whose integration into a "healthy whole" (p. 6) should, as proposed by Jung (1991), be sought out. In order to come to terms with their own incompleteness, Jung argues that humans perform a persona to satisfy societal expectations. The diametrical opposite to this faux-ideal persona is what Jung coined to be one's shadow. As aptly explained by Hamilton (2020): "We disown socially unacceptable feelings such as anger, aggressive [tendencies], fear, shame and our sense of our inadequacies into the [shadow side] of our psyche" (p. 6).

One such disavowal and repression of unacceptable emotions can be observed in picturebooks such as *Not Now Bernard* and *Where the Wild Things Are*. Both picturebooks feature protagonists who experience rejection from one or more caregivers. Whilst Max in *Where the Wild Things Are* is punished for misbehaving by his mother, Bernard in *Not Now Bernard* is neglected by emotionally unavailable parents. Monstrous characters are introduced in both books, soon after the protagonists experience parental rejection. Max dreams himself off to a fantastical island, where he becomes king of wild things, i.e. monsters, and Bernard is eaten by a monster, which then experiences the same domestic neglect the boy had suffered. In both instances, the boys' emotions are dealt with multimodally by introducing a monstrous character to illustrate the consequences of repressed anger, pain, and unmet needs. Whilst Max, toward the ending of the book, consciously identifies his shadow when he sees the reprehensible behavior displayed by the monsters, Bernard does not succeed in overcoming his shadow. Instead, he is devoured by the monster and, metaphorically, succumbs to his shadow by fully becoming one with the monstrous.

Over time, the role of monsters in literature for children has not necessarily changed as much as it has expanded. In addition to the more traditional cautionary tales, self-help books for children are now part of the non-human, literary spectrum. Monsters from picturebook classics, such as *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), differ in various regards from those featured in more contemporary texts like *Sesame Street: Breathe, Think, Do with Elmo: Problem Solving for Little Monsters* (2021) by Newman and Kwiat. The former implicitly touches on the protagonist's innermost feelings under the guise of constructing a fantastical tale, whilst the latter openly addresses conflicting emotions and how to deal with them. Although adult readers may be equally aware of the theme of mental health and human emotion in both books, a young reader might not be as conscious of *Where the Wild Things Are* as arguably being a story about repressed emotion.

Before delving into some of the core differences between texts like the

aforementioned picturebooks, it is important to note that *Not Now Bernard* (1980), *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963), and *Sesame Street: Breathe, Think, Do* (2021) do not represent their respective publication eras, in terms of plot or style. As previously stated, the introduction of more amicable monsters in children's literature has been an expansion rather than a shift from foe to friend. These texts do, however, clearly illustrate two varying approaches in addressing the topic of human emotion in different ways, which can indeed be telling of a societal shift in attitudes toward mental and emotional health.

Whilst texts like *Where the Wild Things Are* or *Not Now Bernard* do not explicitly address the protagonists' inner turmoil, books like *Sesame Street: Breathe, Think, Do* outwardly address the monster characters' negative feelings, such as jealousy. In *Where the Wild Things Are*, the monsters become foil characters for the human protagonist through which he learns to appreciate his humanity and the expectations that come with it. *Not Now Bernard* merely very vaguely suggests a possible build-up of negative emotion in the protagonist Bernard and only depicts unruly behavior explicitly via the monster, after it has eaten and consequently traded places with Bernard. Human and monstrous identities are blurred, as the monster arguably represents Bernard's transformation into a more misbehaved version of himself after having experienced excessive parental neglect. *Sesame Street: Breathe, Think, Do,* on the other hand, exclusively features relatable monsters as though they were equal to humans in their emotions and experiences. As each monster has a name and personality of its own, it is humanized to a large degree. Even the reader themself is invited to identify as a little monster, as the title suggests.

It is evident that some texts appear to discuss human emotion by juxtaposing the human to the non-human, or by implying that emotional pain has led to a descent into the non-human, whilst others construct relatable narratives about the human experience through non-human mediators. What Carla Kungl (2017) discusses in the context of language-learning books for children also reigns true for texts such as the ones under consideration: Viewing monstrous narratives through a structuralist lens can be helpful in understanding why monsters represent ideal companions for young readers. Structuralism aims to reveal commonalities across various cultures and therefore becomes a relevant framework for the examination of general human behaviors. Because monsters as such belong to no specific culture and thus come with no presuppositions or bias, they are well suited for guiding children toward an understanding of a concept as abstract as language (Kungl, 2017, p. 25). As emotions are similarly intangible and even more innate to human beings, fictional monsters may serve the same purpose here as well. By mediating the worlds

between young and old or emotional and rational, a monster functions as an impartial outsider to uncover inherent structures throughout humankind.

What further distinguishes the monsters in tales like *Where the Wild Things Are* or *Not Now Bernard* from those set on Sesame Street is the lack of a concrete identity in the former two. Whilst the monsters from *Sesame Street: Breathe, Think, Do* have their own, individual personalities and names, the monsters in the two unconventional classics are nameless. The only glimpses of personality in *Not Now Bernard'*s monster are its facial expressions, which appear almost identical to the protagonist's – which again suggests that the monster is actually Bernard after having suffered too much emotional neglect to humanly bear. What may be the advantages of introducing nameless, language-less monsters as opposed to constructing concrete, humanized identities? Sayfan and Lagattuta (2006) assert that children are indeed capable of distinguishing between "real versus imaginary realms and [that they] view imaginary creature situations as more equivocal and open to personal interpretation than real creatures" (p. 1760).[3] The more abstract and imaginary a fictional monster therefore seems, the easier it will be for a young reader to interpret its actions in a way that makes sense to the child. Studies on positive pretence, as discussed prior, show that young children commonly cope with fears by constructing minimizing narratives or filling gaps with their own interpretations (Maynes, 2020, p. 4). The monster in Bernard's garden becomes more of a non-human embodiment of human emotion rather than a wholly new character. The lack of information about the monster thus creates space for positive pretence. In a way, the curious antagonist can be regarded as the anthropomorphization of the protagonist's complex, repressed emotions.

3.   Visualizing emotion: Anthropomorphism as a multimodal strategy

In a discussion on the ethics of anthropomorphism in picturebooks, Fraustino (2014) poses the following question: "Is it right for us to assign human attributes to things other than us (and especially to animals) for our own ideological, cultural, didactic, and entertainment purposes?" (p. 146). Regarding monsters in the context of picturebooks, I believe the question can be answered with a yes. Whilst the anthropomorphization of animals can lead to harmful misinterpretations of their behaviors – both for the human and for the animal –, monsters inhabit a realm of the non-human with its own unique advantage, namely that it is entirely fictional. Because monsters do not represent concrete beings or individuals

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[3] See also Harris, Paul, et al. (2006), "Germs and Angels," pp. 76-96.

in a child's real life, they can take on the role of embodying more abstract concepts or processes. Although the anthropomorphization of monstrous creatures comes with useful creative liberties, that is not to say that there are no critical choices to be made to avoid potentially harmful ideas or unintentional implications. Particularly when engaging in guided readings with children who might have experienced early trauma, disclaiming conversations about the fictionality of monsters should be considered. Nevertheless, monstrous protagonists, or even antagonists, can serve useful purposes in literature for young readers by becoming mediators between different realms, such as those between children and adults, humans and animals, actions and emotions, or the physical and the mental.

Although interactions between child protagonists and monsters are common in picturebooks, interactions between two or more monsters can be similarly helpful to convey ideas about emotions and interpersonal relationships to young readers. Though contemporary stories like the picturebooks about the inhabitants of Sesame Street more often than not feature monster-to-monster interactions, traditional tales too have used monster-to-monster relations to hold up a mirror to their human readers. Gerald Raymond Gordon (2017), for instance, discusses monsters in the context of a classic illustrated story by Hirosuke Hamada about two Onis: *Naita Aka Oni* (1978). In Japanese culture, Onis are mythical beings who live in their non-human form as punishment for having been trouble-makers in their previous, human lives. Gordon (2017) interprets *Naita Aka Oni* as a story about "differences between individuals and groups" (p. 98) as the tale explores the Onis striving to be accepted by the humans who fear and avoid them.

Viewing Onis as anthropomorphized non-human beings becomes highly complex, considering that they firstly, represent a reincarnation of human beings, and secondly, live in the same world as humans. By confronting anthropomorphized, human-like-yet-non-human beings with the human realm, the latter can be understood from an outside perspective. For instance, Gordon's (2017) discussion of the story of two Onis contributes to a deeper understanding of how far the construction of the non-human can function to teach young readers empathy: "Through the special omniscience granted as the story's reader, the child gets to see the familiar human culture from a more objective perspective and also take an empathizing look into the monsters' world" (pp. 98-99). Gordon (2017) further asserts that child readers learn to perceive the monsters as deserving of respect, as the children themselves may relate to issues of alienation, much like the Onis in the tale. Similar to the monsters from contemporary picturebooks like *Sesame Street: Breathe, Think, Do,* the Onis from Japanese mythology experience emotional turmoil and hardship, which is relatable for

human readers yet experienced through the lens of an Other who feels alienated by human society. Children who may struggle to navigate adult expectations and social rules will not only be able to empathize with the Onis, but may also feel validated in their own gripes with the world of human adults.

4. Monsters and Trauma

Just as a picturebook can construct monstrous characters to help children comprehend abstract ideas in more concrete ways, young minds may draw on encounters with monsters from various media to process their own experiences. Jenny Hamilton (2020) explains that a monster can, for instance, become a "symbolic representation of the traumatic experience, informed by the interplay of the cultural and personal meanings the individual attaches to monster imagery" (p. 7). Hamilton also comments on the dangers of re-traumatizing individuals through encountering monsters in films, for instance.[4] Because picturebook monsters which are constructed to appear harmless and benevolent to most viewers may inadvertently trigger painful memories or stress responses in young readers, providing context before a guided reading may be a useful way to ease a child into the fictional narrative, rather than confronting the child with monstrous imagery without preparation.

Perhaps it is the non-human quality of monstrous characters which lets readers think about trauma in a compartmentalized way, as the mediator is entirely fictional. To further explore this possibility, Hamilton (2020) draws on research which expands on Kristeva's widely established concept of the abject as "the 'place where meaning [collapses],' the place where 'I' am not" (Kristeva, 1982, p. 9; cited in Hamilton, 2020, p. 3). Hamilton (2020) moreover applies this idea of a twilight zone between human and non-human to "an experiential processing account of trauma" (p. 3) and finds parallels between firstly, the self-structure and Kristeva's (1982) subject, and secondly, the biological, physical, human experience and Kristeva's abject. Trauma, thus, can likewise be seen as a sort of abject:

> In post-traumatic stress, monster imagery sits at the border between our ideas about self and world and our new experience of the shattering of these assumptions (Hamilton, 2020, p. 3).

To further discuss trauma in the context of monsters and picturebooks, it must be noted that traumata vastly differ, depending on a myriad of factors. For instance, a young infant who receives infrequent attention may, through an unreliable or inconsistent caregiver, suffer from

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[4] See also Wooder, Bernie (2008), *Movie Therapy*.

an attachment trauma, which manifests in insecure interpersonal behavior in later life. An individual who has suffered physical abuse, on the other hand, may suffer from both psychological and physical trauma, whereby the latter may be healed but the former might subconsciously affect future relationships in ways which are detrimental to themselves, others, or both. Depending on the traumatic experience suffered, trauma will manifest in different forms for every individual.

Oftentimes, related to the topic of trauma are notions of nightmares, fever dreams, or physical unwellness. Blurred lines between the human and the non-human become particularly frightening when human children themselves shape-shift or become trapped in an alternate reality. In a discussion of children's classics, Frenzel (2021) points out that Alice, the protagonist from Lewis Carroll's *Alice in Wonderland* (1865), is openly referred to in the original tale as a "fabulous monster" (Carroll, 1865; 1970, p. 288-289; cited in Frenzel, 2021, p. 316). Because of Alice's transformations after consuming magical treats and potions, she herself becomes non-human and a curiosity even to the curious creatures of Wonderland. The protagonist's shape-shifting after her consumption of dubious liquids and strange substances suggests her feeling unwell and out of control, as Alice despairs at not being able to control her transformations. The horrific concept of physical loss of control has been studied as a metaphor for various experiences, ranging from puberty to eating disorders (Westcott, 2020, pp. 11-24). Because Alice retains her human form to a large extent, she remains relatable in her tragic circumstance of experiencing abject horror. Going back to Hamilton's (2020) warning that certain fiction may re-traumatize young audiences, the multimodal reading experience about a young protagonist who no longer feels in control of their body may trigger severe unease in readers who have struggled with body image issues, physical abuse, or the natural yet potentially perturbing course of puberty. *Alice in Wonderland* is a prime example for firstly, literature which challenges the borders between the human and the non-human and secondly, a canonical classic which has been re-imagined countless times over decades and thereby also has inspired more child-friendly and sensitive versions of the potentially disturbing subplots.

5. Conclusion

To conclude, monstrous characters can be constructed to fulfil various purposes. Whether they are narrators, protagonists, antagonists, or foil characters – monsters can help

young readers make sense of complex, human experiences. From powerful emotions to abstract thoughts and ideas, the non-human can demonstrate and embody what otherwise cannot easily be imagined by a developing mind. The multimodal monstrous form can aid young readers in comprehending the perception and reception of emotions, such as repressed anger or jealousy, as well as the existence of intangible concepts, such as societal alienation.

The bountiful research on canonical novels, such as *Frankenstein*, has popularized the psychological lens for examining literature and inspired the analysis of contemporary children's picturebooks through similar lenses of child behavior and human psychology.[5] As mediators between dichotomous worlds – such as the adult versus the child realm or the emotional versus the rational sphere –, non-human characters are able to embody complex emotion through multimodal strategies, such as anthropomorphization. Whether human characters interact with monstrous foil characters, or two or more monsters engage with one another in a text, the display of emotions and overcoming of interpersonal obstacles provides valuable social demonstration for young readers. Involvement of the non-human invites imaginative co-creation on the reader's part and thus helps them comprehend complicated situations from a novel perspective. Scholars such as Perry Nodelman (1992) contend that children and the non-human share core commonalities, as they are both unlike adult humans (p. 34). Perhaps this connection between child and monster is what makes the monstrous protagonist a relatable and personable character to non-adult audiences.

Through strategies of co-reading fictional narratives, children can be encouraged by their guardians to think about the world in more nuanced ways. Specification, for instance, challenges young individuals to question emotions and behaviors with both an open mind and concrete thoughts (Morena, 2014, pp. 119-120). Further evidence for children learning about the world and coping with their own fears through creative thought and imagination comes from studies on children's fear management. One of the most popular coping mechanisms for managing fear, namely positive pretense, is used by young minds to make sense and rationalize frightful narratives (Maynes 2020, p. 4).

Although the examination of classics like *Not Now Bernard* and contemporary texts like *Sesame Street: Breathe, Think, Do* does not imply that the representation of literary monsters has inherently changed, it does show that the spectrum of monsters in children's fiction has grown in diversity. In addition to gruesome antagonists, monsters are gaining popularity as friendly companions for young readers.

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[5] For example, Jackson, Hannah (2018), "Creating a Monster."

Monsters show us something of what it means to be human, playing a complex role in the process of survival and adaptation, in the struggle to come to terms with existential threats and overwhelming events (Hamilton, 20202, p. 7).

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