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'WE'RE GOING ON A BEAR HUNT'

**A POSTHUMANIST EXAMINATION OF THE REPRESENTATION OF
BEARS AND CHILD-BEAR RELATIONS WITHIN CHILDREN'S LITERATURE**

[REDACTED]

[REDACTED]

Advisor:

[REDACTED]

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Abstract

This dissertation uses a posthumanist lens to investigate the prevalent image of the bear within children's literature. Through a textual and thematic analysis of three children's texts which focus on relationships with fictional bears and children, the study utilises a posthumanist framework in the analysis of the chosen texts to, in turn, consider and identify trends within these stories. This research subsequently explores and presents numerous potential implications that these children's texts could have on young readers, subsequently driving the primary research question of this thesis: how might the prevalent image of the bear within children's literature affect child readers? Literature in the relevant fields of study related to the topic are reviewed within chapter two. This includes research regarding the representation of animals within children's books, wider child-animal relations, eco-literacy, anthropomorphism, and specific bear characters in children's literature. A general overview of the three selected children's texts is then presented. The chosen texts are *The Dancing Bear* by Michael Morpurgo (2012), *The Last Bear* by Hannah Gold (2021) and *Big Bear Little Brother* by Carl Norac (2010). The methodology used in this thesis is a close textual and thematic analysis of each text. The study examines the representation of the bear, the depicted relationship between bear and human child and a depicted sense of interconnectedness between the two. This thesis identifies potential trends in the texts, examining and subsequently explaining the potential imaginative and practical implications of children's literature in which bears are represented. It subsequently finds that, despite these texts being fictional, they provide young readers the opportunity to interact with key ideas surrounding human-animal relationships – and issues that emerge when anthropocentric human societies fail to acknowledge and appreciate the emotional capacities and agency of the animal.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Representation of Bears and Bear-Child Relations in Children's Literature

As a child, I was an avid owner of a vast collection of teddy bears and despite now being an adult, I still hold a soft spot for them. The teddy bear toy holds a global presence within the lives of millions of children and the image of the child and the bear as a pair of best friends is exceedingly culturally prevalent across society and the period of childhood. There are innumerable children's books which tell stories of friendship between bears and children. The bear character has and continues to dominate various types of children's stories for a diverse range of ages. Not only is the topic of the bear in children's literature one which I feel sentimental about, but I believe there is a clear gap in the scholarly research of children's literature that subsequently drove my academic urge to explore this under researched area within this thesis.

Posthumanist theory can potentially help humans see themselves as being interconnected, rather than entirely separate, from other non-human beings, including that of the animal. This was reason to believe that it would provide the most appropriate lens in the examination of this topic area. In investigating the representation of the bear, it felt important to actively explore the potential impact that these texts could have on young readers, subsequently driving the primary research question of this thesis: how might the prevalent image of the bear within children's literature affect child readers?

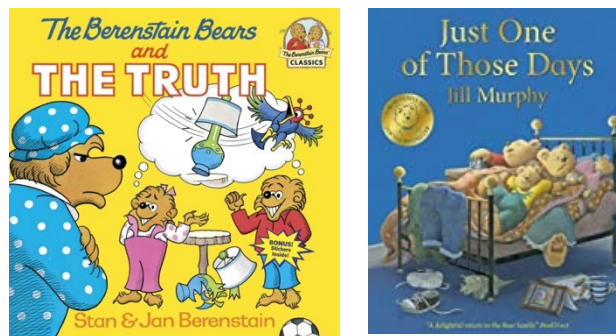
Through a close reading and analysis of three children's bear stories, this research aims to consider and identify trends in the texts, demonstrating how key posthumanist themes are manifested within them and then subsequently reveal the potential implications upon young readers. The texts selected for this study were two chapter books - *The Dancing Bear* by Michael Morpurgo (2012) and *The Last Bear* by Hannah Gold (2021) - and one picture book - *Big Bear Little Brother* by Carl Norac (2010).

1.2 The Texts: Text Selection and Overview of the Texts

In the search for children's books in which a bear character is present, a vast selection can be found. Subsequently, I decided to create four categories in which the books could be placed. Inevitably, some books fell into more than one of the categories which are listed below, as well as some exemplar titles:

Bears as Social Beings:

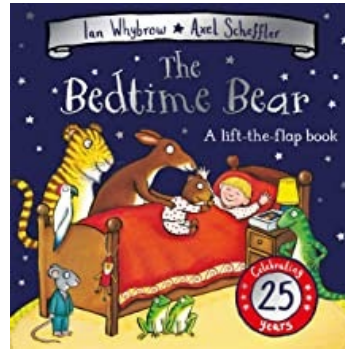
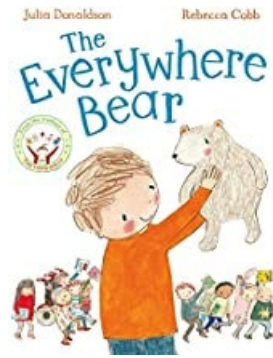
This category was mostly inclusive of books that featured anthropomorphic bears; literature about bear families, parent and child bears, and domesticated bears living in a human-like world. In many of these portrayals, the bears rarely show any animalistic or 'bear-like' qualities (for example- growling, roaring or climbing).



Examples include *The Berenstain Bears and the Truth* by Stan and Jan Berenstain (1984) and *Just One of Those Days* by Jill Murphy (2021)

Bears as Companions to Humans:

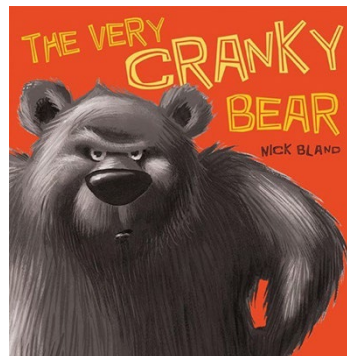
Many of these books were stories about a human child with a bear as their companion within their life or adventures. The bear sometimes acted as the child's protector, providing them with comfort or friendship; in other texts, the child was the animal's protector. The bear companion was often an anthropomorphised teddy bear toy.



Examples include *The Everywhere Bear* by Julia Donaldson (2017) and *The Bedtime Bear* by Ian Whybrow (2016)

Bears as Villains:

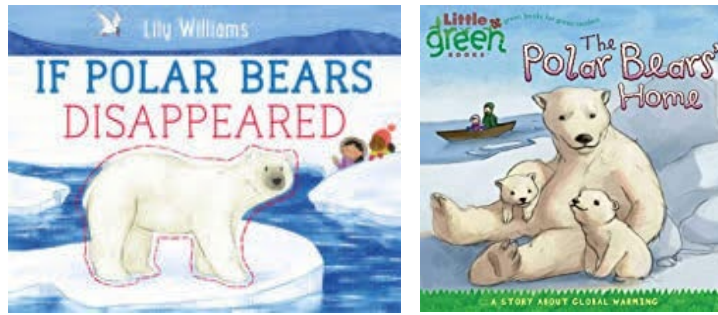
In these texts, the bear was something to be feared by humans; it was often portrayed as a predator with carnivorous urges who was a dangerous and aggressive character.



Examples include *The Great White Bear* by James Dubern (2021) and *The Very Cranky Bear* by Nick Bland (2008)

Bears as Victims:

Most literature that fit into this category was about endangered polar bears who were at risk due to the climate crisis. Several of these books were non-fiction and appeared to try and engage readers in eco-literacy, meaning they specifically highlight animal realities to provide an ecological education to readers. Other texts in this category focussed upon circus bears and bears hunted or captured by humans.



Examples include *If Polar Bears Disappeared* by Lily Williams (2018) and *The Polar Bears' Home* by Lara Bergen and Vincent Nguyen (2008)

Deliberating which category to select as the focus of this thesis, there was something striking about the image of the human child and the bear together and the narratives which presented them as both equals and friends. Concerning the climate crisis, children are going to be entrusted with the future responsibility of the planet. The direct relationship children have with the natural world, including animals, seemed particularly relevant. Books which directly depicted these child-animal relationships therefore seemed both intensely interesting and equally important to examine, leading me to select the category 'Bears as Companions to Humans'.

Several teddy bear books within this sub theme adhered to the criteria of depicting a relationship between a bear and a child. However, I decided to exclude texts which focussed on inanimate teddy bears and their relations with children. I wanted to centre on the relationship between the child and the bear in its 'real' animal form and felt that the representation of the teddy bear deviated from this focus.

As an avid fan of children's picture books, I initially planned to only select picture books for this study; however, after reconsideration, I felt that chapter books would give me richer verbal descriptions to analyse. I therefore selected one picture book and two chapter books, deciding to concentrate on their textual and story elements. The three texts do include illustrations and whilst incorporating an analysis of the visual elements would have been insightful, the size limitation of a master's thesis leaves me being unable to do so without inhibiting this study's overall depth and coherency.

1.3 The Research

Numerous celebrated and culturally present children's characters take the animal form of the bear; Paddington Bear, the Bernstein Bears, Baloo, Rupert the Bear and Old Bear are just a few widely recognised bear characters who have and continue to be adored by generations of children and adults. Arguably, the most famous literary bear of them all is also one of the most historically loved and recognised children's literature characters of all time: Winnie the Pooh.

If we consider whether children are more likely to hold ties to certain animals than others, one might expect particular species of animal to be more dominant in children's stories, learning and culture. Standing as "the world's best recognized character toy" (Leclerc, 2008), the teddy bear has a "worldwide popularity" (Heljakka, 2021) and a deep-rooted history in the lives of children. The farmyard animal – which tends to be domesticated – is another dominant animal representation within early childhood, particularly in nursery rhymes, toys and children's media. It could be argued that certain images of animals are more visible in a child's life based on our perception of how safe they are to be around, or the likeliness of encounters with them in reality. If this is the case, bears would be excluded because they are not typically bred to be tamed in human culture. Or perhaps, animals that are visually appealing can be more expected to feature within material for children because they hold a quality which makes them more cuddly, loveable or 'cute' for child consumers. For example, the teddy bear toy takes the form of a "cutified" real bear, evolving "from a long-limbed bear to a cute, snub-nosed, baby-like creature" (Helijakka, 2021). Further ideas surrounding the representation of the animal in childhood will be explored in chapter two.

There is extensive scholarly research detailing the specific representation of particular animal species within children's stories; this includes studies concerning fish (Coats, 2001), horses (Heineken, 2017) and rodents (González, 2019). Notably, there is a significant amount of research dedicated to wolves in children's literature with a particular focus on their representation within children's fantasy and fairy tales; see Mitts Smith's *Picturing the Wolf in Children's Literature* (2010). There are papers that focus on the representations of bears within children's literature, as well as research concerning texts which contain bear

characters. However, the bear holds a dominant presence on the bookshelves of children, and I believe that the scholarly research available does not equate to the primacy of this literature. In turn, this dissertation aims to contribute towards the evident gap in this research area by specifically exploring the under-researched topic of bear-child relations and the bear's representation in children's texts through a unique posthumanist lens. It will provide an impactful study from a 21st century perspective to subsequently bridge a gap in academic research concerning children's literature.

1.4 A Framework for the Analysis

This thesis focussed on the posthumanist analysis of the representation of bears and the depicted relationship between the bear and human child within the chosen texts: *The Dancing Bear*, *The Last Bear* and *Big Bear Little Brother*. The methodology involved using a posthumanist lens to carry out textual and thematic analysis. Posthumanism is a theoretical lens that considers and explores human-nonhuman boundaries to subsequently "facilitate a dialogue as to how those very borders might become more fluid" (Jaques, 2014: 3). It holds the potential to evoke the innovative prospect of "getting out some of the old boxes" (Hayles, 1999: 42) to help human beings reconsider and subsequently expand conceptions of what it truly means to be human. Posthumanist scholars suggest that elements of posthumanism can validate nonhuman subjectivity (Flanagan, 2017), surpass traditional humanist ways of thinking (Nayar, 2014) and "conceptualize being human as being interconnected with the natural world" (Wolfe, 2009: 23). This makes it a theory that is highly relevant in the assessment of books that present relationships between human children and animals. The framework guided the analysis, helping this dissertation do more than just acknowledge the presence of the bear and bear-child interactions, but to interrogate the inner dynamics of these texts and examine their potential implications on young readers.

1.5 Methodology

The methodology involved in this dissertation utilised a qualitative close reading, employing thematic analysis and content analysis of the story and textual elements of the three children's texts. Virginia Braun and Victoria Clarke (2016) are pioneers of these

techniques and write extensively about the practice of thematic analysis; recognizing it as a method that can be used to analyse and interpret several themes within numerous texts. In their developed approaches, themes are developed “early in the analytic process through engagement with data and/or theory” (Braun & Clarke, 2016: 741). Therefore, this thesis used a deductive approach, meaning several preconceived themes were applied to the readings and analysis of the children’s texts; posthumanism was used as the theoretical framework to subsequently help identify these. The following posthumanist ideas were used to guide the readings of the children’s texts and portrayals of bear-child relations:

- Challenging what it means to be ‘human’
- The validation of nonhuman subjectivity and challenging of anthropocentrism
- Binaries between human and nonhuman being challenged and crossed
- The idea of interconnectedness between human and nonhuman

These posthumanist ideas were chosen to assist in the analysis of the representation of the bear, child protagonist and the portrayed relationship between the two. In the analytical readings of the literature, the following elements in the children’s texts were identified:

- Qualities typically considered ‘humane’ being assigned to the bears
- A depicted relationship between bear and human child that could be perceived as a reciprocal friendship
- Moments and ways in which child/bear or human/animal binaries were blurred or interrogated
- A sense of interconnectedness between child and bear

These ideas were then explored further to examine how the children’s texts could affect young readers, offering numerous imaginative and practical implications. This study purposefully adopted this methodological framework – with a specific qualitative focus – because it was the most appropriate approach and enabled this thesis to answer its proposed research question: how might the prevalent image of the bear within children’s literature affect child readers?

Chapter 2: Animals and Bears in Children’s Literature and Culture: A Review of the Field

This chapter presents some relevant scholarly papers that were used within the research for this dissertation. The first subsection (2.1) presents a variety of literature which focusses on the animal in children’s books, as well as children’s lives and wider childhood culture. The next two sections (2.2 and 2.3) then explore various works regarding particular anthropomorphic depictions of animals and relevant information around animal ethics. The final section (2.4) will then detail a search for relevant papers on bears in children’s literature.

2.1 The Animal, Childhood Culture and Children’s Literature

According to Fudge (2002), there is work dating back to Freudian theory which acknowledges psychological and physical comparisons between humans and animals. Haraway provides several examples including the likes of family structures, nakedness, emotions and bodily functions (2007). Fudge writes that “like us- they form bonds, communicate with each other, some of them even manage monogamy” (2002: 7). Fudge and Haraway both emphasise that there are similarities between animals and humans. Animal rights theorists have also previously highlighted that humans and animals occupy “the same status as subjects of a life with desires, emotions and experiences” (Regan, 2004: 61). Regan argues that when humans become aware of these resemblances, it could encourage them to develop an ethics of care towards animals (see section 2.3- ‘Animal Ethics’).

Scholars have alluded to a perception that – in comparison to adults – there is less of a distinctive divide between children and animals. Research suggests that they are more similar to one another, identifying resemblances between the animal and the human child that are both physical and psychological (Dobrin & Kidd, 2004; Haraway, 2007). These include the similar attraction to caregivers (Glynn, 2013), the “avowal of their bodily needs” (Freud, 1950) and the association of “both being in need of adult authority” (Demers & Moyles, 2008). Social psychologist Gail Melson could be considered the pioneer of this discipline, offering an illuminating observation regarding children’s bonds with real and imagined versions of animals. In her book *Why the Wild Things Are: Animals in the Lives of Children* (2001), she

explains that children live “quite comfortably and consciously in the world of animal symbols” (2001: 158) and they “graft animals into their inner worlds and themselves into the imagined worlds of animals” (2001: 158). Here, she recognises that younger generations tend to have a natural connection to animals and a customary ability to give animals a place in their own realities and imaginations.

The symbol of the animal dominates popular childhood culture and various mediums for children such as film, advertisements, toys, educational material, clothing, theatre and picture books. Melson writes that “McDonald’s Happy Meals to Saturday morning cartoons are awash in animalia” (Melson, 2001: 142). Research which recognises the animal as dominant in children’s culture encourages an interesting analytical point of interest regarding the utilisation of animals within wider media marketing from adult populations. This is an interesting thought, and whilst this dissertation will not delve into it more, it is key to acknowledge the animal symbol as one which is prominent, and often placed by adults, within several aspects of children’s lives.

More specifically, scholars have recognised the animal as holding a dominant place within children’s books since the origin of the children’s animal story in the eighteenth century (Ratelle, 2014; Blount, 1974; Melson, 2001). From the didactic moral tale to stories designed to entertain, the animal has held a central presence throughout the history of children’s literature. Harju and Rouse emphasise this within their research, suggesting that animal stories have “appeared consistently” over time “in multiple forms and multiple genres” (2018: 456). In a study by Kathryn Norcross Black involving one hundred randomised picture books, it was found that just eleven of the texts did not include an animal (Melson, 2001: 140).

There are several works of scholarly literature regarding the topic area of animals within children’s books; from Blount’s fiction-focused study, *Animal Land: The Creatures of Children’s Fiction* (1974) to Ratelle’s *Animality and Children’s Literature and Film* (2014). There exists scholarly criticism of a variety of specific genres including animals in fables (Blount, 1974), “animal autobiographies” (Demello, 2012) and animals in non-fiction (Genea & Deloache, 2011).

There is also existing research regarding the representation of the animal in children's picture books. Some scholars suggest that images and illustrations are what can work beyond spoken language to challenge the binary between the human reader and fictional animal subject. Dobrin and Kidd define what they call "the rumpus" (2004: 55) as a

"primal celebration of wildness and a reflection of the human need to perform animality in order to be connected to the natural world" (Dobrin & Kidd, 2004: 55).

Lewis then proposes that this celebration of wildness is "best represented by illustration alone" (2012: 290) because it is through a suspension of language that

"the very questions concerning divisions between the human and the animal, of speech and noise, reason and affect are temporarily suspended" (Lewis, 2012: 290).

In correspondence, Walsh asserts that images can "jolt readers into recognizing the disrupted ties of human-animal alliance" (2002: 153). Some scholars (Arizpe and Styles, 2002; Walsh, 2002; Doonan, 1998) advocate that the illustration of the animal can be utilized as a powerful tool. Doonan argues that the reader is "required" (or is invited) to "enter an imaginary relationship with the [animal] gazer" (1998: 165). Although this dissertation does not centralise on children's picture books, part of the analysis section in chapter four focuses on the suspension of language; hence, the research relating to picture books is partly relevant and highly insightful.

2.2 Anthropomorphism in Children's Literature

It is relevant to this dissertation to examine the research regarding anthropomorphic representations of animals in children's literature, particularly scholars who question the implications of these depictions. Anthropomorphic portrayals of animals are common in children's literature: a study of one hundred randomly selected picture books found that 40% of these showed "nonhuman protagonists living thoroughly human lives" (Melson, 2001: 140).

Scholars have argued that anthropomorphised animals can have a number of implications on child consumers. Firstly, some academics (Ratelle, 2014; Jaques, 2017) believe that anthropomorphism can assist in the teaching of moralistic values to children, as well as encouraging them to adopt appropriate societal attitudes and behaviours. Children can learn middle-class values (Ratelle, 2014; Jaques, 2017) when they see animals do the “acting and mistake-making” (Applebee, 1978), “trying out roles for us” (Burke, 2004). Other scholars argue that anthropomorphism can be used to explore other key societal issues. There are studies regarding anthropomorphism in children’s books and the exploration of intersectional factors within society, such as gender (Arthur & White, 1995), racial difference (Bow, 2019), cultural inclusivity and identity (Williams, 2014) and the representation of “psychological conflicts of marginalised groups” (You, 2020: 187). These examples of research reflect how anthropomorphism could be employed as an educational tool in children’s literature, exemplifying how animals could become the first vocabulary and literary platform for children to develop an understanding of themselves and wider societal relations.

Chengcheng You explains that it is the entertainment value – the “naïve and fake anthropomorphic animals” (2020: 187) – that “inspire children’s interest in exploring these animals’ real lives” (2020: 188). In her study, *The Necessity of an Anthropomorphic Approach to Children’s Literature*, she argues that in the “world’s current state of cascading environmental impoverishment” (You, 2020: 183), an anthropomorphic approach in children’s literature could draw ethical attention to the societal anthropocentric and “narcissistic” (ibid: 184) tendencies that most humans have.

On the other hand, Anderson and Henderson (2005) argue that anthropomorphic depictions of animals produce harmful repercussions for animals, hindering literature’s ability to challenge anthropocentric ideologies. They explain that “when expectations engendered by misguided representations are not met, the way we relate to real animals—in all contexts—is affected” (Anderson & Henderson, 2005: 304). In their paper *Pernicious Portrayals: The Impact of Children’s Attachment to Animals of Fiction on Animals of Fact* (2005), they argue that there are dangers of distorted misrepresentations of animals and that “impossible” characters in children’s texts and films result in “a disservice done to real animals” (2005: 297). This specific case study – an analysis of dog fiction – argues that if real animals are not

the same as the characters presented in stories, there could be potentially damaging consequences for those animals and the relationship the reader holds with them.

The nuanced arguments presented above reveal the supposed advantages and drawbacks to the representations and subsequent misrepresentations of animals within children's books. This research will continue to deliberate the puzzling challenge how best way to represent animals to engage child readers and ensure that the expectations they hold of real animals do not become skewed.

2.3 Animal Ethics

There is a significant variation in cultural manifestations of how humans value animals. Contextualised in the Western world, this section will examine various existing opinions concerning the behaviours and attitudes that children tend to hold towards animals. Some earlier scholars have warned that "if left uninstructed" children will "torment" and treat animals "very roughly" (Pickering, 1981: 91). However more recent scholars – as well as research in psychological science (Wilks, 2021) – suggest that young people are more likely to regard the life of an animal as that of a human being (Melson, 2001: 162). Matti Wilks proposes that young children perceive animals more positively because they lack the awareness of "practices relating to meat production and animal experimentation" (2021). Perhaps a cognitive bias relating to animals could emerge as a child grows older and they become more exposed to the instrumental use of animals in society. If children are surrounded by stories in which animals are anthropomorphized in their early developmental stages, they might be sheltered from the reality of how animals are used for food and other 'valuable' human benefits.

However, other scholars are more intrinsically anthropocentric within their arguments, proclaiming that animals in fictional stories can be utilized as "didactic tools" (Pickering, 1981: 9) to encourage young people to treat animals and – in turn – other humans with more care and respect (Pickering, 1981; Ratelle, 2014). Studies have demonstrated that one of the earliest signs of behavioural and psychological problems in children is intentional harm to

animals (Melson, 2001: 164) suggesting that if children learn to respect animals, they will be deterred from mistreating other humans at later stages in life.

Jaques proposes that humans become more likely to feel obliged to grant rights to animals in the discovery of their human-like traits (2014). In *Children and Animals*, Gene Myres argues that “we’ve yet to come to terms with our own animality, preferring to see animals as really human” (1998: 5). She suggests that for humans to feel that the animal is valuable, it must be “akin” to us (Jaques, 2017). Human rights activists also propose that portraying the animal as more ‘human’ is “especially effective” (Regan, 2004) in encouraging what Ratelle coins a “culture of animal sympathy” (Ratelle, 2014).

When children read stories of animals and develop direct or imaginary relationships with them through literature, they could be inspired to devote more attention to animal welfare. Several studies point toward the effect that children’s literature can have on children’s understanding of the natural world and the formation of attitudes they form around it (More, 1984; Burke & Copenhaver, 2004; Ganea, 2011). Jacques draws a resemblance between posthumanist theory and children’s books, explaining that they both “hold the unique potential to offer a forward-focused agenda that unites the possibilities of fantasy with demonstrable real-world change” (2014: 6). This idea that children’s books could inspire a “real-world change” (ibid: 6) and an ethics of care towards animals is highly relevant to this thesis.

The theme of animals’ suffering within stories could motivate readers to treat real animals with kindness (DeMello, 2012: 65) and even interrogate or question human treatment and “noncriminal putting to death of the animal” (Derrida, 2008: 112). Ratelle is concerned with how texts could encourage the advocacy for the legal personhood rights of all animal species through the exploration of the “slippages between subjectivity and captivity” (2014: 118). Through an animality reading of two children’s films about dolphins, she explains that when narratives allude to the resemblances between the fictionalised and real lives of animals, it draws attention to the importance of extending personhood to animals. Ratelle’s activist position offers ethical and potentially controversial claims that provide insightful examples of how young readers can be invited into fictional interspecies relationships which

assist in the teaching lessons that affect their lived social reality. Ratelle's ideas are evocative of those belonging to Jane Bennett; both call for an emphasis upon "the agentic capacity" (Bennett, 2010: 6) of 'things' "in an attempt to counter the narcissistic reflex of human language and thought" (ibid: 193). Bennett and Ratelle advocate for the agency and subjectivity of the nonhuman to be recognised more widely within wider societal thinking.

Moreover, Melson (2001) writes about a genre that she calls the "saving the animals story" (151). She chooses not to describe its ability to emphasise the agency of the animal or encourage an ethics of care, but alternatively, explains how stories like these are embedded with anthropocentric ideologies. She provides a case study of a text in which the child develops a "special mysterious bond" (2001: 155) with an animal character after saving its life. Despite this, the child's sense of mastery is affirmed through the narrative. Melson proposes that when children are depicted as allies to vulnerable animals, they ultimately become glorified human saviours. She also explains that there is an inherently humanistic nature to stories in which children gain confidence and/or joy in their experiences with animals. This idea of a saviour/victim binary further illustrates the complex intricacies of how to best effectively represent the animal. Even if the 'saving the animals story' presents children caring for animals, it still inherently holds the human at its centre, demonstrating the inevitable difficulty of moving away from anthropocentrism within human-told stories.

2.4 The Bear in Children's Literature

Despite there being a clear gap in scholarly research that explores representations of the bear within children's literature, there are some existing studies that have addressed this issue. As these works are relevant to this project's primary area of research concern, they will be discussed below. This section will examine the importance of their empirical findings and how these relate to wider discussions that are applicable to this thesis' academic contribution to the field.

Images of the Bear in Children's Literature (1987) by Anne Royall Newman is one paper which focusses on the specific representation of bears in children's literature. Newman

interestingly examines varying representations of the bear, stating that there are various types of – what she coins – “bear literature” (1987: 132). In this short paper, Newman discusses the bear and its appearance within the children’s literature genres of fairy tales, myths and chapter books. She describes several different representations of the bear character including the “frightening furry beast” (1987: 133), a warm and comforting companion to the child hero, a villain to be overthrown and an animal that a human has been transformed into (Newman, 1987). She discusses several famous anthropomorphized bear characters including Winnie the Pooh, Paddington Bear and Baloo from Kipling’s *The Jungle Books*, making insightful comparisons between them. Mentioning just over ten books that include the representation of the bear, Newman touches upon the bear as “a potent symbol in children’s literature” (1987: 137) contending that the species “frequently stands for the instinctive side of man” (1987: 132). In suggesting that the bear represents the “terrifying and comforting aspects” (1987: 132) of nature – sometimes simultaneously, sometimes separately – Newman presents some interesting points of analysis. This dissertation thesis will build upon her research, providing a more up to date study that also uses a specific and unique posthumanist perspective, something this paper does not to adopt.

The only other specific study on the representation of bears in children’s literature that could be found was a chapter written by Lizanne Henderson called *Bear Tales: Ways of Seeing Polar Bears in Mythology, Traditional Folktales and Modern-Day Children’s Literature* (2020). The paper details the historical dominance of the polar bear character, investigating “the main archetypes and character functions of the polar bear that have emerged over time” (2020: 251). Interestingly, Henderson notes that there has been a “noticeable upsurge” (2020: 258) in books that feature the polar bear, specifically post-2000. Henderson’s chapter explores how polar bears in stories have “functioned in different ways for different people at different times and continue to evolve for new audiences” (2020: 256), touching upon eco-literacy narratives for children. She identifies the key themes of “family and friendship” (2020: 257) and “cooperation between humans and animals” (2020: 257) within seventy-one polar bear books; both themes are highly relevant to this thesis. Henderson also states in her conclusion that polar bear characters who can speak – which she depicts as being a natural occurrence for child readers – can provide “emotional distance for the reader” (2020: 259) to “[shape] young minds towards a respect for the bear and its threatened habitat” (2020: 259).

Overall, Henderson’s work provides as in-depth discussion of the representation of the polar bear as a “guiding spirit” (2020: 253) within mythology and legends, whilst mentioning several potential implications of the representation of the bear in children’s literature, which are of relevance to this dissertation.

Furthermore, there are several scholarly works within this field of research that focus on individual bear characters and the specific texts to which they belong. Though I will not provide an exhaustive list of all the publications on this distinctive topic area, I have referenced key case studies below. For example, there is current research which explores the presentation of the refugee experience in the Paddington bear books and films (Smith, 2020), the representation of various “transactional analysis ego states” through the animal characters of A. A Milne’s Winnie the Pooh (Adams, 2009), implicit British citizenship training through the series of Rupert Bear (Beck, 2012) and the sex role stereotypes in the Berenstain Bear franchise (Fraustino, 2007). As demonstrated, there are numerous key studies which focus upon texts which contain bear characters, most of these tending to belong to popular culture. Although the aforementioned studies above do not specifically explore representations of the bear, as an animal, within children’s literature, it is still important to discuss the previous scholarly studies within the field, situating the context of this project and revealing the research gap it is attempting to fill.

Overall, there is an extensive amount of research concerning the relationship between children and animals, as well as the representation of the animal within children’s literature and the wider cultural lives of children. Despite the existence of research which offers analysis of children’s texts in which bears are present, there appears a lack of extensive and up-to-date research regarding the specific representation of the bear and the literary relationship between bears and children, as well as the implications of these texts. Therefore, this thesis has made a key academic contribution towards bridging this gap – offering a unique and insightful posthumanist perspective, building upon the existing research within this area.

Chapter 3- An Overview of The Texts

3.1 Plot Summaries

From hereafter, the bear characters are referred to by the names given to them within the texts: Bear (from *The Last Bear*), Bruno (from *The Dancing Bear*) and Big Bear (from *Big Bear Little Brother*). The child protagonists go by the names of April (from *The Last bear*), Roxanne (from *The Dancing Bear*) and Minik (from *Big Bear Little Brother*).

***The Last Bear* by Hannah Gold (2021)**

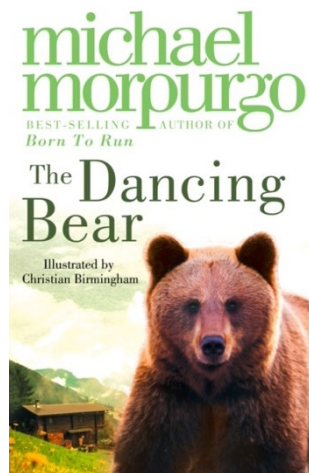
The Last Bear is a beautiful story about friendship, love for nature and the consequences of global warming. April, the book's young and fearless protagonist, and her father, an Arctic researcher, move to 'Bear Island', a quiet and apparently uninhabited island. April is told there are "no polar bears left" (Gold, 2021: 24) on the island, but one summer night, April meets one- starving, lonely and a long way from home. After naming him 'Bear' and tending to his injured paw, April establishes his full trust and becomes determined to save Bear from his misery. She nurses him back to health and the two develop a deeply special friendship. After the pair nearly drown in a dangerous storm in an attempt to sail to another island, Bear and April are rescued. Eventually, April manages to get Bear back to his righteous home on another island where other bears live. The book ends with the pair parting and April's vow to return to visit Bear in years to come and to continue her environmental work.



(Pictured- *The Last Bear* (2021) by Hannah Gold, illustrated by Levi Pinfield).

***The Dancing Bear* by Michael Morpurgo (2012)**

Originally published in 1994, this short chapter book is described by the author as a “gentle and deeply moving story of a young girl and her bear” (Morpurgo, 2012). Set within a small mountain village, the story appears to span across ten years and depicts the growth of both bear and child from childhood to adulthood. The story’s protagonist is a young “lonely orphan child” (Morpurgo, 2021: 4) called Roxanne who takes it upon herself to adopt an abandoned bear cub who she names as ‘Bruno’. The two develop an unlikely friendship and become inseparable, despite the disapproval from Roxanne’s grandfather and other adults in the village. However, when a “glamorous film crew” enter the village in search of “a dancing bear”, Roxanne goes from defending her supposed best friend to encouraging him to “dance” on camera, which he is eventually forced to do for the sake of human entertainment (Morpurgo, 2012: 27,27,29). Roxanne decides to leave Bruno to join the production company after the promise of becoming a famous singer, leaving him in the care of our narrator, an unnamed elderly man who lives in the village. At the end of the story, the narrator goes to feed Bruno and finds him dead in his cage, gazing into the space where Roxanne left him.

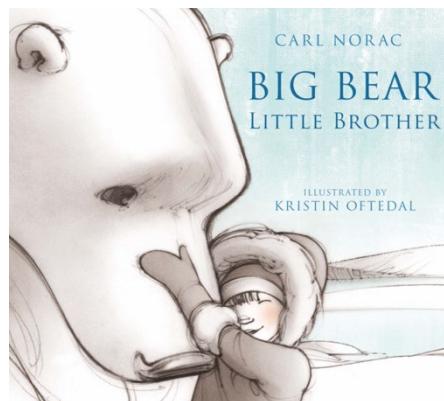


(Pictured- *The Dancing Bear* (2012) by Michael Morpurgo, illustrated by Christian Birmingham).

***Big Bear Little Brother* by Carl Norac (2010)**

In this picture book, a solitary anthropomorphised polar bear is wandering through a snowy landscape when he hears a cry, and a child called Minik tumbles down an icy cliff. After initially thinking the noise was a human hunter, the bear rushes to catch him, and so starts a

wonderful story of friendship. The two formulate their bond and play in the snow together, sliding down the hill and throwing snowballs at one another; Minik is even taught how to roar. The boy is kept safe by the bear who he names 'Big Bear' – “his big brother” (Norac, 2010: 7). Throughout the story, the pair communicate through dialogue and decide that despite their differences, they are not so different from each other are just like “brothers” (ibid: 7). As a terrible snowstorm approaches, Big Bear guards Minik against the wind and snow. Suddenly, the boy’s father emerges looking for him in the middle of the storm; Big Bear is frightened that he is a hunter and Minik jumps to the bear’s defence. Minik’s father cannot see Big Bear, indicating that he is possibly a figment of Minik’s fantasy. After Minik is reunited with his father, he is taken away and Minik and Big Bear are then separated. As bear and child walk away from each other, neither of them will ever forget the wonderful and fun times they spent together.



(Pictured- *Big Bear Little Brother* (2010) by Hannah Gold, illustrated by Kristin Oftedal).

It is important to clarify that Big Bear is the only bear character that is anthropomorphised in his ability to communicate using spoken word; Bruno and Bear cannot use speech in this way. Whilst Big Bear does have some ‘bear-like’ animalistic qualities, the communication between him and Minik happens largely through dialogue, whereas the other pairs use forms of communication alternative to spoken word.

Chapter 4- A Posthumanist Analysis

This chapter will provide the main analysis section of this thesis, presenting a posthumanist analysis of the three selected children's texts. Posthumanism is used as a framework to closely examine and analyse the representation of the bear's ability to experience love, the presentation of a reciprocal friendship between child and bear and the subsequent entanglements of human and animal binaries. It is important to acknowledge that the depicted bear-child relationships are entirely fictional and the wider implications of this will be examined in section 4.4; it will question how realistic these bear stories are, as well as how they might fit within a child reader's reality. Each section alludes to the posthumanist themes mentioned in the methodology section (1.5).

4.1 The Need for Love

All three books portray the bear characters as emotional beings who demonstrate the agentic emotional capacity required to experience love. Each animal is depicted within descriptions and their relationship with a human child as holding the ability to show their love to others and demonstrate a desire to be loved. Across each text, this is a vital part of their presentation of an animal as an emotional being who – like humans – exhibits the ability to show and feel complex emotions, alongside being emotionally sensitive to other individuals.

A primary message featured in *The Last Bear* is that every being needs to feel loved, no matter what species they are. At the beginning of the story, Bear is deeply isolated and unhappy; however, it is within the company and love that April offers him that he finds happiness, resulting in the reader witnessing an extensive transformation in his mental and physical health.

When April first discovers Bear, he is depicted as physically weak through the description of being “heartbreakingly skinny” and “vulnerable, pathetic even”, showing signs of having an agitated and emotionally unstable nature (Gold, 2021: 77,69). He is both “tentative” and untrustworthy of April: when she tends to his injury, he is described as “trembl(ing)” (ibid:

83,91). Within this anxious behaviour, April – alongside the reader looking in – can see that he is deeply unhappy; both mentally and physically. However, as he and April spend more time together, he starts to show his affection whilst becoming progressively more relaxed within his nature. He demonstrates his feelings of love towards her in small movements, like when he “nuzzled her shoulder” or “licked her face” (ibid: 164,261). His eyes are described as continually “softening” and he becomes more playful, “danc[ing] with life and mischief”, his ears “twitch[ing] [...] like he was laughing” (ibid: 126,120,156). By the end of the story, the reader has witnessed not only changes to Bear’s physical health (weight, thickness of fur and ability to run and climb) but a drastic transformation in his overall mood and emotional stability.

Similarly, the depicted bear-child friendship in *Big Bear Little Brother* continues to blossom throughout the narrative. His playful personality contrasts with the anxious and on-edge behaviour that Big Bear displays while walking alone at the beginning of the story. The reader is encouraged to notice Big Bear starting to show his fun-loving side; he is pictured juggling snowballs, walking on his hands and sliding in the snow.

Despite the humanisation of both Bear and Big Bear within their displays of affection towards the human and subsequent domestication, neither bear loses their innate animalistic qualities. As they begin to relax into their relationships with the children, both bears continually display their ability to defend themselves against the predators in their challenging natural environments and its changing forces. They become more human-like in their increasingly softening personalities but simultaneously retain defensive animal-like behaviours when these are required.

In *The Dancing Bear*, Bruno’s mood is consistently dependent upon whether he is in the company of Roxanne. Throughout the entirety of the story, from the moment we meet him with “his arms wrapped around [Roxanne’s] neck” (Morpurgo, 2021: 13), he is described as “never straying far from Roxanne. He would follow her everywhere” and was “always anxious when she was away” (ibid: 16,24). This might be interpreted as the deep love he holds for her – similar to the way that a human baby loves its mother. However, it could be regarded as an unhealthy dependency and that Bruno’s attachment to Roxanne might not necessarily be

perceived as a genuine love, but more so, a strong emotional desire to be accepted to fill the void that is a result of the involuntary separation from his family pack.

There is intense debate regarding the animals' ability to experience love (Howard, 2019), as well as the differentiation between true love and affectionate behaviour. Some might argue that it is simply sentimental to believe that animals could ever love us or hold the capacity to develop meaningful human bonds. However, according to experts (Majdic, 2021; Sunstein & Nussbau, 2006), disciplines like neuroscience and evolutionary biology support the idea that some animals can possess the physiological attributes needed to experience love, subsequently making a "broader move toward the recognition of animal emotions" (Bekoff, 2002: 20). In each children's text, the bears' happiness is (or becomes) largely dependent upon the love and company they receive from the child characters, subsequently linking to the idea that the bears maintain and exhibit a desire for loving companionship. Consequently, this alludes to similarities between the human and animal, as well as recognising the animal as an emotional being. Readers might already be able to identify certain animals that they consider possessing the capability to bond with humans: they might name animals that are typically domesticated or kept as pets like dogs, cats or horses. However, these stories introduce the bear as a species that society might not commonly perceive as being capable of feeling or requiring love. In doing so, each story challenges stereotypes of bears as powerfully ferocious and short-tempered 'beasts'. As evidenced in each plot development, each bear desires to feel emotionally safe and stable which they all achieve in growing connections with the child protagonists. By presenting a vulnerable and emotional side to bears who, like us, experience feelings of loneliness when they are isolated from any company, the texts subsequently explore and reveal this similarity between humans and animals.

The Animal as a Familial Figure

The animal is not only depicted as an emotional being, but as a valuable and dependable source of love within the lives of the child protagonists. In *The Dancing Bear* and *The Last Bear*, both narratives allude to the idea that Roxanne and April lack parental love in their emotional lives. April's mother died in a car accident and despite living with her father, he

appears to be physically and emotionally absent from her life, preoccupied with his job and emotional heartbreak with the passing of his late wife. Roxanne is an orphan who lives with her grandfather – “a dour and unloving man” (Morpurgo, 2012: 12) who speaks aggressively towards her. The significant lack of caring familial relationships in these children’s lives could be a driving factor that encourages both Roxanne and April’s ambition to develop a meaningful relationship with the bear.

April takes great comfort in her relationship with Bear, admitting that when she is with him, it is the happiest that “she has ever been” and that he is “the best friend she’d ever had” (Gold, 2021: 166,173). She shares thoughts and feelings with him that she never once appears to consider sharing with her father. April appears to – subconsciously – transfer her feelings about her relationship with her father into her relationship with Bear; in psychological terms, this is referred to as transference (Ladson & Welton, 2007). The idea of a therapeutic setting and April’s choice to redirect her emotions about her human relationships onto an animal allows the reader to understand her subconscious and repressed feelings concerning her familial relationships; it also forms an important basis of April and Bear’s relationship. Paternal and maternal transference are both common types of transference when “an individual looks at another person as an idealized father/mother figure” (Ladson & Welton, 2007: 48). This behaviour is evident in the way April seeks protection, comfort and love from Bear. Bear offers her the emotional companionship that she lacks in her family relationships; hence, the process of transference is evident here as the animal, Bear, functions as a therapeutic tool for her. For example, she talks to Bear about the loss of her mother and the emotional consequences it has taken on her on her family. She becomes emotional in front of him on several occasions, opening up and telling him

“I wish... I wish he could meet a new wife [...] I know it’s bad of me to say that because I had my mum. To be honest I can’t remember much about her except she was made of rainbows” (Gold, 2021: 125).

In contrast, the play on words within the story’s title – *Big Bear Little Brother* – alongside the scene in which Minik asks Big Bear “will you be my big brother?” (Norac, 2010: 7) depicts that the bond between Minik and Big Bear is more of a sibling-style relationship. It is not

centred on an intensive emotional and paternal connection, as is evidenced in the relationships in Gold and Morpurgo's texts. Minik and Big Bear take part in several fun and imaginative activities like dancing, throwing snowballs at each other, pretending to be pirates and sliding in the snow, revealing this relationships' more playful dynamic. Despite this different type of relationship, Minik appears to take immense joy and pleasure in the time he spends with Big Bear and their connection could still be described as familial-like.

A possible interpretation of Gold and Norac's texts is that the children protagonists find themselves in spaces in which no other humans or family members are particularly present and, therefore, they feel more inclined to invest in their relationships with the bears they find themselves in company with. For example, if April had two loving parents, she might not remain as committed in her relationship with Bear. Perhaps Minik only adopts Big Bear as his "big brother" (Norac, 2010: 7) because he is the only being that is currently in his presence. Despite these possibilities, April, Roxanne and Minik value the bears "qua particular individuals rather than to individuals qua, say, members of their species" (Gheaus, 2012: 587). Here, Gheaus explores the idea that the children look past the bears as emotionless animals, and, instead, value their unique individuality; subsequently viewing them as worthy and adequate subjects of their love and affection. Throughout the process of developing meaningful connections with each bear, the children find comfort and enjoyment within these relationships. The bears are able to offer the children things that humans typically seek within relationships such as fun, companionship and physical affection.

Scholars have referred to animals' abilities to meet human desires. As mirrored within research concerning relationships between humans and dogs, experts have alluded to a human's need for love and comfort and "the animal's ability to meet this need in a consistent and trustworthy manner" (Gheaus, 2012: 592). The reader might have never considered that other species who are not typically domesticated or live in human society can be creatures who can feel love and reciprocate this; subsequently resulting in both humans and animals leading more emotionally fulfilled lives.

To summarise this section, the stories explicitly highlight a mutuality of need between animals and humans; the bear and the child share a desire for love and are both able to fulfil

the emotional needs of one another. This subsequently encourages readers to not only contemplate the emotional capabilities and needs of bears (and possibly other animals) but to consider that animals have more commonalities with us than they might have previously thought. Gheaus argues that “shared neediness is as good a basis for including animals in the moral sphere as are sentience, subjectivity or capability” (2012: 586). This idea of sharing closes the perceived societal gap of anthropocentrism between humans and animals, along with the allusion to this reciprocal need for love and the idea that humans and animals can respond to one another’s emotional needs.

4.2 A Reciprocal Friendship- The Relationship Between Child and Bear

This section will build upon the last, continuing to consider the bear as an emotional being and to explore how the stories reveal that “human beings and certain animals can stand in a relationship of reciprocity” (Gheaus, 2012: 592). Each story presents a reciprocal friendship between animal and human which is permeated by the “morally charged” (Gheaus, 2012: 584) values of trust and protection. Hence, this section will analyse the depicted friendship between the children and the bears, as well as the concept of a human-animal communication and its importance in these relationships.

Protection

All three child protagonists demonstrate a desire to protect the bear characters; they actively advocate to defend the rights of the bear (April), fight to allow the bear to live as part of human society (Roxanne), show disgust at the idea of bears being used for human entertainment (Roxanne) and speak up in defence of animal rights and animal livelihoods being damaged at the hands of human action (April and Minik). Roxanne defends Bruno “as if her life depended on it” (Morpurgo, 2012: 19) without any care for society’s judgment. April and Minik both go as far as to sacrifice their lives for the bears: April jumps in front of a gun that is pointed at Bear and Minik “throws himself” (Norac, 2010: 19) in front of Big Bear as a sled pulls up, shouting “Daddy, stop! [...] He saved my life!” (Norac, 2010: 19).

There are societal consequences – including being praised and/or ridiculed – for Roxanne and April’s caring behaviour towards animals. April is perceived as an outsider, “disliked” and “different” from “the other girls at school” (Gold, 2021: 13,25,106). In contrast, Roxanne is admired by the villagers and is described as a “princess” and an “angel”; there was a perceived “beauty” in “how well she handled Bruno” (Morpurgo, 2012: 37,22,16,20). The idyllic Snow-White-like description of Roxanne “watching rabbits [...] and following butterflies” (ibid: 12) and April’s preference to spend time with the foxes in her garden show how they are both naturally drawn to animals. Both children are unique and “just different” (Gold, 2021: 205) in the ability to form a meaningful relationship with a bear. Take the following passage from *The Last Bear*:

“the thought of sharing a deserted island with a polar bear might have scared some children- but not April [...] In fact, she felt the opposite- a shimmery glimmer of excitement” (Gold, 2021: 45).

Both girls are ‘not like other children’: they are unique in their approach to animals. Putting the child within the role of animal protector aligns with literature which suggests that children are more likely to regard the life of an animal as that of a human being than adults are (Melson, 2001).

The bears also show traits of being protective over the children. From the beginning of the story, Big Bear exhibits a caring nature when “running” and “diving” to save Minik from falling and being “crushed on the hard ice” (Norac, 2010: 3). He displays a thoughtful and responsible nature throughout the story; for example, he checks the ice is thick enough before Minik walks on it, attempts to lead himself and Minik out of the incoming snowstorm and “pulls [Minik] in close, desperately trying to warm him” (ibid: 17) from the “violent” (ibid: 17) weather. Similarly, Bear is constantly “guarding and protecting” April, expressing his fierce loyalty towards her when, with “a protective expression on his face”, he holds her in “his jaws” (Gold, 2021: 161,252,264) to save her from nearly drowning. It is suggested that Bruno also feels a need to protect Roxanne: “he would follow her everywhere, almost as if he were guarding her” (Morpurgo, 2012: 16).

The bear's need to protect the child characters challenges common presumptions that place humans within the animal saviour role, disputing "the paternalistic concept of human as caretaker" (Henderson, 2020: 257). In the case of April nearly drowning and Minik fainting because he is too weak to survive the harsh weather, the reader is presented with narratives in which the human requires being saved by the animal against forces – the natural elements – that are bigger than both human and animal.

Furthermore, when the bears protect the children, it demonstrates the animal acting in a moral way, engaging in ethical behaviour. Gruen suggests that there is extensive scientific evidence to suggest that some animals can demonstrate moral behaviours and hold cognitive skills that were once considered unique to humans (2012). Scientific studies have demonstrated animals can perform acts of morality such as protecting the sick or weak, cooperation, empathy and concern for the needs of others (Garner, 2004). All three fictional depictions of the bears demonstrate one or more of these, inferring how the texts reveal that animals can be ethical beings. Each story reinforces the idea that animals can hold the capacity to express moral judgement and caring capabilities, subsequently encouraging the reader to also consider this.

Trust

As well as the element of protection, each human-animal relationship is grounded in the value of trust. The children put trust in the bears, expecting a degree of self-control from them. For example, April trusts Bear "with her life" (Morpurgo, 2012: 181) to climb the mountain safely and Roxanne trusts Bruno to curb any potential aggression when she sits in his cage with him. Similarly, all three bears trust the children to continually pet them, ride on their backs (April and Minik) and heal their injuries (April). In the initial development of trust, there is hesitation from the bears (Bear growling and swiping at April) and the children (Minik backing away from Big Bear). However, as each plot progresses, the bears and children become considered as trusted friends to one another.

There seems to be a dissonant nature to the representation of the bear and the relationship between the animal and the child. On the one hand, the bears show protection and become

pet-like and domesticated in their relationship with the child protagonists which allows unique and meaningful friendships to grow. April thinks that when Bear lets her watch him sleep, it demonstrates “how much Bear trusted her” and that this trust “is one of the most special gifts an animal can give a human” (Gold, 2021: 173). On the other hand, the animal instincts for self-protection and defensiveness do remain in opposition to other humans such as hunters and adults. Surely, we cannot be truly sure that the bear understands this ‘trust’ between them and the child. The possibility inevitably remains that, if this narrative were real, at any moment, the bear’s animalistic instincts could take over, even if they do not intentionally mean to break the ‘trust’ with the child.

However, despite this element of dissonance, these stories of animal-human relationships bear strong resemblances to human friendships in the way they are founded in a sense of morality. When Minik tells Big Bear “now it’s my turn to protect you, Big Brother” (Norac, 2010: 18), there is evidence of a reciprocal faithfulness. Each bond is based on the moral elements of trust, faithfulness, protection and empathy. The bears become a part of the children’s emotional lives after they give it a name, affection and comfort. It is within this shared affection and meeting of the animals’ needs that “a rich moral vocabulary” (Gheaus, 2012: 586) begins to emerge. Like the child characters, young readers might begin to see animals as more than non-emotional entities, but as beings who can sit “in ethical relation” (Gruen, 2012: 227) to humans. According to Gruen’s definition, “being in ethical relation involves being able to understand and respond to another’s needs, interests, desires, vulnerabilities, hopes, perspectives, etc” (2012: 227). The bear-child friendships could be perceived as ethical relationships in the way they are built upon mutual caring and respect, and readers are able to witness each fictional child demonstrating their willingness and openness to be in ethical relation with a bear.

Communication

Another key aspect of the fictional human-animal relationships is the communication between bear and child. In *The Last Bear* and *The Dancing Bear*, despite neither animal being able to use spoken language, both pairs of bears and children work to find alternative means to communicate.

In *The Last Bear*, there is an emphasis on the practices of listening and confiding in one another. Both April and Bear have experienced the traumatic experience of losing a mother and share their stories with one another. April does so directly through speech, and Bear does so “in the way that all animals tell their stories. It was just a matter of [April] sitting down and listening properly” (Gold, 2021: 188). Despite being unable to vocalise his story, April gives Bear time to respond emotionally to her questions. For example, his “ears flattened against his skull”, “a light shone out of his face” and he “pulled away from [April] and roared so hard” (ibid: 189,190,193). Elements like physical touch, facial expression, body language and volume are all important means through which Bear communicates. April talks out loud to Bear and confides in him whilst feeling that he is truly listening and understanding what she is saying.

Similarly, Roxanne and Bruno are described as understanding each other. Roxanne holds an ability to calm Bruno down when he is agitated or distressed by singing or gently talking to him. She claims “I’ve talked to Bruno. I’ve told him. He understands. [...] You understand, don’t you, Bruno?” (Morpurgo, 2012: 57) She also claims to know what he is thinking, for example, that he “hates being laughed at” (ibid: 38) or that he does not want to perform for the camera. As the film company discuss their plans to make Bruno dance, the adult narrator even confidently claims that Bruno “understood every word. I knew he did” (ibid: 48).

The one definitive difference between these relationships and standard human relationships is the use of spoken language. As animals cannot communicate in the distinctive verbal form of communication that humans tend to employ, the child character – and reader – must decide for themselves whether the bear can comprehend what they are being told, or to what extent. There is an inevitable element of doubt and speculation since an animal’s understanding can never be assured, nor what is truly going on in its head. On occasion, April accepts that it would be “foolish” not to accept the possibility that Bear does not understand her, admitting that she “likes to think” that he knows what she is telling him, confessing “it’d be silly to expect him to reply” (Gold, 2021: 172,145,172). This subsequently grounds the story within reality by moving away from the romanticised idea that animals can understand us and that we can be sure of what they are thinking.

Gruen argues that the ability to communicate with language is not exclusively tied to one's general abilities, importantly noting that "we don't generally think of language use as a necessary condition for moral consideration in the case of humans" (2012: 42). She provides the examples of unconscious and deaf-mute humans as beings who, despite not holding the ability to use speech, can still have a sense of humour, require care and feel emotion. Evidently, the use of language is not dependent on the abilities of humans, encouraging us to consider that despite animals being unable to use language, they could also have deeper cognitive and/or emotional capacities than one might expect. Readers may never have deliberated the idea that animals can have independent thoughts and feel emotions in the way that humans can. Scientific research has examined interspecies emotional communication and the way that many species can interpret perceptual cues to take part in complex animal-human communication (Benz-Schwarzburg, 2020). By having the fictional child continually speculate what the animal is thinking (and, at times, explaining it), readers might feel encouraged to do the same, perhaps alongside them.

"Most humans were oblivious to when animals were in pain because they don't show their emotions in the same way. But April knew differently. Just because you couldn't see emotion in their faces didn't mean they couldn't feel. And Bear's emotions were as real as any human's: scudding and naked and raw" (Gold, 2021: 185).

This quote from *The Last Bear* summarises the above point well; although animals are unable to exercise spoken language, these stories demonstrate that speech is not the only form of communication that can bring people and animals together, transcending the boundaries of verbal forms of communication. Gold writes that the love between April and Bear was "like magic" in the way it was "unspoken between them" (Gold, 2021: 158,158). Clark writes that "animals become our friends, we become their friends, when they look back at us and we are confronted by the mystery of the Other" (2008). April and Roxanne both seem to embrace this idea, opting to believe that when they speak to Bear and Bruno, the animal holds a degree of cognitive ability required to understand them. April even finds it easier to project her feelings onto Bear than anyone else in her life, signifying that she feels this animal maintains better listening abilities than her father. Each fictional relationship between child and bear suggests that there is a chance that humans can communicate with animals "through the

silent language of a profound sharing of affection” (Clark, 2008). The texts suggest that despite the animal’s ability to use human’s most popularly adopted form of communication, we should reconsider the complex cognitive and emotional capacities they hold.

In contrast to Gold and Morpurgo’s texts, Minik and Big Bear communicate through the medium of spoken human language since Big Bear is granted the anthropomorphic ability to use it. The anthropomorphism in *Big Bear Little Brother* makes it a story of fantasy and arguably the least realistic of the three texts. The child’s father cannot see Big Bear, and this, as well as the final page which reads “how wonderful it was to dream” (Norac, 2010: 24), indicates that Big Bear could be a product of Minik’s fantasy and imagination.

According to Ratelle, influential philosopher Descartes greatly valued acts of speech and championed that the spoken word “became a means by which to divide the exclusively human from the animal” (Ratelle, 2014: 94). It is debatable as to whether granting the fictional animal the ability to speak challenges or reaffirms human-animal divides. On the one hand, giving Big Bear a voice exposes young readers to a story in which the child and the animal can explicitly connect. Walsh advocates that anthropomorphism holds the potential to do more than “sentimentalize or romanticize animal behaviours” (2002: 153). Perhaps it allows the bear a subjectivity through the ability to speak his inner thoughts and feelings. This subsequently allows the reader (and the fictional child) access to these. Conversely, by granting the animal the ability to use speech, the story becomes one of fantasy which could be perceived as unrealistic – or possibly silly – to older readers. There is also an inherently anthropocentric quality to granting animal characters a voice since the human author has used the bear as a mouthpiece for their own words.

There is a paradoxical duality that exists here which raises issues about ‘the willing suspension of disbelief’, a term originally coined by Samuel Taylor Coleridge in 1817 which refers to the avoidance of critical and rational thinking (Ferri, 2008). Adult readers have an awareness that *Big Bear Little Brother* is a fictional story which includes an imaginative representation of a bear. However, younger readers might not hold this understanding and could potentially develop a belief that animals can truly understand and use human speech. This is an

important implication to consider since it impacts readers' perceptions of animals and wider relationships with them.

Section 4.2 has examined the depictions of friendships between bears and children in the texts, exploring how each fictional relationship is grounded in the values of trust, protection and loyalty. Each text depicts the animal's ability to understand these morals of friendship as well as their own place in the relationships. In Morpurgo and Gold's texts, the children and the bears overcome the communication barrier between them and are able to successfully build a deeply meaningful friendship through alternative means. All three texts explore the possibility of a reciprocal relationship of mutual feelings between a wild animal and a human, subsequently raising ideas around the duties that arise from this kind of mutual consideration and our understanding of animals' cognitive and emotional capacities.

4.3 The Entanglement Between Bear and Child

Posthumanist theory challenges what it means to be human and by continuing to apply a posthumanist approach to the texts, this section will now present ways in which the bear stories explore an entanglement of human-animal boundaries. It will examine how habitual, physical and emotional animal-humans binaries are crossed in the texts through the story elements and representation of the human-like bear and the wild and animalistic child.

Animalisation of the Child

Opposite to the humanisation of the animal is the animalisation of the human. April in *The Last Bear* appears to display animal-like characteristics when she "opens her ears", "twitch[es]" and "manages to smell the hard glaciers of the ice" (Gold, 2021: 174,171,174). It is explicitly described that "with each roar [...] she became a little bit more bear and a little bit less human" (ibid: 162). The more time she spends with Bear and "after weeks of practicing", she becomes 'better' at the animalistic behaviours he teaches her: to listen with her "ears pricked up" and to roar "properly" (ibid: 171,172,180). In *Big Bear Little Brother*, Big Bear also teaches Minik how to roar. When Big Bear tries to prove to Minik that he "can be

terrifying”, Minik shouts back “in his loudest voice” “I’M NOT SCARED OF YOU!” (Norac, 2010: 9).

Several scholars have examined young fictional children who they classify as ‘wild child’ characters. For example, Harju and Rouse write about children such as Max from *Where the Wild Things Are* and Mowgli from *The Jungle Book*, describing them as “unfettered, explosive and in-between” (2017: 456). They are neither a well-behaved child nor an entirely “well-governed animal” (ibid: 456) and thus, could be described as part-human, part-animal. This is how readers could perceive April considering she retains all her human characteristics whilst developing animalistic behaviours.

Chengcheng You describes how “feral children” (2020: 188) typically fit into a similar category to animals such as rats and stray dogs because they are typically marginalised and put “on the edge” (ibid: 188) of society. Parallels can be drawn between this idea and the way that April is outcast by her classmates for taking an interest in animals. Harju and Rouse (2018) write about the wild child figure more positively, stressing that children who embody the animal through imaginative play can explore their interconnectedness with the natural world. It is interesting to link this with the developmental stages of childhood: animalistic ‘wild’ behaviour is more commonly seen in younger children which alludes to the idea that as children grow, society encourages them to repress their ‘wild’ side, subsequently increasing the likelihood that they will progressively lose their interconnectedness to animals.

It is up to the reader to decide whether April has developed a sense of hearing which allows her to listen to Bear’s roar miles away. However, through her time on the island, April has been free from the pressure of human society and educational practices like schools which reject animalistic behaviour and encourage the control of messy impulses like roaring or twitching. In the exploration of the animal and natural world, Minik and April express their ‘wild’ side, embodying the animal through their behaviour, imaginative play and physicality.

The children in the texts embody their inner animal through their relationships with the bears and the natural environments they find themselves in. When we consider the implications of the presentation of the ‘wild child’, young readers are not necessarily being

encouraged to become feral or put themselves in the physical presence of wild animals. However, the implications could be more imaginative. The image of Bruno and Roxanne running “across the fields” (Morpurgo, 2009: 22) or April and Bear “sharing” (Gold, 2021: 152) the island demonstrates the delight these children get from feeling their interconnectedness with animals and embracing that wildness and readers can experience and share that joy through these fictional stories.

Habitats

Binaries between child and bear are further blurred through the physical crossovers between animal and human environments. Firstly, April and Minik both venture outside of ‘the human world’ into natural environments. Within these spaces, the children face unique experiences that humans rarely encounter in their everyday life, such as battling extreme weather conditions and climbing up and sliding down mountains.

The narratives do hint that humans do not belong in this ‘natural’ world because they are not built to survive its conditions. In *Big Bear Little Brother*, Minik struggles with the environment that Big Bear lives in, becoming “exhausted” (Norac, 2010: 16) as he attempts to walk through the harsh snowstorm. April has similar issues with Bear’s habitat: she nearly dies in the freezing ocean and is only able to explore and reach parts of the island by riding on his back.

However, in the willingness to explore these natural environments is the appreciation that humans and animals share one world. April and Minik are not afraid of spaces that humans might typically feel unable to enter, perhaps because of preconceived judgements of the animals that live there. Both children take immense pleasure and find magic in the exploration of the animal space. Big Bear and Bear also show signs of being highly content with having the human child in their environment, appearing lonely before the children’s entrances. They also show a voluntary approach in their interactions with the children, suggesting that both animals grant ‘consent’ to having the child in their space.

In contrast, it could also be argued that Minik and April are invaders of the bears’ spaces and that they are infringing upon the natural world. It is suggested in *Big Bear Little Brother* that other humans have previously disturbed Big Bears’ space, subsequently damaging his

welfare; for example, he becomes anxious and “stop(s) dead” when “a man appear(s) on a sled” (Norac, 2010: 17). This relates to the debate concerning whether humans should interfere with animal environments. When April tends to Bear’s injury, her attempt to interact with him initially aggravates and frightens him. The animal’s fear of the human encourages the reconsideration that animals, even the ones we typically perceive as scary, could also be intensely frightened of us. When innocent animals are presented as fearing humans or suffering at the hands of humans, it encourages a degree of animal sympathy and human guilt.

The Dancing Bear is different to the narratives of Gold and Norac’s stories because, in Morpurgo’s text, it is the animal that is brought into human society, rather than the child being the one to enter the animal space. This breaking of the human-animal divide disturbs the ‘ordinary’ way of life for the inhabitants of the mountain village in which Bruno is brought to live. There appears to be a wide societal fascination of the spectacle of a caged animal and the villagers “flock” to “have a little look at the bear” (Morpurgo, 2012: 21,14). This crossing of binaries is, at first, welcomed by most of the village who see him as special, referring to him as “our mascot, the pride of the village” (ibid: 16). The children – “an excited cavalcade” – are a societal group who take a particular delighted interest, taking “turns to carry him” and going out to search for him when he goes missing (ibid: 16,18).

Morpurgo explores the idea that an animal could live as part of human society and, subsequently, bring humans great joy. However, the story essentially presents an image of a bear in captivity where human amusement comes at the cost of the animal’s freedom. Roxanne ‘adopts’ Bruno: he does not make the active choice to leave his environment to live within the ownership of a human child. He is described as always “ambling along behind her” (Morpurgo, 2012: 27), indicating a power imbalance within this animal-human relationship. Readers might question whether it is ethically correct for humans to claim the right to unofficially ‘adopt’ animals as their own in the way that Roxanne does. Bruno becomes a domesticated bear – a pet to Roxanne who is made to perform tricks for human entertainment. It could be argued that he does not have a choice in his friendship with Roxanne, considering he has spent most of his life within her ownership inside a cage. It could

also be perceived as selfish and anthropocentric of Roxanne to bring an animal into her proximity and out of the environment Bruno would live naturally.

On the one hand, when habitual animal-human binaries are crossed in the stories, it demonstrates the excitement, adventure and joy that animals, and their 'worlds', can bring children. On the other hand, it simultaneously raises concerns around animals fearing humans, questioning whether 'owning' animals and entering their spaces is deeply anthropocentric. It is vital to acknowledge that in every text, it is the human that initiates the crossing of the habitual binaries; April and Minik enter the animals' spaces and Roxanne physically brings the animal into human society. Animal rights advocates (Regan, 2004) believe that animals deserve the right to live as they wish without being interfered with by humans or subjected to human desires. Each narrative raises and then subsequently suspends the question of whether it is ethically correct for the human to interact with the animal and its environment, leaving the reader to decide for themselves.

An Emotional Entanglement

Another way in which human-animal binaries become entangled is within the emotional co-dependence between bear and child, evident in *The Last Bear* and *The Dancing Bear*. In Gold's text, April's happiness is dependent upon Bear; she spends sleepless nights worrying about him and "could never forgive herself" (Gold, 2021: 156) if she were to leave him isolated on the island. In *The Dancing Bear*, "so long as Bruno was happy" Roxanne "was too" (Morpurgo, 2021: 22). Bruno's happiness is also entirely dependent upon Roxanne's presence; he "would follow her everywhere" (ibid: 16) and becomes highly anxious when she is away from him.

There is a deeper more complex emotional entanglement that exists between April and Bear who are described as becoming emotionally adjusted to one another. April is "so attuned to him that [...] she felt the sadness ripple out of him" (Gold, 2021: 192) and equally, he "was attuned to her in the way animals develop a sixth sense about people they love" (ibid: 170)., Gold's story tells of how, despite being different species, this human and animal have been able to develop an intense connection and awareness of each other that is only typically expected between two humans.

April begins to see her own emotions in Bear and there are moments where the reader does not know whose feelings are being described. For example:

“Bear’s eyes spoke of hunger and desperation. Perhaps loneliness too, although April wasn’t sure if that was a reflection of her own feelings or not” (Gold, 2021: 90).

April describes the way that she sees herself in the animal and it is difficult for the reader to differentiate the human from the animal. This is also the case when their hearts are described as “beat(ing) together” (ibid: 151). These descriptions allude to ways in which animals and humans can both feel emotion in the same way, despite being different species. Anthropocentric ideologies which advocate that human and animal are entirely separate beings are also subsequently challenged through descriptions in which they merge, emotionally, into one.

This section has explored how human-animal binaries become increasingly tangled throughout the texts. The physical and emotional binaries of human and bear become challenged within the representation of the emotional animal and the ‘wild’ child who sees themselves as interconnected with the natural world. Human and animal environments also become crossed within all three plots, raising complex ethical questions around the humans’ right to enter these spaces, and whether we should – in opposition to anthropocentrism – see the world as equally shared between humans and animals.

4.4 Bear Stories Within a Child’s Reality

More mature readers could perceive all three fictional children as immensely brave in their interactions with the bears. April acknowledges the warnings that her dad has issued her, but chooses to see beauty, not danger, in Bear. Roxanne shows no discomfort at being covered in bear scratches and almost immediately, Minik gets over his initial fear of Big Bear. Despite the depicted relationships being meaningful to the children (and perhaps to the bears also), it is important to question how believable these texts are for child readers. Of course, the stories are not entirely of true nature in numerous ways. For example, bears cannot talk and

a child would typically not be granted permission or hold the equipment required to wander the Arctic alone. However, we must consider that younger readers might not necessarily understand this; we cannot definitively rule out the possibility that a child could be inspired by these stories (and the fictional children within them) to pursue a relationship with an animal that could potentially put them in danger. In her book, Gold in fact offers a disclaimer stating that she took “liberties” in the writing of her story and that “she would never advise trying to actually befriend” or pursue a relationship with a bear because “in real life, they are extremely dangerous wild animals” (Gold, 2021: 296,297,296).

Dangerous Behaviour

The texts ground themselves within reality in several ways, firstly by including animalistic qualities in the depictions of the bear characters. This includes activities that humans would typically describe as ‘bear-like’ such as walking on all fours, roaring and scratching. There are also numerous verbal mentions – as well as visual depictions within illustrations and book covers – of realistic bear features like fur, paws, claws and tails.

One ‘bear-like’ quality that adds to the picture of the realistic bear is the dangerous and aggressive behaviour that is often directed towards human characters. In *The Last Bear*, Bear “lunged, open-mouthed, directedly towards her (April) with his sharp, pointed teeth” (Gold, 2021: 84). There are numerous frightening descriptions of this “human-eating polar bear” (78); for example, when he lets out a “huge” “cavernous roar” (65) that is “ear-splitting” (92) or “lurch(es) forward, taking a step” (66) towards April that holds the force and power “a thousand times more powerful” than a cat (ibid: 78,65,92,66,84). Bruno similarly displays aggression toward a human child when he “swiped playfully at Tiny but it was enough to send him reeling backwards, hitting his head on a wall” (Morpurgo, 2012: 18).

Portrayals of the bear as aggressive – as well depictions of their potentially dangerous behaviour – allude to stereotypical perceptions of the real bear, subsequently moving away from representations that are romanticised, inaccurate or of a fantastic nature. Although the fictional bears might not have an intent to cause harm, the strength they exude is evidently dangerous to human life. Through these descriptions, readers are brought closer to reality

through a reminder that these bear-child friendships could never happen in reality because of the bear's potentially lethal behaviour.

Perception of the Adults

In *The Last Bear* and *The Dancing Bear*, the adult characters tend to perceive the bear characters as highly dangerous and something to always be feared; their opinions contrast greatly to the feelings of the child protagonists. Although the villagers in Morpurgo's text initially enjoy Bruno's presence in the village, after he grows bigger, they hold a community meeting after becoming "adamant" that "it was just too risky to keep him" (Morpurgo, 2021: 18,19). The father figures of Roxanne and April hold more extreme views than this. Roxanne's father advocates and maintains the belief that "bears are for killing, not keeping" (ibid: 14); the only reason he lets Bruno stay on his property is to profit from him. April's dad brands it "ridiculous" (Gold, 2021: 93) for a bear and human to be friends, as well as other adults in her life who believe that "bears are not friendly animals" including her grandmother who instructs her- "if you see a polar bear [...] remember to RUN" (ibid: 24,19).

It is important to question why the adults and children have such differing opinions. After a sea crew save Bear and April from drowning, the captain's son Tör explains to April that the reason his father believes that bears are "uncontrollable" is because he "grew up in a different time" and that "times have [since] changed" (ibid: 268,270,270). This idea of a generational difference in opinions parallels with scholars – previously discussed in section 2.4 – who suggest that children are more likely to treat animals with respect than adults.

It is important to acknowledge that this does not necessarily mean that adults cannot develop close relationships with animals. April's father is eventually inspired by his daughter's ability to see animals as friends after initially lacking an open-minded approach to doing so. After April asks him "why aren't you doing more?" (about climate change), he is described as "half-listening" and then "frowning" because "it was obvious he had never asked himself the question" (ibid: 198,201,198,198). April is frustrated by "people" – assumingly adults – for "not understanding" (ibid: 201,201) the damage that humans and their anthropocentric practices can have on the lives of animals and the wider state of the environment.

Within the texts, there is an existing clash between the opinions held by the children and adults which may result in a sense of cognitive dissonance for young readers. Children might be torn between the child's idealistic belief that bears are our friends and the grounding insistence from the more dominant and overruling adults that bears are dangerous and that we therefore must never go near them. Perhaps the qualities which make the bear potentially scary and dangerous not only present a more accurate picture of real bears but, consequently, help us understand why April and Roxanne's fathers hold their opinions that we must stay away from bears. When the bears become anxious, aggravated or scared, it is repeatedly proven that they can and will show aggression, at times, towards innocent humans.

The inclusion of adult opinions could impact the child reader and the authenticity of the story, and it is interesting that the authors have all chosen, in this way, to ground their stories within reality. Elements of the texts are unrealistic and of a fantasy nature, however the inclusion of adult opinions arguably make the texts more realistic. The depiction of bears could largely be put down to plot elements and when incidences occur and children are put in danger, it makes the stories more real. Children are asked to believe somewhere in-between the approach of the child characters (who help to prove that there can be a softer side to bears and that they are not only capable of being aggressive and fierce beasts) and that of the adults (who see the danger and truth within cultural prevalent perceptions of the bear as a dangerous animal who should be feared).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 The Potential in the Bear Texts

This dissertation has used a posthumanist lens to provide an in-depth study on the popular image of the bear within three children's literature texts: *The Last Bear*, *The Dancing Bear* and *Big Bear Little Brother*. Overall, this thesis finds that, in all three narratives, the bears are portrayed as complex emotional beings in which the protagonists grow to develop strong, meaningful and reciprocal relationships with. Morpurgo, Gold and Norac all present stories of friendships between bears and children that are grounded in the moral values of love, trust and protection – that develop throughout each text. This research has considered and identified trends in the stories, subsequently revealing insightful wider and complex implications of the texts.

This study has explored how the children's texts offer an eco-literacy and encourage readers to develop an ethics of care for animals. Each narrative touches upon how society chooses to “destroy, abuse and exploit” animals “for mere comfort” (Gheaus, 2012: 596) by focusing on the detrimental consequences that human behaviours can have upon the welfare, conditions, and lives of the bear characters. The explicit themes of infringement upon an animals' space, climate change (in *The Last Bear*) and the abuse of animals for human entertainment (in *The Dancing Bear*) all play an important role in the practical implications of teaching children the importance of treating animals with respect; or even take interest in a particular topic like climate change or animal welfare. It is suggested in each narrative story that the protagonists all care immensely about animal lives, even when society disapproves of their choices to do so. In turn, these passionate fictional role models could have positive implications on child readers in encouraging them to replicate their behaviour and deep care for animals' welfare.

Additionally, each text challenges culturally prevalent and stereotypical images of bears as aggressive 'beasts' by revealing that they can demonstrate a softer side. This is clear in each text when the children adopt a more open approach when getting to know each individual bear, respectively. This research has explored the concept of a reciprocal relationship that is

equally felt by both the animal and the human. It is important to acknowledge that this study has not intended to claim that universally, every individual needs animal friendships in their lives, or that we can hold emotional bonds with bears as they are fundamentally, wild animals. However, a major theme explored in this study is the similarities between humans and animals: each text explores the commonalities between bears and humans through the friendships between them, subsequently helping readers to uncover the moral significance and relevance of each animals' wider needs. Each text fictionally demonstrates that bears are deserving of receiving love and affection and, in turn, can directly reciprocate this love to each child. In the cases of Bruno and Bear, despite their inability to use spoken language, the reader is made aware of explicit signs that bears are emotional beings, which might also be of a true nature. Consequently, readers can better comprehend ways in which the bears' emotions are evoked, allowing said reader to feel a deeper level of interconnectedness to them. The texts highlight a sense of "solidarity and commonality" (Gheaus, 2012: 597) between child and bear, resulting in the readers' enhanced appreciation of reciprocity between animals and humans.

By adopting a posthumanist analysis, this study has deeply explored the way that anthropocentric human/animal binaries become blurred within the children's texts. Through the depiction of the bear as an emotional being and the child's animalistic desire to be in nature, both entities become entangled; physically and emotionally. By alluding to ways in which each species can be like the other, anthropocentric ideologies are subsequently challenged, encouraging children to further consider how the human and the animal share more commonalities than they may have initially considered.

5.2 A Reflection on the Research

By selecting the category 'Bears as Companions to Humans', the texts chosen for this dissertation involved narratives in which the human was not just an observer or dangerously involved with a wild bear. Instead, both parties physically interact, developing meaningful relationships together. This thesis has effectively explored the representations of the bear in each story, whilst also providing a more in-depth analysis, discussing the implications of when

animal and human binaries are blurred within children's literature; in turn, revealing the importance of this study and its wider academic contribution.

Examining the texts through a posthumanist lens has effectively guided this analysis by helping to determine which aspects of the texts to examine. Whilst adopting this framework has been useful, there are multiple other perspectives which could compliment and subsequently build upon this study's findings. For example, future research could similarly examine the bear in children's literature but through an alternative lens, such as an anthropomorphic or imaginative focus; both of which could produce insightful results.

This study has carefully acknowledged the fictional nature of imaginative representations of bears in each text, as well as outlining key narrative elements which ground them in reality. Questioning whether the fictional relationship between the child and bear could be replicated in real life has been an important point of contention in this study. There is a fantastical nature to each text, despite them also being grounded in a realistic and modern-day setting. In turn, having both elements of fantasy and reality is what helps engage readers in the plot and can subsequently provide them with a deeper understanding of the animal and the relationship they can develop with them in their external life.

5.3 Possibilities for the Future

Despite the word count restrictions of a master's thesis, this study has shown, through its in-depth analysis, that there is a clear gap in children's literature research, specifically exploring the wider representations of the bear. Hence, a possibility for future research could be to conduct further analysis across a wider range of sources, subsequently examining the topic in new avenues; this could include picture books and how the visual and textual representations function within children's texts. The widely popular teddy bear toy also provides another category of books to be investigated. It would be fascinating for future studies to involve qualitative empirical research, directly involving young readers and their experiences with representations of bears.

Children are becoming increasingly aware of the developing climate crisis, and the serious implications it poses on their own future livelihoods. The educational power of children's literature to potentially encourage readers to consider their relationship with the natural world, including that of animals, seems especially relevant in the face of global environmental issues. This dissertation began with the initial idea of examining if bear stories in children's literature could have imaginative or practical implications on child readers.

In turn, despite the texts being fictional, the representation of bears has multiple important implications for the child reader. It could provide a key platform which allows children to develop an enhanced understanding of animals, potentially recognising that they are not void of emotions and that we should treat them with respect, similar to the way we are taught to interact with other human beings. A key function of children's literature is in its potential to influence young reader's expectations, attitudes, and behaviours towards bears, animals and the external natural world. Through an in-depth case study, this research has looked at three exemplary texts, *The Last Bear*, *The Dancing Bear* and *Big Bear Little Brother*, discovering that each story and its specific representation of the bear has multiple positive implications for the child reader. Gold, Morpurgo and Norac each offer an engaging and heart-warming story of friendship and adventure, whilst also providing young readers the opportunity to interact with key ideas surrounding human-animal relationships – and issues that emerge when anthropocentric human societies fail to acknowledge and appreciate the emotional capacities and agency of the animal. To conclude, through the adoption of a methodological posthumanist approach, this study and its subsequent findings provides a rich and insightful academic contribution. It has revealed the wider implications and functions of the representation of bears within children's literature, consequently bridging an evident gap in this area of research.

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