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Declaration of Authenticity

I hereby confirm that this diploma thesis was written by myself. Quotations from secondary sources, as well as any ideas borrowed or paraphrased passages are clearly marked in the text and acknowledged in the bibliography.

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1. Introduction

The animals have been very good to us, after all, lending themselves for our entertainment and edification with never a murmur (Blount 19).

Children's literature is full of talking and dressed animals, and one could even go as far as to say that the appearance of anthropomorphised animals is almost expected in children's stories. Ranging from little spiders, to pigs, mice, horses, wolves or monkeys and tigers, animals of every kind populate children's literature and especially picture books. But if one looks closely enough, one might realise that not all animals are represented in the same way and while some are dressed in beautiful human clothes and talk and sing, others behave completely like their natural selves without any human attributes being portrayed on them. However, no matter which kind of animal story, children nearly always love stories about the furry creatures because children are not only fascinated by their four-legged friends but also because they relate to animals. One animal that seems to be portrayed particularly often is the rabbit. When looking at a library shelf for children's literature one might easily stumble upon books such as Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902), *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny* (1904), Margaret Wise Brown's *Goodnight Moon* (1947) or Richard Adams' *Watership Down* (1972), but even in stories where rabbits are not the main characters one can still find them hopping around, such as for instance the White Rabbit in Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865).

So why are anthropomorphised animals so prevalent in children's books and why are they so popular? The first chapter of this thesis will consider these questions to detect whether an explanation for it can be found. Additionally, the first chapter will discuss different varieties of animal stories. Even though there are various ways of dividing stories by means of their animal characters' behaviour, stories will be classified according to Sutherland and Arbuthnot's categorisation. Firstly, completely anthropomorphic animal stories will be discussed on the basis of Kenneth Grahame's classic *The Wind in the Willow's* (1908), as well as Else Holmelund Minarik's *Little Bear* series (1957). Secondly,

partially anthropomorphic stories such as Beatrix Potter's *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck* (1908) and *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle* (1905), as well as Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* (1877) and Elwyn Brooks White's *Charlotte's Web* (1952). Lastly, Ernest Thompson Seton's short story "Lobo, the King of Currumpaw" (1898) and Marguerite Henry's *Misty of Chincoteague* (1947) will be considered as representatives of the realistic animal story. The third chapter of this thesis is concerned with the role of the rabbit in children's literature. The various representations of rabbits in children's literature will be examined to discover why rabbits are such prominent animals in children's stories and to determine that each rabbit is portrayed in a distinct and individual way. Since the books to be analysed are both picture books, the next chapter sets out to examine the importance of animals, as well as the importance of illustrations in picture books.

The main objective of this thesis is to demonstrate the vast range of rabbits as characters in picture books. Moreover, this thesis aims to broaden the image of rabbits in literature instead of just limiting it to their portrayal as endearing and fluffy as they appear in Beatrix Potter's novels, by examining Potter's *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (1902) and John Marsden and Shaun Tan's *The Rabbits* (1998). On the one side of the spectrum the reader will find charming and lovable little rabbits, living in a pastoral world and illustrated in pastel water-colours. The rabbits that await the reader on the other side of the spectrum could not be any more different. These rabbits are a far cry from the adorable and sweet rabbit one is used to. Stiff, two-dimensional and hostile-looking creatures with weapons and military uniforms populate *The Rabbits* and perfectly illustrate the darker, more political and perhaps less expected side of the spectrum.

Beatrix Potter's famous and timeless book *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and John Marsden and Shaun Tan's haunting story *The Rabbits* will be discussed from various points of view. Background information for both picture books will be examined to detect how Potter's own life influenced her work and how the process of colonisation and the invasion of land, as well as the rabbit problem in Australia, have shaped Marsden and Tan's work. While both works have serious underlying messages in common, the style of illustrating and writing of the artists differ greatly. Potter on the one hand decided to portray her rabbits

as adorable and fluffy creatures in an idyllic setting while Tan on the other hand created dangerous and selfish rabbits that evoke fear and antipathy.

In comparison to *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, which was deliberately written and published for children, Marsden and Tan's *The Rabbits* is a rather controversial book due to its confronting themes. Since it is a picture book, readers automatically assume that it is a children's book even though it has never been classified as such by its artists. On the contrary, the topic and graphics of the book are clearly targeted at a more mature audience and therefore, it is not a book one would read as a bedtime story to one's young children. However, this thesis includes *The Rabbits*, even if it might not be considered a children's book, as it is an ideal counterpart of Potter's charming tale and perfectly represents the darker side of rabbit portrayal in picture books.

2. Anthropomorphism in children's literature

In consequence of a well-known though inexplicable instinctive tendency, man attributes purposes, will and causality similar to his own to all that acts and reacts around him. (Ribot qtd. in Piaget 234)

Animals have always been a prominent and beloved subject matter in stories and literature, ranging from nursery rhymes to fairy tales and tales about talking animals that behave like humans. According to Flynn (418), there is a “long cross-cultural tradition of anthropomorphic animal stories” that dates back to the Greek storyteller Aesop (c. 550 BC) as well as to the *Panchatantra* (c. 300 AD), a collection of short stories from India. This first sub-chapter will define the term ‘anthropomorphism’ and will further investigate why anthropomorphised animals are so abundant in children's literature. The second sub-chapter will then offer a categorisation of anthropomorphised animal stores.

2.1. Defining anthropomorphism

The ascription of human characteristics to animals is called ‘anthropomorphism’ and Burke and Copenhaver (206) note that

[m]any of us share our homes and our hearts with our pets. Certainly our local environments, whether we live in a city, a suburb, or the country, are filled with a vast variety of animals both large and small. So, it would seem rather intuitive that these same creatures would find a place in the stories that we tell. And they do. But when these animals begin to talk and scheme and learn to read, we have gone past their intuitive inclusion in a replication of reality and have put them to use in a purposeful distortion of reality.

The questions arise why animals are so frequently portrayed in literature, especially in children's literature, and why artists regularly depict their animal characters in clothes or talking. According to a study by Lévi-Strauss (referred to in Melson 15), “animal species and behaviors functioned as a symbol system that mapped onto human actions and emotions and made them intelligible” referring to the idea that animals might “function as a meaning system though which children make sense of both themselves and their surrounding environments.” Animals are prominent characters in stories, movies, television shows or advertisements but also in children's own stories, their dreams and imagination. Melson (18) notes that animals help children to “explore facets of

themselves – the wild beast, the cunning fox, the faithful dog, the huge and toothsome dinosaur.” Markowsky (460) suggests four reasons why artists anthropomorphise animals in their writings. Firstly, according to Markowsky (460), children can identify with animals because the “animal in themselves – stripped of all human trappings of speech and clothing” might be familiar to the young readers. Likewise, Sigmund Freud (qtd. in Ascione 70) claims that children identify greatly with animals since a child “unhesitatingly attributes full equality to animals” and “does not yet show any trace of the pride which afterwards moves the adult civilized man to set a sharp dividing line between his own nature and that of all other animals.” Freud (qtd. in Oliver 258) argues that children can identify more closely with animals than with the mysterious adult because children allow “animals to rank as their full equals” and hence they “feel themselves more akin to animals than to their elders, who may well be a puzzle to them.” For instance, young children who read Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, may identify themselves with Peter Rabbit, who does not follow his mother’s advice, gets himself into trouble and ends up in bed drinking camomile tea. Additionally, Richard Scarry (qtd. in Albanesius) pointed out that

children can identify more closely with pictures of animals than they can with pictures of another child. They see an illustration of a blond girl or dark-haired boy, who they know is somebody other than themselves, and competition creeps in. With imagination – and children all have marvellous imagination – they can easily identify with an anteater who is a painter or a pig who transforms from peasant to knight.

Secondly, Markowsky (461) notes that talking animals have the ability to lead the readers into a world full of fantasy. Even though spotting a rabbit on a field is not an unusual experience, seeing a rabbit with a blue coat like Peter Rabbit is doubtlessly an event one would only experience in a fantasy world. Markowsky (461) argues that it is important for children, as well as for adults, to “participate in an occasional flight into fantasy” to escape reality for some time and immerse oneself in an alien world full of wonders. The third reason Markowsky (461) states is for variety, because an artist can develop a great diversity of characters “with few words if an animal is used to express attributes commonly assumed to represent the creature.” Especially artists of picture books can use this technique to their advantage. For example, a sloth would not

need an elaborate description of its character because it believed to be a slow and lazy being. Lastly, animal characters that portray certain types of human beings are often used for humour (Markowsky 461). Artists use animals as caricatures of certain types of human beings, such as a grumpy grandfather, a greedy businessman or an anxious child. On the one hand, young readers are entertained by those caricatures, while on the other hand the text offers ways of dealing with those types of people (Vogl 69). An example of an exaggerated personality is Toad from Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. In the book Toad is described as a dandy and as someone who looks after his appearance and his clothing, while the common perception of toads is that they are ugly and muddy (Markowsky 461). What is more, Vogl (69) notes that animal stories foster a positive relationship between young readers and animals because those stories emphasise the children's wish to care for and protect animals since "the vulnerability of wild creatures encourages a sense of compassionate kinship." Another reason for anthropomorphism is because animals reflect characteristics such as "gender, race and ethnicity, generation, and identity" and allows the artists to comment on them, either unintentionally, or subversively (Wells 3). Similarly, Burke and Copenhaver (206) comment that

[w]hen the political, religious, social, or personal risks are high, when we are standing close to the metaphoric fire, the use of animals has long provided intellectual and psychological distance and allowed us to critically explore that which we would not be comfortable exploring directly.

Therefore, artists frequently interchange humans with animals to emphasise the message of the story instead of focusing on traits such as gender, race, religion or class.

2.2. Animals in children's literature

According to Sutherland and Arbuthnot (381), three types of animal stories can be identified: Firstly, stories in which animals behave entirely like human beings. Secondly, stories in which animals are portrayed as animals, except talking and sometimes wearing clothes. The last type of animal stories is the

realistic animal story, which depicts animals behaving entirely like animals (Sutherland and Arbuthnot 381). The first category displays anthropomorphism in a greater degree than the second category, where animals are less anthropomorphised, whereas the third category does not anthropomorphise animals at all. Burnford (qtd. in Markowsky 460) suggests that at first, children enjoy reading or hearing stories about talking and dressed animals and later move on to stories where animals are portrayed objectively and more realistically. To understand the three categories mentioned more clearly, this chapter sets out to examine various animal stories. *The Wind in the Willows* and *Little Bear* will be discussed as completely anthropomorphic animal stories, while *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck*, *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle*, as well as *Black Beauty* and *Charlotte's Web* will be examined as partially anthropomorphic tales. Lastly, "Lobo, the King of Currumpaw" and *Misty of Chincoteague* will be looked at as representatives of realistic animal stories.

2.2.1. Completely anthropomorphic animal stories

I can see that little town still, with its river and bridge and shipping, the cheeses and barrels piled high on the quays, the high pitched roofs and the bright green shutters. I am vaguer about the inhabitants, but I think they were anthropomorphised Mice – 'dressed mice' as I would have called them then, with woollen comforters and wide trousers like Dutchmen, and pipes in their mouths... I may have wished, and wished intensely, that I might find this town in reality and go to it. But that was because I had first imagined the town and judged it to be simply delightful, almost adorable in its own right. My only reason for wishing to go to it was its adorableness. (Lewis qt. in Blount 131)

People are often in a reminiscent mood and it seems as if nostalgia is always with us. Life used to be simpler in the good old days and was set in more rural settings, rather than in today's fast moving urban centres. One begins to long for a joyful and romantic place in the countryside, populated only by tiny animals, where the rural past finally returns (Blount 131). In reality, animal life is not happy in the way humans think of it. On the contrary, human life can be happy. However, it often is not, but there is always a chance to achieve happiness. By attributing human qualities onto animals, the artist saves the tiny creatures from pain and death on the one hand, while making humans small and ascribing them animal qualities to free them from human miseries like

heartache, revenge or jealousy on the other hand (Blount 131-132). In completely anthropomorphic stories, animals are represented as “tiny human replicas, dressed in human clothes with a doll-like charm, happy with animal innocence allied to human consciences [...] [living] an idealised rural life full of pleasing holiday amusement [...] [and] [o]ne knows that life is not like this; one cannot help wishing sometimes that it were” (Blount 132).

It is paradoxical that even though no one has ever heard animals talk in our human language, in stories from all over the world, animals are portrayed as speaking in human language and instead of questioning this phenomenon, people rather accept it as a given (Le Guin 22). The following is taken from Le Guin’s article “Cheek By Jowl: Animals In Children’s Literature”.

“Do you know,” asked the Wart,
thinking of the thrush, “why birds
sing or how? Is it a language?”

“Of course it’s a language. [replies
Archimedes, Merlyn’s owl.] It isn’t a
Big language like human speech,
But it’s large.”

“Gilbert White,” said Merlyn,
“remarks, or will remark, however
you like to put it, that ‘the language
of birds is very ancient, and like
other ancient modes of speech, little
is said, but much is intended.’”
(T.H. White, qt. in Le Guin 22)

A few bird species are able to imitate human language, trained apes can indicate what they want by using sign language, but no creature, except homo sapiens, has the ability to talk in a language like the human language. What makes the human language so unique is its syntax, meaning that single words alone are not sufficient but the combination and recombination of words is the key to human language. Animals can signify their needs, like a dog barking at its owner and bringing him/her its leash as he wanted to say “Let’s go for a walk!” but the dog would not be able to say “She and I might have gone for a walk if it hadn’t started raining so hard” (Le Guin 22). The dog might not even be able to think like that, and a great deal of thought depends on language, like thinking about past events or envisioning events that did not take place, telling a story or telling lies. “[T]o say “the thing that is not,” as the Houyhnhnms put it –

you need grammar, syntax, verb tenses and modes, you need what Archimedes the owl calls “a big language” (Le Guin 22). Most animal discourse, however, is different from our discourse, since animals signify their needs without grammar, syntax or any of the above. Le Guin (23) wonders if this is the reason why humans do not label animal discourse as language and if humans want to feel superior to animals by refusing to acknowledge that they have a language. “Sometimes people annoy me dreadfully – such airs they put on – talking about ‘the dumb animals’. Dumb! Huh!”, the parrot Polynesia frets about humans to Dr. Dolittle (qt. in Le Guin 23). Nonetheless, in a large amount of stories, animals are presented as being able to talk. The reason for this is because animals do talk and humans understand them by translating their behaviours and sounds. On the one hand, some artists are very precise when translating animal language and try to be scientifically correct by not ascribing animals any feelings or intentions as in realistic animal stories. On the other hand, various artists like to incorporate an element of fantasy into their stories and allow animals to talk in human language as in the following examples (Le Guin 22-23).

A highly celebrated book belonging to this category is Kenneth Grahame’s novel *The Wind in the Willows*. *The Wind in the Willows* was originally a series of bedtime stories and letters for Grahame’s only child Alastair before it was published in 1908 (Fudge 71). The story is set on a riverbank in the countryside where Grahame creates a place that critics have called ‘Arcadian’, or in other words ‘idyllic’ (Cosslett 151). The riverbank is populated with small woodland creatures such as the Mole, Badger, Rat or Toad. Graham’s animals dress and act like humans and experience exciting and daring adventures throughout the novel. Furthermore, each animal has an individual personality that differs from the common conceptions of the animal, which can best be explained on the basis of Toad’s character. Toad is portrayed as a rich, stubborn and adventurous creature who can drive a motor-car and often finds himself in trouble. It becomes obvious that Toad, as well as the other animals, bear only little resemblance to their real life counterparts. Blount (148) describes Grahame’s characters as

middle-aged men living in what must be early retirement, earning nothing, paying for nothing, doing nothing as becomes animals, yet very much involved

with the real world, strolling along roads, eating at hotels, taking part in court actions [...]and] they have not found anything particularly constructive to do.

They seem to be mostly concerned with amusing themselves, going on boating trips and picnics and overall behave remarkably like humans do, while experiencing an inconsistency of scale so that they can interact with humans and their objects. As A.A. Milne (quoted in Rudd 7) puts it, “it is necessary to think of Mole, for instance, sometimes as an actual mole, sometimes as a mole in human clothes, sometimes as a mole grown to human size, sometimes walking on two legs, sometimes on four. He is a mole, he isn’t a mole.” As mentioned above, Grahame’s animal characters alter between human size and their natural size throughout the story without explanation. Once Rat wanders through a field with corn-stalks waving over his head, on another occasion Rat and Mole can stroll through town and at the same time Toad is big and human enough to ride a train and tip the Porter. In addition to the humanisation of their change in size, the wild forest animals utilise domestic animals as humans do. For instance, Toad drives a car, Mole rides a horse, Badger hangs ham in his kitchen and Rat and Mole go on a picnic and pack their basket with “coldtonguecoldhamcoldbeefpickledgherkinsaladfrenchrollscressandwidgespotedmeatgingerbeerlemonadesodawater” (Grahame 13). Even when the riverbank residents are in contact with humans, they are not regarded as animals, instead, the humans interact with them as if they were humans themselves (Fudge 72). For example, at Toad’s hearing in court the “Chairman of the Bench of Magistrates” fails to notice that Toad is also a toad and calls him an “incorrigible rogue and hardened ruffian” (Grahame 94). However, exactly this excessive humanness of wild animals, especially Toad’s character, has become a crucial point of criticism, since his behaviour is hardly ever toadlike. One critic is Beatrix Potter, who is highly attentive when it comes to humanising animals in her own stories and clearly dislikes the idea of Toad having a hair comb. According to Potter (qtd. in Linder *History* 175),

all writers for children ought to have a sufficient recognition to what things look like — did he not describe ‘Toad’ as combing his *hair*? A mistake to fly in the face of nature — a frog may wear galoshes, but I didn’t hold with toads having beards or wigs.

Therefore, critics remark that the book is an insignificant contribution to natural history (Cosslett 172). However, Darcy (216) argues that the remaining animal-ness of Grahame's characters and the natural riverbank setting add to the overall impression and effect of the book. After all, even though the animals in *The Wind in the Willows* are greatly humanised, they still possess some animal-based abilities, for example, hibernation.

No animal, according to the rules of animal etiquette, is ever expected to do anything strenuous, or heroic, or even moderately active during the off-season of winter. All are sleepy – some actually sleep. All are weather-bound, more or less; and all are resting from arduous days and nights, during which every muscle in them has been severely tested, and every energy kept at full stretch. (Grahame 57)

Even though Grahame attempts to portray his characters to be true to their animal natures, he manages to write about hibernation in a human way by using animal instinct and transforming it into 'etiquette' (Cosslett 173). According to Cosslett (173) this 'etiquette' represents a reminder of the harsh reality of animals' lives as in the story the Mole recollects "that animal-etiquette forbade any sort of comment on the sudden disappearance of one's friends at any moment, for any reason or no reason whatever" (Grahame 17). However, Grahame "simultaneously alludes to and covers up this intrusion of the 'red-in-tooth-and-claw' side of animal life" because none of the characters disappears during the book (Cosslett 173).

Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows* can be read as a political and social story since the animals form a community and live in accordance with their particular social code in their hierarchical world. Cosslett (178) suggests that "Badger is the Squire, Toad the aristocrat [...], Rat the leisured upper-middle class gentleman, Mole a shabby-genteel Pooterish clerk, or a grammar-school boy." The lower class, which is represented by the weasels and stoats, is dreaded and despised and revolts by invading Toad Hall. However, proper order is soon restored when Toad returns to Toad Hall and the weasels move back to their woods. Not only is the animal's world a hierarchical one, it is at the same time a safe haven since it is isolated from the 'Wide Woods' and the 'Wide World'. In the story, Rat clarifies "Oh, that's just the Wild Wood [...] [w]e don't go there very much, we river-bankers. [...] Beyond the Wild Wood comes the Wide World [...] [a]nd that's something that doesn't matter, either to you or

me” (Grahame 232). The riverbank is a safe place, a place where the animals consciously shelter from human aspirations, sex, money and politics – all these things belong to the Wide World.

Other stories in which animals are completely anthropomorphised are Else Holmelund Minarik’s *Litte Bear* (1957) short stories. The purely textual stories revolve around Little Bear, his mother and his friends who enjoy their imaginative adventures; for example, they pretend that they are on a fishing boat and encounter a mermaid. Little Bear’s dream is to become a fisherman one day and go on real fishing expeditions. Additionally, he learns to write and sends a letter to one of his friends who is attending school. However, even though Little Bear “appears to be a biological bear – meaning that he has fur and looks like a bear, [...] he really is only a nominal bear” because he lives in a fully furnished house with his family and the bears all wear clothes (Vogl 70).

2.2.2. Partially anthropomorphic animal stories

In partially anthropomorphic animal stories animals act as protagonists and generally behave like animals, while humans, who might be present in the story, generally only act as secondary characters (Le Guin 24). Even though animals may behave according to their species, there is an element of fantasy incorporated in all of the stories. This subsection will be divided into two parts. Firstly, stories in which animals wear clothes and have the ability to talk and secondly, stories in which animals behave like animals but are only able to talk will be discussed.

Another fantastical element incorporated in partially anthropomorphic stories is the fact that animals not only talk and sometimes even wear clothes but they are also able to use tools like an oven or a flat iron (Le Guin 25). The incorporation of human characteristics can contribute to a familiar footing for the audience, but “the secret of the good ‘dressed animal’ is that it never loses its believability as an animal, even though it wears clothes and talks” (Sutherland qtd. in Vogl 70). Beatrix Potter’s animal characters are a combination of realism and fantasy. While Potter’s animals are “more akin to [...] the paintings of specimens from nature used to illustrate natural history books” (Golden qtd. in Cosslett 153), she integrates anthropomorphic details into her drawings, such

as animals wearing clothes, using tools or sometimes portraying them in human poses (Cosslett 153-154). According to Scott (193), “[c]lothing the animals preserves the integrity of her naturalistic observation while clearly revealing the humanness the stories depict”, and Lane (*Beatrix* 130) argues that

[t]here is nothing grotesque or misleading, however fabulous. All her little hedgerow, farmyard and wainscot animals are conceived with *imaginative* truth, and though they are shrewdly humanized, and their stories told throughout in human terms, there is, imaginatively speaking, not a word of falsehood.

In Potter’s (32) picture book *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-duck*, the cunning fox is depicted as a “sandy whiskered gentleman” who is clothed in a plus-fours suit and a scarlet waistcoat. When Jemima meets him for the first time, he is reading a newspaper and Jemima, who is only dressed in a bonnet and a shawl, is highly impressed by the “elegantly dressed” gentleman (Potter, *Jemima* 20). Jemima is looking for a place to lay her eggs away from her farm and the fox offers her his shed as a nesting place. The fox’s shed is covered in feathers but Jemima, who cannot identify the fox underneath his clothes, is unable to realise that the shed is ultimately covered in her natural clothing. Furthermore, the fox’s speech resembles an upper-class style, which disguises his true nature even more: “I have a sackful of feathers in my woodshed. No, my dear madam, you will be in nobody’s way” (Potter, *Jemima* 27). While the fox dresses as a gentleman when Jemima is around, he is illustrated as an unclothed fox on all fours, counting Jemima’s eggs when she is at her farm. Jemima, as well, is pictured without clothes when she is at her farm and only wears her bonnet and her shawl when she is out in the wood. It becomes apparent that Potter’s animals behave more like humans when they are wearing clothes and more like their animal selves when the clothes come off.

Potter’s picture book *The Tale of Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle* revolves around a hedgehog, called Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle, and a farmer girl, called Lucie. When Lucie loses her “pinny” and “handkins”, she sets out to find them on the farm (Potter, *Tiggy-Winkle* 7). She asks the farm animals if they have seen her belonging. She asks Tabby Kitten, who is busy washing its paws, as well as Sally Henny-penny, who clucks that she is going barefoot and finally follows Cock Robin over a stile until she finds herself in front of a hill with a tiny door. Inside the hill,

Lucie encounters Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle, who is wearing “a large apron over her striped petticoat” and a cap (Potter, *Tiggy-Winkle* 20). When Lucie asks Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle if she has seen her “pocket-handkins”, she replies: “Oh, yes, if you please’m; my name is Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle; oh, yes if you please’m, I’m an excellent clear-starcher!” (Potter, *Tiggy-Winkle* 23). Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle works as a laundress and washes the farm animals’ clothes. Potter does not explain why the small hedgehog has to do manual labour when the farm animals do not. A possible reason might be because farm animals produce eggs, wool, milk and other products for Lucie’s parents and so they “work” for board and lodge. Since Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle is not a farm animal, she has to work as a laundress for her upkeep. In contrast to the upper-class style of the cunning fox in *The Tale of Jemima Puddle-Duck*, Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle speaks in a lower-class style (Cosslett 158). Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle shows Lucie the laundry she is doing for the animals and Lucie is astounded that for example, sheep can take off their woolly coats, Cock Robin can send his red waistcoat to be washed and also Peter Rabbit sends his blue coat to be cleaned by Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle. It is obvious, that on the one hand “the animal’s *natural covering* is being viewed as its clothing, whereas in other cases, like Peter Rabbit’s blue coat, or Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle’s own clothes, they are clearly inspired by human wardrobe” (Scott 193). Moreover, the behaviour of the farm animals gains importance when Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle takes Sally Henny-penny’s pair of stockings out of her laundry basket and tells Lucie that “she’s worn the heels out with scratching in the yard! She’ll very soon go barefoot!” or when she explains to Lucie that she only has to iron the “pair of mittens belonging to Tabby Kitten” because “she washes them herself” (Potter, *Tiggy-Winkle* 36). In the end, Lucie says her goodbyes to Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle, who is already running up the hill, suddenly portrayed smaller, without clothes and her prickles showing so Lucie realises that “Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle was nothing but a HEDGEHOG” (Potter, *Tiggy-Winkle* 57). As can be seen in both of Potter’s tales, the animal’s true nature, like the predatory characteristics of the fox or Mrs. Tiggy-Winkle’s extraordinary personality, is revealed when the clothes come off.

While Beatrix Potter’s dressed animals accentuate the romantic side of animal fantasy of the nineteenth century, Anna Sewell’s novel *Black Beauty* emphasises the wish for a better treatment of animals. In *Black Beauty*, the

animals are not dressed but are merely able to talk. In her book, Anna Sewell speaks up for those who cannot speak and gives animals a voice in form of a first person animal narrator, a horse called Black Beauty. The story is told by the horse in a strong and clean prose, but Black Beauty's vocabulary and knowledge of comparison by far exceed anything a horse could think (Le Guin 24). However, Le Guin (24) suggests that the knowledge and observations made by Black Beauty are accurately limited to what it is a horse could know or feel in real life. Black Beauty lives to see nearly every event possible for a horse and experiences various kinds of cruel and kind riders until his retirement in the countryside. According to Blount (251-252) the book gives children and also adults an idea of what it would be like if one could experience all the positive, as well as negative experiences a horse makes. Since it is not made clear in the book to whom Black Beauty is talking to, it "allows the reader to slide in and out of horse-consciousness, blurring the human/animal divide" (Cosslett 69). This is especially obvious when Black Beauty describes the process of 'breaking in' a horse in the third person: "He must never start at what he sees, nor speak to other horses, nor bite, nor kick, nor have any will of his own" (Sewell 11). Cosslett (70) states that the reader is forced to identify with the 'breaking in' experience of the horse when Black Beauty describes it in terrible detail:

Those who have never had a bit in their mouths, cannot think how bad it feels; a great piece of cold hard steel as thick as a man's finger to be pushed into one's mouth, between one's teeth and over one's tongue, with the ends coming out at the corner of your mouth and held fast there by straps over your head, under your throat, round your nose, and under your chin; so that no way in the world can you get rid of the nasty thing. (Sewell 30)

Sewell creates an identification between the reader and the animal protagonist in her book and "offers a "humanizing" tale, an instructional discourse" which is supposed to guide and enhance the master's behaviour and attitude towards the animal servant (Hansen 207). The suffering and mistreatment makes the animals appear more pitiable and combined with the humanised horse characters, which the reader can immediately identify with, the protagonists of *Black Beauty* cannot be easily forgotten. Anna Sewell's *Black Beauty* had a severe impact on the world as it helped to abolish the bearing rein, a "device

that forced horses to hold their heads up unnaturally high” (Cosslett 74) and helped people to see animals in a different and more emphatic way.

Another highly celebrated author who makes use of talking animals is E.B. White. With his children’s novel *Charlotte’s Web*, he introduces the reader to a fantastical fantasy world, in which animals have the ability to speak. However, not everyone can understand the animals. To outsiders, the barn animals seem like ordinary animals, yet the young girl Fern is able to understand the animal language. The story revolves around a little pig called Wilbur, who is the runt of his litter and is saved from the slaughterhouse by Fern. One day, when Wilbur is mature enough he is sold to Mr Zuckerman, Fern’s uncle, where he meets and becomes friends with Charlotte the spider. When Mr Zuckerman decides to butcher Wilbur in winter, the pig gets terrified. “I don’t want to die!” he screams and tells Charlotte “I want to stay alive, right here in my comfortable manure pile with all my friends. I want to breathe the beautiful air and lie in the beautiful sun” (White 51). White humanises Wilbur and therefore, Wilbur possesses a large range of human emotions: he cries, he sobs, he is bored and longing for friendship and most of all, he is scared of death. When Wilbur expresses his feelings to Charlotte, she tells him “You shall not die” (White 51) According to Griffith (115) what Charlotte intends to say is that Wilbur is too young to die and that “death is for the old, and not the young”. To save Wilbur from the slaughterhouse, Charlotte starts spinning the words ‘Some Pig’, ‘Terrific’, ‘Humble’ and ‘Radiant’ into her webs. Thereby, Wilbur becomes a celebrity and Mr Zuckerman realises that the pig is worth more alive than dead and Wilbur escapes the slaughterhouse for a second time. Besides the communication between animals of different species and Charlotte’s ability to weave messages into her web, life in the barn reflects reality as if all they do is eat, sleep and indulge in some forms of entertaining games. On the subject of anthropomorphism White (qtd. in White and Guth 615) states in *Letters of E.B. White*:

I discovered that there was no need to tamper in any way with the habits and characteristics of spider, pigs, geese, and rats. No ‘motivation’ is needed if you remain true to life and true to the spirit of fantasy.

Remaining true to life as well as to the spirit of fantasy is best explained by examining Charlotte, the bloodthirsty and carnivorous spider. Equalling a real

spider's behaviour, Charlotte traps flies in her web. "Of course I don't really eat them. I drink them – I drink their blood. I love blood" (White 39). White (qtd. in White and Guth 614) continues by saying that "Charlotte does what she does. Perhaps she is magnifying herself by her devotion to another, but essentially she is just a trapper." White deviates from the common perception of a spider by making her an original heroine in his story. In the end, however, Charlotte dies of old age, leaving behind an egg sac to hatch. As mentioned before, death is for the old, and White's story demonstrates that Charlotte is not afraid of death because she has lived her life and she is ready to accept life's order and, therefore, death (Griffith 115). Another theme in White's story is the fact that people, as well as animals, change. In the case of Fern, the change becomes apparent when she grows up, falls in love and loses sight of Wilbur. In the beginning of the story, Fern is the only one who is able to understand the barn animals. Fern's mother, Mrs Arable, is concerned about Fern because she told her mother that the animals could talk and Mr Arable has two interpretations to offer. Firstly, he proposes that Fern's lively imagination is responsible, but later he suggests that "[m]aybe our ears aren't as sharp as Fern's" (White 54). When Fern grows up, however, she loses interest in Wilbur and cannot understand the barn animals any longer. Fudge (73) argues that

[t]here is a sense of melancholy here, a sense of a recognition that adulthood brings with it a loss, a distance from the natural world that can never be bridged. Part of growing up, it seems, entails a growing away from animals.

Even though Fern changes and the spider Charlotte dies at the end of the story, Wilbur is happy with his life in his barn and the company of Charlotte's offspring.

The spectrum of partially anthropomorphic stories is very broad as artists can either portray their animal characters as dressed and talking animals or they can depict them as realistic animals and only equip them with the ability to talk. In Potter's stories the little woodland animals can talk and are sometimes dressed in human clothes. The importance of clothing becomes apparent since Potter's animals behave more like their natural self without clothes and more like humans when they are wearing clothes. On the other side of the spectrum is Sewell's *Black Beauty*, a natural horse who has the ability to talk to other horses. Sewell lends her voice to *Black Beauty* to reveal the mistreatment and suffering of animals. Lastly, White's *Charlotte Web* is a completely different

animal story belonging to partially anthropomorphic stories. White depicts a world where animals can talk but not everyone is able to understand the creatures. The author remains true to the animal's lives but simply equips them with the ability to talk and so creates a wonderful tale about animals and friendship.

2.2.3. Realistic animal stories

The last category of animal stories focuses on realistic animal stories where animals do not only look like animals but also behave entirely according to their true nature (Vogl 71). To be considered a realistic animal story, authors need to portray their animal characters objectively and “present the animal's perceptions and feelings within its own frame of reference, avoiding interpretation in human terms as much as possible” (Le Guin 23). To be capable of portraying an animal realistically requires a deep understanding and a close observation of the animal and any assumption made about motives of the animal character need to be in accordance with the scientific interpretation of natural animal behaviour. Previously mentioned forms of animal stories used to be fictional accounts that often portrayed animals acting as humans and wearing furry coats or even human clothing. For example, in the case of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*, animals act as a replacement for humans, living in a social hierarchy. In contrast, the realistic animal story highlights and stresses the viewpoint of the animal itself and “the interest centres about the personality, individuality, mentality, of an animal, as well as its purely physical characteristics” (Charles Roberts 34).

In the late nineteenth century the concept of Darwinian evolution posed a problematic situation for Western civilization as it called fundamental ideas about science and religion into question. Prior to Darwinism, nature writers based their books on former ideas about evolution and nature, namely on Creationism (Dunlap 56). One of the most successful authors of the realistic animal story genre is Ernest Thompson Seton who grew up experiencing the debate over Darwinism (Dunlap 56). In Seton's best-known collection of short stories *Wild Animals I Have Known* (1898) he portrays the animals' lives in great detail and authenticity without ascribing them human moral dilemmas

(Blount 254). In contrast to Sewell's *Black Beauty*, Seton does not write from the animal's perspective. In other words, there is no first person narrative and the storyline is merely based on Seton's observation of the animal's behaviour (Blount 254). As T.H. White (referred to in Blount 256) points out, the lives of wild animals are sufficient enough, with no need for more drama, and most of the stories come to a bad end, emphasising life's order. The difficulty of writing a realistic wild animal story is explained by Seton (qtd. in Cosslett 91):

For the wild animal there is no such thing as a gentle decline in peaceful old age. Its life is spent at the front, in line of battle, and as soon as its powers begin to wane in the least, its enemies become too strong for it; it falls. There is only one way to make an animal's history untragic, and that is to stop it before the last chapter.

However, even though Seton's stories end with the death of an animal, his intentions are didactic (Le Guin 24). Seton wants his readers to understand what it means to live the "lives of the hunted", respect them and treat them in a better way (Le Guin 24). One of Seton's short stories is "Lobo, the King of Currumpaw", which was published in 1989 in his short story collection *Wild Animals I Have Known*. Lobo is a cunning wolf who lives in the Currumpaw rangelands in Northern Mexico where he and his pack feed on cattle. After various failed efforts to kill Lobo, Ernest Seton himself goes on the hunt to kill the clever leader of the pack. To avoid poison and traps, the wolves only eat what they have hunted down themselves and catching Lobo becomes a difficult undertaking until Seton discovers Lobo's weakness, a female wolf called Blanca. One day, Seton manages to catch Blanca with a trap while Lobo runs off and watches Seton kill his mate. After Blanca's death, Seton (*Wild Animals* 47) describes Lobo's howls as having "an unmistakable note of sorrow in it [...] It was no longer the loud, defiant howl, but a long, plaintive wail". In the end, Seton succeeds in catching Lobo by using Blanca's scent and states:

A lion shorn of his strength, an eagle robbed of his freedom, or a dove bereft of his mate, all die, it is said, of a broken heart; and who will aver that this grim bandit could bear the three-fold brunt, heart-whole? (Seton, *Wild Animals* 54)

At the time of his hunting experience, Seton did not have a positive view of wolves, however, when reflecting upon his gruesome deeds, he "transitioned from wildlife killer to wildlife protector" and founded the wildlife conservation

movement (Witt and Attenborough 5). When criticised by his readers for the many deaths of his animal characters, Seton (*Wild Animals* 15) states that “[t]he fact that these stories are true is the reason why all are tragic. The life of a wild animal *always has a tragic end*”. Through his quest to kill Lobo, Seton came to understand that “[w]e are different [from animals] only by degree, making us not *apart* from nature, but rather a part of it” (Witt and Attenborough 5). In his short story *Lobo, the King of Currumpaw*, Seton portrays Lobo as a hero and himself and his men as villains (Witt and Attenborough 5) to establish a sympathetic identification with the hunted wolf (Polk 54). In his book *Lives of the Hunted*, Seton (12) explains his intentions of writing realistic animal stories:

In what frame of mind are my hearers left with regard to the animal? Are their sympathies quickened toward the man who killed him, or toward the noble creature who, superior to every trial, died as he had lived – dignified, fearless, and steadfast?

One could claim that naming animals anthropomorphises them to a certain extent but Cosslett (143) notes that the naming of the wolves is a human device “to give them individuality” and to serve “as recognition devices, a sign that these animals are ‘known’ by humans.” Even though Seton names the wolves in his short story, the animals are portrayed realistically compared to the more humanised animals of partially or completely anthropomorphic stories.

A further realistic and purely textual animal story is Marguerite Henry's horse story *Misty of Chincoteague*, which is about the lives of Phantom and her daughter Misty, two captured wild ponies. Henry's story can be categorised as a realistic animal story because both ponies act according to their true nature. Furthermore, Henry's horses do not talk like *Black Beauty* but rather the ponies' emotions are interpreted by the people in the book. For instance, when Misty licks a boy's face “it was as if she had said, ‘Why is everyone so quiet? I'm here! Me! Misty!’” (Henry 171) Beyond that, when Phantom is freed and runs back to her island, she turns around and glances one last time at her people. “‘Take good care of my baby,’ she seemed to say. ‘She belongs to the world of men, but I – I belong to the world of the wild things!’” (Henry 170) By adding the word ‘seem’, Henry emphasises how Phantom's last look back is interpreted by humans and not language produced by the pony. Therefore, as Vogl (72) notes,

“[m]otives are never imputed directly to the horses and the animals are never sentimentalized”.

Animal stories in children’s literature appear in a vast variety of forms but all focus on animals as central characters. The stories range from almost purely human to purely animal, from books where animals live together in a society while portraying human qualities and behaviours, to animals that behave according to their true animal nature. In between those two extremes is the partially anthropomorphic animal story, which portrays the animals as true to nature but at the same time equips them with the ability to talk and even occasionally dresses them in human clothes. One of the most famous examples for the completely anthropomorphic animal story is *The Wind in the Willows*, in which animals not only dress like humans but they also act like human beings. Potter’s delicate animal stories on the other hand depict the animal characters as dressed and talking. However, Potter’s animals’ behaviour is mostly according to their nature so they do not lose their believability. Lastly, an expert in the field of realistic animal stories is Seton, who brilliantly and precisely tells stories about animal behaviour with a didactic intention.

3. Rabbits in literature

Rabbits are one of the most popular animals depicted in children’s literature and sometimes they are used to replace child characters in literature. As already discussed, a lot of artists use talking or dressed animals and Bettelheim (47) claims that for children “it is believable that man can change into animal, or the other way around” because of the “inherent sameness”. The question arises why rabbits are so prominent in children’s literature. One reason might be that the “rabbits’ long ears, human-like eyes, silly big feet and fluffy tails” entertain young children and delight them (Davis and DeMello 183). Additionally, animal behaviourists suggest that the “soft bodies, big eyes, stubby limbs and round faces of small animals” resemble the physical characteristics of a newborn child and stimulate especially young girls to look after and take care of their pets or toys (Davis and DeMello 183). In her article *Rabbits in Children’s Books*, Farmer (527) also notes that next to mice and rats, “rabbits are the most common animal in the world” that, with the exception of the Antarctic, inhabit

every continent on earth. Therefore, most children around the world are familiar with rabbits.

One of the most famous and well-known folklore animals is Brer Rabbit, the trickster. Trickster figures are known in most cultures and they can appear either as a human being or as an animal (Baker 149). The Brer Rabbit tales were collected by Joel Chandler Harris at the beginning of the twentieth-century and have their origins in stories brought to America by slaves from West Africa (Baker 149). Brer Rabbits stories revolve around one of the weakest animals that manages to win by outsmarting other animals. Since the rabbit is a small animal that lacks skills for fighting, it is an easy prey item to various predators (Baker 155). However, rabbits are exceptionally quick and fertile and thus, rabbits have managed to gain in numbers (Baker 155). In Brer Rabbit's stories, his quick wits and tongue often save him while at the same time making a fool of other animals. A constant characteristic of the trickster character is its dishonesty since the trickster is always trying to win by cheating or lying to others (Baker 151). According to Baker (151), "[d]efiance of authority, foolishness, greed and other less than admirable but very human traits are part of the makeup of these rabbit tricksters." Nevertheless, the rabbit trickster also reveals his good and kind side to the reader. Family is important to Brer Rabbit, as can be seen in *The Famine*: When Brer Rabbit and Brer Fox agree to exchange their families for food, Brer Rabbit helps his family to escape and persuades Brer Fox that his family has been eaten by Brer Fox's wife. After selling his wife, Brer Fox shares the food with Brer Rabbit, who tricks him again and goes home to share all the food with his family (Lester 40-43). Lester (ix) points out that "[t]he universality of Trickster tales is not the result of cultural borrowings, but of the universality of what it is to be human" and the trickster illustrates to the audience that one's weaknesses can be turned into one's strengths. Baker (158) suggests that "this may be the most important message of the trickster – that each person has the power to deal with the inconsistencies and inequities of life, no matter what those may turn out to be."

In some stories rabbits are portrayed because they contribute a particular trait to the story. For example, in Carroll's (10) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, the White Rabbit is not only afraid of the Red Queen but also always late and in a hurry, calling out, "Oh dear! Oh dear! I shall be late!" Since

rabbits are known to be exceptionally fast, timid and a common prey, this might have been reason enough for the artist to portray a rabbit that is always late and afraid of the queen (Davis and DeMello 173). What is more, rabbits tend to escape into their holes or burrows when danger approaches, which is also apparent in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* when the White Rabbit, just as Alice does, jumps into his hole to move between the fantasy and the real world (Davis and DeMello 173).

Beatrix Potter, who frequently incorporates rabbits into her tales, utilises rabbits as substitutes for children and to “explore common emotional themes in childhood” (Davis and DeMello 174). In *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, Potter personifies Peter to resemble a little boy. She dresses him in a little blue jacket and invents exciting adventures for the little rabbit. Since Peter does not want to listen to his mother, he explores Mr. McGregor's garden and gets himself into a lot of trouble, just as young children do.

Another childlike rabbit figure can be found in Margaret Brown's picture book *Goodnight Moon*, where a young rabbit is just about to go to bed, wearing his blue and white pyjamas. Davis and DeMello (176) note that

Brown's melodic litany contrasts the intimacy provided by familiar objects (“a comb and a brush and a bowl full of mush”) with the vast world beyond the windows (“good night stars, good night air, good night noises everywhere”), thus evoking both the comfort and the mystery a child experiences while falling asleep.

Even though the illustrator Clement Hurd initially wanted to draw humans, Brown insisted on rabbits and still the protagonists are so human that the reader nearly forgets that they are rabbits (Davis and DeMello 176).

As well as *Goodnight Moon*, Sam McBratney's picture book *Guess How Much I Love You* (1995), also centres around a young hare about to go to sleep. However, Little Nutbrown Hare and his father Big Nutbrown Hare are portrayed more realistically than the rabbits in *Goodnight Moon*. Even though the two hares are anthropomorphic hares, they live as actual hares would. Instead of living in a human house like the rabbits in *Goodnight Moon*, the two hares live in the wood and possess various qualities of wild rabbits (Flannery 148). Not only do Little Nutbrown Hare and Big Nutbrown Hare wear no clothes and sleep in a nest of dead leaves, they also display “the proper white and

brown coloring of a hare, as well as the huge ears, long back feet and telltale cottontails” (Davis and DeMello 177). In McBratney’s (16-18) story, the two hares declare their love for each other. At the end of the book *Little Nutbrown Hare* states, “I love you right up to the MOON” and when he falls asleep his father whispers, “I love you right up to the moon – and back.” According to Flannery (149), the naming of the two hares ‘Big’ and ‘Little’, implies that the young hare is a copy of his father and that “naming a child after oneself or referring to a child as a little version of a parent signifies a special relationship in a family.” It is a rather rare occurrence that a male parent is portrayed, but Flannery (150) notes that a father is often responsible for night time activities because he is at work during the day and can spend time with his child at bedtime.

In Margery Williams’ children’s novel *The Velveteen Rabbit: Or How Toys Become Real* (1922) the author amplifies “the experience of a subject grappling with its own sense of itself – grappling with the question of what it is” (Jacobson 8). Williams illustrates struggles everyone can identify with because even though child readers are not toy rabbits, they will “nonetheless grow up by struggling with the question of what reality is and, indeed whether [...] [they] are real” (Jacobson 8). In the story, the Velveteen Rabbit is given to the Boy for Christmas but soon gets neglected by him and so the Velveteen Rabbit becomes friends with an old toy, the Skin Horse. The Skin Horse explains that if a toy is greatly loved, it will become real but “[b]y the time you are Real, [...] most of your hair has been loved off and your eyes drop out and you get loose in the joints and very shabby” (Williams 5). As the Boy becomes ill, he begins to love the Velveteen Rabbit and the toy starts to age. However, after his recovery, the Boy throws the Velveteen Rabbit away. The nursery magic Fairy appears and says, “I take care of all the playthings that the children have loved. When they are old and worn out and the children don’t need them any more, then I come and take them away with me and turn them into Real” (Williams 22). In the end, the Velveteen Rabbit becomes real at last and is reborn as a wild rabbit in the woods. According to Jacobson (16),

[b]oth children and adults who read this book watch painfully the rabbit’s various trials [...] We feel the vulnerability of his path to becoming real [...] in the world at large. [...] The story raises these questions: What does it mean to be real? What does it mean to have agency? What does it mean to matter or

count to others? The book reveals the crucial means we deploy to work through these issues.

In the book the 'answers' to the questions above are resolved by a magic fairy, who makes the toy rabbit's wish come true and turns him into a real rabbit. On the one hand, the story leaves the reader thinking that everything is resolved, but on the other hand, the tale reminds the reader of life's misery and sadness (Jacobson 17).

Rabbits are not unfamiliar animal characters in children's literature. However, Richard Adams was the first author to turn rabbits into heroes of their own "epic tale of leadership and the struggle for survival" in his novel *Watership Down* (Hammond 48). *Watership Down* sets itself apart from other rabbit stories by portraying the rabbits realistically, apart from the fact that they can speak. Adams based his book on Ronald Lockley's observations and studies about rabbits and writes in his acknowledgments at the beginning of the book:

I am indebted for a knowledge of rabbits and their ways, to Mr R M Lockley's remarkable book, *The Private Life of the Rabbit*. Anyone who wishes to know more about the migration of yearlings, about pressing chin glands, chewing pellets, the effects of overcrowding in warrens, the phenomenon of re-absorption of fertilized embryos, the capacity of buck rabbits to fight stoats, or any other features of Lapine life, should refer to that definitive work.

Even though Adams portrays his rabbits more realistically than the other authors mentioned above, he still allows them to not only speak, but also think, act and feel as human beings (Hammond 50; Petzold 18). However, the reader never forgets their rabbitness, which enables Adams to, on the one hand, depict an authentic picture of a rabbit's life, and on the other hand, attribute human characteristics such as speech, reason and human emotions to his rabbits (Hammond 50; Petzold 18). Baker (149) notes that "Adams has created for his rabbit civilization a formal mythology which includes a powerful, idealized rabbit trickster figure" which helps to define and maintain the rabbits' sense of identity "by providing a cosmogony and recounting the deeds of the lapine ancestor and trickster here El-ahrairah" (Petzold 18). The rabbit god Frith created the world as well as all the animals and El-ahrairah, the first rabbit. Frith blesses El-ahrairah with "a cunning mind and lightning speed" and his stories are passed on from rabbits to their children:

All the world will be your enemy, Prince with a Thousand Enemies, and whenever they catch you, they will kill you. But first they must catch you, digger, listener, runner, prince with the swift warning. Be cunning and full of tricks and your people shall never be destroyed. (Adams 274)

These fables serve in the same way as human fables do as they teach how and why things are and at the same time, delight the rabbits with entertaining adventure stories. Moreover, Hammond (49) points out that “these tales constitute the mythology of the rabbits, explaining their racial origins, characteristics and religious beliefs.”

Considering all the books discussed in this chapter, it becomes apparent that there is no set pattern for rabbits in children’s literature. Rabbits are portrayed as standing upright, as the White Rabbit in *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*, they are portrayed realistically moving on four legs in Adams’ *Watership Down*, or as toys that turn into real rabbits as the Velveteen Rabbit. Since each artist uses rabbits in a completely different manner, one realises that rabbits are highly versatile when it comes to conveying a story or morals in children’s literature. Considering the examples above, it seems as if the rabbit’s size and changeableness might be the key to its success in children’s literature. To clearly understand the vast spectrum of rabbits in literature, *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and *The Rabbits* will be analysed in chapters 5 and 6.

4. Picture books

“What is the use of a book”, thought Alice, “without pictures or conversations?” (Carroll 1) Alice is right about books without pictures, especially when it comes to children’s literature. Picture books are often the first encounters with literature for young children and form the base for lifelong learning. These books not only familiarise young children with literature but they also offer “children insight into the feelings of others, as a transmitter of cultural heritage, and as a resource for the development of cognitive and linguistic skills” (Nodelman and Reimer 30). Bader’s (1) succinct definition of picture books is as follows:

A picture book is a text, illustrations, total design; an item of manufacture and a commercial product; a social, cultural, historical document; and foremost an experience for a child. As an art form it hinges on the interdependence of

pictures and words, on the simultaneous display of two facing pages, and on the drama of the turning page.

Nodelman (qtd. in Arizpe and Styles 20) takes the definition of picture books further and states that

picture books are a significant means by which we integrate young children into the ideology of our culture. Like most narratives, picture book stories most forcefully guide readers into culturally acceptable ideas about who they are through the privileging of the point of view from which they report on the events they describe [...] (in other words) to see and understand events and people as the narrator invites us to see them.

4.1. Animals in picture books

One characteristic of children's picture books is the frequent use of anthropomorphic animals as protagonists. The animals are often used as substitutes for children or adults or are associated with specific character traits, such as the wise owl, the loyal dog or the stubborn donkey. Moreover, the animal protagonists also represent the "animal-like condition of children", indicating that children are still closer to their innate instincts than adults (Nodelman and Reimer 194). "Like human children, Peter Rabbit is torn between the opposing forces of his natural instincts and the societal conventions represented by the mother's wishes" (Nodelman and Reimer 194). Another advantage of animal protagonists, according to Goldstein (qtd. in Spitz 73-74), is that children's books

use animals to encourage empathy, to permit children to identify without being blocked, presumably, by the particulars of race or sex or ethnicity. The logic of this universalization/abstraction" as she explains, "has it that making all the characters animals is an advance over making them all white. The logic also implies, however, that it would be impossible to ask children to identify with individuals culturally defined as visibly different from themselves."

However, animals are often used as protagonists because most children simply enjoy reading or listening to the animals' adventures.

4.2. Illustrations in picture books

There exists an adage that “a picture is worth a thousand words” and with picture books this certainly holds true as well. As Mitchell (140) argues, this saying is true “because the exact words that can decode or summarise an image are so indeterminate and ambiguous.” The visual elements in picture books create a crucial aspect because they are generally intended for young children who are not capable to read yet and therefore, will greatly engage with the images instead. Arizpe and Styles (22) note that a picture book is a “book in which the story depends on the interaction between written text and image and where both have been created with a conscious aesthetic intention.” Pictures are used to support the written text and the word/image interaction can vary (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Dynamics* 225). Nikolajeva and Scott (*Dynamics* 225-226) state that

in *symmetrical* interaction, words and pictures tell the same story, essentially repeating information in different forms of communication. In *enhancing* interaction, pictures amplify more fully the meaning of the words, or the words expand the picture so that different information in the two modes of communication produces a more complex dynamic. [...] Dependent on the degree of different information presented, a *counterpointing* dynamic may develop where words and images collaborate to communicate meanings beyond the scope of either one alone. An extreme form of counterpointing is *contradictory* interaction, where words and pictures seem to be in opposition to one another.

The illustrations in picture books assist in telling and conveying a story. In Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, text and illustrations do not always convey the same message but they either contradict, complement or enhance each other, as will be discussed in chapter 5. Shaun Tan’s artwork in *The Rabbits* will be examined in chapter 6 to demonstrate how a counterpointing dynamic between text and illustrations can create an incredible story by complementing one another. As Nodelman (19-20) points out, particularly “the pictures in contemporary books are often intricate in detail and sophisticated in style, even when they accompany simple texts, or even single words; and they often accompany complex stories that focus on elements different from the ones on which the pictures themselves focus.”

Fang (131) notes that the images in picture storybooks can take on various functions. Firstly, they can help establish the setting. Whereas in books without pictures the setting is described in words to define the story's location and mood, the setting in pictures books can be described in words, shown in illustrations or both (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 61). For instance, various time periods or foreign cultural settings can be portrayed in greater detail through illustrations than words. Likewise, illustrations can capture the mood of a book by making use of a wide range of colours, associated with a certain emotion. For example, in Chris Van Allsburg's picture book *The Polar Express* (1985) the bright and lively colours typically associated with Christmas are replaced with dull and dark colours to create a mysterious mood (Fang 132). Another example for the creation of a certain mood in a picture book story is Beatrix Potter's nostalgic setting of most of her tales (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 68). Potter depicts the idyllic countryside where she portrays simplicity of life and moreover, dresses her characters in clothes that used to be up-to-date in earlier times. Thus she portrays an idyllic and nostalgic setting in the pastoral tradition that puts the reader in a reminiscent mood (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 68). An advantage of picture books when it comes to setting, as well as to characterisation, is that the "difference between diegesis (telling) and mimesis (showing)" becomes obvious (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 61). Since artists are only able to describe space in words, they can show it in pictures, which is often more effective (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 61).

Secondly, illustrations help to define and develop the characters of a book (Fang 132). Illustrations portray the characters and their emotions in great detail and can make them appealing to children. In a novel, or any other verbal narrative, characters are portrayed by external and visual characteristics, as well as the emotional and psychological state of the character (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 81). Dialogues and monologues of the characters provide further dimensions of the characters (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 81). In picture books artists often exclude the verbal description of the character's appearance because an illustration of the character is generally more efficient (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 82). Nevertheless, even though it is difficult to communicate the characters' qualities (such as shyness, courage or

intelligence) visually, “the characters’ poses, gestures and facial expressions can disclose emotions and attitudes, such as happiness, fear, and anger” (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 82-83). An example for this function of illustrations is Maurice Sendak’s picture book *Where the Wild Things Are* (1963). The illustrations portray Max and the Wild Things, as well as the spectacles taking place, in great detail while the author only uses few words to depict them. What is more, Nikolajeva and Scott (*Picturebooks* 83) note that “[p]ictures naturally have a superior ability to convey the spatial position of the character, and especially the mutual spatial relationship of two or more characters, which often reveals their psychological relationship and relative status.” Moebius (256) also states that the main character’s positioning and size in pictures is relevant, and that a “character that is on the margin, ‘distanced’ or reduced in size on the page, and near the bottom will generally be understood to possess fewer advantages than the one that is large and centred.” Nikolajeva and Scott (*Picturebooks* 83) are in agreement with Moebius and remark that large characters are often more significant than smaller characters. Another way in which illustrations can function is as plot development or extension (Fang 133). Since the text in picture books is usually rather short, illustrations can help to develop or extend the plot further and to reinforce the story.

While illustrations are beneficial to “expand, explain, interpret, or decorate a written text” (Bodmer 72), they also contribute to the development of children’s literate behaviour in a variety of ways (Fang 137). Firstly, artwork in picture books motivates children to not only read, but also to interact with a text (Fang 137). For example, children can try to find objects or characters that are hidden or they can try to envision what will happen in the next picture (Fang 137). Secondly, illustrations can function as an efficient tool to encourage and inspire creativity, since books with only little text animate the reader’s imagination (Fang 137). According to Fang (137), children often relate pictures to their real life experiences and “construct meaning based on their existing schemas or schematas.” However, children have less life experience, as well as reading experience than adult readers and are referred to as “‘naïve’ with respect to literary conventions” (Arizpe and Styles 25). With the help of picture books, ‘naïve’ readers slowly develop into experts and

[a]s their experience of books and of life widens, children develop more subtle schemata: not only information but also ways of connecting that information to a text's reference to it that allow them to make greater sense of what they read and get deeper pleasure from it. (Nodelman and Reimer 53)

Thirdly, pictures can “provide mental scaffolds” for young readers and help them to better understand the written text (Fang 138). Since young readers have only limited vocabulary and syntax, as well as knowledge of the world, they depend on illustrations to assist in the development of the plot and characters (Fang 138). Nodelman's (216) explanation for the need of illustrations in picture books resembles Fang's opinion, when stating that young readers “find them easier to understand than words and need pictorial information to guide their response to verbal information.” Lastly, pictures in picture books promote the reader's aesthetic acknowledgement of art, which is important because aesthetic sensitivity “is a primary source of experience on which all cognition, judgment, and action depend. It furnishes the raw material for concepts and ideas, for creating a world of possibility” (Broudy 636).

In conclusion, illustrations in picture books can act as a narrative on their own or they can strengthen, contradict or enhance the textual narrative. Wolfenbarger and Sipe (279) advocate that picture books should be incorporated into the curriculum for young adult readers because “carefully considering the peritextual features, illustrations, text and the interrelationships among these elements may lead older students to a new appreciation for picture books and the professional work that goes into creating them.” Since picture books are generally seen as books for only young children, it prevents not only young adults but also adults from developing an expanded visual literacy.

5. The Tale of Peter Rabbit

For more than a century, Beatrix Potter's wonderful books have been read and loved by children and adults all over the world. Especially *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*'s popularity is enduring and Potter would have been delighted to know that her stories and her art have been entertaining children and grown ups for such a long time. The timeless tale of Peter is about a young rabbit who, despite his mother's warning, explores Mr. McGregor's garden and gets into big trouble. In the garden Peter almost gets caught by the gardener because his jacket gets tangled up in a gooseberry net but Potter rescues the little bunny just in time to save him from being put into a pie like his father. Potter turns her most famous and beloved character into a hero and implies that Peter's dilemma is indeed Mrs. Rabbits fault, who tries to domesticate her son and forces the young rabbit to wear shoes and a jacket like a human child.

Even though Beatrix made little effort to be a famous and well-known artist, her anthropomorphised animal stories made her immortal. However, besides Potter's brilliant tales, the story of her own life is captivating as well. Growing up in a rather restrictive household, Beatrix lived a secluded and lonely life, which made her turn to animals for companionship. After Potter's private journal was translated, scholars identified various themes of Potter's childhood as underlying messages of her tales.

This chapter will provide a short biography from Beatrix Potter's childhood to her marriage to discover which themes are represented in her tales, followed by a literature review which gives an overview of works published about Potter and her tales. The next chapter on Potter's artwork and narrative style will be divided into Potter's illustrative and narrative style, and the cover, format and design of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*. Following the analysis of Potter's distinct style, a detailed examination of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* will be conducted which will be divided into three parts. Firstly, the relationship between text and image, secondly, the importance of clothes and thirdly, the depiction of Peter Rabbit will be analysed.

5.1. The Tale of Beatrix Potter

To clearly understand Potter's tales about constraint and escape, it is necessary to consider and examine the artist's life, since her childhood provides a good basis for her anthropomorphised tales. On July 28th 1866, Helen Beatrix Potter was born to Rupert and Helen Potter in London. Beatrix spent her restricted and lonely childhood at Number Two Bolton Gardens and was her parent's only child for the first few years of her life (Lane, *Beatrix* 11). Beatrix's nursery was situated on the third floor and she rarely left the nursery or went outside the house and was educated by a governess (Lane, *Beatrix* 12). Lane (*Beatrix* 13) notes that Beatrix Potter "had been born into a period and a class which seem to have had little understanding of childhood." It was common for parents and children to be separated for most of the time and "life as the Rupert Potters understood it held little interest in the solitary child upstairs, and it would perhaps have surprised them if anyone had suggested that life might conceivably be made interesting to one so young" (Lane, *Beatrix* 13). Beatrix spent her first years secluded in her nursery without the companionship of other children and Lane (*Beatrix* 13) suggests that "quiet, solitary and observant children create their own world and live in it, nourishing their imaginations on the material at hand." Beatrix's parents however, did not notice that their daughter was an unnaturally lonely child (Lane 27).

When Beatrix was six years old, her brother Walter Bertram Potter, but called Bertram or Bert, was born in 1872 (Taylor, Whalley, Hobbs and Battrick 11). Finally Beatrix had a companion but when Bertram was old enough he was sent to school away from home and only joined the family for their summer vacations in Scotland or the Lake District. During their months long vacations Beatrix and Bertram wandered through the woods, went on expeditions, watched and caught all kinds of animals and Beatrix's love of nature began to prosper (Taylor et al. 12-13). The two children decided to create a collection of all the animals and plants they encountered in the garden and many of them – dead or alive – the children took back to the house and hid them in their room (Lane, *Beatrix* 32). Beatrix and Bertram carefully observed, measured and finally drew all these animals and plants to create a portfolio filled with drawings and studies (Luce-Kapler 141). They even went as far as to skin and boil dead

animals and keep their bones (Lane, *Beatrix* 32). Even though Beatrix's drawings were botanically accurate, "here and there on the grubby pages fantasy breaks through – mufflers appear round the necks of newts, rabbits walk upright, skate on ice, carry umbrellas, walk out in Bonnets and mantles like Mrs. Potter's" (Lane, *Beatrix* 32).

After the long summer vacations Beatrix and her parents returned to Bolton Gardens while Bertram went back to school. Beatrix, who was alone again, studied the discoveries of their vacation and drew pressed flowers, studied the skeletons of little woodland animals or recorded a day of the life of a snail family, which she kept in a flower pot in her nursery (Lane, *Beatrix* 36). Soon Beatrix provided a home for some lizards, a pair of mice, a rabbit and some other small animals, which she hid in her room (Lane, *Beatrix* 36). Animal companionship was tolerated more than human companionship and so Beatrix began to study them carefully; for instance she noted the differences in the breathing system of newts and frogs, and discovered that each animal has its own individual personality (Taylor et al. 72-77). Whenever Beatrix travelled, her animals were her constant companions as she brought them with her to make sure that she was never without company. "She had made friends with rabbits and hedgehogs, mice and minnows, as a prisoner in solitary confinement will befriend a mouse" (Lane, *Beatrix* 38). During her twenties, Beatrix became a talented naturalist who studied plants, animals and especially fungi. Her studies and drawings of fungi were remarkably detailed for her time, particularly noting that Potter was an amateur (Taylor et al. 87). On the basis of her studies, Potter wrote a research paper about fungi titled "On the Germination of the Spores of *Agaricineae*" but even though the paper was read in 1897, Beatrix was not granted the honour to present it herself and ultimately the experts failed to appreciate its importance (Taylor et al. 90-91).

When Beatrix was about 17 years old, her mother hired Miss Annie Carter, who was only about 20 at the time, as Beatrix's German teacher and even though Beatrix was not delighted at first, the two women became good friends (Taylor et al. 15). When Miss Carter got married, she left Bolton Gardens and gave birth to her son Noel Moore, to whom Beatrix frequently wrote (Taylor et al. 17-18). The letter Beatrix wrote to Noel when he was 5 years old and laying in bed due to an illness became "one of the most famous

letters ever written” (Taylor et al. 18). It was a letter about four little rabbits, accompanied by small ink drawings and Noel kept Beatrix’s letter so when she asked him about it years later, he lent it to her to copy it (Lane, *Beatrix* 61-64). Beatrix wanted to make a children’s book out of her story and after changing small parts of the text and drawings, she submitted it to about six publishers but was rejected by all (Taylor et al. 97-98). Because Potter had faith in her book, she decided to publish it by herself (Taylor et al 98). Finally, in 1902, Fredrick Warne & Co decided to publish *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, but not without making small changes, such as printing the book in colour or changing little bits of the text and illustrations (Taylor et al. 98-99). The small book about a naughty little rabbit became a huge success and even though her parents were proud of Beatrix, her cousin Caroline later notes that Beatrix

was delicate & her Mother tried to keep her as a semi-invalid far too much [...] I do not think her mother was much help to her: it was her brother first, then her father whom she cared for. [...] Her father was very proud of her and her books but like many fathers of his time, did not realize that she had the right to her own life (Lear 443).

Regardless of her parent’s behaviour, Beatrix was finally starting to establish her independence and in 1909, Beatrix’s publisher Norman Warne proposed to her (Lane, *Beatrix* 94). Throughout their cooperation, Beatrix and Norman grew extremely fond of each other and so she accepted his marriage proposal (Lane, *Beatrix* 94). However, her parents “set the whole weight of their authority against” their daughter’s marriage to a publisher and because Beatrix was a dutiful daughter, “she did not question her parents’ right to dictate to her in this matter, and it even cost her some sacrifice of principle, as well as a great deal of guilty misery, to oppose them in it” (Lane, *Beatrix* 95). It was settled that Beatrix could wear her engagement ring but that no one – except members of the two families – was to know about the engagement (Taylor et al. 24). Lane (95-96) notes that “the defiance of her parents [...] marked her first real independence, almost her spiritual growing up” and Beatrix “had her first experience of what happy human life could be.” Unfortunately, Norman fell ill soon after their engagement and died of leukaemia and Beatrix was devastated and unable to grieve openly since no one except her family knew about her loss (Taylor, *Rabbit* 24-25).

Before Norman's death, in the summer of 1905, Beatrix accompanied her parents on a holiday to the Lake District and decided to buy a farm called Hill Top Farm in Near Sawrey (Lane, *Beatrix* 98). She had loved the area, the landscape as well as the people and Lane (*Beatrix* 99-100) notes that Beatrix considered it as a perfect little place from her childhood on because "it lay for her still under that golden haze of the imagination which enchants for ever the first miraculous countryside which the town child discovers." But Beatrix was still not free since she was spending most of her time with her parents in Bolton Gardens, which she considered as her "unloved birthplace" (Lane, *Beatrix* 115). After Norman's death Beatrix purchased a second farm in 1909 and took property advice from a land solicitor called Mr. William Heelis (Taylor et al. 26). They became close friends and in 1912, Mr. Heelis proposed to Beatrix, who instantly accepted (Taylor et al. 27). However, her parents opposed the match because "should their daughter marry, they would have to find someone else to look after them in their declining years" but Beatrix married William in London on 14 October 1913 (Taylor et al. 27-28). Finally Beatrix could escape her life at Bolton Gardens completely and "she had adopted her new name with alacrity of one who for years had longed for the dignity of marriage, and also with the joy of a fugitive who stumbles on an unexpected disguise" (Lane, *Beatrix* 148). From that day on, she closed the door on her past, signed as 'Beatrix Heelis' and disliked to be called 'Miss Potter' (Lane, *Beatrix* 148). It seems that Beatrix did not want to be reminded of her earlier life at Bolton Gardens, which she disliked too much and so she buried her past self and became a new person in her new home.

5.2. Literature Review

Since Beatrix Potter's death in 1943, a plethora of biographies as well as criticism about her tales have been written. Because her wonderful tales, especially *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, remain beloved by children as well as adults, scholars are not only concerned with Beatrix Potter's life but also with the tales' underlying messages and the secret to the tales' ongoing success.

Margaret Lane was the first to publish a biography on Beatrix Potter called *The Tale of Beatrix Potter: A Biography* (1946). Lane was lucky enough

to meet with Potter's husband Mr. William Heelis, who, just as his wife, was a very reserved person and Lane (*Purely* 284) notes that "when I approached her widower, the gentles of men, who received me with a trembling blend of terror and courtesy, it appeared that he considered himself under oath to conceal the very facts that he had in his possession [...] what he did know he was unwilling to divulge." Since Beatrix Potter was a particularly private person, her husband did not feel entitled to talk about her life because "[s]he would not have wished it, he said; what was more, she would never have allowed it" (Lane, *Purely* 285). The first to decipher and transcribe Potter's coded diary was Leslie Linder, who published her work *The Journal of Beatrix Potter: From 1881 to 1897* in 1966. Other biographies on Beatrix Potter are Judy Taylor's *Beatrix Potter: Artist, Storyteller and Countrywomen*, which was published in 1986 or Linda Lear's 2007 publication of *Beatrix Potter: A Life in Nature*. All these books discuss Potter's lonely and restricted childhood, her fight for independence, her marriage and her love for the flora and fauna.

Other scholars focused on Potter's narrative style, such as Ruth McDonald in her book *Beatrix Potter* (1986) as well as her article "Narrative Voice and Narrative View in Beatrix Potter's Books" (1989) or Barbara Wall's in *The Narrator's Voice: The Dilemma of Children's Fiction* (1991). And yet others discussed the importance of clothes in Potter's tales such as Carole Scott in her articles "Between Me and the World: Clothes as Mediator between Self and Society in the Work of Beatrix Potter" (1992) and "Clothed in Nature or Nature Clothed: Dress as Metaphor in the Illustrations of Beatrix Potter and C.M. Barker" (1994). As well as Scott, Virginia Lowe also discusses the effects of clothing on Potter's characters in her article "Little Fur Coats of their Own: Clothed Animals as Metafictional Markers and Children as their Audience" (1996).

Scholars Mark West ("Repression and Rebellion in the Life and Works of Beatrix Potter", 1999), M. Daphne Kutzer (*Beatrix Potter: Writing in Code*, 2003) and Alex Grinstein (*The Remarkable Beatrix Potter*, 1995) focus their attention on how Potter's life, and especially her secluded childhood, can be interpreted as the foundation of her tales. In 2002, *Beatrix Potter's Peter Rabbit: A Children's Classic at 100*, edited by Margaret Mackey was published by Scarecrow Press. Thirteen scholars discuss a wide range of issues regarding

The Tale of Peter Rabbit, ranging from the making of the book, contemporary issues to adaptations, sequels and rewritings of the tale.

As long as Beatrix Potter's tales will be read and loved by children and adults, scholars will continue to investigate not only Potter's life but also the themes of her delicately illustrated tales.

5.3. Potter's artwork and narrative style

When Beatrix was young she found great joy in drawing and as she grew older she continued to draw and educate herself about art (Taylor et al. 35-36). Beatrix was born into a very talented family since her parents' both sketched and were highly interested in arts and photography and her brother Bertram later became an artist and a farmer (Taylor 36-44).

Trying to assess the various influences on the work of an artist is rather like trying to unscramble an egg. If the egg has not been very well scrambled it is possible to trace some of its constituent ingredients – a little white among the yellow, for example – but for the most part it has become something quite different from the sum of its parts. In the work of Beatrix Potter we can sometimes catch a glimpse of this influence or that, especially when she was young, but for the most part the artist she became was the well-scrambled result of all she had seen and absorbed. (Taylor et al. 35)

Beatrix was probably influenced by various artists and while she was always aware of the current artistic trends but instead of following them and reproducing ways of drawing, she converted these trends to create her unique and personal art that still endures more than a hundred years after her first publication.

5.3.1. Potter's style of illustrating and narrating

Beatrix Potter worked on both the illustrations as well as the written narrative for her books and defended many features of her book from being changed or removed completely when they were published. Her tales fascinate readers because "they blend the human and animal spheres" (Scott, *Clothed* 85). The audience might find animals and humans living in the same society as in *The*

Tale of Pigling Bland (1913), then again the reader discovers a society of only animals that imitate a human society without humans as in *The Tale of Ginger and Pickles* (1909). (Scott, *Clothed* 85). In *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny*, the reader uncovers a world where animals and people coexist in different societies (Scott, *Clothed* 85).

Potter's first book *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* was privately published in 1901, the same year Queen Victoria passed away. Even though Potter grew up in the Victorian Era, Chandler (287) claims that Potter's books "quietly challenge Victorian mores and literary styles" and are "harbingers of modernism." Potter's books distinguished themselves from other books of that era because they "spoke directly to children and granted young readers an opportunity to explore their world and resist the confines of strict obedience" (Chandler 288). Moreover, Potter's tales feature other characteristics, which writers of the modern era often incorporate into their works. Chandler (288) suggests that Potter "liberates highly wrought illustration from fussiness, simplifies book format, hones writing to sparse precision, celebrates anti-heroes, [...] surprises with unconventional conclusions, and rejects cultural values of the Victorian age."

One of Potter's strengths is her delicate and appealing artwork. Readers are immediately drawn to her beautiful and captivating illustrations and want to know more about Potter's charming little creatures. Here Potter stays true to the Victorian emphasis and interest in natural history (Chandler 288). Potter was affected by the Pre-Raphaelite interest in nature, which manifested itself by a "somewhat niggling but absolutely genuine admiration for copying natural detail" (Hobbs 15). Sir John Millais, one of the founders of the Pre-Raphaelite Brotherhood, a famous painter and friend of the Potter family told Beatrix that "plenty of people can *draw*, but you [...] have observation" (Taylor et al. 47). Because of Potter's artistic vision, she always had a desire to draw plants or animals in natural detail and she writes in her diary:

It is all the same, drawing, painting, modelling, the irresistible desire to copy any beautiful object which strikes the eye. Why cannot one be content to look at it? I cannot rest, I must draw, however poor the result, and when I have had a bad time come over me it is a stronger desire than ever, and settles on the queerest things, worse than queer sometimes. Last time, in the middle of September, I caught myself in the backyard making a careful and admiring

copy of the swill bucket, and the laugh it gave me brought me round. (Taylor et al. 16)

Exactly those accurate botanical and anatomical drawings that Potter drew distinguish her tales from other children's books. According to Luce-Kapler (143), Potter's "illustrations, although seemingly simple, appeal on two levels: the detailed and scientific as well as the magical and imaginative." Even though Beatrix's little woodland creatures are dressed in human clothing, her anthropomorphised animals never seem grotesque or exaggerated in any way. Quite the contrary, Potter's precise and naturalistic representation of rabbits, mice, hedgehogs or toads indicate Potter's love and respect for the animals she drew and lived with. What is more, Potter does not deny death or lurking dangers and predators in her work but rather softens the presence of them with humour and incorporates knowledge about "the real nature of animals and the interconnectedness of life" into her stories (Luce-Kapler 144). Potter creates a natural community where animals only interact with each other if it is true to their nature. Moreover, animal characters sometimes reappear in other tales as if they knew each other. An example is Peter Rabbit who reappears in *The Tale of Benjamin Bunny* and is on a mission to rescue his coat from Mr. McGregor's garden with his cousin Benjamin Bunny. With this approach, Potter manages to "create a special world and to fill it with original believable characters" (Deksnis 438).

Since Potter aspired to draw her illustrations with such accuracy, it often took her long periods of time to perfect her drawings and she was prepared to fight for her illustrations. When her editor once criticised the frog Jeremy Fisher portrayed in *The Tale of Jeremy Fisher* (1906) as being too yellow, Potter brought Jeremy, a real frog, to her editor to demonstrate the frog's colour and prove her accurate depiction of the frog (Luce-Kapler 143). As already mentioned above, Potter blurs the line between human and animal perfectly and always incorporates the terrifying together with the charm and appeal of her characters. Lane (*Beatrix* 130) notes that "All her [...] animals are conceived with *imaginative* truth, and though they are shrewdly humanized, and their stories told throughout in human terms, there is, imaginatively speaking, not a word of falsehood. We close the books knowing more about animal and human nature than we did before."

Another feature that sets Potter apart from her contemporaries is her simplicity regarding her illustrations (Chandler 290). While Victorian children's books were generally ornately illustrated, Potter "limited the scene depicted, reduced extraneous details, and provided considerable white space on her pages" in her books which lead to a "quietness" in her work (Chandler 290). For Potter there was no need to highly embellish the background of her drawings and she decided to portray the background simple so it would not distract the reader's attention from the more important central characters (Chandler 290). An additional significant technique that distinguishes Beatrix Potter's art is that she "portrayed the world from a mouse's– or rabbit's– or small child's– eye view. The vantage point in her exquisite watercolors varies from a few inches to a few feet from the ground, like that of a toddler" (Lurie 94-95).

As already stated at the beginning of this chapter, Potter also incorporates the following features of modern literature into her work: "antiheroes [...], and unconventional, unexpected conclusions" (Chandler 301). None of Potter's woodland creatures is a typical hero. While Peter Rabbit and Benjamin Bunny are constantly disobeying their parents' rules, Squirrel Nutkin (*The Tale of Squirrel Nutkin*, 1903) is an impertinent squirrel, and Jemima Puddle-duck is a naïve simpleton. In the end, Potter's characters stay exactly the same and do not change their behaviour even though their actions get them into trouble. Child readers often prefer less heroic characters and Lurie (95) found that students sympathised more with the rebellious Peter Rabbit than with Peter's obedient sisters because the students acknowledged

the concealed moral of the story: that disobedience and exploration are more fun than good behavior and not really all that dangerous, whatever Mother may say. Consciously or not, children know that the author's sympathy and interest are with Peter, and with Tom Kitten and the Two Bad Mice; with impertinent, reckless Squirrel Nutkin, and not with the other timid, good squirrels or with obedient, dull little Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cottontail.

Potter's tales break with the Victorian tradition of punishing naughty children because Potter endorses rather than punishes Peter's behaviour (Chandler 303). As Carpenter suggests (286-287), "[f]ar from following the 'well-established tradition' of English children's stories about animals, and exhorting the reader to good and docile behaviour, the narrator of *Peter Rabbit* and its successors is definitely on the side of the transgressors." Even though Potter's

tales start out as moral tales, their endings “are a far cry from the Victorian norm” as they are light affairs (Chandler 303) and Carpenter (279) argues that

[t]here is nothing in her work that resembles the moral tale. In fact it might be argued that she is writing something pretty close to a series of immoral tales; that the voice is [...] a rebel, albeit a covert one, demonstrating the rewards of nonconformity, and exhorting her young readers to question the social system into which they found themselves born.

Regarding Potter’s written narrative, an important feature of her tales is the spare text, which accompanies her simple illustrations and achieves “a new, less rambling effect in her prose by her brevity” (Chandler 294). Dresang (108) states that even though “[t]he classics’ may bring to mind lengthy books full of words that push the child reader to sophisticated thinking, [...] in *Peter Rabbit* Potter has done the same with parsimony.” Beatrix Potter’s simple narrative style can be explained by her purpose, which was to “reach and entertain little children” (Chandler 299). But even though Potter kept her narrative text short, she enjoyed using difficult words every now and then because she was of the opinion that “[c]hildren like a fine word occasionally” (Messer 330). An example is the lettuce’s “soporific” effect in *The Tale of the Flopsy Bunnies* (1909) or the sparrows which “implored to exert himself” in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*.

Potter was once asked to explain *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*’s formula for success and she replied that the story was written for a young child and not designed to appeal to a group of adult publishers and that “[i]t is much more satisfactory to address a real live child” (Linder, *History* 110). Lane’s (*Beatrix* 130) opinion on Potter’s success is the following:

The answer is that [...] they are good art. A high level of execution, founded partly on a naturalist’s loving observation of animal life, partly on an imaginative awareness of its character, lifts her work into a class of its own among children’s books. Her water-colours have the beauty and fidelity one might expect in some luxuriously produced set of volumes on natural history, and some of them, (the illustrations of *Squirrel Nutkin* are a case in point) might almost be admired without remark in such a context; until some sly detail, faithful to squirrel character but not to squirrel habit, arrests the eye, and we find ourselves in a world where squirrels gather nuts into little sacks, play marbles with oak-apples on a level beech-stump, and cross the breadth of Derwentwater on rafts, using their tails for sails.

Potter’s love for and sense of animal beauty and her precise drawings along with her tremendous imaginative truthfulness are the main components of

Potter's successful stories. Another secret ingredient of Potter's artwork and writing, which contributed to the longevity and success of her stories, is her originality, which makes her books fascinating to children. Potter's power is to create a unique world, which is filled with original inhabitants who truly come alive in her stories and she manages to capture "the timelessness of the animal world and [makes] her stories timeless to us" (Luce-Kapler 145).

5.3.2. Cover, format and design of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*

According to Nodelman (44), "the size of a book influences our response to it." While large books are expected to tell energetic and adventurous stories, smaller books, such as *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and Beatrix Potter's other books, are assumed to tell more delicate and fragile stories (Nodelman 44). Because of this, the audience expects charming, delightful and delicate stories when reading small books, and Nodelman (44) notes that most readers find "charm and delicacy [...] even if it is not there." Very small as well as large books are associated with the child reader. On the one hand, small books can easily be held by children's small hands, while on the other hand, large books usually contain large illustrations which facilitate the young reader's exploration (Nodelman 44).

Another important feature of picture books is the cover illustration. By looking at the book's cover, the reader already gains visual information about the story and can use this knowledge as a foundation and expectation for the rest of the story (Nodelman 49). Beatrix Potter's cover of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* duplicates an illustration of Peter Rabbit, which can be found in the book on page 18. The only differences between the illustrations are the lack of background colour on the front cover as well as the beige and rectangular border, which surrounds the little rabbit on the front cover illustration. According to Nodelman (50) the cover illustrations "often seem to have been chosen to convey the essence of the story inside and thus to set up appropriate expectations for it." The back cover of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* also duplicates a scene from the story. The illustration, as well as the written narrative from pages 8 and 9 are printed on the back cover of the book and portray Mrs. Rabbit and her three children. Underneath the picture the text says: "Now, my

dears”, said old Mrs. Rabbit one morning, “you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don’t go into Mr. McGregor’s garden.” When regarding both covers, one might already assume that Peter will get himself into trouble. On the back cover, Mrs. Rabbit is warning their children to be good little bunnies while Peter is already facing away from his mother. On the front cover, Peter is depicted as running to Mr. McGregor’s strictly forbidden garden. Therefore, the reader will expect a story about Peter’s adventure.

When opening the picture book the reader’s attention is drawn to the illustrations. An important feature of illustrations is framing. Nodelman (50) suggests that “a frame around a picture makes it seem tidier, less energetic.” White space surrounding a picture can serve as a frame, “create a sense of constraint, and demand detachment” but white space can also “provide a focus that demands our involvement” (Nodelman 53). In *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* both instances of white space can be found. The opening illustration on page 6 depicts four rabbits in their natural habitat without clothes. The background shows a large fir-tree as well as the orange-brown ground, the sky and other trees. Nodelman (53) suggests that this opening illustration of the rabbit family in their natural habitat can be “seen with the detachment of observation within a landscape framed by a white border.” The following illustration on page 9 however, depicts a humanised rabbit family without a background and the rabbits simply “stand against a white space that now has the irregular shape of their bodies” (Nodelman 53). Since “isolating characters against a white space the shape of their bodies forces attention upon them” and the reader is involved with the rabbits to a greater extent than when looking at the opening illustration (Nodelman 53). Another example can be found on page 29, where Peter is running from Mr. McGregor. Here the characters are again depicted with a white space around their bodies to highlight Peter’s distress. Peter and Mr. McGregor are only connected by a small bit of light brown ground and since the illustration is unframed, Peter “literally has room to run off the page” to escape the angry gardener (Kutzer 43).

The layout of the book is straightforward and ordinary. On each double page, Potter placed an illustration on one page as well as one piece of text on the other and “the pictures alternate without exception between the right page and the left page of the opening” (Mackey, *Peter Rabbit* 10). According to

Nodelman (46) “those books in which illustrators have chosen to place pictures only on one side of the two-page spread, there is less opportunity for depicting setting and, as a result, greater concentration on and closer empathy with the characters depicted.” Because Potter wants the reader to feel for her animal characters, she puts more emphasis on the depiction of the characters than on the setting. Additionally, Potter integrates page turns as essential pauses to build up suspense. As Mackey (*Peter Rabbit* 11) notes, Potter’s “page breaks serve many narrative and poetic purposes.” For example, when Peter jumps into the watering can to hide from Mr. McGregor, “the delayed mention of the water appears at the end of the page, setting up suspense over the consequences to Peter” (Mackey, *Peter Rabbit* 11). The page turn defers the resolution and the reader needs to read on even further to learn about Peter’s escape from the tool shed which raises the reader’s excitement.

5.4. Analysis of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*

For many people *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* is Potter’s most famous book and for even more, “the names of Beatrix Potter and Peter Rabbit are synonymous” (Taylor et al. 95). Rabbits always played a big part of Potter’s life as she owned pet rabbits from an early age on and spent years studying, drawing and living with them (Talyor et al. 95). Kutzer (38) goes as far as to say that “[r]abbits, in fact, may be seen as her alter-ego during the first phase of her career. Like rabbits, Potter was shy and not easily seen by others. Also like rabbits, Potter was surprisingly strong and feisty” when it came to her work. Beatrix adored her two pet rabbits Peter and Benjamin and she often sketched them from all angles or wrote about them in her journal (Taylor, *Rabbit* 20). Through her close observation of her pets, she learned a lot about rabbit behaviour and took notes about it in her journal (Taylor, *Rabbit* 20).

Rabbits are creatures of warm volatile temperament but shallow and absurdly transparent. It is this naturalness, one touch of nature, that I find so delightful in Mr. Benjamin Bunny, though I frankly admit his vulgarity. At one moment amiably sentimental to the verge of silliness, at the next, the upsetting of a jug or tea-cup which he immediately takes upon himself, will convert him into a demon, throwing himself on his back, scratching and spluttering [...] He is an abject coward, but believes in bluster, could stare our old dog out of countenance, chase a cat that has turned tail. Benjamin once fell into an

Aquarium head first, and sat in the water which he could not get out of, pretending to eat a piece of string. Nothing like putting a face upon circumstances. (Linder, *Journal* 300)

Potter admired rabbits and some scholars argue that writing Peter's story might have been one of her ways of dealing with her own problems, as well as her struggle for independence and her rebellion. Potter imagined a place that does not exist. She envisioned a world where animals have the ability to talk, think and behave as humans, she dresses them in human clothing and anthropomorphises her animal characters in various degrees.

5.4.1. The relationship of text and image in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*

In their book *How Picturebooks Work*, Nikolajeva and Scott (1-2) state that "[t]he function of pictures, iconic signs, is to describe or represent. The function of words, conventional signs, is primarily to narrate [...] The tension between the two functions create unlimited possibilities for interaction between word and image in a picturebook." Stephens (164) comments on his notion of "intelligent picture books" and suggests that a crucial principle of the text and image relationship is

a capacity to construct and exploit a contradiction between text and picture so that the two complement one another and together produce a story and a significance that depend on their differences from each other. Further, because individual pictures do not have grammar, syntax or linear flow, but freeze specific moments in time, rarely presenting more than one event within a single frame, this relationship between text and picture is one between differently constructed discourses giving different kinds of information, if not different messages.

Nikolajeva and Scott (230) further note in their article "The Dynamics of Picturebook Communication" that *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* exhibits a complementary relationship of text and illustrations where "the balance between pictures and prose [...] complement and enhance one another: They rarely overlap, but rather work together to strengthen the ultimate effect."

The first double-page spread of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (see fig. 1) is an excellent starting point for this examination. According to Nikolajeva and Scott (*Picturebooks*, 30), the opening pages offer some contradictions between

the written text and the illustrations, which “keep the reader alert and involved.” By simply looking at the illustration, one can spot four rabbits: three little rabbits inside the fir-tree and their mother who is looking at the reader. However, while the text tells the reader that “there were four little Rabbits [...] [who] lived with their Mother” (7), the illustration only shows three little rabbits at first glance. This discovery requires the reader to look more closely at the illustration to find the fourth little rabbit. Because Potter’s illustrations are anatomically correct, the reader can assume that the hind legs and the tail which are poking out of the fir-tree, belong to the fourth little rabbit, instead of being the hind legs of one of the bunnies inside the fir-tree (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 30). Mullins (2) argues that the “ostensibly subtle illustration therefore immediately calls attention to the significance of one rabbit in the group.” In addition, Harris (74) also argues that the interplay between text and illustration communicates to the reader to differentiate Peter as the hero of the story. Even though the rabbits are identical in terms of colour and expression, the one little rabbit that is stuck underneath the fir-tree can be characterised by his restless and rebellious pose (Mullins 2). Another counterpoint between text and illustration is the realistically illustrated scene of rabbits in their natural habitat compared to the verbal text, which fictionalises the rabbits by giving them names (Mullins 2).



Fig. 1: Opening illustration (Potter, *Peter* 6)

The second double-page spread is an example for complementarity of text and illustrations in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Dynamics* 231). In comparison to the anatomically correct first double-page spread, this illustration depicts the bunnies in a human stance, wearing clothes and even holding little baskets. Peter, who is standing on the right side, is facing the audience and his sisters turn their backs to the reader, standing around their mother. Peter is foregrounded and is even looking at the reader, who immediately regards Peter as the protagonist of the story. Mrs. Rabbit is talking to her children and tells them, “Now, my dears, [...] you may go into the fields or down the lane, but don’t go into Mr. McGregor’s garden” (8). While Peter’s sisters are gathered around their mother, Peter is turned away from them, and by his pose, one can tell that he is already thinking about all kinds of mischief. “Peter, with his back turned and his whiskers on the alert, is clearly entertaining rebel thoughts” (Mackey, *Peter Rabbit* 9). According to Nikolajeva

and Scott (*Dynamics*, 231), the combination of the verbal narrative and illustration “communicates to the reader a sense of imminent peril, the meeting of a dangerous situation (words) with the refusal to be guided by experience (picture).”

On pages 30 to 33, Potter’s illustrations enhance the written text. The text on page 31 and page 32 tells the reader that “Peter was most dreadfully frightened; he rushed all over the garden, for he had forgotten the way back to the gate. He lost one of his shoes among the cabbages, [a]nd the other shoe amongst the potatoes.” Instead of picturing Peter who is running through Mr. McGregor’s garden, Potter chose to illustrate the cabbage bed with a little robin who is examining Peter’s lost shoe on page 30. On page 33, Potter depicts a robin picking at Peter’s other shoe in the potato bed. Peter, however, is nowhere to be found in both illustrations. Instead of portraying the little rabbit, Potter preferred to draw the reader’s attention to the lost shoes, which are examined by other curious animals. The reader is worried about Peter because he is nowhere to be found and wonders if something happened to him. Potter creates tension and tantalises the reader by concealing what has happened to Peter.

Another excellent example for the relationship of text and illustration can be seen on pages 36 and 37, where Peter is caught in a gooseberry net (see fig. 2). According to Nikolajeva and Scott (*Picturebooks*, 94), the “relationship between text and image is complex.” By only looking at the picture, the reader might see a dead rabbit lying on the ground, being watched by three sparrows. “Peter’s eyes are closed, his position frozen and unnatural” (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 94). While the reader might interpret Peter as a dead rabbit, the written text tells a completely different story of how “Peter gave himself up for lost” (36) and communicates to the reader that Peter is still alive but he is in despair and in great danger. The text on the one hand is concerned with the details, such as Peter’s mind-set and a warning from the sparrows. The illustration on the other hand communicates “the emotional and physical paralysis of despair” (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 94). The detailed illustration adds an emotional dimension to the text, which cannot be found in the text alone (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 94). Furthermore, the weak Peter is contrasted with the energetic sparrows “who flew to him in great

excitement, and implored him to exert himself” (36). Nikolajeva and Scott (*Picturebooks*, 95) suggest that the reader can identify with the birds who try to get Peter to move and want to “press energy into Peter’s lax body” so he can escape Mr. McGregor.



Fig. 2: Peter getting caught in the net (Potter, *Peter* 37)

The illustration and the text on pages 38 and 39 perfectly exemplify the difference between Potter’s verbal narrative and her delicate illustrations. Because most illustrations feature Peter in close-up, the audience can identify with him, while Mr. McGregor is only depicted from far away or parts of his body and therefore, he is distanced from the audience. Since the reader identifies with the little rabbit, they sympathise with him and want him to escape the cruel gardener even though he is the actual intruder. On page 39, the reader learns how Mr. McGregor tries to “pop [a sieve] upon the top of Peter.” The verbal

narrative is presented in a matter-of-fact tone, as if Mr. McGregor's murderous intentions are everyday occurrences and the situation seems less dangerous as it actually is. However, the illustration on page 38 depicts little Peter who is scared and is trying his best to escape the vicious gardener. The illustration shows how Peter is almost caught under the sieve and all of a sudden the situation seems more precarious than the verbal narrative reveals. The reader fears for Peter's life, hoping he would manage to outrun Mr. McGregor. Potter perfectly captures the desperate moment of frightened little Peter about to be caught in the gardener's sieve. While the verbal narrative tells an unemotional story of how Peter almost got caught, the illustration perfectly portrays Peter's desperate situation.

A counterpoint between text and image is produced on pages 58 and 59. While the verbal narrative suggests that Peter "slipped underneath the gate, and was safe at last in the wood outside the garden" (59), the illustration on page 58 offers the reader a less comforting scene. Peter is still in the garden, just about to crawl underneath the gate while Mr. McGregor is running after him and swinging his hoe. By only looking at the illustration, the picture suggests that Peter is not yet safe, while the text confirms the reader that Peter has managed to escape Mr. McGregor and is finally safe. Nodelman, (258) suggests that most of Potter's illustrations in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* depict a "moment toward the end of the actions implied by the text but not at the very end" as one can see in the example given above. According to Nodelman (258) "a rhythmic pattern of relationships between words and images" is established and is explained by Nodelman (258). Generally, the reader glances at the illustration before reading the text. While reading the text, the reader moves backwards to learn about the events that happened before the portrayed moment, as well as what is happening during that depicted moment and goes on to learn what is going to happen next. After reading the text, the reader returns to the illustration and looks at it a second time. Since the text usually communicates more information than is depicted in the illustration, a "close look at the picture creates a retardation, a backward movement that builds tension and thus suspense" (Nodelman 258). As Potter uses this technique on nearly every page, "a strong contrapuntal pattern develops" (Nodelman 258).

On pages 60 to 61, the reader comes across an instance where text and illustration ironically contradict each other. On page 60, the text reads, “Mr. McGregor hung up the little jacket and the shoes for a scarecrow to frighten the blackbirds.” However, instead of portraying frightened and scared birds, Potter depicts three curious blackbirds that are looking at the scarecrow. One also finds the little robin from earlier images in the picture book, which is sitting on one of the scarecrows arms. Mr. McGregor’s plan to scare away the birds by putting up a scarecrow with Peter’s jacket and shoes is clearly not going to plan.

Beatrix Potter successfully incorporates text and illustrations which do not always communicate the same message to the reader but complement, enhance or even contradict each other. As a result, text and images produce “a story and a significance that depend on their differences from each other” (Stephens 164). Mackey (*Peter Rabbit* 12) notes that “pictures are not simply an additional embellishment; they share with the words the task of conveying the import of the story” and Potter clearly manages to create “intense, emotionally charged scenes” with her intricate connection of text and images (Mullins 10). Potter’s secret is the cooperation of words and illustrations and her ability to merge these elements carefully.

5.4.2. The importance of clothes in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*

In Potter’s beloved picture book *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* the rabbits are often depicted as wearing clothes. “Humanity’s use of clothing is often regarded as one of the markers of the difference between humans and animals” and the dressing of her rabbit characters can “be seen as an extension of their humanisation” (Flynn 431). Potter dresses her rabbit family in somewhat old-fashioned clothes, probably the kind of apparel that was considered fashionable during Potter’s time. Scott (*Between* 192) suggests that Potter’s implementation of dressed animals indicates her understanding of the crucial role that clothes play since they mark “the point at which the individual and the social world touch, and [express] in physical terms the subtle relationship between the inner personality and the social milieu, the interaction that defines self.” Clothes are particularly important for children who are on their way to develop self-definition, as one’s wardrobe is “a very personal and immediate experience of [the]

relationship to the world” which surrounds them (Scott, *Between* 192). However, in her article “Clothed in Nature or Nature Clothed”, Scott (79) states that for Beatrix Potter “clothes, and the social self they represent, are imprisoning; they mar and hide the real, natural self, rather than provide a means to express it” and she adds that “for Potter clothes are usually a matter of anxiety and are often downright constricting or hostile to life” (77). Scott (*Clothed* 79) suggests that the reason for Potter’s negative view on clothes might be due to the corset, which was in fashion during Potter’s time and “crushed the flexible lower ribs, [...] constricted the lungs and vital organs” in order to produce an hourglass figure. Scott (*Between*, 196) further notes that “Potter’s resentments against the social conventions and constraints that are senseless and galling to children [...] are being expressed in her character’s clothes-related adventures.”

While clothing is of great importance in many of Potter’s tales, in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* the animal’s attire does not only act as decorative illustrations but plays a crucial part in the narrative (Scott, *Between* 192). At first glance, the tale seems to be concerned with the notion of obedience, revolving around Peter’s naughtiness. However, the tale looks critically at how Peter’s clothing almost hinders him from escaping Mr. McGregor and questions whether the little rabbit “should act on instinct, as an animal, or do as his mother wishes and act like a civilized human” (Nodelman 116). Potter’s dressed animals blur the distinction between animal and human and emphasise the “conflict between human, civilized expectations and animal urges” (Nikolajeva and Scott, *Picturebooks* 94).

On page 13, the illustration shows Mrs. Rabbit buttoning little Peter’s blue jacket extremely tightly, so tightly that he almost seems strangled (Cosslett 157) and she warns her children to “run along, and don’t get into mischief” (12). Kutzer (44) notes that ironically, Peter does almost get strangled in the course of the picture book due to his human jacket getting caught in the gooseberry net. While his well-meaning but controlling mother insists on Peter and his sisters to wear their human clothing, Peter’s jacket nearly gets him killed (Kutzer 44). “The danger to his life lies in his domesticated nature, not in his wild nature” (Kutzer 44).

Peter does not listen to his mother’s warning and gets himself into trouble when entering Mr. McGregor’s garden. While Mr. McGregor is chasing

Peter around the garden, the illustration portrays the little rabbit as running on his two hind legs as humans do. However, during the chase Peter's tiny shoes come loose and he loses "one of his shoes among the cabbages, and the other shoe amongst the potatoes" (31-32). Without the restrictions of his shoes, Peter suddenly sprints on four legs like a real rabbit would and manages to escape Mr. McGregor. Since rabbits are famous for their fast speed and manoeuvrability, Peter is able to outrace the gardener after he sheds his clothing and believes in his innate defences and abilities.

Unfortunately, Peter entangles himself in a gooseberry net and is stuck (see fig.2). "Peter gets caught in the net not because he is a rabbit, but because he is a rabbit in human clothing" (Kutzer 44). Potter clearly draws attention to the clothing and emphasises that Peter "got caught by the large buttons on his jacket. It was a blue jacket with brass buttons, quite new" (35). Since Peter cannot free himself from the net, he needs to shed his jacket and reconnect with his wild rabbit nature in order to survive. Mullins (5) notes that "only by dehumanizing himself" Peter will be able to escape danger and survive. The next illustration on page 38 shows Peter as a natural rabbit, hopping on four legs without any human personality or clothes. Kutzer (44) suggest that "Peter's jacket represents not only his social self but also his maternally dominated, domesticated self, which is suffocating him and threatens to 'kill' him as much as Mr. McGregor threatens him." If Mrs. Rabbit would not have insisted on dressing her children in human attire, trying to tame and domesticate Peter, he would not have gotten into as much trouble and danger in the garden.

Peter manages to free himself by shedding all of his restrictive human clothes but Scott (*Clothed* 78) claims that Peter's feeling of freedom is soon ruined by his knowledge of the impending punishment and anger from his mother. "Whether lost accidentally or accidentally on purpose, the freedom is short-lived and tinged with guilt" (Scott, *Clothed* 79). Peter's escape is only possible by leaving behind the domesticity and clothes his mother forced upon him and acting as a wild rabbit. Scott (*Between*, 197) suggests that Peter is safe without his clothes because, compared to human children, he has his own fur coat underneath which keeps him warm and protected. It becomes clear that by the act of shedding his clothes, Peter frees himself, not only from all the

dangers that lurk in the garden, but also from his mother's confinements that keep him from being a natural rabbit.

The illustration on page 17 shows Flopsy, Mopsy and Cotton-Tail picking blackberries without wearing their jackets. One could argue that the three girls are not as good as the reader first thought since they took off their jackets just as Peter did. However, Peter needed to shed his attire because he got himself into trouble and could not escape without returning to his natural rabbit self. Peter's sisters, on the other hand, took off their red jackets because they were picking blackberries and were trying to keep their jackets as clean as possible. Since blackberry thorns are awfully sharp and blackberry "juice stains easily and deeply" the girls put off their jackets to protect them from any damage (Kutzer 41). "Putting their jackets to one side does not reveal their innate rabbit nature so much as it shows how careful they are of their belongings" in comparison to their rebellious brother (Kutzer 41). However, it can be argued that Peter's sisters are not as obedient as one might think. Without their mother's supervision, Flopsy, Mopsy and Cotton-Tail might take off their jackets to be their natural self and not to protect them from blackberry stains.

A full-length portrait of Mrs. Rabbit on page 14 shows her wearing a red cape, a white dress, a brown striped skirt and brown shoes while carrying a green umbrella and a basket (see fig. 4). Potter (15) tells the reader that Mrs. Rabbit is on her way to the baker to buy bread and buns. Kutzer (40) notes that this picture of Mrs. Rabbit "is an early example of the sly kinds of visual irony in which Potter excelled, and of the ways in which subversive messages were often encoded in her illustrations" and McDonald (32) states that Peter's mother "looks suspiciously like Little Red Riding Hood." Since *Little Red Riding Hood* revolves around a young girl who does not listen to her mother's advice, one might think that Peter should be referenced to the girl instead of his mother but Potter decides otherwise. Clearly, there is a great resemblance between Mrs. Rabbit and Little Red Riding Hood as Mrs. Rabbit is depicted highly similar to Little Red Riding Hood with her red coat and her basket, as well as walking through the woods alone. Additionally, Mrs. Rabbit is also carrying an umbrella even though it is not raining. This reveals Mrs. Rabbit's anxious nature since it "underscores the sense of motherly anxiety" and demonstrates that she is "cautious about the unexpected" (McDonald 32). Maybe her husband's accident

in Mr. McGregor's garden is the reason for her wariness and cautiousness and her futile attempt to keep her children safe and out of Mr. McGregor's garden. However, the little girl in the fairy tale is not an anxious and fearful character at all. The anxious character in the tale is portrayed by Little Red Riding Hood's mother and Kutzer (40) states that "Potter is conflating the mother/daughter figures of the fairy tale to her own subversive ends." Potter visually indicates that Mrs. Rabbit is as vulnerable when walking in the woods as Peter in the garden (Kutzer 40). Danger does not only lurk in Mr. McGregor's garden but also in the woods, even for rabbits who dress up nicely and are on their way to the baker to buy food instead of stealing it from someone else's garden (Kutzer 40).



Fig. 3: Mrs. Rabbit (Potter, *Peter* 14)

Mrs. Rabbit is a good and caring mother but she puts too much effort into domesticating and humanising her children by making them behave like human

children and making them wear human clothing. Certainly, Mrs. Rabbit's intentions are amiable but she puts all her children at risk. Flopsy, Mopsy and Cotton-Tail, who all follow their mother's rules do not get themselves into trouble as Peter does, but they will always live with the restrictions of their mother's rules. Peter on the other hand almost gets killed due to his human clothing. Without his shoes and jacket, he could have easily outrun Mr. McGregor but he struggled to escape because of his attire, which was holding him back. One could assume that Peter's dangerous adventure was entirely Mrs. Rabbit's fault since she was the one to mention Mr. McGregor's garden in the first place and forces Peter to wear human clothing. Even though Peter experienced a hazardous escape, he is still the only one of his family to be his true self and behave like a natural rabbit.

By carefully choosing situations in which Potter either dresses her rabbit characters or omits human clothing entirely, she demonstrates a fascinating play on anthropomorphism. The rabbits, and especially Peter, change in and out of clothing during the book, impeding the reader to clearly identify them either as rabbit characters or child substitutes. The more clothes an animal wears, the more human it becomes. The saying "clothes make the man" certainly holds true for the rabbits in Potter's tale. When depicted as wearing clothes, the rabbits appear more human than when not wearing any human attire. With every piece of clothing Potter adds to her characters, she anthropomorphises and humanises them further. Potter's rabbits are simply stand-ins for human characters and Scott (*Between* 193) notes that "[c]lothing the animals preserves the integrity of her naturalistic observations while clearly revealing the humanness the stories depict."

5.4.3. The depiction of Peter Rabbit

In the tale, Peter's human nature is suggested early on by Potter. While his sisters, Flopsy, Mopsy and Cotton-Tail, all have pet names, Peter has a human name. Kutzer (39) notes that since Peter is the only little rabbit with a human name, he is also the only one who "will have adventures that resonate with human children." However, Peter's human name also makes him responsible for his mischief and adventures. When looking at the second illustration (9), the

reader can already tell that Peter is a rebellious rabbit who wants to explore the world and break free from his domestic borders. Instead of listening to his mother like his sisters, Peter is standing with his back to his mother, without his shoes on and his blue coat unbuttoned, ready to get into trouble.

According to Mullins (1), “Peter determines his identity by breaking boundaries, which appear in the form of his mother’s rules, and also literally in the shape of the many physical barriers that are presented [...]: the gate, the net, the sieve, the door, and [...] walls.” In addition to those barriers, Peter’s shoes and his blue jacket also turn into physical restrictions in the tale and “have the power to both create and complicate Peter’s identity” (Mullins 1). To break free from being one of the “four little rabbits” (7) and develop his own identity, Peter needs to cross the mentioned physical barriers and restrictions, as well as his mother’s boundaries (Mullins 1).

At the beginning of the tale, Peter “who was very naughty” (19) is compared to his sisters “who were good little bunnies” (16). While his sisters “went down the lane to gather blackberries” (16), Peter “ran straight away to Mr. McGregor’s garden” (19). Already Peter is being portrayed as being a naughty little rabbit who rushes into trouble, as he is not slowly going down the lane but racing into Mr. McGregor’s garden to get there as fast as possible. As Peter “squeezed under the gate” (20), he crosses two boundaries. Firstly, he disobeys his mother’s rules and secondly, he crosses the gate to the garden, a physical boundary, which “separates the world of forest and garden, safety and danger” (Mullins 4). The illustration on page 21 portrays Peter’s alert and attentive expression because he is aware of his father’s fate, who ended up in a pie. Even though Peter knows about his father’s “accident” (11), it does not deter him from his adventure. Campbell (42) defines this “call to adventure” as a happening that needs to take place to develop and find one’s identity. “The familiar life horizon has been outgrown; the old concepts, ideals and emotional patterns no longer fit; the time for the passing of a threshold is at hand” (Campbell 43). Peter passes this threshold by wandering off into Mr. McGregor’s forbidden garden and disobeying his mother’s rules. Nikolajeva and Scott (*Picturebooks* 93-94) note that Peter is a perfect example of “the naughty boy who values his independence and whose desire to transgress boundaries far outweighs his mother’s warnings or his personal safety.”

After Peter squeezes under the gate into Mr. McGregor's garden, he is depicted as a blissful rabbit, nibbling on a radish while holding another one in his other hand. It seems as if he does not notice the shovel next to him, which signals Mr. McGregor's presence. Potter tells the reader that Peter "ate some lettuces and some French beans; and then he ate some radishes" (21). Kutzer (42) notes that lettuces, French beans and radishes are generally not vegetables children enjoy, but they are vegetables that rabbits like to indulge in. Since all these vegetables have a sharp and sometimes bitter taste to them, Kutzer (42) suggests that "Potter is suggesting not only the richness of the garden's delight but is also foreshadowing the bitter edge Peter is about to discover in this garden". When Peter is blissfully eating his vegetables, he is portrayed larger than a little bunny would really be. Compared to the shovel's handle next to him, Peter appears to be as tall as the shovel when actually he would only be as tall as the handle (Kutzer 43). On the next page (24) Peter is feeling sick because of all the food he ate and compared to the potted plants in the background, Peter appears to be much smaller than in the illustration before. In almost the same manner, Peter is depicted as a small rabbit on page 26, when he first encounters Mr. McGregor. The reader realises that Peter is actually really small and his size indicates his vulnerability.

Scott (*Unusual Hero* 28) states that Peter is an anti-hero because he is a "small, easily frightened, emotionally driven, and certainly not very rational animal" and has realistically human characteristics. When Peter loses his shoes and gets caught in the net, he feels the need to revert to his rabbit self to escape the dangers of Mr. McGregor's garden. By shedding his clothes, Peter turns into a wild rabbit, which complicates his identity because "without his clothes, [Peter] has again become physically indistinguishable from the other rabbits" (Mullins 7). Peter's human and animal identity is further emphasised when he tries to find his way out of the garden and reaches a locked door in a wall (see fig. 3). The wall and the locked door separate the little rabbit from the freedom and safety of his home and the woods. Since Peter is a small rabbit, he is unable to reach the key, which is stuck in the door's keyhole and Peter realises "his physical limitations, vulnerability, and isolation" (Mullins 7). In the illustration (50) Peter is portrayed as part human and part animal. Because he left all his clothing behind to free himself, he is depicted without clothes and

more like a natural rabbit. However, compared to the illustration at the beginning where unclothed rabbits are depicted anatomically correct, Peter is standing upright, with his left foot crossed over his right foot while wiping a big teardrop from his face. Potter clearly portrays Peter in a human stance, leaning against the blue door and resting his left paw on the door. Mullins (7) argues that “Peter’s physical (rabbit) self is therefore invested with decidedly human qualities and emotions.” Suddenly “the little rabbit requires sympathy for his plight where formerly there was only admiration for his bold-faced mischievousness” (MacDonald 30) and when Peter begins to cry, his humanness as well as his childlikeness speak to the audience and illustrate Peter’s hopelessness and fear (Scott, *Unusual Hero* 26).



Fig. 4: Peter – half human, half animal (Potter, *Peter* 50)

When Peter finally manages to escape the garden and return to the fir-tree, his mother puts him into bed and Peter is again portrayed as quite small (66). Indeed, one can only see Peter's ears and a small part of his face from under the bedcovers. Peter is almost invisible and his size again indicates his vulnerability. Kutzer (47) suggests that in the end Peter has been captured, not by Mr. McGregor, but "by the forces of domesticity, the very forces he was trying to escape by running to Mr. McGregor's garden." This time however, Peter cannot escape Mrs. Rabbit's care. Potter seems to suggest that both, the garden and Peter's home have attractions as well as dangers. "[H]ome is comfortable and safe from gardeners and other dangers, but home is also suffocating, closed, and airless. Yes, home provides the caring figure of the mother, but that same mother stifles all the energy, activity, and passion of her son" (Kutzer 47). While Mr. McGregor is a danger to the little rabbit's physical self, the confinements in Mrs. Rabbit's home are dangerous to Peter's spiritual self and to his true rabbit nature (Kutzer 47). Even though in the end "Flopsy, Mopsy, and Cotton-Tail had bread and milk and blackberries for supper" (68), drinking chamomile tea is Peter's only punishment. While Peter's sisters enjoy their nursery supper with spoons, a cup and napkins tied around their necks, Peter has gorged himself on vegetables from Mr. McGregor's garden. Kutzer (47) notes that his sisters, who followed Mrs. Rabbit's rules, eat food that is "delicious but not suited to the tastes of real rabbits" while Peter "indulged in a veritable feast of adult tastes, and more to the point adult rabbit tastes." In the end, Peter's sisters are not supposed to be the reader's role models (Kutzer 47). The one little rabbit with the human name, the one that goes on exciting, yet dangerous adventures, and the one that outsmarts Mr. McGregor is the actual role model for readers of this tale (Kutzer 47). Even though Peter is disobeying his mother's rules, he gets to experience an adventure and survives a risky undertaking that his father did not survive. The reader cannot help but to root for and identify with the courageous and rebellious little rabbit. In the end, Peter "taunts both mother and father and ends up [...] triumphant [...] despite the chamomile tea" (Kutzer 43).

In *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, Potter deals with the relationship between children and their parents and brilliantly sums up one of the central issues of childhood "– whether one should act naturally in accordance with one's basic

animal instincts or whether one should do as one's parents wish and learn to act in obedience to their more civilized codes of behavior" (Nodelman 116). The significance of that problem might explain why anthropomorphised animals in picture books are so prominent "these curiously ambiguous creatures actually represent our understanding of childhood better than any less ambiguous creature might" and especially animals such as rabbits or hedgehogs are small enough to convey the dilemmas and traumas of young children (Nodelman 116). Potter's characters "flit between human and animal roles, according to the needs of the plot" (Tucker 63). Children can identify with Peter throughout the book. They can "identify their own fantasies of independence with the adventures of such characters, just as they can thoroughly enjoy the way that Peter makes a fool of his stern, adult enemy" (Tucker 64). Children, no matter which social class, race or age can identify with Potter's warm and charming rabbits since they transcend all of these factors (Tucker 64).

6. The Rabbits

The Rabbits is a picture book written by John Marsden and illustrated by Shaun Tan and was published in 1998. The book is about colonisation and is told from the perspective of a colonised being. While on the surface the picture book is about the colonisation of Australia by the Europeans, the written narrative never explicitly states this to be true and therefore, it is also a book about any colonised land and its indigenous people. Additionally, the book is about the impact of industrialisation and the exploitation and destruction of land. The unnamed narrator tells the story of an invasion by rabbits and the following encounter between the invading rabbits and the indigenous animals. The ruthless rabbits arrive to the new land with highly inventive equipment, exploit the land and take away the indigenous' children. The matter-of-fact tone of the written narrative rips into the reader's heart while Shaun Tan's surrealistic illustrations serve to convey the notion of strangeness and engage the audience to think critically about the occurrences in the book. It is a story about distrust, despair and destruction.

Before analysing the picture book, it is necessary to consider and examine the process of colonisation and the many injustices that Aboriginal and

Torres Strait Islanders had to face. Moreover, Background knowledge about the history of the rabbit problem in Australia is essential to be able to grasp the full meaning of the story. After providing the crucial background knowledge, a short literature review about the controversial picture book is given which considers various critical opinions about the book. Next, Shaun Tan's artwork will be discussed in detail and divided into five sub-chapters: Firstly, Tan's unique style of illustrating will be explained, while secondly, the artistic choices for cover, design and layout will be discussed. Thirdly, stylistic choices which affect the mood and atmosphere of the picture book will be analysed and fourthly, important reoccurring objects in the illustration will be discussed. Lastly, the various depiction of rabbits and numbats will be examined.

6.1. Historical background - colonisation and Aboriginal people

MacIntyre (4) states that “[f]or the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the European invasion was a traumatic event with lasting consequences for their mode of life, health, welfare and very identity.” The impact of the British colonisers affected Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people not only at the time of the colonisers' arrival but they suffered from the consequences from the First Fleet in 1788 until the twenty first century (Jupp 12). Jupp (12) suggests “land, population, economy, society and culture” as the five areas which have been mostly affected by European settlement. This subchapter will focus on the effects Europeans had on Aboriginal land and population since those two aspects are incorporated into *The Rabbits*. For convenience, the terms Aborigines or Indigenous people will be used as umbrella terms to refer to both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in this thesis.

When the first settlers arrived in Australia they were aware of the fact that there were already people living on this continent but they did not notice any form of “civilisation” and it seemed to them as if the “Aborigines did not really *inhabit* the land after all, but merely wandered across it” (Carter 70). Therefore, it was suggested by the Europeans that the Aborigines “had no notion of property or possession [...] [and] the land was available for settlement without the need for their consent” (Carter 70). For this reason, Europeans treated the land as “*terra nullius* (land belonging to no-one)” and colonised the

Australian landscape without awarding Aboriginal people any rights to their land (Carter 70). From the colonists' point of view, the Australian landscape was an untouched and original landscape (Carter 70). However, Flannery (279) states that what Europeans labelled as simple cultures were "highly specialised responses to Australian conditions". In reality, Aboriginals did not only adapt to Australia's climate but they also "actively intervened in their environment, changing it to increase food supplies and developing specific technologies to exploit natural resources – elaborate fish and eel traps, harvesting 'bush tucker', and [...] using fire to create open grasslands" (Carter 75). Moreover, Jupp (12) notes that

[...]and was central to the religious life of Aboriginal people and it was the primary basis of their economic survival. For the arriving Europeans it was something to be exploited for commercial gain. Aboriginal people had developed an ecological balance with the often-fragile Australian environment over many thousands of years. The Europeans undertook rapid, uncontrolled economic development in Australia that had far-reaching consequences for the land and for the Aborigines who depended on it.

While one might think about colonisation only in terms of the subjection of native people, the colonisers' motives were also driven by the longing for control over land and exploitation of land and the subsequent wealth (Carter 32). The pastoral expansion spread across Australia remarkably rapid and Day (195) states that the pastoralists achieved "the physical occupation of a continent in the shortest time the world had ever witnessed." Agriculture, grazing, as well as sealing and whaling was the early settlers' economy until the breeding of Merino wool opened up a new way to earn money in the early nineteenth century (Carter 32). From the 1820s on, there was an enormous increase of sheep numbers and Macintyre (59) calls flocks of sheep "the *shocktroops* of land seizure".

In 1815 most effective European settlement was concentrated within a radius of one hundred kilometres of Sydney [...] By 1890 there were over a hundred million sheep and nearly eight million cattle pastured in every part of the country except the desert interior. Their spread was accomplished in a hundred years, and in that space of time the original Australian bush gave way to a landscape and environment created very largely in the interests of the flock of sheep, the herds of cattle and the men and women whose economy depended upon them. (Bolton 21)

The introduced sheep fed on nutritious native grasses while “their hooves trod down and hardened the topsoil” which led to impaired plant growth and the grazing of sheep “led to soil erosion and the pollution of waterways” (Carter 34). Since the impact of sheep on the landscape was so severe, the pre-existing landscape got colonised by introduced plant and grass species and could not re-establish its original form (Carter 34). The colonisers celebrated the new pastoral landscape “as the *typical* Australian landscape [...] [which] stood for successful colonisation, the pacification or ‘conquering’ of the bush, the triumph of wilderness ‘settled’ into productive order” (Carter 35).

In 1992, “the Australian High Court recognised that the Murray Islanders held native title rights over their land, effectively debunking the doctrine of *terra nullius*” (Collins-Gearing and Osland). This decision “became known as the Mabo Decision” (Collins-Gearing and Osland) because Eddie Mabo and four other Torres Strait Islander people “claimed rights in their traditional lands against the Queensland government” (Carter 111). According to Collins-Gearing and Osland “[t]he Mabo Decision has been the most influential legal decision in this country in defining the rights of Indigenous Australians in a “post-colonial” society. Hence, pre-Mabo and post-Mabo have come to signify the strong colonial framework before 1992 and the legally altered one after the decision.”

Another issue of European settlement was concerned with the drastic decline of the Aboriginal population and Jupp (13) notes that “between 1788 and 1981, [...] the population as a whole had been reduced by 77 per cent.” The drastic decrease of Aboriginal people in those years was not only caused by frontier conflicts but also by “introduced infectious diseases [...] ranging from the common cold, smallpox, influenza, measles, and whooping cough to sexually transmitted diseases such as syphilis” (Rolls and Johnson 86) as well as “a catastrophic decline in the birth rate” (Rolls and Johnson 4). Carter (74) explains that at that time, the decline of Aboriginal people was not regarded as problematic but rather as desirable because of their subordinate standing in the evolution. An article in the *Melbourne Age* (January 1888) reads:

[i]t seems a law of nature that where two races whose stages of progression differ greatly are brought into contact, the inferior race is doomed to wither and disappear. [...] The process seems to be in accordance with a natural law which, however it may clash with human benevolence, is clearly beneficial to mankind at large by providing for the survival of the fittest. Human progress

has all been achieved by the spread of the progressive races and squeezing out of inferior ones. (qtd. in Reynolds 9)

Even though at the beginning people believed that Aborigines were a dying race, by the 1930s the population size of the Aborigines was growing with an immense increase in half-caste children (Carter 79). Therefore, the European settlement did not only have an impact the population size of the Aborigines, but also its composition.

Until the 1930s in most areas the population had a high male ratio and a shortage of young people. Immediately following first contact came the appearance of people of mix descent. This pattern continued so that by 1900 there were approximately 10 000 mixed descent people in Australia, growing to over 50 000 in the 1960s. (Jupp 13)

While the number of full blood Aborigines experienced a decline, the vast increase of half-caste children created “a gnawing source of anxiety in the new nation [...] [because] [t]heir presence also threatened cherished notions of racial purity [...] through race mixing” (Haebich 134). Since half-caste children had half European ancestry, it was believed that they could be educated to a certain level into the white society if they were removed and refrained from their parents and the Aboriginal culture and instead placed in institutions (Carter 421-422). The *Bringing Them Home* report (1997) by the Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission (HREOC 4) states that “between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities between 1910 and 1970.” According to Carter (80), the removal of children uncovers the illusion of “benevolent settlement” because people were led to believe that child removal was in the children’s favour when the true goal of the policy was to prevent racial inter-breeding. By removing children from their Aboriginal influences, the government was of the opinion that “colour, and therefore identity, could be ‘bred’ out of Indigenous people by whitewashing them with ‘superior’ English blood” (Birch 124). Removed children were put in institutions but did not receive the same education and opportunities compared to white children (Carter 421) and Haebich (155) claims that “Aboriginal children were not being groomed for citizenship but were being trained to become docile, semi-enslaved and disenfranchised domestic and rural workers.” Despite the government’s attempt to ‘whiten’ Aboriginal and especially half-caste

children, most victims of the Stolen Generation regard “themselves as Aboriginal, and [are] regarded as Aboriginal by others” (Jupp 92).

In recent years, the practice of child removal, as well as the violence against Aboriginal people have been linked with the concept of *genocide* and Curthoys (36) explains that it

is not only the killing of people, but also the attempt to eliminate some people's sense of being a people, a distinct human group. That is why the question of the removal of children is so important [...] for it is clearly not about killing, but about the attempt to eradicate any sense of 'peoplehood', of national or ethnic or group identity.

The *Bringing Them Home* report (HREOC 27) furthermore states that the removal of children needs to be regarded as a “gross violation of human rights” and “an act of *genocide*” because the underlying aim was to “absorb” the children so “Aborigines as a distinct group would disappear.” Moreover, the *Bringing Them Home* report advised the Australian parliament, as well as churches and state governments to “officially acknowledge responsibility and [...] make official *apologies* to Indigenous individuals, families and communities” (Carter 432). In 2000, two years after the publication of *The Rabbits*, ‘Sorry Day’ marches were held in Australia's capital cities (Carter 432). However, even though most state governments as well as churches followed the report's recommendation to apologise, Prime Minister John Howard refused to apologise to the Stolen Generation.

My position in relation to the apology is very simply that I don't believe in apologising for something for which I was not personally responsible. It's as simple as that. And I was brought up as a child by my parents to say sorry when I was to blame. Now, I think it's just too simplistic to say to the whole community, well, because these things were done – and there's a lot of debate about the degree and the intensity and the level of responsibility ... - to say, well, let's get it over with and say 'sorry', and then it's fixed. (qtd. in Kelly 254)

Howard declined to apologise because he believed that the policy of the removing of children was not illegal and moreover, the incidents “should not be judged by today's standards” (Nobles 125). In 2007, Paul Rudd, a member of the Labor Party, was elected Prime Minister and his “apology to the Stolen Generations on Parliament's first day (13 February 2008) underscored their

commitment to apology and to Aboriginal issues in general” (Nobles 126). A part of the apology read:

We apologise for the laws and policies of successive parliaments and governments that have inflicted profound grief, suffering and loss on these our fellow Australians. We apologise especially for the removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, their communities and their country. For the pain, suffering and hurt of these Stolen Generations, their descendants and for their families left behind, we say sorry. (qtd. in Nobles 126)

Even though Rudd’s apology to the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people was an enormous step towards the improvement of the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous people, “discrimination, violence and injustice have lived side by side with the positive developments” (Balvin and Kashima 199). Being confronted with negative stereotypes, such as being aimless and lazy, unemployed and law-breakers, as well as being addicted to alcohol is still a part of life for Indigenous people in Australia (Balvin and Kashima 199-201).

6.2. The rabbit problem in Australia

While the European settlement of Australia is usually regarded as a merely human invasion, Coman (1) claims that “the real conquerors of Australia were not humans [but] [...] the animals and plants of Europe [...] which really changed vast areas of native grasslands, shrublands and woodlands.” Imported sheep, cattle and other foreign animals, as well as various foreign plants were responsible for the modification of Australia’s original landscape (Coman 1-2). The imported European rabbit, *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, had devastating consequences not only for Australia’s environment, but also for its economy (Coman 2). While rabbits are often seen as beloved pets, farm animals or hunting subjects, in Australia the rabbit is regarded as a vertebrate pest (Coman 10). According to an article by the Bureau of Resource Sciences and the CSIRO Division of Wildlife and Ecology (Williams, Parer, Coman, Burley and Braysher 1), “[t]he introduced European rabbit [...] is one of the most widely distributed mammals in Australia and, except for the house mouse [...] the most abundant.”

Domestic rabbits reached Australia with the First Fleet in 1788 (Williams et al. 18). English settlers did not only want to transform the wild Australian bush into the kind of nature they were familiar with, they also wanted game animals which were small enough to hunt (Coman 17). Importing rabbits appeared as an excellent solution and Thomas Austin of Barwon Park was the “first person to introduce wild rabbits to the Australian mainland” (Williams et al. 18). The rabbits spread from Austin’s estate (Victoria) and Kapunda (South Australia), another release place, to New South Wales in 15 years (Williams et al. 19). It took the rabbits another 15 years to reach Queensland and finally they invaded Western Australia and the Northern Territory by 1900 (Williams et al. 19). In his book *Analysis of Vertebrate Populations* (1977), Caughley concludes that the rabbit in Australia was the fastest colonising mammal on the planet, just as the English settlers were quick to colonise the land. Today, rabbits inhabit almost all of Australia’s mainland, except Australia’s most northerly regions.

Since rabbits are so abundant in Australia, they “are a major environmental and agricultural pest [and] [d]amage to the environment is particularly significant in semi-arid and subalpine areas where rabbit and sheep grazing has fundamentally altered the ecosystem” (Williams et al. 1).

What is the difference between chainsaws, bulldozers, sheep and rabbits? Not much really. Though chainsaws and bulldozers are the preferred tool for clearing land, sheep and rabbits are just as effective. They eat tree seedlings so that when the adult tree dies there are no young ones to replace them. The net effect is identical, only the time scale differs. (Pickard 1991 qtd in Williams et al. 66)

In areas where rabbit abundance is high, trees and shrubs cannot reproduce since rabbits feed on their seedlings (Williams et al. 2). Therefore, “[r]abbits need to be kept at low densities for many years to permit successful regeneration of species that are highly palatable to rabbits” (Williams et al. 66). If there is a decline in native trees and shrubs, expected outcomes are an increase in erosion, as well as alterations of native plant and bird communities (Williams et al. 2).

The rabbits’ impact on Australia’s flora and fauna is disastrous and they are thought to be responsible for “the decline and extinction of many of Australia’s terrestrial mammals that weigh between 35 and 5500 g [...], particularly in the arid and semiarid zones” (Australian Government, Department

of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts 1). One of the most harmful effects of the European rabbit on Australia's native animals is due to the competition for food and shelter (Williams et al. 1-2). In Australia's drought months, rabbits eat everything edible and even though their population declines, they reproduce faster than Australian mammals. Coman (45) quotes a passage from Ian Parer's unpublished report which was abridged and later published in *Managing Vertebrate Pests: Rabbits* in 1995, in which he describes the scenario:

The few survivors of the crash live on falling leaves and seed pods, the roots of herbs, the slightest sproutings from perennial grasses and shrubs and even termites. They have even been seen 5 metres up trees. Immediately prior to and during the population crash there is a major dispersal of juveniles and subadults. These rabbits would stop their dispersal movement in any slightly favourable area. Any native mammals in these favourable habitats would have to compete with both residents and immigrant rabbits. Local extinctions of rabbits and native mammals could result. With the breaking of drought rabbits increase in numbers at a faster rate than the native mammals. The rabbits then spread out from their survival areas and soon recolonise vacated areas. By the time native mammals had increased enough to be able to colonise, another drought would be upon them.

In summary, feral rabbits in Australia are responsible for not only the decrease and extinction of numerous native animals but also for land degradation and soil erosion, as well as damage of native plants. Controlling feral rabbit populations has proven difficult and current techniques include biological and chemical, as well as mechanical controlling techniques (Australian Government, Department of Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities). Down to the present day, rabbits are announced as a pest animal and it is illegal to hold a rabbit in the state of Queensland (The State of Queensland, Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry).

Since the European rabbit is such a fatal introduced species, it becomes obvious that it was a conscious decision to portray rabbits in *The Rabbits* instead of any other creature. The settlement of the Europeans in Australia can in many ways be compared to the colonisation of the rabbit in Australia. Both introduced "species" colonised Australia in a rapid speed and pose a threat to the native population as well as take over the land to completely modify the landscape.

6.3. Literature Review

The Rabbits has been a controversial picture book for various reasons. On the one hand, some argue that it is “too politically correct” (Banerjee 418), while on the other hand, others are of the opinion that “the portrayal of the Aboriginals is patronising and silencing” and some disagree with the picture books categorisation as a book for children (Banerjee 418). For example, Nimon states:

While those well versed in children’s literature recognise *The Rabbits* as an allegory best suited to the reflective, informed and mature reader in high school or beyond, the choice by author and illustrator of the picture book format and the marketing of the title in bookshops alongside titles for pre-schoolers confounds many. Certainly, reading *The Rabbits* is a discomfiting experience. Marsden and Tan cry in the wilderness of an apocalyptic landscape. The written text echoes the declamatory chant of the Greek chorus of tragedy. The sombre images subtly shape-change the familiar into the nightmarish; in the manner of Hieronymus Bosch. Tan creates an Australian vision of Hell (7).

This chapter will give a short overview of three distinct readings of the text. Firstly, Collins-Gearing and Osland’s critical reading of the text will be discussed. They argue that “the narrative struggles to re-write pre-Mabo settlement myths with a post-Mabo awareness that the land was wrongfully taken and the colonisers have built a whole nation on this theft” (Collins-Gearing and Osland). Secondly, Bradford’s critical opinion of the text will be considered. Bradford claims that *The Rabbits* “seizes upon the symbolism of home and homelessness to construct a dehistoricised, uncomplicated and undynamic past” (106) and further argues that the book’s illustration “merely reinscribes colonial discourses as it mobilises binaries which distinguish colonised from colonisers: nature and culture; primitive and advanced; ancient and modern; child and adult” (107). Thirdly, Banerjee’s reading of *The Rabbits* as a contact zone will be considered. Banerjee emphasises that the “overwhelming message of the book is the destruction of the landscape due to colonialism” and analyses the picture book itself as a “troubled contact zone where text and image exist in tension with each other such that two separate but interwoven strands ultimately come together to deliver a poignant message” (418).

In their critical reading of *The Rabbits*, Collins-Gearing and Osland argue that the psychological notion of *terra nullius* leads “to a clash of pre-Mabo metanarrative of settlement and post-Mabo awareness of invasion and dispossession.” They further state that “[p]ost-Mabo, non-Indigenous representations face the dilemma of acknowledging the presence of Indigenous peoples within colonialist frameworks built on the doctrine of *terra nullius*” (Collins-Gearing and Osland). In other words, the story of the white settlement has long been and still often is the foundation for “ideological, institutional and societal practices and beliefs” that downgrade Indigenous civilisation and culture (Collins-Gearing and Osland). The picture book clearly acknowledges that the land was populated by a native species before the colonisation and both the written narrative, as well as the illustrations deal with the rabbits’ invasion and their influence on the inhabitants and the landscape (Collins-Gearing and Osland). However, Collins-Gearing and Osland argue that the book “struggles to subvert pre-Mabo narratives of Australia as an empty landscape and replace it instead with a narrative of invasion and dispossession.” The colonisers are unable to see that the Aboriginal people are using the land in their own unique way because it is used differently to what they are used to and “ [n]on-Aboriginality is constructed on agrarian, pastoralist and scientific superiority” (Collins-Gearing and Osland). The assumption of an empty land is enough to justify for the occupancy of the land but according to Collins-Gearing and Osland, the text overturns this by displaying the destruction of the environment by the rabbits. “The text struggles to come to terms with a non-Aboriginality that overpowered Indigenous Australians and a non-Aboriginality that acknowledges that dispossession” (Collins-Gearing and Osland).

While the narrative endorses a post-Mabo awareness of the deprivation of the original inhabitants’ rights and destruction of land, it is still “confined by a pre-Mabo collective memory of colonialist superiority” (Collins-Gearing and Osland). The picture book tells the story of colonisation, starting with the arrival of the colonisers in the new land. Collins-Gearing and Osland consider the beginning of the picture book problematic because the numbats’ history and existence before the colonisation stays unmentioned and they are only depicted in relation to the rabbits (Collins-Gearing and Osland). Additionally, the artists

address the problem of the story's "Western temporal perspective" since Indigenous perspectives of time are often cyclical compared to the Western one way linear view of time (Collins-Gearing and Osland.) However,

Indigenous views of time as cyclical do not always separate these acts of invasion and colonisation from other important moments in Indigenous life and knowledges. That is, in concentric circles, colonisation, particularly the removal of children, remains close in time. It is not an event that happened in the past and is nearly or easily forgotten. (Collins-Gearing and Osland)

Collins-Gearing and Osland claim that the book's features serve "to reinforce the Western linear approach to time, movement from one period to the next and therefore movement further away from the original period: that is, the book starts with the arrival of the Rabbits and Numbats' existence before this is now long and forgotten".

The picture book's final page again strengthens the rabbits' urge to control the numbats. The narrative text "Who will save us from the rabbits?" (Marsden and Tan 29) emphasises the colonialist assumption that the original inhabitants are unable to save themselves and are dependent on a saviour (Collins-Gearing and Osland). According to Collins-Gearing and Osland, "the text's attempt to acknowledge a post-Mabo landscape of invasion and dispossession is undercut by pre-Mabo suppression of Indigenous voices, leaving no space to address injustices and denial of Indigenous rights." Towards the end of their article, Collins-Gearing and Osland argue that *The Rabbits* can be regarded as "a morally charged retelling of the nation's collective memory of colonisation. Pre-Mabo, the collective Australian psyche, and its doctrine of *terra nullius*, depended on being 'morally' and legally right [...]. Post-Mabo, the nation's psychological *terra nullius* has to come to terms with being morally 'wrong'."

In contrast to Collins-Gearing and Osland's opinion about *The Rabbits*, Bradford (106) focuses on how the "text seizes upon the symbolism of home and homelessness to construct a dehistoricised, uncomplicated and undynamic past." Because the notion of home and especially the loss of it is a crucial motif in postcolonial literature, Bradford draws on Homi Bhabha's study of the unhomely moment. Bhabha explains that when traumatic histories are written down as literature, there is a "moment of transit" (448) where "private and public

worlds collide” (Bradford 105) and struggle to “frame and name [...] social reality” (Bhabha 448).

The Rabbits portrays colonisation through a repetition of disastrous events. “Still more of them came. Sometimes we had fights, but there were too many rabbits. We lost the fights. They ate our grass. They chopped down our trees and scared away our friends ... and stole our children” (Marsden and Tan 15-22). Especially the portrayal of the removal of children depicts the Aboriginals “as not merely helpless [...] but as forced into collusion with the colonisers”, which is demonstrated by their fingerprints on the colonisers’ documents (Bradford 107). As well as their parents, the children are also objectified and defenceless. According to Bradford (107),

[t]his is no unhomely moment; the past is not opened up to a present in which social reality is renamed and reframed. Despite its ingenuity, the illustration merely reinscribes colonial discourses as it mobilises binaries which distinguish colonised from colonisers: nature and culture; primitive and advanced; ancient and modern; child and adult. Certainly the objectification of the indigenous constructs a sense of pathos, but again this is characteristic of Australian colonial discourses in which Aborigines are sentimentalised as helpless victims of modernity.

This notion of the helpless Aborigines is exactly what Collins-Gearing and Osland disapprove of and criticise in their reading of *The Rabbits*. Furthermore, Bradford (107) looks closely at the book’s final page where she is of the opinion that the tone shifts “into an overworded and heavily descriptive register” which distinguishes itself quite notably from the indigenous “we” the reader has encountered so far. “Who will save us from the rabbits?” (Marsden and Tan 29) Compared to Collins-Gaering and Osland, Bradford (107-108) argues that the illustration of both numbat and rabbit, combined with the narrative “we” establishes an alliance between the two species and “the text constructs a dehistoricised domain in which ‘we are all victims together’.” However, Bradford is in agreement with Collins-Gearing and Osland concerning the Western representation of the colonisation of Australia. “[W]hite representations of blackness tend to work towards the formulation of white identities” (Bradford 109) and therefore, “implacably reduces the non-white subject to being a function of the white subject” (Dyer 13). Bradford (109) agrees with Dyer’s opinion and explains that “Aboriginality is reduced to a universal victimhood

figured within Western metanarratives” because the story is told by two non-indigenous artists who might find it more difficult to “contest colonial histories” than Indigenous writers as well as to step outside of their Western cultural frameworks.

As already mentioned, Banerjee’s reading of *The Rabbits* focuses on the destruction and depletion of the landscape by the colonisers as well as on the “contact zone” (418) where rabbits and numbats meet. Even though some scholars such as Bradford or Collins-Gearing and Osland critique the victimised portrayal of the Indigenous people in the picture book, Banerjee (418) acknowledges the injustice committed to the people but emphasises especially the injustice committed to the landscape, the flora and the fauna. Banerjee (419) claims that the rabbits and the numbats are only peripheral to the “machinery and the emblems of industrialisation and modernisation that gradually take over the pages.” While at the beginning of the picture book the landscape is portrayed as fertile and soft in beautiful colours, the land changes to a barren and dark one throughout the story. This depletion of the landscape is highlighted on the last few pages not only by Tan’s illustrations but also by Marsden’s written narrative: “The land is bare and brown and the wind blows empty across the plains. Where is the rich, dark earth, brown and moist? Where is the smell of rain dripping from gum trees? Where are the great billabongs alive with long-legged birds?” (Marsden and Tan 25-28) Banerjee (419) argues that “[t]his lament is not for the original inhabitants who have been tortured and abused in a myriad of ways, but rather for the ecological devastation perpetrated by the rabbits.”

In her article, Banerjee (422) explains that the common portrayal of coloniser-colonised relations is to depict them in contrasting ways and to emphasise the power relations between the two. According to Pratt (8), her understanding of a “contact zone”

foregrounds the interactive, improvisational dimensions of imperial encounters [...]. A ‘contact’ perspective emphasises how subjects get constituted in and by their relations to each other. It treats the relations among colonizer and colonized [...] not in terms of separateness, but in terms of co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices.

For Banerjee (422) it becomes obvious that the colonisers have undergone a progress of transformation throughout the book. While starting off as colonisers who industrialise and deplete the landscape, the rabbits find themselves as cohabitants of the land (Banerjee 422). Especially the final image of the book emphasises this and depicts the colonisers and the colonised in Pratt's (8) notion of "co-presence, interaction, interlocking understandings and practices." While Pratt focuses on a contact zone between humans, Haraway's definition of contact zone is "a space for multispecies entanglements and assemblages" (Banerjee 422) where "current interactions change interactions to follow. [...] Contact zones change the subject – all the subjects – in surprising ways" (Haraway 219). Again, the last image of *The Rabbits* perfectly illustrates Haraway's opinion of a contact zone, as Tan portrays two entirely different species who come to the mutual recognition that they are in this together. In *The Rabbits* two

vastly different worlds collide and the known world is altered and completely reconstituted to create a common world for cohabitation. After all, the project of settler colonialism, though rendered through violent and oppressive means, is ultimately a home-making enterprise. The aggressively depleted and reassembled world that the coloniser creates is also the world in which he will make his home. (Banerjee 423)

At the end of the picture book, the rabbits come to realise that they have depleted the land and are in need of a saviour themselves (Banerjee 423). Banerjee (423) explains that the last sentence in the book "Who will save us from the rabbits?" implies "a sense of shared suffering necessary for new worldmakings and mutual co-existence despite incommensurable differences."

Banerjee (419) analyses the picture book in order to present it as a "troubled contact zone" itself where the written narrative is in tension with Tan's illustrations. The tension between Marsden's text and Tan's visual narrative produces different but interwoven stories (Banerjee 420). On the one hand, Marsden tells the story of colonisation and invasion in sparse text while on the other hand Tan creates a tale of "estrangement, of uncomfortable confrontations, and ultimately of environmental destruction" (Banerjee 420). While Tan focuses on modernisation and industrialisation of the landscape, the reader is unable to find any information about this in Marsden's written narrative. Still Tan's illustrations depict the destructive exploitation of the land

and its resources as well as the consequences of industrialisation and the destruction of the land.

In an interview, Tan explains that “[i]f you were more visual and you absorbed the images you would sort of take it in a different way and see it as more of a universal tale of some environmental problem, whereas the text led you [to] think it was about racial and social issues” (qtd. in Do Rozario 189). Marsden’s text clearly epitomises Pratt’s (8) idea of a contact zone, which she describes as “the space of imperial encounters, the space in which peoples geographically and historically separated come into contact with each other and establish ongoing relations, usually involving conditions of coercion, radical inequality, and intractable conflict.” Marsden’s narrative communicates Pratt’s idea through his dialectic conflict between the numbats and the rabbits, between “us” and “them” in sentences such as: “They brought new food. And they brought new animals. [...] But some of the food made us sick, and some of the animals scared us” (11-12) or “They ate our grass. They chopped down our trees and scared away our friends... and stole our children” (19-22). While Marsden portrays the species as “us” versus “them”, Tan’s illustrations focus on estranging representations (Banerjee 420). As already mentioned and critiqued by other scholars, Marsden who does not descend from Indigenous heritage “problematically assumes the indigenous position [...] thereby unwittingly speaking for the Indigenous population” (Banerjee 420). Tan on the other hand concentrates on the issue of strangeness and unfamiliarity and “neither assumes an indigenous illustrative voice, nor a European one” (Banerjee 420). Concerning the last image of the picture book, Banerjee (421) suggests that Marsden might have envisioned a different illustration for the ending, one that binds together with the “us” versus “them” framing of his narrative, and therefore, portraying the numbats alone and wondering “Who will save us from the rabbits?” (29) Instead, Tan “subverts the binary logic of the text and masterfully alters the speaking voice” (Banerjee 421). The final question, according to Banerjee (421-422) “is posed [...] collectively, in unison, by the two very different creatures that populate the text – the original inhabitant, as well as the self-questioning rabbit who has now come to realise the folly of his ways.” Both Bradford and Banerjee believe that the last illustration of the two species constructs an alliance, Bradford also argues that “the text constructs a

dehistoricised domain in which ‘we are all victims together’” (Bradford 107). Banerjee contradicts Bradford’s argument by stating that the text has harshly “critiqued the nation making enterprise” of the colonisers that it seems impossible for this one last moment to be able to dehistoricise it (Banerjee 422). Shaun Tan clearly achieved his objective to make the illustrations open for interpretation and especially his last illustration has caused a lot of disagreement among scholars.

6.4. Shaun Tan’s artwork in *The Rabbits*

“The pictures in contemporary picture books are often intricate in detail and sophisticated in style, even when they accompany simple texts” (Nodelman 19) and *The Rabbits* certainly fits this description. Since *The Rabbits* has only little written narrative, the readers focus most of their attention on Shaun Tan’s marvellous illustrations. Tan’s illustrations are a narrative on their own and the discordance of text and illustration adds another dimension and point of view to the story. Since illustrations are so prominent and important in *The Rabbits*, the aim of this subchapter is to analyse Shaun Tan’s artwork. The outline of this analysis is based on Nodelman’s theory in his book *Words about Pictures* (1996). Firstly, Shaun Tan’s style of illustrating Marsden’s written text will be discussed. Secondly, the style of format and design will be analysed to detect how those choices manage to capture the reader. Thirdly, the analysis will focus on how certain stylistic choices can affect the mood and atmosphere of the picture book, and fourthly, crucial objects found in Shaun Tan’s illustrations will be analysed. Finally, the depiction of the rabbits and numbats will be analysed.

The Indigenous people are portrayed as some kind of marsupial but throughout the picture book they are nameless beings. According to Collins-Gearing and Osland, the Indigenous marsupials have been “identified by reviewers as bandicoots, tree kangaroos, [...] but most closely resembling a numbat, a small, furry, white-banded creature, with a long bushy tail, that feeds mainly on termites and is currently classified [...] as an endangered species.” To simplify the description of the Indigenous people in the book, they will be referred to as numbats. The description of a numbat fits the illustrated

marsupials as well as the status of an endangered species. Since the indigenous population declined since the colonisation, they could also be viewed as an “endangered species”.

6.4.1. Shaun Tan’s style of illustrating

According to Cianciolo (27),

[s]tyle is a term that refers to the configuration or gestalt of artistic elements that together constitute a specific and identifiable manner of expression. Style refers to the personal character or form that is recognizable in an artist’s work because of his or her particular and consistent treatment of details, composition, and handling of a medium.

The style of illustrations in picture books is crucial because they have a narrative function and are fundamental for the comprehension of the story (Werner 40). Therefore, no matter how individual an artist’s style is, the illustrations’ function is to assist and guide the reader in order to connect to the story. Nodelman (78) states:

However individual a style may be, then, it always expresses more than just individuality, and because styles do convey meanings, illustrators make the choices that create style in picturebooks deliberately in the context of their conception of the narrative effect they intend, rather than unconsciously in the context of their experience or merely in terms of their personal preference.

Shaun Tan (“Originality” 4) explains that even though his illustrations have been labelled as “‘highly imaginative’, ‘strikingly original’ [...] what is original is not the ideas themselves, but the way they are put together.” He explains that an original and extraordinary world would possibly be too different, too peculiar and therefore, unreadable (Tan, “Originality” 4). He goes on to say that the most alluring and compelling stories are the ones that stimulate “us to look at familiar things in different ways, as if to remind us of their true meaning; the way we live, the things we encounter, way we think and so on” (Tan, “Originality” 4). Tan’s illustration style in *The Rabbits* is surrealistic (Mallan 10) and Nodelman and Reimer (284) clarify that surrealism is often used to depict “unrealistic situations in a highly representational way that makes the impossible seem strangely possible.” Tan absolutely manages to create a “surrealistic world [...] where the

‘impossible’ has already happened” (Mallan 10). The ‘impossible’ can be interpreted as the colonisation and the dreadful events that accompanied the European settlement from the perspective of the Indigenous people and Cianciolo (28) states that “[s]urreal pictures are composed to suggest the kind of images experienced in dreams, nightmares, or a state of hallucination”. Tan’s surrealistic style surely fits the nightmarish scenes of colonisation, dispossession of land and the removal of children. Unsworth and Wheeler (71) comment on Tan’s surrealistic style in the picture book and note that “Tan uses surreal illustrations to unsettle the reader and provoke uncertainty, but his use of colour is also central to the construction of the interpersonal or interactive meanings concerned with the relationship of the viewer to what is portrayed.”

In *Rabbiting On: A Conversation about The Rabbits* in 1999, Tan explains that there was no collaboration with John Marsden while illustrating the picture book and that he prefers “doing something quite removed from what the text is doing without losing the reference, so the mental circuit for the reader is quite convoluted, and therefore exciting.” An example for this can be seen in *The Rabbits* on page 19, where it says, “They ate our grass.” The reader might expect an illustration of rabbits eating grass but Tan’s illustration shows gigantic fish-head harvester cropping the landscape. According to Nikolajeva and Scott (226), the text and illustrations in *The Rabbits* develop a counterpointing dynamic “where words and images collaborate to communicate meanings beyond the scope of either one alone.” With his illustration style, Tan wants the reader to “go off-course a bit, which hopefully fires off some otherwise dormant neurons” (*Rabbiting On*). When it comes to the meaning and the background of *The Rabbits*, Tan (“Originality” 5) explains that even though the picture book tells the story of the European colonisation and the injustices committed towards the indigenous people, “universally, it’s the story of colonisation everywhere, about power, ignorance and environmental destruction.” By using the history of the European settlement in Australia as a resource, Tan wanted to create a completely imaginary world “which is parallel rather than symbolic” because it makes the story more universal and readers can connect with the story, regardless of their knowledge about Australian history (*Rabbiting On*). Even though Tan tried to illustrate a universal story of colonisation and invasion, he used the European invasion as part of his resource and studied everything

from tree kangaroos, books about Surrealism, Egyptian friezes to landscape paintings of Australian artists (Tan, “Originality 5-6). In addition to inspirations from visual resources, Tan was also inspired by Henry Reynold’s *The Other Side of the Frontier* (1981) and states that nearly every illustration can be referenced to Reynold’s book (Tan, “Originality” 6).

Ultimately, Tan wants his readers not only to be fascinated by the strangeness of things, but also wants to encourage them to reflect about what they have read long after they finished reading the picture book (Tan, “Originality” 8-9).

6.4.2. Cover, format and design of *The Rabbits*

According to Nodelman (42), first impressions of a book such as “the artist’s choice of medium and style, the density of texture” as well as the colour choices can already raise the reader’s expectations about the picture book. The large size of *The Rabbits* also influences the reader’s expectations since larger books are mostly associated with dynamic and energetic stories, while smaller books such as Beatrix Potter’s *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* are associated with delicate and charming stories (Nodelman 44).

An important feature of picture books is the cover illustration because readers “use the visual information [...] as the foundation for [their] response to the rest of the book” (Nodelman 49). The powerful front and back cover illustration of *The Rabbits* depicts the arrival of the rabbits and is illustrated in great detail (see fig. 5). Tan (“Originality” 7) explains that his cover illustration is based on the painting by E. Phillips Fox *Landing of Captain Cook at Botany Bay, 1770*, which was painted in 1902. Instead of Captain Cook and his crew arriving in Botany Bay, Tan’s version of the painting depicts rabbits invading the numbats’ land, almost exactly mirroring the gestures and clothes of the Europeans in the original painting. The two Aborigines in the background of the painting are replaced by two marsupials in Tan’s version. Tan (“Originality” 8) states that he borrowed this resource to evoke “a certain 19th Century European way of framing moments of historical significance, where key figures are actors on the world’s stage, supernaturally well composed, monumental and mythical.” The rabbits are portrayed in the foreground as stiff creatures and without the

title the reader would probably not identify them as rabbits straight away. The rabbits' humongous ship is very intimidating with a multitude of sails and the ship's prow resembles a harpoon. Next to the humongous ship, "[t]he surrounding darkness of the sea and sky and the swirling yellows on the page create an aura of dread and fear" (Banerjee 420). The two numbats are portrayed on the right hand side in the background, sitting on a small hill, clearly depicting the numbats inferior status compared to the rabbits' presence on the cover. As Moebius (256) notes, characters presented smaller and in the background are likely to be seen as having fewer benefits than the ones being positioned in the middle of the illustration. The cover illustration is an illustration taken out of the picture book and has "been chosen to convey the essence of the story inside and thus to set up appropriate expectations for it" (Nodelman 50). According to Tan ("Originality" 8), he "wanted to introduce a surreal dreamlike quality, ambiguous in terms of mixed awe and dread, exaggerated but not caricatured or didactic. Most of all, [he] wanted to produce an image that was enigmatic and thought-provoking." The title *The Rabbits* is printed in bold letters in the upper third of the cover using a foreign and strange alphabet instead of a regular Roman alphabet. For example, the 't' resembles a cross and the 'e' has a wave underneath it. Maybe these letters present letters from a foreign culture or a different time. The back cover shows the rest of the ship and a red strip, which appears to be a piece of a flag or maybe a piece of the rabbit's clothes. On the red strip it reads:

A rich and haunting
allegory for all ages,
and cultures.

The rabbits came many grandparents ago.
They built houses, made roads, had children.
They cut down trees.
A whole continent of rabbits...

These words give the reader an uneasy feeling and already set the mood and the reader's expectations for the story. The cover illustration certainly portrays the rabbits as intruders of the numbats' land and depicts them as a higher advanced species, wearing clothes and arriving by ship compared to the unclothed numbats. The reader instantly realises that these rabbits are nothing

like Beatrix Potter's bunnies and that they are going to disturb the numbats' peaceful world.



Fig. 5: Cover of *The Rabbits* (Marsden and Tan)

When opening the picture book, the front endpapers depict an almost idyllic calm blue image of a lake in which long legged birds are hunting for fish, soaking up the sun and rearing their young. The illustration shows a peaceful image of nature, which is immediately juxtaposed with the dark colours of the half title page. The unreadable writing on the half title page forms what seems to be the British flag with a royal seal in the centre of the page. Compared to the serene illustration on the front endpapers, the dark and gloomy half title page already foreshadows the impending disaster. On the title page the reader is presented with what seems to be a ripped piece of paper floating on the lake depicted on the front endpapers. However, instead of a light blue, the lake now is dark blue and the birds all look to the right, as if they descry something in the distance the reader cannot see yet. All these pages provide the reader with information, even though the story has not started yet. The cover, the front endpapers, the half title page and the title page all communicate to the reader that *The Rabbits* is not going to be a cheerful story but rather a gloomy story with no happy end. They reveal that change is about to come, that the peaceful

and quiet order will be disrupted and thus, establish the atmosphere and mood of the rest of the book.

6.4.3. Mood and atmosphere in *The Rabbits*

Painter, Martin and Unsworth (35) argue that “the most instant bonding effect created by a picture book is that established by its choices in the use of colour” because certain colours elicit particular emotions and thus, can convey a specific mood and atmosphere to the reader (Nodelman 60). Painter et al. (35) suggest that colour creates an “ambience” which can be “regarded as a visual meaning system for creating an emotional mood or atmosphere”. While colour is often divided into hue, shade and saturation, Painter et al. (35) focus on warmth, vibrancy and familiarity. Figure 6 shows the choices in ambience according to Painter et al. (35).

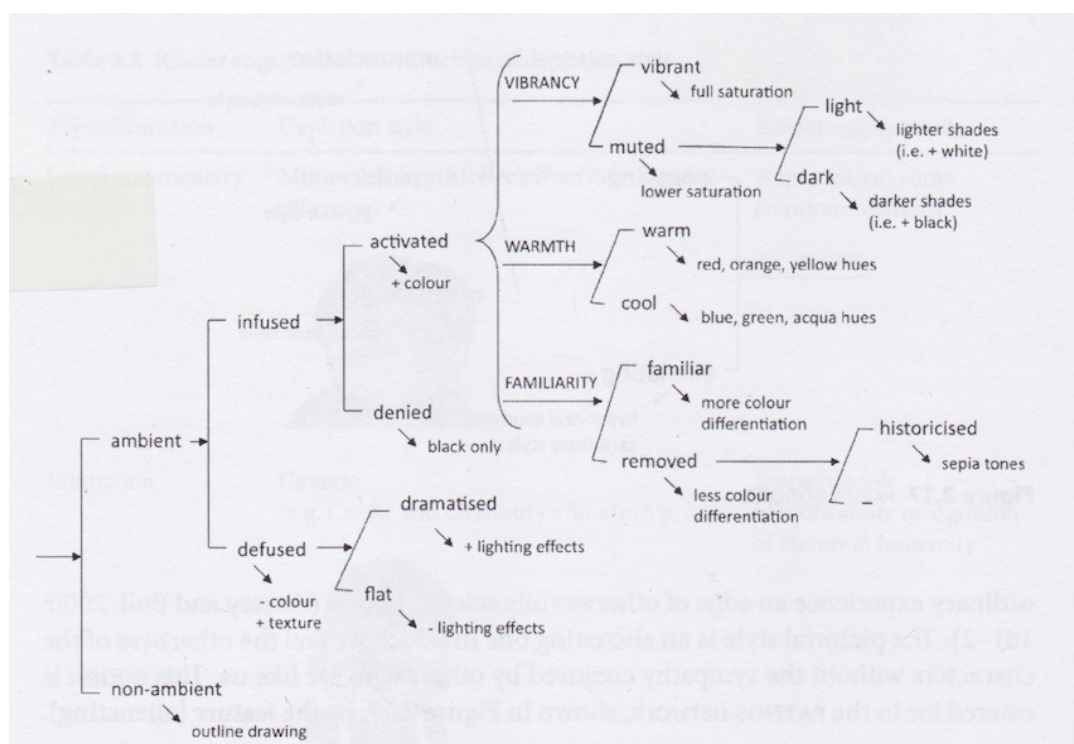


Fig. 6: Choices in ambience (Painter et al. 35)

Variation in vibrancy depends on the saturation of the colours, as they can be either vibrant (full saturation) or muted (lower saturation) and thus evoke different moods in the reader (Painter et al. 37). The second ambience system

is warmth, where warm and cool colours contrast each other to create either a positive or a negative mood (Painter et al. 38). Lastly, familiarity “is realised by the amount of colour differentiation in the image”, meaning that an illustration with a great amount of colours seems more familiar to the reader than an illustration that lacks colour variety (Painter et al. 38). This is due to the fact that the reader, who experiences the world in a great colour variety feels removed from normality if the world is depicted in only two or three colours (Painter et al. 38).

A good indicator for mood and atmosphere is the diverse depiction of sky and landscape in *The Rabbits*. The first double page introduces the reader to a sun-drenched, peaceful and orderly world, which is presented in vibrant colours. Clear blue sky with plenty of white birds dominates the right side of the illustration, giving the reader an impression of clean and unpolluted air. On the left, a warm brown and orange coloured cliff depicts sunbathing goannas, evoking a calm and relaxing atmosphere. In the far distance however, is a small chimney that blows black clouds into the clear blue sky, which might be seen as a sign of what is yet to come. Pages 3 and 4 portray an immense land which is home to native animals like tiny bugs, lizards and birds as well as a multitude of native plant species. The sky is bright blue and the multi-coloured landscape is painted in vibrant and warm colours which creates a comforting and peaceful mood. The only disturbance in the picture is the black marking of wheels that runs over the landscape. The reason for the marking of wheels is the rabbit's strange machine that resembles a carriage and puffs black smoke out of a chimney. The landscape is still healthy on page 5 but on page 6, there seems to be a rip in the page. While the left side shows the original red-brown landscape, the right side of the rip illustrates a dark brown landscape which is marked by wheels and footsteps. The text reads: “More rabbits came...” (6). If the arrival of only a few rabbits could cause such alteration to the landscape, the question arises what harm a multitude of rabbits could do. The mood and atmosphere of the story turn from comfortable and peaceful to uneasy and threatening.

After the rabbits have arrived and built their houses and industries, the change in the sky indicates a change in atmosphere. On pages 9 and 10, the painting is divided into two parts. The majority of the illustration portrays the rabbits and their mission to build houses and industrial buildings. The sky is

blue but darker than at the beginning of the picture book and the industries are filling the sky with black wads of smoke and clouds. While the rabbits are polluting the sky and altering the landscape in the bottom 7/8th of the picture, the top 1/8th of the illustration depicts the original layer that belongs to the numbats. The brighter clear blue sky however is already starting to fill with little white and grey clouds, as well as grey smoke, which is streaming out of the industries' chimneys. This indicates the beginning of pollution and disorder of the numbat's land. The change in sky might symbolise the numbats' changing attitude towards the intruders, realising that they are disrupting their peaceful and orderly world. "They didn't live in the trees like we did. They made their own houses. We couldn't understand the way they talked" (Marsden and Tan 9-10). As the rabbits invade more and more land, crop the land and introduce foreign animal species, the depiction of the landscape changes with the mood of the story.

Pages 11 and 12 illustrate two different consequences of the rabbits' invasion on the landscape. The right side and part of the left side portray a multitude of strange looking and angst-inducing sheep, as well as cows and rabbits which all feed on grass and other farmed landscape. The sudden change from the original brown and orange land to a pastoral landscape, combined with the exaggerated use of vibrant colours, which seem unnatural to the Australian landscape, create a surreal-looking almost dreamlike picture of pastoral landscape which evokes an uneasy feeling. None of the colours of the original landscape can be found in the picture anymore and suddenly the natural land changes to what seems to be an artificial construct (see fig. 7). The boundaries between the vibrant yellow and green colours of the fields appear unnatural compared to the colour scheme of the natural landscape where orange and brown colours represented the soil and splodges of various colours portrayed the plants and animals living on the soil. The other part of the right side shows a dark brown and bare landscape. A small billabong is the only water resource far and wide and is even too small to keep the fish alive. Dead fish are scattered over the bare landscape, which is marked by imprints of hooves leading to the billabong. The imprints indicate that the rabbits and their introduced hooved species have not only degraded the landscape, but also

depleted the numbats' and native animals' water resources. From this point on, dark colours become more and more prominent.



Fig. 7: Artificial landscape (Marsden and Tan 11)

On pages 13 and 14, night-time is portrayed by the use of only a few colours and the sky is painted in a muted green colour, lacking saturation and intensity. This lack of intensity might be due to the fact that the sky is filled with a multitude of stars, which could also be the rabbits' artificial light sources. The vast number of stars, usually considered a fascinating and rare sight, suddenly appears overbearing and even threatening. The threatening atmosphere is due to the excess of cool colours, low saturation and the lack of colour variety.

As the story progresses, the mood and atmosphere of the picture book becomes even more depressing and gloomy. Again, the sky is a useful indicator as it becomes more and more murky and dark as the story turns ever more

sombre. The rabbits have undoubtedly taken over the numbats' land, they built houses and industries, introduced non-native animal species and cleared the land with their colossal machines. On pages 23 and 24, Tan illustrates a black and white painting of the rabbits' settlement with an abundance of industrial buildings and chimneys polluting the air. There is only a little strip of blue sky left which is being sucked into four large suction tubes. The reader realises that the sky is being sucked in instead of being blown out of the tubes because of the arrows on the tubes which indicate the travelling direction of the sky. The absence of colour creates a dismal atmosphere as if all life and joy of the good and orderly world of the numbats is being sucked into the rabbits' tubes.

The blue sky has vanished and all that is left is a brown and black sky, a bare landscape and desolation caused by the rabbits. The numbats are left lamenting their peaceful and orderly life, their landscape and their animals: "The land is bare and brown and the wind blows empty across the plains" (26). "Where is the rich, dark earth, brown and moist? Where is the smell of rain dripping from the gum trees? Where are the great billabongs alive with long-legged birds?" (27-28) At the end of the picture book the vivid colours of the beginning fade away and dark colours dominate the artwork. The sky turns from a bright blue to a dark blue and finally to a black sky. As well as the sky, the land also changes from warm and saturated orange and brown colours to unsaturated brown and grey colours, depicting the depletion of the land. The last page of *The Rabbits* illustrates one rabbit and one numbat sitting across each other and looking into a small waterhole. The land is bare and littered with cans, bottles and pieces of the rabbits' machines and the sky is filled with thousands of stars. Subdued and unsaturated shades of blue create a feeling of hopelessness and despair which is reinforced by the verbal narrative "Who will save us from the rabbits?" (29)

The powerful contrast between the colour scheme used in the beginning compared to the one used at the end of the book becomes clear (see fig. 8 and 9). While the sky is bright blue and filled with birds in the beginning, throughout the book the sky becomes more and more polluted until it turns completely dark. The same holds true for the depiction of the landscape. The multi-coloured and fertile landscape is modified by the ruthless rabbits to their own

advantages and soon the colourful land becomes dark brown and barren and fruitless.



Fig. 8: Fertile land (Marsden and Tan 3)

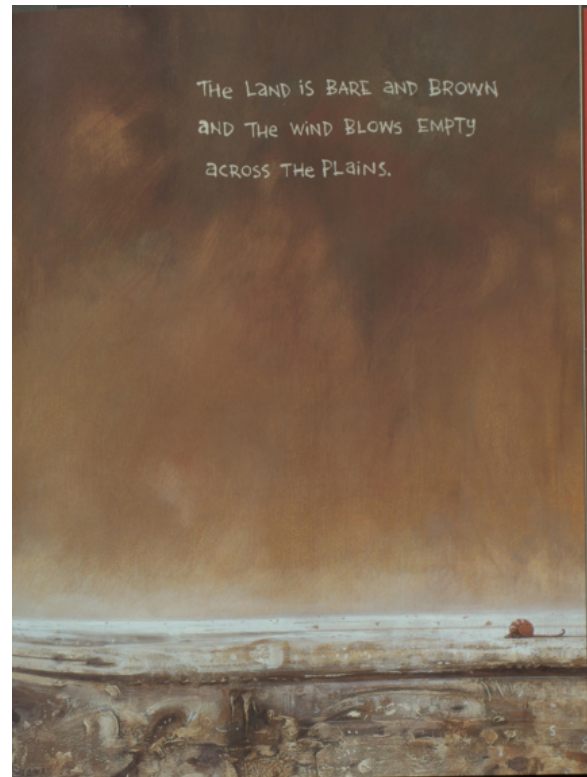


Fig. 9: Barren and infertile land (Marsden and Tan 26)

6.4.4. Objects in *The Rabbits*

While colours can establish and convey a certain mood and atmosphere, “most of the narrative information that pictures provide comes from the specific objects depicted” (Nodelman 101). Objects gain meaning through the context and the reader’s general knowledge and life experience (Nodelman 101). Readers with more life experience and knowledge about, for example, literature, art or history, will find more objects in an illustration.

Objects are often visible through symbolism and codes (Nodelman 106). “Symbolism is the habit of mind through which physical objects come to represent abstract ideas other than their actual selves” (Nodelman 106). For example, a picture of a heart usually symbolises love or an image of a heart with an arrow through the heart’s middle represents heartbreak. In other words, symbolism uses concrete objects to convey an abstract idea to the reader.

Nodelman (107) explains that “[a]ll symbols are inherently arcane” and only readers who are familiar with them are able to interpret them since “[k]nowledge and experience can provide [...] familiarity.” Codes on the other hand depend on cultural signs, for instance postures and gestures of the portrayed characters. For example, if a character is drawn with a red face, readers would generally assume that the character is embarrassed.

In *The Rabbits*, Shaun Tan has incorporated a variety of symbols and codes, many of which are ascribed to the rabbits themselves and the industrial objects and introduced animal species they bring to the new land. Because the rabbits operate and work with industrial objects, they appear more humanised than the numbats. Tan ascribes various objects to the rabbits to anthropomorphise them to a great extent and to establish a clear distinction between the humanised rabbits and the more natural numbats. This passage will only focus on the objects the rabbits bring to the numbats’ land since the depiction of the rabbits and numbats will be discussed in detail in subchapter 6.4.5. The depiction of the rabbits and numbats in *The Rabbits*.

The first enormous object in *The Rabbits* is the rabbits’ ship on the cover. A ship can denote travel and arrival and generally has positive connotations. However, the size and shape of the rabbits’ vessel awes not only the numbats but also the reader. It becomes apparent that the ship and its owners are going to invade and take over the land on which they disembarked as strangers just a moment ago. The multitude of sails reaching up in the sky, the smoking chimneys, the wheels and wings on the ship and the golden colour all indicate that the rabbits stem from a superior and highly developed culture. The sharp, thin and pointed ship’s prow resembles a harpoon-like weapon that will destroy everyone and everything that stands in the rabbits’ way or tries to challenge them. Mallan (11) notes that the “big ship [...] is painted in colours of gold and its size is enormous, signs suggestive of the wealth and might of the Empire.” The ship is a reoccurring symbol throughout the picture book. On page 2, the ship’s chimney can be seen in the distance. It is puffing out black smoke into the bright blue sky and already brings a sign of chaos and disorder to the story. On page 9, the ship can be seen in the background but due to its colossal size it is still clearly visible. One last time the ship is depicted on pages 23 and 24 where a ship statue sits on top of a large column in the middle of the street.

Maybe the ship is being worshiped by the rabbits because without it they would have never invaded and taken over the new land. McGlasson (27) suggests that “the monstrous dragon mothership represents the power of the British Empire to invade and conquer, devouring those weaker than herself.”

Another object that is visible on the cover and throughout the picture book is the rabbits’ flag, which is raised on almost every page to illustrate the rabbits’ invasion and ownership as well as their power over the numbats and their land. On pages 17 and 18, it says, “We lost the fights.” Tan’s illustration shows the inside of the soil which is filled with dead numbats curled into little balls, defeated by the rabbits. On top of the ground the rabbits have raised a vast number of flags as if they have raised one flag for each defeated numbat to express their power and as a warning sign to the remaining numbats. The pattern of the flag itself bears resemblance to the Union Jack, with eight arrows pointing outside in every direction, signalling the rabbits’ invasion of every single part of the country.

Because of the rabbits’ highly developed culture, they are often depicted with industrial objects such as wheels or clocks. The depiction of wheels illustrates the development and innovation of the rabbits in comparison to the numbats. Wheels are first encountered on the cover of *The Rabbits* where they are attached to the enormous ship but on a closer look, wheels are also incorporated into the rabbits’ hats, already making wheels a part of the rabbits. On pages 3 and 4, as well as on pages 5 and 6, there are marks on the land that lead to the rabbits’ steampunk carriage. The large wheels of the carriage damage the soil and leave marks that can be interpreted as signs of the rabbits’ power over the land. On page 5, one of the rabbits is showing a wheel to the numbats, who seem both fascinated but also fearful towards the invention. The idea of wheels becomes more and more elaborate when on pages 9 and 10 the boundary between rabbits and machine gets blurred (see fig. 10). Two of the rabbits are portrayed with wheels in place of their feet and look like a rabbit/machine hybrid. On the same pages, the importance of the wheel is depicted once more when a gigantic ornate picture on wheels is wheeled across the pages by the two wheel-legged rabbits. The painting illustrates a detailed picture of the rabbits’ ideal vision of their new home and foreshadows what is yet to come. The buildings in the ornate painting, as well as the

buildings on pages 9 and 10 “stand on furniture legs because they have no material or conceptual relationship to their new environment – they are just transplanted, like furniture” (Tan, “Rabbiting On”). While giant buildings on furniture legs dominate the painting’s landscape, the rabbits’ vision has already turned into reality on pages 23 and 24. As the painting is rolled across the ground on pages 9 and 10, it squashes a small lizard and leaves a trail of blood on the ground (see fig. 10). This incident symbolises the rabbits’ carelessness towards the land and in consequence also towards the numbats.



Fig. 10: Wheel-legged rabbits squash a lizard while transporting a painting of buildings on furniture legs (Marsden and Tan 9)

Another recurring symbol in *The Rabbits* is the clock. Again a clock is already featured as part of the rabbits’ ship on the cover and can be found numerous times throughout the picture book. On pages 9 and 10, a large clock is depicted on top of the ornate painting while a lizard is nosing the strange new object. However, clocks are not only found on the rabbits’ objects but also on

the rabbits' uniforms. While on pages 9 and 10, the rabbits merge together with the industrial objects and have grown wheel-legs, the clocks again blur the boundary between animal and machine when on page 16 the rabbit soldiers have grown clocks instead of eyes and shoot at the numbats. Over forty clocks are depicted on pages 23 and 24 as they are incorporated into each of the rabbits' buildings. The portrayal of clocks can represent time as well as progress and improvement, but it can also indicate that the numbats' time is running out because the rabbits are taking everything away from them. According to Banerjee (421), "Tan uses the technique of repetition" where not only clocks and flags, but also buildings, guns and other objects "are repeated endlessly on the page until they fade into the horizon." Instead of portraying thousands of rabbits, Tan chooses to depict a multitude of buildings and chimneys in place of rabbits to indicate how "dreary buildings and smoke-spewing chimneys become stand-ins for the rabbits themselves, [and] further [blur] the boundaries between humans, animals, machines, and buildings" (Banerjee 421).

In addition to numerous industrial objects the rabbits bring to the new land, they also introduce foreign animal species which destroy the land, degrade the soil and threaten the livelihood of the native animals. An example can be found in the bottom right hand corner of page 10. A rat with large and sharp teeth is depicted devouring a lizard. Next to the rat a few blood stains can be seen on the floor. The terrifying rat might belong to the species of the black rat (*Rattus rattus*) or the brown rat (*Rattus norvegicus*). Both rat species are considered pest species in Australia (Williams, Singleton and Dickman 366) and were introduced to Australia with the First Fleet (Banks, Cleary and Dickman 1035).

In order to keep and feed the animal species the rabbits introduced to the new land, the rabbits need to alter the land to a pastoral landscape. Introduced grass and plant species are used to plant fields as the animals' food source. One introduced animal species is the sheep, which is depicted on page 12. All sheep are branded with the rabbits' royal seal, signifying the rabbit's ownership of the sheep. Moreover, the sheep are tagged with a number tag on their head and a tag on their behind which reads "100%". The tag 100% tag indicates the purity and quality of the wool as well as the focus on the profitable business

with Merino wool. As mentioned earlier, the production of Merino wool opened up a new and profitable way to earn one's living and the enormity of sheep farming is perfectly illustrated by Tan on pages 11 and 12. An abundance of sheep grazing the land is filling the illustration on these pages (see fig.11). When looking more closely at the sheep the reader realises that they do not look like ordinary sheep but rather like grazing-machines. Their enormous mouths are filled with large teeth, which quickly graze the land and the lack of eyes makes them appear even more frightening. Compared to their massive bodies, their legs and hooves seem fragile and thin but the degree of destruction of their hooves on the soil can still be seen by the dark hoof marks in the soil. Because "[g]razing by cloven-hoofed livestock [...] [has] a major impact on soil structure and the soil regulatory processes that provide plants with water and nutrients" (Yates, Norton and Hobbs 36), the sheep help the rabbits' on their mission to deplete and degrade the new land.

In addition to sheep, the rabbits introduce cattle and rabbits to the new land. The cows are painted in a dark purple colour and the dotted lines on their bodies appear to be painted on portions for the butcher to cut out. Furthermore, the cows have wheels instead of hooves, which also degrade the soil and they even have mechanical milking machines attached to their udders. In the back of the illustration the reader can spot rabbits which are grazing the fields. However, even though the rabbits can only be seen in the distance, they appear larger-than-life (see fig. 11). All introduced animal species make the reader feel uneasy due to their mechanical and unrealistic depiction. What is more, the animals are piled up like products in a supermarket in the back of the picture. Sheep and cows are stacked upon each other and transported somewhere else with the help of a carriage-like machine that runs on rails (see fig. 11). The shapes Tan uses for the depiction of the rabbits' and their objects and animals also suggest symbolic meaning. Mallan (11) explains that

[t]he organic lines which delineate the natural environment are soon replaced by the inorganic shapes of the material symbols of progress and colonial power – factories, buildings, furnaces, machines, weapons. Lines are harsh, straight, repetitive, suggestive of the drive for mass production, conformity and sameness.



Fig. 11: Introduced animal species (Marsden and Tan 11)

All the rabbits' industrial objects, their flags and their animals are signs of their superiority and development in comparison to the numbats' culture. The rabbits measure time with a multitude of clocks, they measure the land and use mathematical formulae to survey and assess the land and operate inventive machines to crop and at the same time destroy the land. They use innovative weapons and guns defeat and keep the numbats in their place (Mallan 12). With the aid of all these objects, the rabbits demonstrate their power over the numbats because they do not own any of these objects and also do not understand many of them.

6.4.5. The depiction of the rabbits and numbats

John Marsden's written narrative establishes a dichotomous representation of the rabbits and numbats. Collins-Gearing and Osland suggest binary oppositions such as "strong, weak; modern, ancient; civilised, primitive; centre, peripheral; conqueror, victim." These dichotomies establish a clear boundary

between “us” and “them”, representing two different groups of beings, with two clashing ways of life and contrasting cultures. In accordance with the written narrative, Shaun Tan’s portrayal of the numbats and rabbits also clearly isolates them into two distinct groups. Tan makes use of anthropomorphism to create a distinction between the two animal species. By dressing the rabbits, as well as by allowing them to operate heavy machines and scientific objects, Tan highly anthropomorphises the rabbits so they appear almost like human beings. The numbats, on the other hand, are portrayed more naturally. They are naked throughout the picture book and only use wooden spears as weapons. Compared to the humanised rabbits, the numbats bear a greater resemblance to animals than to humans.

Tan (“Originality” 5) explains that when illustrating the picture book “the image of Beatrix Potter bunnies with redcoats, muskets and British flags was not going to work – that’s one thing [he] did know.” Instead of depicting the rabbits as fluffy and likeable creatures, Tan decided to portray the intruders as an unappealing species that is invading and destroying the land and habitat of others. The rabbits bear resemblance to Europeans, they are anthropomorphised rabbits with uniforms and weapons who bring all kinds of innovative industrial objects to the new land. Tan (“Originality” 7) notes that during his arts degree he learned about how “industrial cultures typically view the natural world through some kind of technological apparatus” and incorporated his knowledge into the illustrations. Tan (“Originality” 7) states that

many of the pictures for the Rabbits tend to be about looking at the world through various artificial framing devices. Lenses, telescopes, maps and paintings feature strongly, all transforming perceptions of an unfamiliar country to meet particular cultural expectations. The inability of the rabbits to see the look beyond their own preconceptions and flawed ideas is a central theme that emerges from these visual cues.

On various pages, the rabbits are portrayed as looking through glasses, telescopes or other devices. For example on pages 5 and 6, one rabbit is experimenting with a lizard while wearing glasses and another rabbit, who is looking at a globe, is wearing a bizarre construction of what seems to be four glasses, a magnifying glass and other indescribable tools (see fig. 12). In the background, another rabbit is standing on a hill and looking through a telescope to measure or explore the land. The rabbits are unable to see the beauty of the

land because they are too preoccupied with their ideas of how an ideal land is supposed to look like. As already mentioned earlier, the rabbits bring a variety of industrial objects to transform the landscape into a more familiar land. The rabbits' inability to accept the new land in its original form and their compulsive attempts to alter the landscape with their innovative objects tells the reader a lot about the rabbits' behaviour and narrow-mindedness towards the land and its inhabitants.

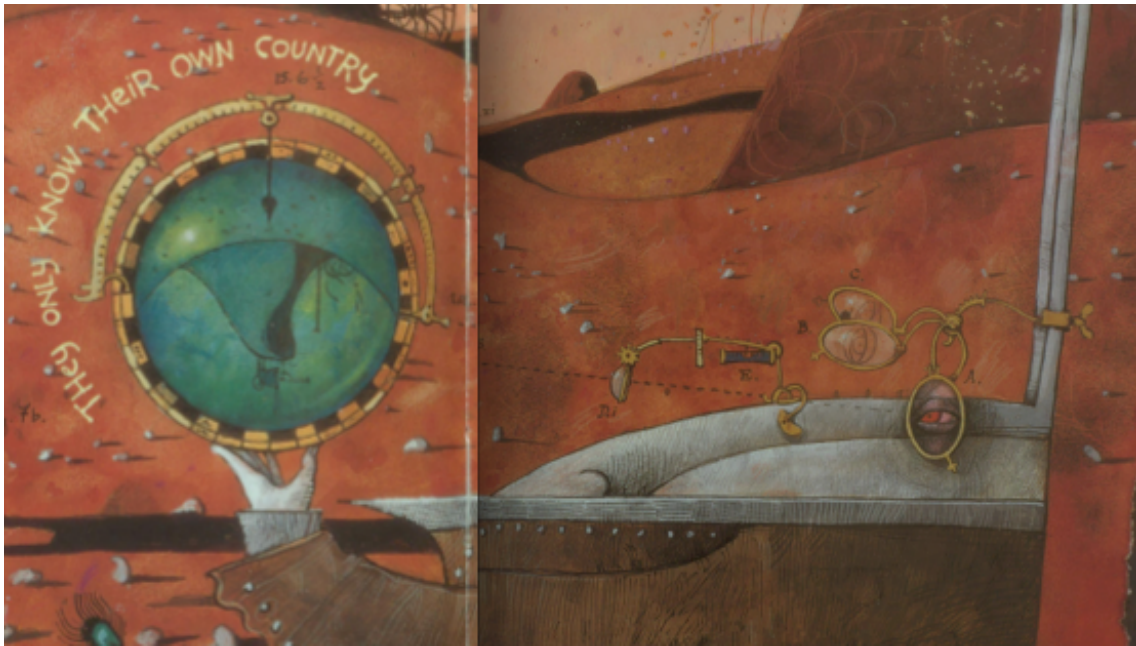


Fig. 12: Various artificial framing devices (Marsden and Tan 5-6)

On the cover the rabbits are portrayed as naval officers, wearing splendid uniforms and carrying their flag and shotguns. Whilst the rabbits are portrayed in their glorious uniforms and their industrial objects, the numbats appear more animal-like than the rabbits. They are depicted in the background, sitting on hill with nothing but their spears. The illustration communicates to the reader that the rabbits come from a civilised culture that focuses on innovation and technology, while the numbats live from and with the land, without the help of industrial objects. The concept of the animal-like numbats is elaborated further on pages 9 and 10 when it says "They didn't live in trees like we did. They made their own houses." Collins-Gearing and Osland suggest that the portrayal of the numbats living in trees is difficult because

[i]n the spirit of *terra nullius*, the original inhabitants are hardly distinguishable from the other native flora and fauna as represented in the book, and one is reminded of section 127 of the Australian Constitution pre-1967, where Aboriginal Australians were not classified as people but as part of the flora and fauna.

Since on the one hand the numbats never stop to be animals and on the other hand the rabbits are depicted almost like human beings, it becomes obvious that the numbats are inferior and need to learn from the rabbits (Collins-Gearing and Osland). Essentially, the numbats could teach the rabbits valuable lessons about living in accordance with nature as well as treating the native flora and fauna to their advantages without depleting the land completely. The rabbits, however, see themselves as the superior culture, they view the numbats' simple way of living primitive and feel entitled to take over the land and interfere with the numbats' traditional way of life.

Throughout the picture book the rabbits' appear overly stiff and their shapes are very angular which makes the reader look at the rabbits with caution, distrust and a bit of fear because "our eyes respond to all these sharp points the way our bodies might if we sat on them" (Nodelman 72). Tan's rabbits only bear little resemblance to actual rabbits and rather are "a strange hybrid form suggesting that they are a blend of both animal and human" (Mallan 12). Since the rabbits are portrayed standing upright, they seem self-assured and confident about themselves and their mission. Their straight and sharp ears either point upwards or backwards and almost resemble weapons like blades or daggers. In addition, the ears are noticeable long in comparison to the rabbits' body size. Due to the threatening portrayal of the rabbits' ears, the reader will automatically rate the rabbits as cold and manipulative creatures, while rabbits' with fluffy ears and round shapes, such as Beatrix Potter's bunnies, are regarded as loveable and sweet. Compared to the stiff rabbits, the numbats seem more natural as they are portrayed round, with less sharp corners than the rabbits and generally likeable "because the shapes happen to be primarily rounded and curved ones – the sort of shapes we associate with softness and yielding" (Nodelman 72). According to Nodelman (72), "the various shapes [...] imply different relationships between objects." Moreover, the numbats' hunched stance indicates their submission towards the intruders and their ears and curled tails are associated with sweetness and harmlessness. Due to the

rabbits' and numbats' portrayal, the reader automatically sympathises with the numbats and realises that there is an immense divide between the rabbits' carelessness and neglect towards the numbats and their culture and the numbats' helplessness and initial naiveté towards the intruders.

Concerning the placement of the numbats and rabbits, the reader clearly notices that "[n]umbats are peripheral in most of the illustrations, and peripheral to the Rabbit's society" (Collins-Gearing and Osland). In other words, the colonisers are given additional visual power in comparison to the numbats' visual power. The numbats are given less visual power and are "for the most part helpless bystanders" (Collins-Gearing and Osland). Moreover, the numbats are "naked and vulnerable, always the objects of the gaze of the colonising Rabbits" (Bradford 113). This becomes especially apparent on pages 23 and 24. As Collins-Gearing and Osland state, "the Numbats are fringe-dwellers in the Rabbits' world, homeless, on the grog (evidenced by discarded bottles), living rough out of cardboard boxes placed beneath a 'Might = Right' sign." While the rabbits are taking a stroll, walking their babies, children and dogs, the numbats are depicted with their heads down next to bottles and boxes. This illustration clearly indicates the numbats' social status in the rabbits' community and the rabbits' power over the numbats.

Compared to the numbats, the rabbits are often portrayed as sitting or standing on top of buildings, machines or hills in order to survey the land. For example on page 5, one of the rabbits is depicted on a hill, looking through a telescope, while the number "31a." next to the telescope indicates the rabbit's mission to measure the land (see fig. 13). Most illustrations spotlight the rabbits' "tools and power, their destruction of the land and all of its original inhabitants and their presiding dominance over the landscape" (Collins-Gearing and Osland). According to Fang (56), a character that is depicted higher in an illustration has "greater pictorial weight [...]" this simply means that our attention is drawn to the same object more". Throughout the picture book, the rabbits are not only generally portrayed in front of the numbats but also bigger in size. The cover illustration portrays the rather large rabbits in the front, while the numbats are depicted smaller in size and in the background of the illustration. Another example is on pages 5 and 6, where two rabbits, who are experimenting with substances and measuring the land, are illustrated in the front to indicate their

importance over the numbats who are sitting on small hills in the background being educated by other rabbits. Again, the rabbits' carelessness about the native animals is portrayed as one rabbit is experimenting with a lizard, letting it fall into a test tube filled with green liquid (see fig. 13). On pages 21 and 22, the most heartbreaking illustration of the picture book, the rabbits again are presented in the front, while the numbats are portrayed in the background, begging for their children to return. The disparity in size again indicates the rabbits' power over the numbats so they can even take away the numbats' children. Even though the rabbits are intruding the numbats' land, their placement in the visual narrative indicates their dominance and control over the numbats and the reader realises that they are the superior and more powerful species in this scenario.

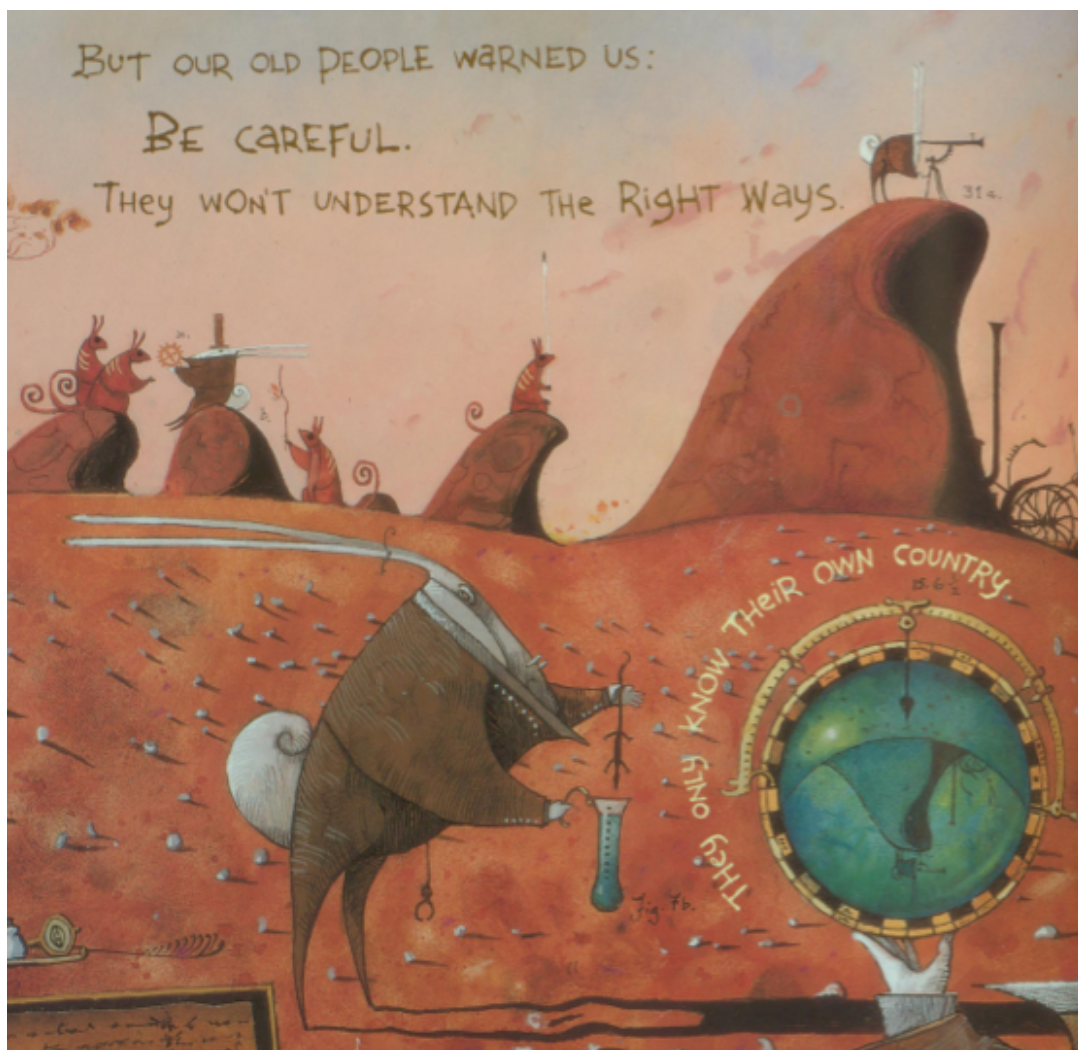


Fig. 13: Rabbits experimenting with native animals, measuring the land and teaching the numbats (Marsden and Tan 5)

The last illustration on page 29, however, shows the rabbits and numbats portrayed in similar ways for the first time. Instead of filling the complete page, the illustration is located in the middle of the page and surrounded by a thick black edging. In the centre of the illustration, one rabbit and one numbat are sitting across from each other, staring into a small water hole. Compared to the different portrayals of the two species throughout the book, the two individuals appear strangely alike in the last illustration. “[T]hey are both seen as diminutive figures with their heads sadly cast downwards towards the watering hole. The rabbit is distinguishable only by his white outstretched ears, while the native creature can be identified by his curling tail” (Banerjee 421). John Marsden’s text reads “Who will save us from the rabbits?” (29) and it seems as if both creatures are looking into an uncertain future together (see fig. 14).



Fig. 14: Rabbit and numbat looking into an uncertain future (Marsden and Tan 29)

7. Conclusion

Anthropomorphised animals have a long history in children's literature and the success and influence of these stories seems to endure time. Whether these stories belong to the category of completely anthropomorphic, partially anthropomorphic or realistic animals stories is of little importance and many of the books are classics of children's literature. This thesis aimed to investigate animal stories to detect potential reasons for the popularity of anthropomorphised animals and discovered four main reasons. Firstly, children can identify more closely with animals and secondly, talking animals lead the children into a fantasy world where they can escape reality. Thirdly, artists use anthropomorphised animals to develop a great variety of characters and fourthly, animals reflect certain characteristics such as gender or race on which the artist can comment on.

As this thesis pointed out earlier, rabbits are one of the most prominent animals depicted in children's literature because they are small enough to convey the predicaments of small children in a world inhabited by large grown ups. However, not only the rabbit's size contributes to its immense success in children's stories but also the rabbit's long ears as well as its fluffiness and its human-eyes fascinate and delight children. Even though rabbits are extremely versatile, artists usually portray rabbits as adorable and furry little creatures and rarely stray off this traditional course. While the rabbit seems to be forever associated with charm and loveliness, John Marsden and Shaun Tan break with this view on rabbits with their haunting story about cruel and ruthless rabbits. Suddenly, the wide spectrum of rabbit representations becomes apparent, and while in some books one sympathises with the charming rabbits, in others one cannot help but feel apprehensive and fearful towards the unusual and almost alien rabbit characters. This thesis aimed to reveal both sides of the spectrum by analysing *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and *The Rabbits* separately as representative books.

Beatrix Potter's partially anthropomorphic tale about a naughty little rabbit has been a children's favourite for over a century and its enduring popularity does not seem to fade. While most adults and children think of *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* as a story for children, which tells the audience to listen to

their parents' advice, there is more to the story than meets the eye. In fact, Potter takes sides with the adventurous Peter and does not punish his behaviour in the end. Even though he cannot join his sisters for supper, he did gorge himself on the wonderful plants in the garden. Potter secretly communicates to the reader that if one does not listen to his parents' advice all the time, one might experience the adventure of one's life, just as Peter did. If one takes a closer look at Potter's own life, one will soon find out that most of her tales convey underlying messages. The themes of control, restriction and escape are evident in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* as well as in Potter's own life. Peter's restrictive mother, Mrs. Rabbit forces human clothing on her children, which eventually causes a lot of trouble and nearly gets Peter killed. While at first glance the reader might assume Mr. McGregor to be the villain, Mrs. Rabbit is actually responsible for Peter's dilemma. Mr. McGregor stays true to his human self when he is trying to catch Peter, who is nibbling the gardener's plants, but Mrs. Rabbit forces constrictive clothing upon Peter which hinders him from being his animal self. By shedding his wardrobe, Peter returns to his animal self and is finally able to outrun the furious gardener, but he would have not been in this dilemma if his mother had not forced human clothing on the little rabbit.

By carefully considering Potter's own life, the themes of restriction and escape did not only become apparent in her tales, but also in her own life. Potter's secluded and rather lonely upbringing certainly influenced her tales. Since she was not allowed to play with children her own age, Beatrix turned to animals as friends and companions, which sparked her deep love for animals and nature. At the age of 47, Beatrix finally escaped the restrictions her parents placed upon her when she married Mr. Heelis and moved to Near Sawry to start a new life in her beloved countryside. When analysing Potter's tales, it becomes apparent that she turned her frustration about the things she could not control, paired with her love for drawing and animals into brilliant tales. Even though Potter includes some darker messages beneath her cheery tales, her rabbits are still portrayed as fluffy and endearing. The tiny woodland creatures appear like cute little rabbits that one would love to pick up and pet.

On the other end of the spectrum, the rabbits in John Marsden and Shaun Tan's *The Rabbits* might make the reader want to run and hide. The

story is about the invasion of a new land but it also tells the story of the consequences of this invasion such as the degradation of land, environment and cultural assimilation. While the written narrative tells the story of the invasion of the country, the illustrations communicate the consequences of the invasion and industrialisation. The rabbits are not fluffy and nice, but they are angular and depicted with sinister red eyes that are terribly similar to human eyes in shape. They are dressed in imperial clothes and bring industrial inventions such as the wheel, the clock or weapons to the new land. The inhabitants of the land, the numbats, are living with the land and are portrayed in round shapes and without clothes. The sympathy of the reader is automatically drawn to the more natural and soft creatures. An important aspect of the picture book is the colour palette of the illustrations. The beginning of the book is illustrated in bright colours; a clear blue sky, blue lake and a colourful and fertile soil is depicted to indicate the health of this land and also of its inhabitants. Little by little, the invading rabbits destroy the land by building industries and buildings, growing foreign crops and introducing hooved animal species, which degrade the soil and make it less fertile. At the end of the book, the sky and the land have turned completely black and muddy, the soil is infertile and the native plant and animal species are in danger of extinction. What is more, the rabbits have stolen the numbats children and killed many of the indigenous animals.

While *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* is an imaginary story with a happy ending, *The Rabbits* was greatly influenced by historic events and is a warning to future generations. It depicts the dreadful destruction and suffering the ruthless rabbits brought to the new land. Even though the artists never clearly state that the book is about the colonisation of Australia, there are many factors that indicate it. Instead of examining the artists' own life, the background information of *The Rabbits* needs to be extracted from Australia's history to detect communalities. Rabbits, just as the Europeans, are an introduced species to Australia. Rabbits spread rapidly across Australia and still endanger many native plant and animal species. Just as rabbits, the European population grew quickly and put the Indigenous community in jeopardy by stealing their children and trying to eradicate their entire race. It is a story about how the

European invasion has shaped and affected the Australian environment as well as its native people and its native animals and plants.

The variety of animal, and especially rabbit characters in children's literature is enormous. Artists continue to imagine stories about these tiny woodland creatures because children can relate to them and are entertained by them. However, this only holds true for stories in which rabbits are depicted as friendly and adorable animals, hopping over the pages from one adventure to the next as Peter Rabbit does. But rabbits can also be portrayed as heartless and ferocious creatures that deliberately harm others. These stories might not be considered a suitable bedtime story for the very young but they perfectly depict the wide range of rabbit characters, which was the primary intention of this thesis.

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9. Abstract

Animals have always had a special place in literature and especially in children's literature. Anthropomorphised animals are popular and beloved characters in children's stories. Tales of dressed or talking animals are often the first stories parents read to their children because the very young seem to especially enjoy these types of stories. This thesis will examine why artists anthropomorphise their animal characters and, additionally, it will classify animal stories into distinctive categories, with regard to their anthropomorphised animals. Since one of the most popular animal characters is the rabbit, this thesis discusses possible reasons for why rabbits are so prominent in children's literature by taking well-known rabbit characters, such as Peter Rabbit or the White Rabbit into consideration. The main objective of this thesis is to demonstrate the vast range of rabbit characters in picture books to broaden the image of rabbits in literature. Beatrix Potter's famous *The Tale of Peter Rabbit* and John Marsden and Shaun Tan's haunting *The Rabbits* will be analysed and discussed from various points of view. Background information on both books will be examined to detect how Potter's childhood and adulthood influenced her tales and to discover how the colonisation and industrialisation of land, as well as the introduction and consequences of the European rabbit have shaped Marsden and Tan's *The Rabbits*. While rabbits are illustrated as charming and loveable creatures in *The Tale of Peter Rabbit*, *The Rabbits* portrays them in a completely different light. By analysing the rabbit characters in these two entirely dissimilar books, the thesis aims to demonstrate the wide spectrum of anthropomorphised rabbits in literature.

10. Zusammenfassung

Tiere sind aus Kinderliteratur kaum wegzudenken. Oft werden Tiere in Kinderliteratur vermenschlicht und so können Katzen auf einmal sprechen, Mäuse singen und tanzen und manche von ihnen sind sogar in bunte Hemden und Röcke gekleidet. Geschichten über vermenschlichte Tiere sind oft die ersten Bücher welche Kinder vorgelesen bekommen und sind bei ihnen besonders beliebt. Diese Diplomarbeit hinterfragt warum Autoren ihre Tiercharaktere vermenschlicht und, zusätzlich, wird ordnet sie Tiergeschichten in verschiedene Kategorien auf Grund ihrer Tiercharaktere. Da der Hase einer der beliebtesten Tiere in der Kinderliteratur ist, werden mögliche Gründe für die Popularität des Hasens an Hand von prominenten Beispielen, wie zum Beispiel Peter Hase oder der weiße Hase von Alice im Wunderland, diskutiert. Das Ziel dieser Diplomarbeit ist es die weite Bandbreite von Hasen in Bilderbüchern zu demonstrieren. Hierfür werden Beatrix Potters berühmtes Kinderbuch *Die Geschichte von Peter Hase*, sowie John Marsden und Shaun Tans packende Geschichte *The Rabbits* aus verschiedenen Perspektiven analysiert und besprochen. Hintergrundinformationen über Beatrix Potters Leben werden miteinbezogen um herauszufinden wie ihr Leben ihre Geschichten beeinflusst hat. Weiters werden die Besiedlungsgeschichte und Industrialisierung Australiens, sowie die Einführung und Auswirkungen des europäischen Wildkaninchens besprochen um herauszufinden wie diese Ereignisse in Marsden und Tans Buch wiedergespiegelt werden. Während Hasen in Potters Geschichte als liebevolle Kreaturen dargestellt werden, werden sie in Marsden und Tans Buch als rücksichtslos und böse charakterisiert. Mit Hilfe der Hasenanalyse dieser beiden Bücher soll die Bandbreite der vermenschlichten Hasen in Bilderbüchern aufgezeigt werden.

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